CHAPTER 12

The *Liber Pontificalis* and the Transformation of Rome from Pagan to Christian City in the Early Middle Ages

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Abstract

This chapter offers a new perspective on the familiar topic of the transformation of Rome from pagan to Christian city in the Early Middle Ages. With the papal history known as the *Liber pontificalis* as its main focus, it considers the peculiarities of this 6th-century text's representation of Rome during the period of the pagan emperors before the beginning of the 4th century, as well as in the aftermath of the conversion of the emperor Constantine during the pontificates of Pope Silvester I and his immediate successors. The chapter argues that the text's portrait of early Christian Rome is essentially an early 6th-century one and can be interpreted as an attempt to convince readers of the dominance of the pope and the steady triumph of orthodox Christianity. Yet excellent recent work on late antique Rome has replaced the old view of a smooth and rapid transition from a pagan to a Chris-

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tian city at the beginning of the 4th century. The *Liber pontificalis* was once assumed to support this neat picture, but careful reading exposes a small, impoverished, vulnerable and diverse community in Rome. At the same time, the text makes claims about the popes' unwavering leadership. The *Liber pontificalis*, in short, not only contains important information about the process of Rome's becoming a Christian city but shapes the perception that the bishops of Rome contributed substantially to the city's development as a holy and Christian city.

Keywords: city of Rome, transformation from pagan to Christian, papal history, *Liber pontificalis*, bishops of Rome, martyrs, Christian communities

Introduction

This chapter on 'being pagan, being Christian' in Rome in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages centres on an obviously well-worked topic on which there is a great abundance of wonderful new work.[1] There are nevertheless still things to be said and work to be done, particularly as far as the *Liber Pontificalis* is concerned. I shall explain more about the text below but should like first of all to offer some background.

I was lucky enough to be part of an HERA (Humanities in the European Research Area) project funded by the ESF (European Science Foundation), 'Cultural Memory and the Resources of the Past', between 2010 and 2013 with colleagues, 'postdocs' and PhD students in Leeds, Vienna, Utrecht and Cambridge. Together we uncovered many examples of eclectic uses of the resources of the past in the Early Middle Ages which helped to shape identities in the post-Roman successor states of Western Europe. In the book we published as one outcome of this project, we argued that particular texts compiled in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages not only reflected social and cultural identities but also could be understood as part of an effort to shape the time and context in which those texts were written by means of restructuring the past (Gantner, McKitterick and Meeder 2015). They were thus an essential component of the formation of cultural memory in early medieval Europe; this evocation of the work of Jan Assmann and Aleida Assmann was quite deliberate (J. Assmann 1999; A. Assmann 1999). My own work focused during this project, and still focuses, on a variety of late antique and early medieval texts offering

narratives of Roman history and representations of the city of Rome. A dominant theme for me, therefore, is the relationship between these very particular narratives on the one hand and, on the other, the realities of the period between the 4th and 10th centuries suggested by the range of material and other textual evidence, some of it only newly available, that we are beginning to understand in new ways. This is particularly pertinent when considering the transformation of Rome from pagan to Christian city in the Early Middle Ages and how this might be reflected in the extant sources. Discussions by many of those contributing to this volume, as well as many studies in the major European languages,[2] have all contributed interpretations of new excavations, burial practices, the development of martyr cults, liturgy and ritual, the variety of pagan and Christian experience and communities, processes of conversion and Christianisation, the diversity of social organisation, and the very gradual nature of the encroachment of Christian buildings within the Aurelian walls of the city of Rome as well as on the principal roads out of the city.[3]

All these have very satisfactorily and convincingly disrupted old but improbable notions of a neat displacement of homogenised pagans by united Christians in both physical and institutional terms with the conversion of Constantine at the beginning of the 4th century (Behrwald and Witschel 2012; Heid 2020). Much excellent work in recent years, nevertheless, has concentrated on the period from the 3rd to the 5th century,[4] and the extension of the discussion into the early medieval period in this volume is both welcome and necessary.

