

My research focuses on papal relations with the East in the first half of the fourteenth century, in relation to schismatics, heretics and non-Christians. It is particularly related to how religions and denominations change both within society and within elite circles, and how these changes are understood by Western audiences. In particular, the spread and acceptance of Catholicism and Roman primacy over other Christian sects is of particular interest, but also how it spread in Pagan, Buddhist and Islamic societies is integral as well.

My work is currently heavily based around a Vatican special register, the *Registra Vaticana* 62, that is mostly concerned with a select set of letters sent by several Popes. The span of the register is the papacies of Clement V, John XXII, Benedict XII and Clement VI, the first four 'Avignon' popes, lasting from 1305 to 1352. However, there is one later letter included during the administration of Innocent VI, in 1355 - that of John V Palaiologos' offer of complete conversion of the Greek Church to Rome in exchange for limited military aid, while several from before these papacies are included; the earliest letter in the register dates to 1199. The register has been largely overlooked in modern scholarship, though several of the letters contained within it have found prominence through other sources, such as the records of the Dominicans and Franciscans.

Part of the reason for this disdain is the difficulties involved in working out the purpose of it. Only two special registers were created, and the reasons behind the creation of RV 62 are murky at best. This forms the first of my research questions: why was this register created, and what purpose did it serve? Initial research points toward this being a collection of letters showing the state of affairs in regards to the lands East of Catholic Christendom in the first half the fourteenth century, particularly focusing on Church unity and the security of Catholic lands against the Turks and other outside enemies. Spiritual and temporal security of the Near East is a common theme in many of the letters, and is clearly an important factor in the creation of this manuscript.

The manuscript can be divided into 4 sections, conveniently differing in themes, contents and scribes. Each section was copied by a different scribe, and there appears to be a different function to each. The first is largely concerned with a historical overview of relations with Christians east of Rome. It primarily contains letters addressed to Greek Christians, Catholics under the Mongols, Armenians and Ruthenians. The second section consists largely of letters to Europeans, and is very much centred around the naval league set up between Venice, the Papacy, Cyprus and the Hospital. The vast majority of letters are between Avignon and representatives of the fleet or leaders of these factions, particularly before and immediately after the capture of Smyrna. The third is a treatise explaining, in great detail, the errors of the Armenian Church, and how it was failing to live up to its promise to obey Catholic dogma. The fourth and final section is a collection of letters addressed to the Popes, dating largely from the thirteenth century, and almost all concerned with Church union between the Roman and Greek Churches.

A large part of the early stages of my research will be in unravelling the mysteries of this register, and attempting to adequately explain the many odd items and strange composition of it. Many of the letters in it appear to be unique to modern scholarship. They appear only in RV 62, and are almost entirely unedited. Others are more common, and appear in the regular registers of the Popes that issued them, or in other sources, but these appear to be the minority. Thus, the contents of this register should be able to inform wider issues to do with fourteenth century papal policy on the East.

In addition to this detailed manuscript work, I will be considering wider papal interest and interactions with the East. Examining the role played by Christians in several non-Christian North African countries is another area I will be considering. How the Church in Rome related to them and their concerns could help refine our understanding of Islamic and Christian relations during this period, a point in time where this interaction is largely unconsidered. Much of Christianities interest in non-Christians had, by the fourteenth century, swung towards the Mongols of the Golden Horde and their conflicts with Poland, and with the rising power of the Turkish emirates in Asia Minor, and interest in the 'Saracens' had collapsed with the fall of Acre. Yet Christians still lived under the Muslims in these lands, and another of the research questions I am asking is how they fit in with the Latinised West.

How the Roman Church dealt with missionary work is also a factor. Several mentions of missions and dioceses in the far East are attested, with the long suffering and hopelessly isolated bishop of Beijing claiming great successes in converting the local population. How successful these missions were in truth is debatable, but another aspect of my research is to see how successful contemporaries thought these missions were, and how they supported or ignored them.

I will also be reconsidering the papal stance on Church unification, in a global sense, and asking to what extent the first Avignon popes considered themselves the world's pastor. This is clearly their professed role, but the extent to which their actions with regards to Christians not under their direct authority corroborate or disparage this view must be considered when considering papal relations with the East. This applies to Greeks, Armenians, Nestorians, Melchites and Jacobites living in Eastern territories either under Christian or Muslim rule, but it also applies to excommunicate Catholics living in the East, such as the Grand Catalan Company after they conquered Athens.

Therefore, the overall aim of the project is to contextualise and reinterpret a much neglected part of the historical narrative in European history with modern approaches. I am looking to explain in wider terms than merely theology or politics a complicated and important process that affected and altered the lives of a great many people both on the fringes of Europe and within it. By re-examining old sources as well as adding new ones to consideration, the project hopes to be able to make a significant contribution to the understanding of the spread of and resistance to religion amongst societies, and the mechanisms that allowed that to happen.

This is what I aim to look at over the coming years, though obviously, at this point, my research is in very early stages and will have come a long way by the end of August. I feel I would benefit greatly from attending these workshops, and believe that I can offer constructive criticism and support to my fellow students there in return. I hope that you will see the potential in my research, and give me a platform to explore it further and expand my understanding of both my project and the Medieval period in general.