

RESEARCH ARTICLE

## Ringling in the papal restoration: Francesco Cancellieri's treatise on the Capitoline bells (1806)

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### Abstract

In 1806 the antiquarian Francesco Cancellieri wrote a treatise on the new bells fabricated for the *campanile* of the Capitoline palaces, replacing earlier ones destroyed during the Roman Republic of 1798–9. Cancellieri's text, and the story of those bells which it contains, offers important insights into the significance of bells in early nineteenth-century Italian Catholicism and also about clerical responses to trauma and loss. Close reading shows how Cancellieri used historical techniques to reconstruct an auditory community around the bells, part of the wider programme of 'resacralisation' which took place in Rome at this time. His words also hint at a complex and nuanced perspective on how to reconcile Rome's papal and republican traditions, which contrasts to later, more reactionary endeavours.

**Keywords:** Francesco Cancellieri; Rome; Capitoline; bells; Pius VII; cultural history

### Introduction

In spring 1806 the antiquarian abate Francesco Cancellieri (1751–1826) published a 200-page book about bells. Two bells, to be precise: the new *campane maggiore* and *minore* installed in the Palazzo Senatorio on the Campidoglio (Capitoline Hill) to replace old ones lost during the Roman Republic of 1798–9. In fact, Cancellieri's book ranges more widely than its title implies: it tells of the history of bells, and of the uses of bells, since ancient times; of bells located on the Capitoline or around Rome, now and in the past; of clocks, solar, water, and mechanical, public and private, Italian and from beyond the mountains; and of bell towers, their construction, and diverse forms. Cancellieri's learning was considerable, but his enterprise was a rush job, as he himself admitted. The erudite cleric told the readers of his work's preface that he had learned of the new bells only on his recent return from Paris, where he had attended the pope during Napoleon's coronation. Only in the moment of his arrival had Cancellieri begun a fulsome programme of research and writing which he completed within just one month. 'One could truly call this "a work of thirty days"' (*In un mese fu ultimato. Onde questo libretto può veramente chiamarsi, Opus triginta dierum*), he boasted (Cancellieri 1806, viii).

Cancellieri no doubt found the Capitoline bells personally inspiring. But his response to them can also reveal something prescient about the *campana*'s cultural significance in Rome and in Catholicism at the time of the Napoleonic Revolutions. Historians of

contemporary anti-Catholic movements often draw attention to the symbolic role that church bells played in their critiques (Falaky 2020). Alain Corbin's work on *Village Bells* has proved particularly seminal within a nineteenth-century context: Corbin argues that Revolutionary efforts to silence and desacralise bells ultimately failed and that many in France still cherished their ability to sound the cyclical and predictable rhythms of sacred time long after Napoleon's demise (Corbin 1998). Others advance similar positions with respect to twentieth-century totalitarian regimes (Hernandez 2004; Garofalo and Farabegoli 2019). Yet the bell's value to Catholics and counter-revolutionaries, as they sought to restore older forms of community, merits further exploration. Bells became an important focal point of their efforts to restore the *ancien régime* because of the bell's role in actuating what Murray Schafer has described as an 'acoustic calendar': a rhythm of sounds which united and dissolved the parish community, linking its members to God through their manifestation of time and space in sound (Schafer 1977, 54–5). David Garrioch has written likewise of 'auditory communities', groups of individuals bound together not merely by exposure in common to a particular sound but by their shared and interconnected internalisation of its significance (Garrioch 2003). Bells were key vehicles for the construction of such groups at this time, for, along with cannon, they were the loudest forms of communication before the advent of the megaphone (Hahn 2015). Niall Atkinson has even seen bells as carefully regulated agents of social and political control within what he describes as a city's 'acoustic topography' (Atkinson 2012; 2016, 17–68). This made controlling bells, and understandings of the meaning of bell sounds, an important part of shaping social memory throughout the early modern period and beyond.

In early *Ottocento* Rome, bell restorations in fact constituted part of a wider programme to reverse 'unwelcome' developments of the years since 1789 (and, in particular, those of 1798–9), expunging traces of them in society and on the polity. Marina Caffiero had written of this process as one of 'resacralisation' in which the symbols of the old Catholic religion, supplanted by civic equivalents by the Roman Republic, were resurrected (Caffiero 1991, 133–58; Caffiero 1997; Boutry 1997). Antiquarians and intellectuals, such as Cancellieri, worked actively in pursuit of that agenda but Caffiero's studies of their activity have focused primarily on their efforts to re-establish symbols that projected the pope's majesty (*maestà*) – admittedly, an important principle in the papal *ancien régime* in which the pope needed to be seen to be believed. Nevertheless, papal *maestà* was by no means Cancellieri's only focus, as his text on bells underlines. Cancellieri himself, the most prolific of his generation of Italian *antiquarii*, is also a complex and interesting figure worthy of further consideration in his own right precisely because his oeuvre went far beyond the most predictable areas. Giuseppe Pignatelli, who wrote about nineteenth-century papal propaganda, belittled Cancellieri as 'a mediocre eighteenth-century scholar' (Pignatelli 1974, 303), but he ought perhaps to be seen as a key figure in the evolution of Italian historiographical traditions in this pre-Risorgimento generation. His works can certainly shed light on intellectual priorities and techniques for realising them at a slightly forgotten moment between the death of Pius VI and Pius VII's great triumphant return to Rome in 1814. They are also an important example of what some scholars now term 'medievalising', that is 'the creative interpretation or recreation of the European Middle Ages' (d'Arcens 2016, i).

Cancellieri's Capitoline bells ultimately matter because historiography of Pius VII's pontificate (1800–23) remains dominated by the events that occurred in its second half, after the pope had faced Napoleon down and during the period in which he thanked Romans for their support for him by unleashing a persecution of small-minded repression on those whom he damned as society's liberal elements. Thomas Albert Howard, writing of the nineteenth-century papacy's longer history, and of the evolution of papal attitudes towards the telling of the past over that time, has emphasised that much of this

programme, like that of Pius' immediate successors, was a response to trauma (Howard 2017, 17–18). Pius VI's brutal death at Napoleon's hands, and Pius VII's no less abhorrent incarceration between 1809–14, led directly to the promotion of the cult of the pope as *martyr* and also to a paradoxical strategy of celebrating the humiliations as a kind of Christian triumph. The twisted logic of this victim-complex was developed to its fullest extent during Pius IX's long but unhappy pontificate (1846–78). Yet Cancellieri's writings in the first years of the 1800s show that there could have been another way. His significance lies in showing how Italian patriotism could be reconciled with support for papal monarchy. And, by emphasising Rome's republican traditions, Cancellieri in fact took a line not unlike that which the Cardinal Secretary of State Ercole Consalvi (1757–1824) was later to promote at the Congress of Vienna (1815): that the Papal States did not need reform because these 'modernising' structures were already built into the political fabric.