A distinctive aspect of many texts in the Early Middle Ages, moreover, is their dynamic relationship with Late Antiquity. This is particularly the case with texts about Rome, where the presentation and reception of versions of the past, written in the Early Middle Ages but with reference to Late Antiquity, have much to tell us about the formation of identities or, at least, about how particular individuals may have endeavoured to shape collective identities. The original *Liber Pontificalis* and its continuations are a fascinating instance of such an attempt to frame a new identity for Christians within a narrative of the transformation of Rome from pagan to Christian city. In this chapter, therefore, I want to consider in particular the peculiarities of the representations in the *Liber Pontificalis* of Rome in the time of the pagan emperors, and the transformations attributed to Silvester and his immediate successors after the conversion of Constantine to Chris-

tianity. In doing so, the oddities of its production and transmission, as well as those of its text, are pertinent, but for reasons of space I address these elsewhere (McKitterick 2016, 2019, 165–88, 2020c).

The *Liber Pontificalis* or 'Book of Popes' is a distinctively structured narrative history of Rome as a series of formulaic biographies of the popes from St Peter, the first bishop of Rome, to the end of the 9th century, that is, Lives 1–108 and 112 (no lives are extant for John VIII, Marinus and Hadrian III). They are numbered in sequence in all the earliest manuscripts and thus create a new chronology of Roman time as well as a particular understanding of the history of the bishops of Rome (*Liber Pontificalis* I; hereafter *LP* I).

Composed within the papal administration, the *Liber Pontificalis* was compiled in several stages. It is with the first of these, usually dated c. 530, and thought to be based on earlier and scrappier information, with which I shall be concerned in this chapter. When first produced, the *Liber Pontificalis* constituted a papal recasting of imperial serial biography, with all the ideological implications such an historiographical choice implies. That is, its closest parallels are not Old Testament kings, martyr passions or even saints' lives but the imperial biographical narratives of classical and late antique authors such as Suetonius, (pseudo-)Aurelius Victor and the person(s) responsible for the *Historia Augusta* (McKitterick 2011). The *Liber Pontificalis* is ostensibly a repository of factual information, but it actually offers both very particular representations of the popes and very far from disinterested narrative strategies in the deployment of information (Deliyannis 2014; McKitterick 2009; Noble 1985). The *Liber Pontificalis*, disseminated very efficiently in early medieval Europe, consequently played a major role in reorienting perceptions of Rome and the Roman past in the Early Middle Ages (McKitterick 2013, 2020a).

Each life contains standard details at the beginning about the *natio* and father of the bishop concerned, his length of time in office and information about his election. The lives then contain a variable amount of information about the religious and political life of the city as well as the bishop's contributions to the church buildings of Rome. The final formulaic information provides the number of ordinations of deacons, priests and bishops each bishop performed, the circumstances of his death and the length of the vacancy before the next bishop took office.

Two further aspects of these manuscripts need to be registered straightaway. First, only a few, of whatever date, go much beyond Life 94 of the mid-8th-century Pope Gregory III (731–741) and very few beyond Life 97 of Pope Hadrian I (772–795). Second, with the exception of one full text and two fragments, all from northern Italy and dating from the 6th, 7th and 8th centuries, all the earliest manuscripts date from the late 8th and ninth century and are of Frankish origin.[5]

A crucial factor is that the representation of the transformation of Rome from pagan to Christian city is essentially a creation of the early decades of the 6th century, when Italy was still under Ostrogothic rule. When the earliest portion of the text containing the biographies of the first 59 popes from Peter to Agapitus was composed, however, Italy was suffering the consequences of the advances of the armies of Justinian, led by Belisarius. The Christians of Rome had recently experienced the schism with Byzantium known as the Acacian schism, quite apart from the tensions usually assumed between Catholic and Arian in Italy itself as a consequence of Ostrogothic rule.[6]

The *Liber Pontificalis*'s Presentation of the Pre-Constantinian Era

The *Liber Pontificalis* opens with letter purporting to be from Jerome to Pope Damasus asking him for a history of his church, and Damasus' reply sending him 'what I have been able to find out about its history' ('Tamen quod gestum est quod potuimus repperire nostrae sedis stadium'). This preface is in all the earliest complete manuscripts and was designed to credit Damasus with the initial compilation, at least, of the *Liber Pontificalis*.[7] Jerome's own Latin translation and extension of Eusebius' *Chronicon* appears to have been a source for some of the information about Rome in the sections up to the middle of the 4th century, as was Jerome's *De viris illustribus*. The Liberian catalogue in the calendar of 354 has long been recognised as a source for the brief notes on many of the earliest popes, but the letter prefaces provide a further association of ideas for the text. Jerome had asked for an

