International Conference

'The Auditors of the Roman Rota: social connections, expertise and influence. Rethinking ecclesiastical careers in a transnational perspective (16th- 19th centuries)'

Universidad de Zaragoza (Spain), 12 -14 November 2025

CALL FOR PAPERS

This conference is an outcome of the ERC project ROTAROM17. *Delivering justice on a transnational scale in Europe. The Roman Rota and the enforcement of a legal culture of negotiation (c. 1560-1700)* (PI: Isabelle Poutrin, Sept. 2023-Aug. 2028).

ROTAROM17 aims to understand the Roman Rota, the high civil court of the Pope, as one of the essential tools of the Catholic Church's transnational governance in early modern Europe. Our purpose is to study this institution which remains poorly known for this period, but also to see law in action in the settling of disputes, as well as the way in which the court's jurisprudence, used as a reference by legal experts and disseminated in libraries, contributed to the making of a legal culture founded on negotiation. The project's second objective is to open a new research field on Europe's oldest still-active tribunal and facilitate access to its massive and under-used documentation by producing essential research tolls and reference works, thus laying strong foundations for future developments of scholarship.

Thus, it is a main objective of ROTAROM17 to understand the fundamental features, strengths, and limits of the authority of a court which was a tool of papal transnational power, delivering justice beyond the limits of the papal state, in territories where its decisions could be contested. We contend that this authority rested on several devices: the auditors' personalities and their social connections in Rome and in their home countries, the court's reputation of high legal expertise and moral integrity, the procedure's orientation towards a search for conciliation between the involved parties, the use of constraint, the decisions' judicial qualities, and the diffusion of the court's jurisprudence through collections of decisions published either under the name of a single auditor, or in series of *Novae, Novissimae, Recentiores*, etc.

The international composition of the Rotal college remained subject to quotas for each "nationality", from the bull *Romani pontifices* (Sixtus IV, 1472) which fixed to twelve the number of auditors of the Sacred Palace, in spite of the "Italianisation" of the Curia in the seventeenth century, and until the disappearance of the "ancient" Rota in 1870. Among the twelve auditors, eight were Italians (three of them chosen by the Pope, five coming from a privileged group of Italian states); and four were ultramontanes, originating respectively from France, the Holy Empire, Castile and Aragon. Yet, since the "classical" historiography of the relations between the papacy and European states focused on political power struggles, jurisdiction disputes and diplomatic crises between Rome and sovereigns, this approach has been instrumental in foregrounding papal nuncios, cardinals, bishops and royal confessors, leaving the college of the Rota aside. More recently, there has been a shift to social and cultural history approaches examining the Curia as a complex administration, paying greater attention to the plurality of actors and organs involved in the Church's governance, and also to the careers of Curial personnel. While several Congregations of the Roman Curia are currently the focus of very dynamic research, the Rota has not benefitted from a comparable interest, for instance through intensive archival exploration, cohesive research questions and themes, or the international and collective dimension of the work

undertaken. Auditors are similarly absent from studies on the pontifical court as a centre of artistic patronage, or as a "ritual city" (Visceglia 2002).

Indeed, the auditors of the Rota have rarely been studied for themselves, especially when they died while they were still at the institution. On the other hand, scholars have produced numerous monographies on members of the clergy who served as auditors and subsequently rose to higher positions (apostolic nuncios, cardinals, popes), but the stage of their career at the Rota has not really attracted attention. Until now, Gnavi's statistical study of the auditors' trajectories remains an exception (Gnavi 1994).

To begin filling this gap in historiography, the ROTAROM17 team is currently working in several directions, focusing on the period 1560-1700. Two researchers are producing an overview of the careers and social characterization of Castilian and Aragonese auditors. A PhD student is currently studying the French Auditors, using mainly the documentation available in French archives. Another line of research is the material circumstances and the place of Rota auditors in Rome's urban life. Yet, because of the pioneering nature of the project, much remains to be done to highlight the many facets of the Rota auditors.

The conference will combine the presentation of the first results of the team's ongoing research with a broadening of perspectives, including a variety of characters, themes or sources. It will look at the auditors in the "longue durée" of the court, placing the chronological milestones from 1472 to 1870, in order to refine comparisons between the auditors' trajectories at different periods. As the ROTAROM17 team does not cover "imperial" auditors, filling this gap would be of particular interest. We therefore propose here a set of themes that can be studied specifically, or in combination with one another. As this is the first conference on this theme, and as the sources for documenting the subject remain largely undiscovered, we mostly expect the papers to open new avenues from the perspective of the social, political and cultural history of the court.