Cancellieri's writings in fact capture and reflect the politico-religious eclecticism that became typical of Italian clerical culture at a particular moment – an eclecticism which emerged gradually from the pre-Revolutionary generation's cultural interests even as it displaced them. We might even say they co-opted but transformed something of the *campanilismo* – that very Italian pride in one's own bell tower – of earlier generations of Italian ecclesiastical historians. Cancellieri's dialectic is not that between the particular and the universal which Simon Ditchfield identified in the works of earlier practitioners of sacred history (Ditchfield 1995). Rather his triangulation lay between traditionalist and patriotic modes of thought and this seems to have been the efficacious combination when processing the events which he had endured.

### Cancellieri: *Antiquario Romano*

Who was Francesco Cancellieri? For a man whose works are still cited by early modernists, and who was the recipient of so many posthumous studies (Ademollo 1877; Trollope 1886; Seni 1893; Praz 1951), historians seem to remember surprisingly little about him. A native of Rome, he published his first work, a poem celebrating reconciliation between the pope and the king of Portugal, aged just nineteen (Petrucci 1974). In 1771, he oversaw publication of a new fragment of Livy recently discovered in the Vatican Library (Visconti 1827, 8; Ademollo 1877, 4). And in 1775 he was appointed librarian to Cardinal Leonardo Antonelli (1730–1811). Antonelli's patronage then facilitated his production in the 1780s of two substantial works: a four-volume description of the antiquities found on the Vatican site, *De secretariis basilicae Vaticanae*, which also commemorated the completion of a new sacristy for St Peter's; and a four-part description of the papal chapels and their attendant ceremonies, as they involved the pope and his cardinals.

Cancellieri's intellectual interests seem to have been characterised by a certain ecclesiastical conservatism likely gained from his Jesuit schooling at the Collegio Romano. He took philosophy classes from the famous probabilist Giuseppe Maria Gravina (1702–80), who (like many Jesuits) was a renowned opponent of Jansenism, the 'reforming' liberal theological movement which, by the later eighteenth century, had become intimately connected to political efforts to dilute ecclesiastical hierarchy (Doyle 2000, 68–90). Jesuit connections seem to have been a defining feature of Cancellieri's early career: the Society's suppression was a huge blow to him, leading directly to his rejection by Clement XIV as a suitable secretary for the papal nuncio to Poland (Trollope 1886, 283). Before entering Antonelli's service Cancellieri nevertheless also worked as a secretary for Abbondio Rezzonico (1742–1810), Senator of Rome and brother to the late Clement XIII's cardinal nephew. This connection, sustained as a friendship until at least the time of his journey to Paris in 1805 (Ticchi 2004, 403), may have fostered Cancellieri's respect for Rome's republican as well as papal

traditions and possibly also facilitated his entry into the Accademia dell'Arcadia where he took the name 'Alicanto Nassio' (Giorgetti Vichi 1977, 14).

Cancellieri did not operate in a vacuum when undertaking his programme of antiquarian interventions in Rome's literary world. Rather, by the early 1800s, he had come to form a crucial node in a noticeable network of others working around Rome and in the papal court. The Vatican Librarian, Gaetano Marini (1742–1815) was one amongst those from whom Cancellieri enjoyed support and friendship. Marini's scholarship, like Cancellieri's, took a variety of forms but focused on the study of epigraphy, papyrology, archaeology, and numismatics. The bicentenary of Marini's death saw a major conference held to appraise his legacy in different areas of scholarship and generated two volumes of papers (Buonocore 2015). Jacques-Gabriel Pouyard (1751–1823), a French Carmelite who fled the French Revolution when it reached his hometown of Aix-en-Provence, was another. Pouyard resided in Rome first in S. Crisogono and later in SS. Silvestro and Martino ai Monti where he developed a fascination with papal vestments and footwear. His *Dissertazione sopra l'anteriorità del bacio de' piedi* (1807) discusses whether the ritual of kissing the pope's foot pre- or post-dates the appearance of a cross on the papal slipper and is his only major published work. However, a second work, *Memorie storiche delle Mitre, e de' Tiriogni Pontifici e della loro origini, e cambiamenti, dall'ottavo secolo, fino al presente*, was completed in manuscript but then lost (Eméric-David 1823; Moreni 1823). The lawyers Leonardo Adami (1760–1820) and Agostino Mariotti (1724–1806), seems to have been others in Cancellieri's circle (Adami 1809, 15). Mariotti had founded a museum of Roman curiosities (Odone 2020) while Adami is notable as one of three scholars to publish treatises that tried to establish the site of St Peter's martyrdom in 1809 (Adami 1809; Freiberg 2005, 186). Pius VII later rewarded Adami with a position in the Vatican Library when he cleared out its personnel post-1814 (Filippi 2015, 1454). The impact of these friendships on Cancellieri's works was likely considerable, though it would take detailed research into their mutual correspondence to identify its effects precisely. Marina Caffiero has undertaken some of this work with respect to some of their specific efforts but there is surely more to be discovered via their correspondences.

In fact, Cancellieri, as one of the more prolific writers from within this group, sustained his efforts over a long period via an output of dozens of treatises and hundreds of notes and letters (Cenci and Baruffaldi 1827; Trollope 1886, 281; Moroni 1881). In many ways the series of *grands projets* to restore Rome's cultural pomp which Pius VI (r. 1775–99) planned in the 1780s (Collins 2004) were the making of him: they kindled his interest in antiquities and gave him the purpose to document what was being discovered in the course of the renovations. Early modernists still regularly make use of his book on the papal *posse*, the ceremonial procession by which the pope 'took possession' of the city of Rome (Cancellieri 1802) because this remains, by far, the most comprehensive and accessible collation of materials about that subject available outside an archive. *De secretariis basilicae Vaticanae* has also recently attracted renewed attention on account of its innovative methods of research and interpretation (Guerrieri Borsoi 2020). Cancellieri's later works include lesser-known works about individual churches, e.g. *Notizie storiche delle chiese di S. Maria in Iulia, di S. Giovanni Calabita e di S. Tommaso degli Spagnuoli* (1823), and about the papal election, *Notizie storiche delle stagioni e de' siti diversi in cui sono stati tenuti i conclavi nella città di Roma* (1823), but also *Osservazioni intorno alla questione promossa... sopra l'originalità della Divina Commedia di Dante* (1814). This final work underscores the eclecticism of his oeuvre and his interest in Italian rather than purely papal themes – something also noted in Pietro Ercole Visconti's elegy to him, composed after Cancellieri's death in 1823: 'il Cancellieri provava altamente l'amor suo verso la patria' 'Cancellieri proved his love for country to the highest degree' (Visconti 1827, 15).