> orderly account of the history enacted in [the] see from the reign of the Apostle Peter down to [his] own time, so that in humility I may learn which of the bishops of your see deserved the crown of martyrdom and

> which of them is reckoned to have transgressed against the canons of the apostles. (*LP* I, p. 117; transl. Davis, *Pontiffs*, 1)

Consequently the text could be seen as a continuation of the Acts of the Apostles, with a particular focus on Peter and his successors. The first life reinforces this not only by bringing Peter from Antioch, but also by stating that he was responsible for the content of Mark's Gospel as well as confirming the content of all four Gospels. In addition, Peter's debate with Simon Magus, another protagonist from the Acts of the Apostles, is described as both before the emperor Nero and before the people ('Hic cum Simone mago multas disputations habuit tam ante Neronem imperatrem quanque ante populum'). This note also continues the reference to Simon in Acts. The allegation is that Simon was undermining Peter's work, but it is otherwise impossibly uninformative, saying merely that Simon was struck down by God after a long period of disputation ('Et dum diutius altercarent, Simon divino nutu interemptus est') (cf. Perkins 2012). I explore the questions raised by this report elsewhere (McKitterick 2020c, 79–81), but of relevance here is the representation of discussion and disputes between the Christians and pagans in Rome precipitated by Christian efforts at conversion, and that these involved imperial authorities and people, if not the emperor himself.

This first life of Peter contrives to offer many of the facets of Christian identity subsequently developed further in the rest of the text: Peter's teaching, the sharing of the stories of the Gospels, the placing of these texts as both central to the Christian faith and confirmed by the *princeps apostolorum*, the dramatic affirmation of faith in the face of imperial persecution by Peter because he was martyred, his disputation and therefore rejection of the erroneous views of Simon Magus as an indication of the maintenance of an accurate and orthodox Christian faith, and lastly Peter's provision for his succession. Further, the life of Peter and the subsequent lives in themselves offer a common history for Rome and help to construct a collective identity for the Christians of Rome

The most obvious messages of the lives before the conversion of Constantine are the championing of the Christian faith and Roman Christians' resistance to state power – that is, what Burrus and Lehmann describe as 'a public stance of political resistance to empire' (Burrus and Lehmann 2012, 7). This is indicated by the bald catalogue

of those martyred. Of the 33 popes before Silvester, 24 were recorded in the *Liber Pontificalis* as martyrs – Peter, Linus, Cletus, Clement, Evaristus, Alexander, Xystus, Telesphorus, Anicetus, Victor, Callistus, Urban, Pontian, Anteros, Fabian, Cornelius, Lucius, Stephen I, Xystus II, Felix I, Eutychian, Gaius, Marcellinus, Marcellus (Lives 1–4, 6–9, 12, 15, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31). The phrasing of the *Liber Pontificalis* elides the question of agency, for it simply mentions that particular bishops were crowned with martyrdom (*martyrio coronatur*) after the note of their incumbency during the reign or time in office of particular emperors or consuls. Very occasionally, others die along with the bishop: Peter with Paul (Life 1, c. 64, 67 AD); Alexander (Life 7, c. 110 AD) with the priest Eventius and the deacon Theodulus; Anteros (Life 20, 235–36) with the priest Maximinus; Fabian (Life 21, 236–50), after whose death the priests Moyses and Maximus and the deacon Nicostratos were imprisoned (*LP* I, 118, 127, 147, 148). The narrative of Urban's death (Life 18, 222–30) is one of the more explicit: '[Urban] was a distinguished confessor. By the teaching he passed on he converted many to baptism. He led many to the palm of martyrdom, and through his encouragement many were crowned with martyrdom.'[8] Later manuscripts, such as *Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana*, Vat. lat. 3764, of the 11th century, appear to have inserted extra names of martyrs, perhaps extracted from later *Passiones*. In the life of Stephen I (Life 24, 254–57) for example, the addition states that Stephen was in prison with nine priests, two bishops (Honorius and Castus) and three deacons (Xyxtus, Dionysius and Gaius). In prison at the Arcus Stillans he held a synod, and he placed all the church vessels and the money chest in the control of his archdeacon Xystus, who succeeded him as Xystus II.[9] In Life 22 of Cornelius (251–253) a dispute between the bishop and the pagan emperor Decius is recorded, with Cornelius' famous retort to Decius' accusation: 'I have received letters about the Lord's crown not against the state but rather with spiritual advice for redeeming souls.'[10] These letters were from Cyprian, though the *Liber Pontificalis* does not say so. Further, Bishop Marcellus (Life 31, 305/306–306/307) was 'caught and held because he made arrangements for the church, and arrested by Maxentius to deny he was a bishop and be brought low by sacrificing to demons. He kept despising and spurning the pronouncements of Maxentius and was condemned to the Catabulum.'[11] The life goes on to report that 'in the ninth month his entire clergy came and rescued him at night'.[12] Xystus II (Life 25,

