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The Avignon Popes and Their Chancery: Collected Essays by
Patrick Zutshi (review)

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is as unimpressed with Henry's homebody-ness as his monastic chroniclers were and he spends little time on the possible reasons for the king's obsession with supporting and sustaining his extended family. Carpenter adopts the standard masculine tropes of martial success and vigorous physical activity as legitimate assessments of a monarch, thus refusing to question the conclusions of men whose lives were spent in cloisters and far away from contact with women and families. In this day and age, it might be useful to raise an eyebrow to such presentations. Henry's own growing dependence on his wife, a very intelligent and opinionated woman who was twelve at the time of their marriage—he was twenty-eight—was, as usual, added to the list of the king's sins of "simplicity" and "immaturity" (read: his lack of interest in warfare was seen as a mark of stupidity and naivete), an assessment Carpenter does not entirely eschew.

This book is, along with his study of the minority before it and the final volume of Carpenter's three-part magnum opus will be, essential reading to anyone whose research focuses on the British Isles in the thirteenth century. It is a true culmination of one historian's life's work, and I look forward to seeing the final volume—with perhaps a more thorough evaluation of this long-lived king's reign—in print.

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The Avignon Popes and Their Chancery: Collected Essays. By Patrick Zutshi. (Florence: SISMEL. Edizioni del Galluzzo. 2021. Pp. xiv, 466. €68,00. ISBN: 9788892900646.

Starting with John XXII (1316–34), the popes of Avignon built up a remarkably elaborate administrative machinery that generated a voluminous body of official paperwork, on which so much of the study of the Avignonese papacy rests. The essential connections between the two—that is, the institutions of the papal bureaucracy, on the one hand, and their documentary output, on the other—has long stood at the heart of Patrick Zutshi's scholarship. In this volume Zutshi presents twenty essays, all but two of which have been previously published, here revised, updated, and organized into a cohesive (if not *quite* fully monographic) study of "the largest and perhaps the most complex of the various departments within the Roman curia" (p. 4) at fourteenth-century Avignon, the chancery. The result is a brightly lit window into the inner workings of the single most advanced and sophisticated administrative system of the European Middle Ages, from one of the leading scholars in the field.

The essays gathered together here span much of Zutshi's career. Chapters 13 and 19 first appeared in the late 1980s; chapters 9 ("At the Point of Death: Licences to Choose a Confessor *in mortis articulo* Issued by the Avignon Popes," pp. 179–203) and 12 ("The Autograph Letters of the Avignon Popes," pp. 241–252) were written for the book (2021). Following a foundational first chapter (a crystalline introduction to the high and late medieval papal chancery and the different types of documents it produced), the book is thereafter divided into five thematically organized sections. The first contains five chapters—one of which (no. 3)

was coauthored with the late Peter Linehan—which concern themselves with “Petitions and Registers” (pp. 27–138). Chapters 7–9 pertain to “The Chancery and Its Production” (pp. 141–203); chapters 10–12, to “The Role of the Pope” in the production of chancery output (pp. 207–51). Zutshi’s long-standing interest in the Avignon papacy and England is evinced by five chapters (13–17) on “Papal Letters and English History” (pp. 255–357). Neatly, the final three chapters (18–20) address “Papal Letters for the University of Cambridge,” where Zutshi served for years as Keeper of Manuscripts and University Archives.

The sometimes byzantine intricacies of the curia and its departments can be daunting, but Zutshi is a sure and steady hand. An institutional scholar in the tradition of Guillaume Mollat, he guides readers easily through the chancery, its workings, and the different types of its documentary products. Zutshi has a superb sense of the bureaucratic spirit that animated the Avignon papacy and communicates it with clarity and precision. His work is everywhere informed by meticulous textual scholarship. Zutshi is never far from the manuscripts—indeed, most chapters contain appendices in which he presents exemplars of the documentary texts he elucidates. Much more than simply a useful assemblage of previously published works, *The Avignon Popes and Their Chancery* stands as the first major, stand-alone, monograph-length study of its subject, in any language (p. ix); as both a supremely informative overview and an eminently informative reference work, it will long be essential reading for scholars of the later medieval papacy and of medieval institutional history more broadly.

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Piers Plowman: The A Version. By William Langland. Translated by Michael Calabrese. (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press. 2020. Pp. xlvii, 160. \$34.95. ISBN 978-0-813-23343-7.)

Piers Plowman and the Reinvention of Church Law in the Late Middle Ages. By Arvind Thomas. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press. 2019. Pp. xiv, 267. \$81.00. ISBN 978-1-487-50246-1.)

For those capable of appreciating it, *Piers Plowman* is arguably the most compelling work of medieval English literature. The tautology of that claim conveys the major conundrum of teaching this sprawling, allegorical, theologically sophisticated, prosodically intricate, visionary work of Middle English alliterative verse. If you teach premodern literature at the undergraduate level, you have to assume zero prior familiarity with not only the text but also all relevant context.

So how does the college teacher attract students to a poem that requires competency in Middle English, a feel for alliterative poetry, familiarity with Christianity, and an appreciation of allegorical imagination? By eliminating two of these hurdles—the linguistic and the religious—Michael Calabrese aims to make the book-length poem accessible. For his translation in modern English, Calabrese has chosen an early version of the poem, the A-text, which was “published” on its own