Cancellieri was the subject of highly disparaging appraisals from Rome's younger, savvier *letterati* which have probably continued to shape broader assessment of his legacy. The poet Giacomo Leopardi (1798–1837), who had some dealings with him in the 1810s, for instance, called him ‘an old fool, a river of chatter, the most tiresome and insupportable bore on earth. He speaks of absolutely trivial matters with the utmost interest, and of things of high import with the coldest indifference’ (*Il quale è un coglione, un fiume di ciarle, il più noioso e disperante uomo della terra; parla di cose assurdamente frivole col massimo interesse, di cose somme colla maggior freddezza possibile*) (Leopardi 1849–92, 1: 239–40). Another poet, Giuseppe Gioachino Belli (1791–1863) was just as unkind, penning the irreverent observation that Cancellieri was the sort of man who ‘began talking to you about radishes, then about carrots in the radish, then about aubergines in the carrot, ending only with the Fall of Troy’ (*Il chiarissimo Francesco Cancellieri cominciava a parlarvi di ravanelli, e poi di ravanello in carota e di carota in melanzana e finiva coll'incendio di Troia*) (Belli 1952, 1940). Yet, by the 1820s, Cancellieri's status in Rome's antiquarian circles was such that his death was marked with several appreciative elegies (Siepi 1827; Visconti 1827; Baradli 1828). Later nineteenth-century writers also continued to engage with him and with his voluminous manuscript collection. Alessandro Ademollo, for instance, reported on his admirable parsimony, which led him to reuse the backs of letters sent to him in correspondence to economise on paper (Ademollo 1877, 8). T. Adolphus Trollope, in another biographical note about him, marvelled at the diversity of Cancellieri's range of correspondents (who included many women), but tempered this with the sort of wondrously weird and condescending observation that only an Oxford man could devise: ‘the producer of an hundred and eighty published works, who also left behind him over an hundred unpublished, is scarcely to be suspected of having been a ladies' man’ (Trollope 1886, 302).

### The Capitoline bells

Cancellieri's interest in bells can be dated back to the restoration, or rather completion, of the bell towers of St Peter's, which was one of Pius VI's most cherished projects in his 1780s agenda (Collins 2004, 87–131). Pius commissioned a new 28,000-pound *campanone* from the silversmith Luigi Valadier (1726–85), which was completed by Valadier's son Giuseppe (1762–1839) after the former committed suicide (Busiri Vici, 1985). Cancellieri's interest in the project was reflected in the final volume of his account of the Vatican antiquities which incorporates a description of the project as a short treatise, ‘De Tintinnabulis Templi Vaticani’ (Cancellieri 1786, 4:1993–2029). Cancellieri later associated this work with *Le due nuove campane* in its introduction: ‘This little Italian work is the daughter of that Latin one’ (*Questa operetta Italiana è figlia della Latina*) (Cancellieri 1786, 4:1993–2029; Cancellieri 1806, vii). The assertion is a touch disingenuous, for the scale of his new enterprise was somewhat broader than his earlier one, as was its degree of programmatisation. ‘De Tintinnabulis’ opens with only the briefest of historical discussions and continues mostly as a record of verbatim first-person accounts of Pius' programme by witnesses. *Le due nuove campane*, by contrast, starts with a general history of bells and does not turn to the Capitoline bells, specifically, until its 37th page. Moreover, only 18 pages of *Le due nuove campane* concern the Capitoline bells at all. The remainder, another 125 pages, discusses clocks and bell towers, concluding with a 50-page letter on *campanile* architecture by his friend Pouyard.

Of course, the Capitoline's bells themselves already had a long and interesting history long before Cancellieri wrote about them. This history reflected fraught interplay between sacred and civic, papal and communal statuses on the Capitoline Hill (Pecchiai 1950, 102–10; Pietrangeli 1957; Aikin 1977). Indeed, the complex nexus of papal institutions

in the city simply did not facilitate processing their status according to the sort of neat division between the civic and the sacred through which many non-Italian bell-critiques of this and earlier eras were framed. The Capitoline hill, one of Rome's major power centres since time immemorial, became the place where medieval Romans congregated to resist their papal overlords (Nussdorfer 1992, 60–94; Canepari and Nussdorfer 2019). The *popolo* revived the ancient Senate there in 1143 during one such uprising (Miglio 1997). In 1347 self-styled tribune of the people Cola di Rienzo used it as the launch pad to proclaim his new Republic (Collins, 2002). The humanist Stefano Porcari (d. 1453) tried something similar during the Vacant See of 1447, when he gathered citizens together in the Capitoline church of S. Maria in Aracoeli (Infessura 1890, 45). Communal magistrates still met in the Palazzo Senatorio during every sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Vacant See to try to reclaim their ancient powers in the absence of papal government (Nussdorfer 1987; Nussdorfer, 1992, 228–53). Anti-papal violence was common on such occasions (Hunt 2015, 181–9).

Innocent III (r. 1198–1216) had brought the first Capitoline bell to the palace as a 'war trophy' from Viterbo after he forced the city's citizens to submit to his authority around the year 1200 (Rodocanachi 1904, 12). The bell's name, the 'Patarina', suggests an association with the Patarine heretics, some of medieval Italy's most notorious (Cowdrey 1968; Lambert 2002, 44–7; Moore 2012, 71–86). Later popes went to great lengths to assert ownership and control over both the bell and the palace that housed it. Boniface IX (r. 1389–1404), Martin V (r. 1417–31), and Nicholas V (r. 1447–55) all added to the medieval buildings. Paul III (r. 1534–49), a man who made so much of his *Romanitas*, rebuilt the complex completely to a design by Michelangelo, and planned his *possesso* procession carefully to pass right by it (Rebecchini 2020, 191–208; De Michelis 2020). Gregory XIII eventually recast the Innocentine Patarina in 1580 as part of wider works on the bell tower (1578–83). And Sixtus V had intervened again in 1585 to sanctify the bell's living quarters by removing pagan statues that adorned the bell tower's parapet, because 'it did not seem appropriate that these idols should stand above [blessed] bells' (*Di ordine di Nostro Signore sono state levate tutte le statue, ch'erano sopra la fabrica della torre di Campidoglio, non parendoli bene, che quelli idoli stessero sopra dove stanno le campane*).<sup>1</sup>