1. Rethinking careers

We invite scholars to rethink the careers of auditors, exploring earlier and (in the case of auditors who rose to other positions) later years in this perspective. What can we know of the social and family connexions that facilitated their nomination to the Rota? Did they have previous contact with the institution? Family ties in diverse configurations, as well as patronage between auditors belonging to a common homeland are careers path that need to be explored. During their service, did auditors cumulate with other charges or missions, at the Curia or outside, at the service of the Pope, of their own prince, etc. – and how did they cope with multiple loyalties? What can we know about friendship and patronage within the rotal college or within the Curia?

After leaving the Rota for another position in the Curia or in their homeland, was this step valued in their subsequent trajectory? Did they keep in touch with their former colleagues? Was the expertise, skills and connexions acquired during their service at the Rota important in the progression of their career? In judicial matters, did former auditors contribute to the spread of the jurisprudence and "style" of the Rota?

Another blind spot in historiography is the level of wealth of the auditors, who are reputed to be modestly remunerated. Thus, their integration into the system of ecclesiastical benefices should be studied as an integral part of their career: did auditors hold multiple major benefices, or did they stay on a more modest level? Apart from the income granted to them by the Pope, what was the source of their assets?

2. Auditors at work

The activities of Rota auditors in the Curia and in the Papal City are another major focus of this conference. Scholars are invited to develop case studies concerning the role of

the auditors in the pontifical court's ceremonial, their implication in "national" institutions in Rome, and their relations with cardinal protectors and secular diplomatic agents, as part of the auditors' duties. Their involvement in other dicasteries of the Curia (Congregation of Rites, Holy Office, Congregation of the Council, Apostolic Penitentiary, Apostolic Signature) can be considered from a career perspective (see above), but also from the point of view of service within papal bureaucracy: how auditors did possibly cumulate several functions with their work at the Rota? Why would these functions be considered compatible and complementary?

Regarding the Rota in particular, the first theme is the auditors' working environment: their libraries, and any objects that might relate to their professional identity or interests; their staff, employed in their respective *studium rotale*; but also the minor functions that supported the administration of justice by the Rota – for example, the notaries of the Rota. A second theme is that of material working conditions: court removals and archive storage, daily work routines of the court, individual and collective productivity, increasing complexity of procedures, time management throughout the year, distribution and circulation of causes among the auditors, interruptions of activity due to external factors are points that have yet to be documented.

3. Ethos, praise and reputation

A first survey suggests that the Rota (the auditors and those around them) endeavoured to promote the court's reputation of high legal expertise, impeccable moral integrity and impressive work capacity. Are some auditors particularly noteworthy for their patronage of artists or scientists? Is artistic and scientific patronage a distinctive practice at this level of the Curia's hierarchy, and not only for members of the Sacred College? Another topic is the ethos of Rota auditors, as it can be seen in instructions to apprentice auditors, descriptions by De Luca and Emerix, auditors' diaries, eulogies, dedications of printed collections of rotal decisions, etc.

The production of collections of decisions can be seen not only as a means of disseminating the court's case law, but also as a vehicle for its reputation, whether for individual auditors or at a collective level. In addition to the quantitative study currently being carried out by the team, qualitative approaches of these books (for example, on auditors' portraits) would be of great interest.

4. Special session "Francisco Peña"

The Conference will highlight the figure of Francisco Peña (1540-1612), Aragonese auditor, dean of the Roman Rota, and a major figure of the Curia in this time, but who is still neglected in historiography. Our objective is to bring together studies shedding light on diverse aspects of this eminent canonist and of its impact and reputation. The session will include 30-minute papers and a round table with shorter presentations (10 minutes) that can be proposed in addition to a proposal regarding another topic.

Scientific and organising committee

- Pr Isabelle Poutrin, coordinator (Université de Reims Champagne-Ardenne)
- Dr Jair Santos, project manager (Ecole française de Rome)
- Pr Eliseo Serrano, coordinator in Zaragoza (Universidad de Zaragoza)
- Pr Simona Feci (Università di Napoli L'Orientale)
- Pr Benedetta Borello (University of Cassino and Southern Latium)
- Pr Anne Bonzon (Université Paris 8)
- Pr Andrea Errera (Università di Parma)

Practical information

The Conference will be held at the Universidad de Zaragoza (Spain), Facultad de Filosofía y letras. Papers can be presented in English, Spanish, French or Italian, with a Powerpoint and a consistent abstract in English. They will last 30 minutes.

Proposals

A title, an abstract (3000 words) and a brief bio-bibliography (1000 words) are expected until **15 March.** The application must be sent to: rotarom@efrome.it

Acceptance of proposals will be communicated by the end of April.

Project information: https://rotarom.hypotheses.org/

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