

Samu Niskanen, Publication and the Papacy in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, Cambridge (Cambridge University Press) 2022, 75 p. (Cambridge Elements. Elements in Publishing and Book Culture), ISBN 978-1-009-11108-9, EUR 11,49.

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David d'Avray, London

This is an important and original book, in a format that will be unfamiliar to most readers of »Francia-Recensio«. It is published by Cambridge University Press, itself a mark of high academic quality, but it is much shorter than a characteristic Cambridge monograph. C.U.P. runs an »Elements« series publishing »original, succinct, authoritative, and peer-reviewed scholarly and scientific research, organised into focused series edited by leading scholars, and providing comprehensive coverage of the key topics in disciplines spanning the arts and sciences« (so the [website](#)). The book under review belongs to a subseries on »Elements in Publishing and Book Culture« which, according to a [video](#) by the series editors, aims to publish studies in the history of publishing from the Ancient world to the present day. The books are very short studies (maximum 30 000 words), published as paper volumes as well as electronically, and inexpensive. The volume under review has less than a hundred pages, including the bibliography (there is no index). Though this sub-series has its own editors, the volumes go through the usual process of double-blind peer review.

The author of this book is a historian: Professor of Medieval History at Helsinki University and Huw Price Fellow at Jesus College Oxford. He is also one of the best medieval Latinists in Northern Europe: his edition of the Bec correspondence of Anselm of Canterbury for »Oxford Medieval Texts« is a model of textual criticism. The book under review is a contribution to *longue durée* intellectual history. It deals with endorsement of publications by popes (though in one case the hoped-for endorsement was not forthcoming). Two of the case studies are from late Antiquity, and two from the period of the Investiture Contest. Overall findings are that papal support really contributed to a work's success, and that the »papal turn« of the later 11th century increased papal collaboration with authors (though the unsuccessful attempt to get papal support is from this period). A byproduct of the analyses is that they can illuminate our interpretation of the works in question, and our understanding of their authors.

The first case is from the 4th century: Jerome and his relation to pope Damasus. It was perhaps the last generation in which the fall of the Roman Empire in the West did not look like a real possibility. Jerome made strenuous and at first unsuccessful efforts to get the pope's attention. Eventually he managed to make his mark. Niskanen argues that one of pope Damasus's letters (number 35)



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was »ghosted« by Jerome, and Damasus commissioned his new translation into Latin of the Gospels. This gradually became very successful (quite early on, it was used by both Augustine and his opponents Pelagius and Julian of Eclanum, notably). Niskanen thinks that Damasus's support was very useful. Jerome had been keen to talk up his connection with the pope and forgeries would spread the idea of a close collaboration between them.

The next case study is from the mid-6th century: a hexameter verse rendering of the »Acts of the Apostles« by one Arator, a member of the Roman clergy. The political context is the attempt by the armies of the Emperor Justinian I to regain control of Italy, against strenuous opposition from the Goths who had ruled it since the end of western imperial rule. From the outset his enterprise had the support of pope Virgilius. The poem would have fallen pleasantly on papal ears, as it emphasizes Peter's primacy.

There were two public recitals of the work in 544 CE, the first on the octave of (*i. e.* a week after) the anniversary of the pope's ordination. Such public readings, followed by praise and constructive suggestions, can be placed squarely in a classical tradition. Later there was a second reading in the church of St Peter-in-Chains. It was done in installments, two days each in April and May. Niskanen evokes the performative skill of the recital. The poem includes attacks on Arian heretics. The 4th century heresy had made a comeback thanks to the Goths, who were Arians. At this time the Goths were holding their own in the war against the Byzantine armies, and threatened to recapture Rome (which they would in fact succeed in doing a couple of years later). Arian clergy in Rome was regarded as a fifth column, and expelled. »To condemn Arianism was to rally against the Goths« (p. 31).

Niskanen brings impressive scholarship to bear on a reconstruction of the poem's reception. He argues that extracts of the poem must have been inscribed on the walls of the church where it was read, St Peter-in-Chains. They turn up in a 9th-century manuscript together with two other epigraphs that must be from that church. Arator did his best to arrange to have the work widely diffused, with apparent success, part of which (Niskanen suggests) was due to pope Virgilius's endorsement.

We then fast forward to the late-11th century and an obscure figure called Fulcoius. He backed one of the losers in the Investiture Contest (Manasses bishop of Reims), and showed sympathy for priestly marriage, the wrong answer according to the Gregorians. Before the fall of his patron he brought his poem on the marriage of Christ and the Church to Rome, prefacing it with an address to Alexander II and Hildebrand, the future Gregory VII. Perhaps unsurprisingly, papal support was not forthcoming, which Niskanen thinks helps to explain why it did not leave much of a mark (though he points out that it was also in an unfashionable genre for its generation). An interesting annotation in a manuscript suggests that it was a schoolbook.



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With his final case study Niskanen returns to Anselm of Canterbury, on whom he is a world expert. Anselm's highly original approach, pure argument rather than a list of authorities, had aroused opposition, sometimes virulent. As a precaution, Anselm first brought out his seminal works, the »Monologion« and »Proslogion«, anonymously. A turning point in his career was a command by the papal legate Hugh of Die to publish them under his own name, which Anselm did, bringing them out as a pair. The legate was backing Anselm, of whom he was a fan. He was acting as delegate of the pope, and Niskanen suggests that he was connecting with a latent tradition of papal claims to give an »imprimatur«, so to speak, to important works. The possibly pseudonymous »Decretum Gelasianum« and two genuine letters of Nicholas I assume such a right. In any case it certainly boosted Anselm's career. Gregory VII too joined the fan club. There is a second relevant episode. When he was already archbishop of Canterbury, Anselm wrote a treatise on the incarnation, employing his characteristic rationalistic method, and dedicated it to Urban II. When in exile, Urban II used his help at a council which aimed to integrate the Greek Christians of Southern Italy into the papal system (Bari, 1098). Anselm spoke and Urban II cited him. Niskanen is surely right that papal support facilitated the reception of Anselm's works and his intellectual approach.

This short work has deserved a long review because it breaks through the barriers of periodisation that constrain and sometimes stultify historical scholarship. It demonstrates an association between the papacy and publication in periods far apart. It is a courageous approach and Niskanen's scholarship makes it work.



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