The Gregorian Patarina had met its fate at the hands of the 1798–9 Republic. It was not amongst the first tranche of 'ecclesiastical assets' to be seized: those were mostly items of gold or silver which the republicans deemed excessive for basic liturgical needs in individual parishes (Cretoni 1971, 218–21; Roveri 1974; Chadwick 1980, 468; Pastor 1891–1953, 40: 343–4). Yet republicans and revolutionaries were not generally well disposed towards bells, either in Italy or France. For one thing, by 1798, church bells had everywhere become symbols of anti-Jacobin resistance. In Rome, Pius VI had ordered all the city's bells to be pealed when fears that the French would sack it first surfaced (Chadwick 1980, 463). And clamorous *carillons* accompanied him again wherever he passed on his long march into exile (Baldassari 1844, 219–21). Revolutionaries banned bell-ringing wherever they took power, which in turn reinforced the bell's symbolic status (Formica 1994, 225n; Broers 2002, 74–9). 'A lu suono de le campane / Viva, viva li populane', as a popular Neapolitan resistance cry went (Crocco 2016, 92).

Rome's church bells seem to have first been taken to meet the demand for metals in April 1799 (Galimberti 2004, 1:241). According to one of Cancellieri's fellow clerics, the Capitoline bells survived until August but were then cut down and broken up (Galimberti 2004, 1:324). Francesco Fortunati, another such cleric, mentions their destruction, in conjunction with pejorative remarks about their destroyers (*iniqui Republicanii*).<sup>2</sup> Another priest, the future cardinal Giuseppe Antonio Sala (1762–1839), recalled the doleful silence after Pius VI's death because they could not be rung (Sala 1980, 3:146). This passage is particularly poignant, for it draws attention both to what the bells meant to

Romans and to why the revolutionaries worked to destroy them: silencing bells muted not just a functional sound but reordered a whole series of liturgical, political, and even theological resonances.

Cancellieri himself says very little about the bells' fate, which is suggestive in itself. He writes only cryptically – an indication of disapproval? distress? – that the old Capitoline bells were 'seized in the course of recent events' (Cancellieri 1806, 37). Rome's civic and ecclesiastical authorities nevertheless, unsurprisingly, prioritised refabrication of *campane confiscate* in the months and years following Pius VII's election at the Conclave of Venice (1799–1800). Santa Maria in Aracoeli, the church next to the Capitoline palace, was one of the first ecclesiastical buildings to receive new chimes, in this instance cast by the Blasi foundry. However, the *Diario Ordinario*, Rome's semi-official newsheet (Formica 1997), reported fairly regularly on other new bells blessed or cast.<sup>3</sup> The Campidoglio's bells were resurrected in 1805 and the *Diario* reported various landmarks in their progress to restoration.<sup>4</sup> The pope himself donated 20,700 pounds of bronze for the project; the bell-founder Andrea Casini cast them; and the silversmith Giuseppe Spagna decorated them. When finished, the new *campana maggiore* (1803) was a 17,940-pound giant and the *campana minore* (1804) also a still substantial 8,977-pound hulk of metal. Both new bells were heavily decorated with images and friezes in a Grecian style and a ceremony was organised to commemorate their consecration, which the *Diario*, naturally, also recounts.

The *Diario ordinario* for 7 December 1805 in fact contains an unusually full and lengthy account of the bell blessing ceremonies under the title '*Relazione della solenne benedizione delle due grandi campane da collocarsi nel Campanile di Campidoglio fatta dalla Santità di Nostro Signore PIO PP. SETTIMO il dì 26. Novembre 1805*'.<sup>5</sup> We learn key details from this account: a papal throne and an altar were set up in the *Palazzo senatorio*'s main *sala*; the communal magistrates greeted the pope when he arrived from the Quirinal Palace, inviting him up the Capitoline's private steps (*scaletta segreta*); a host of clergy performed a celebratory mass in the papal presence, which culminated in his benediction of the bells. Only the illness of the Senator Abbondio Rezzonico spoiled the occasion, but Pius VII remedied that by visiting him separately at his sickbed in the apartment on the palazzo's upper floor after the ceremony. Perhaps notably, the process of reactivating the bells through the blessing is described not merely as '*per restaurare*' but as '*per ripristinare*', a verb with higher literary connotations ('pristine') and a sense of fundamental renewal.

### Cancellieri's history of bells

The Capitoline bells were thus being constituted and reconstituted as part of a rich fabric of sound-in-politics in Rome for centuries before 1800. Nevertheless, Cancellieri's was the first major attempt to interpret their story in the context of wider narratives. The book starts with bell history, which unfolds after a quip by Polydore Vergil (1470–1555) that the bell is one of few human inventions whose inventor is unknown (*De rerum Inventoribus*, Lib. III. c.18). Nevertheless, Cancellieri asserts, the evidence favours an Italian origin, if not for the concept of a bell then at least for the special type of bronze from which they were traditionally cast. Some claim that the Goths introduced this alloy into Italy only at the end of the seventh century, Cancellieri concedes. But ancient texts, notably Isidore of Seville (c.560–636), show Italian manufacture to have predated this. Indeed, Cancellieri plays the game of word association: '*campana*' derives from 'Campania', the region surrounding the town of Nola where the metal was first produced. Much of Cancellieri's Italian patriotism in these pages also, on one level, merely echoes an earlier treatise by another former papal official, Angelo Rocca (1545–1620) (Rocca 1612). However, broadly speaking, the sentiments in these passages also fit with the well-known pattern of rising national consciousness in Italy. Antonino de Francesco has observed how assertions of the

antiquity of Italian culture, such as Cancellieri's, were became a key building block in efforts to imagine Italian cultural identity and, further, that they helped sidestep more difficult questions in the building of national consciousness brought about by Italy's long-standing lack of political unity (De Francesco 2013, 15–17). Such phenomena are better studied in the context of slightly later generations, even amongst the clergy (Noether 1951; Lyttleton 2001; Laven 2006; Isabella 2009), and Cancellieri could perhaps be seen as a forebear of better-known clerical patriots such as Antonio Rosmini (1797–1855) or Vincenzo Gioberti (1801–52).

Cancellieri's discussion progresses from bell-origins to bell-uses – and this section of his text goes to great length to establish the bell's essential sacrality. He corrects a popular misconception that bells must be 'baptised'; in fact they are only 'blessed' (*benedette*) in a ceremony whose origins are (once again) Italian. The first reliable record of bell blessing comes from one that John XIII performed for the Lateran bell in 968 (though Cancellieri, following Rocca, concedes that the English Alcuin mentions an *ordo* about bell-blessing as early as 770). Cancellieri explains the confusion between baptism and blessing: an earlier rite of blessing for all liturgical vessels had also involved washing them, and the practice may have been transferred in some quarters. He also identifies another time-honoured practice – that of ascribing to each bell a 'protector' saint – which also emerged early, most probably as a means to help the faithful distinguish one bell from another. Yet this assignation was far from benign: it had led to the spread of 'abuses' and superstitions, amongst which Cancellieri includes the custom of naming godparents for each bell, of dressing them up in precious 'clothing', and of ritualistically calling out the bell's 'name' whilst clutching its rope.

Here Cancellieri sounds, strikingly, less like a fusty old clergyman and more like a Catholic Enlightener. But what is most important is his method: he compiles his text on the basis of a systematic trawl through printed sources. Indeed, he roots his discussion in an apparently encyclopaedic knowledge of printed sources for bell history and for the history of Rome. The approach is clearly intended to convey to the reader a certain sense of authorial erudition – as, for instance, when a discussion of Leo IV's bell tower in the now defunct church of Sant'Andrea in Vaticano draws on a particularly obscure passage in the *Liber Pontificalis*.<sup>6</sup> Cancellieri was very proud of his approach, noting that 'I was able to pull these pages together, without having to resort to the authors who wrote about the subject' (*Nondimeno ho potuto accozzar questi fogli, senza bisogno di ricorrere agli autori, che ne hanno scritto*) (Cancellieri 1806, vii). He even attempts something like a joke: 'even though I have been without books, I do not want to be branded a mere autodidact' (*Non essendo neppur co'Libri, molto meno mi basterebbe l'animo di entrar nel numero degli Eruditi, senza Libri*).<sup>7</sup>

When Cancellieri at last turns to the Capitoline bells directly, he makes a particular point of rejecting claims (still advanced by twenty-first-century historians, including once by the present author) that the great bell was only rung to announce very specific events like the pope's death or the start of *carnevale*. Instead, he supplies a list of occasions for their ringing which is tantamount to a veritable history of the Roman commune. The earliest example Cancellieri finds comes from 1235, when 'the bells previously from Viterbo' commemorated the peace agreed between Gregory IX (1227–41) and Angelo Malabranca, the then Senator of Rome.<sup>8</sup> Cancellieri finds evidence that the bell rang again in 1281 and 1283; in 1327 it called Romans to arms; in 1360 it summoned them to a public meeting; in 1410, it celebrated the antipope John XXIII's election; in 1438 it delighted in the truce agreed between Rienzo Colonna and Giovanni Vitelleschi (Titular Patriarch of Alexandria but also a *condottiere*); in 1453 it marked the justice meted out on Battista di Persona, a man both pardoned and hanged in the same day; in 1481 it rejoiced at Mehmet II's death in Constantinople; in 1493 it proclaimed Alexander VI's



holy league with Venice and the duke of Milan; and so on. All this, although superficially tedious, is actually extremely purposeful: it not only records what was known about the old bells but also instructs those who will ring the new bells not only *when* to do so but *what* it will mean when they do. Future bell-ringers are thus invited to participate in one of Garrioch's 'auditory communities', in this case those bound together across time by common exposure to the sounds of these bells. The whole passage is essential to the project of bringing the new bells into communion with the pre-revolutionary past and showing how they can be used to facilitate its resurrection.

Cancellieri briefly discusses a few other topics in relation to the Capitoline bells themselves – the Palazzo Senatorio's original construction of them under Boniface IX (1389–1404), the erection of its new bell tower under Gregory XIII, the office *campanaro* (bell-ringer), once important but now venal, etc – before he turns to clocks. The discussion of clocks, beginning with that previously attached to the façade of Santa Maria in Aracoeli and now incorporated into the Campidoglio's *campanile*, is similarly purposeful – and not only because clocks, like bells, were acoustic as well as visual markers of a temporal calendar. Cancellieri discusses the invention of different types of clocks (water clocks, hourglasses, pendulum clocks, mechanical clocks) and the appearance of famous public clocks in Rome, Italy, and Northern Europe. He even ponders some theoretical questions about them: is it possible to create a perpetual clock and would you need to wind it? But the significant part of the discussion arrives when Cancellieri posits a more loaded question: whether Italian methods of time measurement are superior to those practised across the Alps? 'Italian' Time (*ora italiana*) operated according to a twenty-four-hour clock which reset half an hour after sundown and had to be adjusted throughout the year to accommodate the shifting of the hours of daylight. 'French' or 'Oltremontano' time (*ora oltremontana*), on the other hand, was the system of hour-keeping based on two twelve-hour cycles within each twenty-four-hour day with which we are still familiar (Dohrn-van Rossum 1996, 113–7). The Roman Republic of 1798–9 had replaced the old Italian system with the French one (Giuntella 1954, 1:70). And, indeed, French revolutionaries had attacked traditional methods of time-keeping everywhere they went, precisely because they saw them to be a basis for the Church's social and cultural hegemony in societies where Catholic liturgies quite literally shaped the very structure and order of the day (Shaw 2011, 63, 93). Marina Formica has described how imposition of the *ora oltremontana* really did alter rhythms of everyday life in Rome, a fact which explains Cancellieri's antipathy to it (Formica 1994, 50). The *ora oltremontana* was an explicitly anti-Christian system that attacked the temporal rhythms of the past.

Cancellieri – in a judgment notably and amusingly at odds with that of Goethe, in his famous account of travelling in Italy (Goethe 1992, 42–3) – now asserts in his text that the Italian method is actually far superior. The *orologio oltremontano* was copied from a Chinese custom and, besides, Italian methods are also just more practicable, especially for those travelling and for the military. Above all, Italian Time is just more Christian, because it organises time in a way that is truer to the clock of life (*orologio vitale*):

*Così carissimo ci dev'essere il nostro Orologio Italiano, che ci viene avvisando a tutte le Ore, quanto propriamente ci resta per arrivare alla Notte, dovendosi accordare da ognuno che l'Oriuo! migliore, e qual che ci ricorda l'ultim'ore* (Cancellieri 1806, 91).

(We ought to hold our *Italian Clock* so dear, because it tells us at all times how much we really have left until nightfall, and we should all agree that *the best clock is the one that reminds us of our last hour.*)

This passage was copied from an earlier pamphlet by his friend and former tutor the Jesuit Giulio Cesare Cordara (1704–85), a ‘plagiarism’ that seems far from coincidental (Cordara 1783, 28; Visconti 1827, 18; Trollope 1886, 282, 284). Originality never mattered to Cancellieri, nor to other writers of the time, more than the chance to make a good point. But here Cancellieri likely also hoped that Cordara’s words would remind his reader of the context in which Cordara himself had been writing: the suppression of his order, another act of aggression against the pope from across the mountains.

### Cancellieri’s Rome: between papacy and republic?

The final aspect to Cancellieri’s text on which I want to remark is, perhaps, best summed up by the story it does not tell. This may, in fact, be one of the most fascinating aspects to his narrative approach and one which modifies Caffiero’s understanding of his significance in the movement to ‘resacralise’ Rome. The Patarina’s origin story ought to have been tailor-made for a text glorifying the return of the pope’s temporal power. Innocent III’s decretal *Vergentis in senium* (25 March 1199), directed at the Viterbans, was the context to the campaigns against them which led to the first Patarina’s capture. It is widely recognised as a key document in papal history, the first to equate political opposition to the pope with heresy (Morris 2001, 442). Yet Cancellieri makes no attempt to exploit its historic significance as a fundamental demonstration of the pope’s *maestà*. This omission is certainly very much at odds with the approach to that subject found in some of Cancellieri’s other works (both the 1802 text on the *Possesso* and in later works post-1814). Cancellieri’s primary concern when writing about the Patarines is, instead, to refute accusations that leading figures in the medieval history of the Papal State were tainted by their heresies. Clare of Rimini (1282–1346), acknowledged as a saint in 1782, is one whom he notably acquits. More surprisingly, Cola di Rienzo – that infamous self-styled tribune of the Roman people – is another. As Cola di Rienzo was, along with the two Marcus Junius Brutuses, one of the most prominent figures in the 1798 Republic’s civic pantheon, this constituted an audacious and potentially contentious act of reappropriation. Indeed, Cancellieri was not long after to pen an elegy for his friend Tommaso Gabrini (1726–1808), parish priest of SS. Vincenzo e Anastasio a Fontana di Trevi, which excused the latter’s ‘excessive enthusiasm’ for Rienzo on the grounds that he had been swayed by his sincere belief that he was one of Rienzo’s descendents (Caffiero 1996, 36–40).<sup>9</sup>

What then should we make of Cancellieri’s decision to omit the Patarina’s origin story? If not for his embrace of Cola di Rienzo later in the text it might be tempting – per Leopardi or Belli – to ascribe it to mere lack of imagination. Nevertheless, it is also possible that Cancellieri ignored it because he wanted to emphasise Rome’s republican history in his text and that excessive glorification of the pope’s *plenitudo* would hardly have been in keeping with such a bifurcated strategy. This strategy, to present a history in which Rome’s cultural heritage was *both* papal and republican, would have been in keeping not only with Consalvi’s later approach in Vienna but also with the attitude both pope and communal magistrates seem to have taken to the design and decoration of the new Capitoline bells themselves. These designs celebrate *in fondo* papal partnership with the Roman commune. The *campana maggiore* is dedicated to the papacy’s patrons, the Virgin and saints Peter and Paul, but the *minore* depicts two local Roman saints (Alessio and Francesca) who had historic associations with the city’s Senatorial class.<sup>10</sup> The *maggiore*’s inscription (Table 1), like the bell’s design itself, also seems pro-papal: it contains a glorious line that invites its reader to contemplate the republican coins from which it was fabricated melting in the heat of a purging fire. And yet, the inscription on the *minore* (Table 2) is notable for its self-conscious adoption of ancient republican terminology.

**Table 1:** Inscriptions on the *Campana Maggiore*

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MVNIFICENTIA · OPTIMI · PRINCIPIS · EX · AEREIS · NVMMIS · PROSCRIPTIS · CONFLATA ·  
ALEXANDRO · LANTE · AERARII · PRAEFECTO

---

(By the munificence of the excellent prince (i.e. Pius VII) recast from confiscated copper coin, Alessandro Lante being prefect of the treasury.)

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PIO VII · P · M · PONTIFICATVS · EIVS · ANNO · IV · AB · VRBE · CONDITA · MMDLIII · VIRGINI ·  
IMMACVLATAE · DIVIS · PETRO · ET · PAVLO · PATRONIS · EX · S · C · SACRA

---

(With Pius VII in the fourth year of his pontificate, the 2,553rd since the founding of the city, holy to the Immaculate Virgin and the patron saints Peter and Paul, the Senate having been consulted.)

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**Table 2:** Inscriptions on the *Campana Minore*

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AES · QVIRITVM · BELLORVM · DIIS · OLIM · PLAVDEBAT · NVNC · DEO · PACIS · PLAVDET · ILLVD ·  
IMPVRA · SVPERSTITIO · MARTI · ME · PIA · RELIGIO · DIVIS · ALEXIO · ET · FRANCESCAE ·  
SENATORII · ORDINIS · EXIMIO · DECORI · FELICIVS · SACRAVIT

---

(The Roman bronze once gave approval to the gods of war, now the impure superstition for Mars gives its approval to the god of peace. Pious faith has quite felicitously consecrated me to the outstanding honour of the divine Alessio and Francesca of the Senatorial Order.)

---

ABVNDIO · REZZONICO · VRBIS · SENATORE

---

DOMINICO · SERLVPIO )

---

AVGVSTO · SCARLATTI ) *Coss.*

---

ALEXANDRO · BONACVRSIO )

---

IOANNE · PATRICIO · C · R · PRIORE

---

EODEM · ET · PHILIPPO · A · PORTA

---

AEDIVM · CAPITOLII · CVRATORIBVS

---

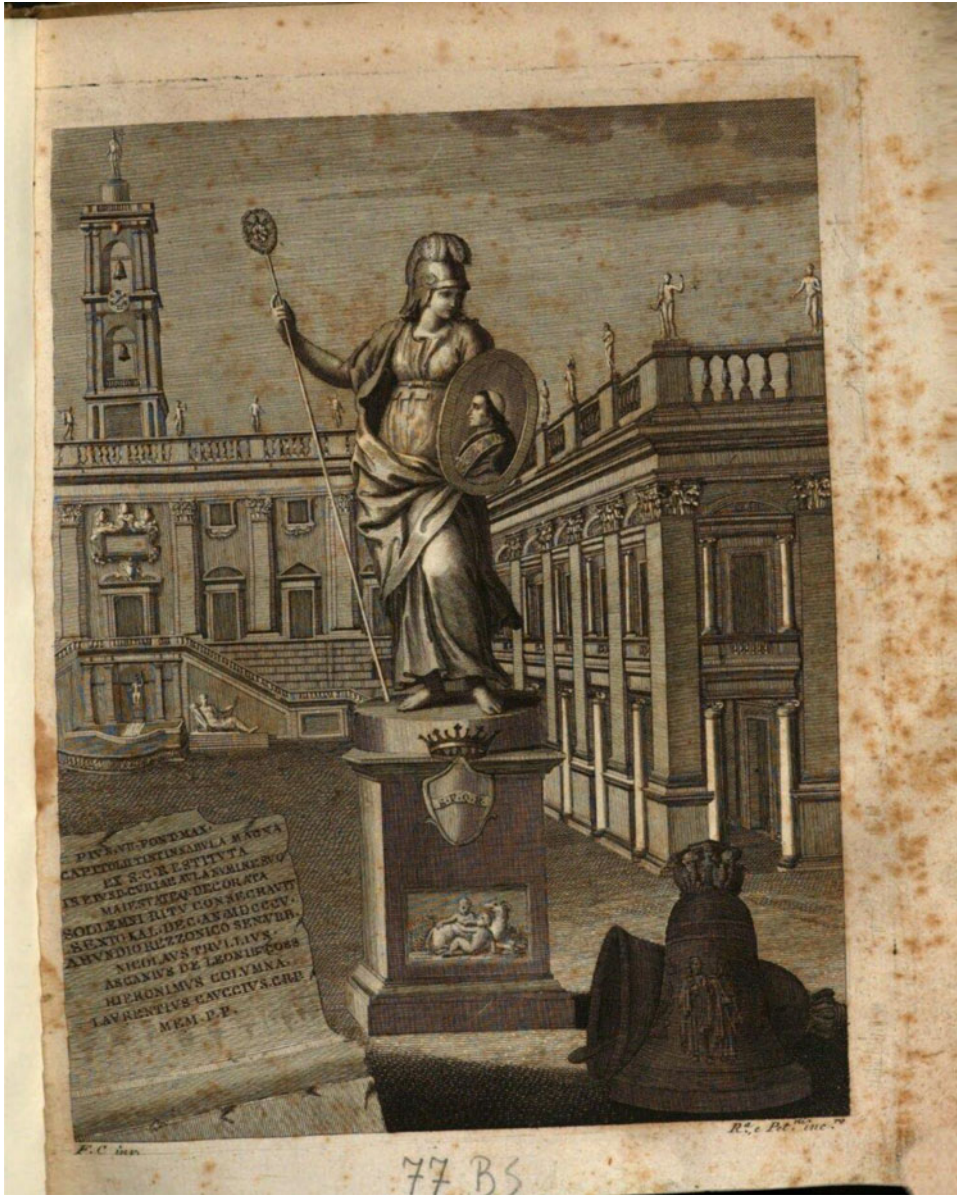
(Abundio Rezzonico, being Senator of the City; Domenico Serlupi, Augusto Scarlatti, Alessandro Buonacorsi, the Conservators; Giovanni Patrizio, Prior of the *Caporioni*; and that same man and Filippo della Porta, being Guardians of the Capitoline Palaces.)

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‘Coss.’ here means conservators, but was also the ancient abbreviation for consuls; the formulae employed are not ‘anno domini’ but ‘ab urbe condita’ (i.e. since Romulus’ founding of Rome in 509BCE). Elsewhere, in the part of the inscription on the *maggiore* that thanks Pius, the ancient formula ‘ex senatus consulto’ is applied.

The bells themselves provide clear evidence of a cultural strategy and also of a hierarchy between the papal *maggiore* and the communal *minore*. Nevertheless, there is also evidence that this hierarchy was contested even in 1805. A quite different inscription, which the Capitoline magistrates placed around the walls of the *sala* where the bell-blessing had taken place, expresses it thus:

*Pius VII Pont. Max. Capitolii tintinnabula magna ex senatus consulto restituta in eiusdem curiae aula numine suo maiestateg(ue) decorata sollempni ritu consecravit sexto kal. Decembr. An.*



**Figure 1.** Lithograph from *Le due nuove campane* (1806), copyright Bayerische Staatsbibliothek München, 4 H.eccl. 152 d, S.5. urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb10003999-3.

*MDCCCV Abundio Rezzonico senatore Urbis, Nicolaus Trullius Ascanius de Leonib(us) Hieronymus Columna coss., Laurentius Cauccius c. r. p. memoriam p. p.*

(Pius VII Pontifex Maximus consecrated the great bells of the Capitol, restored by order of the Senate, in a solemn rite on 26 November 1805 and this hall in the same palace was also decorated in honour of his divine majesty through the agency

of Abundio Rezzonico, senator of the city, the conservators Niccolò Trullio, Ascanio de Leoni, Girolamo Colonna and the Prior of the Caporioni Lorenzo Cauccio.)

The significance of this inscription is surely that Pius VII's agency over the bells' restoration is notably diminished. He is no longer their great benefactor; his role is merely to have consecrated them after they had been restored on the 'Senate's' order. The shift in emphasis at the very least raises questions about how far the magistrates truly accepted Pius VII's narrative about his status as Rome's restorer. But what is more remarkable is that this is the inscription text that appears on the only substantive image in *Le due nuove campane* (Figure 1), a plate reproduced inside the front cover. The plate shows the *campanile*, its bells, and clock in the background; in the foreground, a statue of Roma Armata, two fallen bells – the lost bells? – at her feet, and these words on a ruined masonry block. Is it significant that Cancellieri reproduced this text rather than the others or merely an accident of design? It is hard to say. However, a further remarkable feature of Cancellieri's text is the muted role it accords Pius VII in the whole proceedings surrounding the bells. His place in Cancellieri's work is no more than liminal – as the mere dedicatee of a preface that includes some remarks on the successes of the journeys to and from Paris (Cancellieri 1806, v; Ticchi 2013) – which ought to at least give pause for thought.

The position of Pius VII, and of the relative presentations of pope and commune, in *Le due nuove campane* and, indeed, on the new Capitoline bells themselves, should matter historiographically. As historians, we are accustomed to viewing Pius VII as the hero-liberator of a later world post-1814 and nearly all scholarship on Pius presents his personality and reign from that vantage point (O'Dwyer 1985; Olson 1986; Rusconi 2010; Worcester 2010; Caiani 2020; Ticchi 2022). But Pius is conspicuously not a heroic saint-martyr here. Moreover, Cancellieri's position on Pius in *Le due nuove campane* is consistent with doubts other Roman priests of his generation harboured over Pius' policies at this juncture. Francesco Fortunati, that other Roman priest *du jour*, was noting down the satires against Pius at this time with a mixture of horror and relish: 'Pius VI sacrificed his throne to save the faith, but Pius VII sacrificed the faith to save his throne' goes one of the better ones.<sup>11</sup> Cancellieri's position is also consistent within an undercurrent of misgivings over the whole enterprise of the trip to Paris which he himself would seem to have expressed in his diary, for instance when he reports disapprovingly on how the French public have mocked the nuncio Speroni (Ticchi 2004, 377). Maria Pia Donato, who has studied several late-eighteenth century antiquarians, argues that their interest in antiquities caused them to lose faith in the papal monarchy (Donato 1992). Cancellieri certainly does not fall into that category – but, for all his traditionalism, he does not appear to have rested straightforwardly at the more reactionary end of papal anti-revolutionary propaganda either.

It is an irony of Cancellieri's career that his position in Pius VII's service was to lead to his own partial cancellation in the decades that followed. Gregory XVI (r. 1831–46), attempting to suppress public memory of his predecessor's overtures towards Napoleon, which he saw as a humiliation, had the original manuscript of Cancellieri's private diary confiscated whence it was lost (Ticchi 2004, 337–41; 2005, 140). This intransigent attitude, rather than Cancellieri's more inclusive approach to understanding the past, was to become a hallmark of papal policy in those mid nineteenth-century years, perhaps with baleful consequences – not only for Cancellieri but for all of Rome.

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## Notes

- 1 *Avviso di Roma*, 24 August 1585, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, *Urb. Lat. 1053*, 409v. This text is reproduced in Orbaan 1910 at 283.
- 2 'In tempo della Repubblica furono spezzata e dai nostri iniqui Republicanì, vendute a peso di metallo', Francesco Fortunati, 'Avvenimenti sotto il Pontificato di Pio VI dall'anno 1775 all'anno 1800', Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, *Vat. Lat. 10730*, 474v–75r.
- 3 Archivio di Stato di Roma, *Camerlengato* I.4.37. Chracas, *Diario Ordinario* (1804), n. 26 (31 March), 11, mentions the blessing ceremony for this bell. Other examples from the *Diario Ordinario* include the two new bells of San Paolo primo eremita mentioned in (1801), n. 45 (6 June), 6; those of San Biagio della Pagnotta, (1804) n. 11 (8 February), 6; that destined for the parish church of Rocca di Papa in the Alban Hills, (1804), n. 63 (8 August), 10; that of Santa Maria della Purificazione, (1804), n. 66 (18 August), 3; and that of San Martino ai Monti, (1805), n. 88 (2 November), 4.
- 4 Chracas, *Diario Ordinario* (1805) 82 (12 October), 88 (2 November), 95 (27 November 1805). Francesco Fortunati's diary also has a report on them from 26 November 1805 which corroborates various details in the *Diario*, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, *Vat. Lat. 10731*, 486v–487r.
- 5 Chracas, *Diario Ordinario* (1805), n. 98 (7 December), 1–14.
- 6 *Liber Pontificalis* 105, c.55: 'fecit etiam ubi supra campanilem et posuit campana cum malo ereo et cruce exaurato'. Duchesne 1892, 2:119.
- 7 Cancellieri includes a footnote to a book about autodidacticism, Heinrich Boncik's *Exercitatio historica Αβιβλους seu de eruditis sine libris* (Leipzig: Christian Scholvinii, 1693).
- 8 The text here gives the year as 1135 but this must be a printer's error, Cancellieri 1806, 40.
- 9 Chracas, *Diario Ordinario* (1808), no. 98 (7 December), 2–12, and no. 99 (10 December), 2–19. Gabrini had written of Rienzo as 'difensore della libertà latina' ('defender of Latin liberty') and enemy of the Roman barons who had been commissioned by Innocent VI 'per ridurre ivi la democrazia in uno stato di moderazione, e farvi osservare quella costituzione che dal medesimo Tribuno vi era stata saggiamente stabilita' ('to bring democracy there into a more modern state, and to make the city observe that constitution which the same tribune had wisely established there').
- 10 Alexius of Rome was a fourth-century monastic saint mentioned in the Roman martyrology. Francesca of Rome (1384–1440) was a mystic who founded a community of oblates. Both saints were reputed to come from ancient patrician (i.e. senatorial) families, at least in local Roman traditions.
- 11 'Girava per Roma la seguente satira. Si rappresentava in un Quadro, che Pio VII era andato a coronare un ladro; e poi sotto diceva: "Pio VI abbandonò la sede per conservare la santa fede. Pio VII abbandonò la fede per conservare la sede"'. Fortunati, 'Avvenimenti sotto il Pontificato di Pio VI', 476r.

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### Italian summary

Nel 1806, lo storico ed erudito di antichità Francesco Cancellieri scrisse un trattato sulle campane dei palazzi del Campidoglio, commissionate per sostituire quelle distrutte nel periodo della Repubblica Romana del 1798–1799. Attraverso la storia di questi artefatti, il testo di Cancellieri offre importanti chiavi di lettura sul significato delle campane nel cattolicesimo italiano del primo Ottocento e sulla reazione ecclesiastica a episodi di trauma e perdita. Un'attenta analisi rivela come Cancellieri abbia fatto uso di tecniche storiografiche per ricostruire una comunità raggruppata attorno alle campane, in funzione di un programma di 'ri-sacralizzazione' che stava prendendo piede a Roma in quel periodo. Dalle sue parole traspare una prospettiva complessa e ricca di sfumature sulla necessità di riconciliare le tradizioni pontificie e repubblicane di Roma, in netto contrasto con interpretazioni più reazionarie che si sarebbero affermate in seguito.

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