257–58) was martyred in the time of Valerian and Decius when there was a very great persecution. He was beheaded along with six others: the deacons Felicissimus, Agapitus, Januarius, Magnus, Vincent and Stephen. After Xystus' passion, his archdeacon Lawrence suffered the same fate along with Claudius the subdeacon, Severus the priest, Crescentius the reader and Romanus the doorkeeper. Gaius (Life 29, 282–295) was martyred with his brother Gabinius the priest 'on account of Gabinius' daughter Susana'.[13] The most extreme case of persecution in the *Liber Pontificalis* is recorded in Life 30, of Marcellinus (295–303), bishop in the time of Diocletian and Maximian, 'when there was so great a persecution that within 30 days 17,000 persons of both sexes were crowned with martyrdom as Christians in various provinces'. Marcellinus was taken to sacrifice to offer incense, which he did, but when subsequently overcome with repentance he was beheaded. It was also after the death of Marcellinus that the bishopric was said to be vacant for '7 years 6 months and 25 days while Diocletian was persecuting Christians'.[14]

There is an interesting precision about the bishops' places of burial, given the date of compilation, and I have suggested elsewhere the way in which the *Liber Pontificalis* became a source of reference about these holy burial places for pilgrims (McKitterick 2006, 46–51). This may even have been one of the intentions of the compilers. Clement (Life 4, c. 95) for example, was buried in Greece but his body was brought back to Rome. Xystus II (Life 25, c. 120), along with many of his predecessors and successors (Fabian, Lucius, Stephen I, Dionysius, Felix I, Eutychian, Gaius, Eusebius, Militades, Julius), was buried in the cemetery credited to Callistus (de Blaauw 2016; Borgolte 1989; Picard 1960), and it was in what is now known as the crypt of the popes that Pope Damasus installed one of his celebrated verse epitaphs cut on a great slab of stone in the distinctive capitals of Filocalus (Cardin 2008, 16–18; Morison 1972, 94–95; Trout 2015). Further burials recorded are the six deacons executed at the same time as Xystus II (Life 25, 257–58) in the cemetery of Praetextatus and Lawrence in the cemetery of Cyriaces on the Ager Veranus in the crypt with many other martyrs (*LP* I, 155), and the Life of Eutychian (Life 28, 274–82) claims that he buried 342 martyrs in various places with his own hands (*LP* I, 159). Zephyrinus (Life 16, 198/199–217) was buried in his own cemetery, near the cemetery of Callistus (*LP* I, 139). The burial of bishops in named cemeteries, such as that of Urban I (Life 18, 222–30) in the

cemetery of Praetextatus, may indicate that landowners had begun to join the Christian congregation (*LP* I, 143). Something of the horror of the days of persecution, even if not the reality, is conveyed by the description in the life of Marcellinus of the dead lying in the street for 25 days 'at Diocletian's command as an example to the Christians', until priests and deacons gathered the bodies at night with hymns and buried them on the Via Salaria in the cemetery of Priscilla.[15]

Only occasionally does the text yield a hint of an accommodation of the process of the acceptance of new recruits by Christians. Pius (Life 11, c. 145), for example, 'decreed that a heretic coming from the heresy of the Jews should be received and baptized'.[16] Victor (Life 15, c. 195) is said to have 'decreed that in case of necessity anyone coming from paganism might be baptized wherever he happened to be, whether in a river, or in the sea or in springs, provided only that his confession of faith as a Christian be delivered clearly'.[17] Marcellus (Life 31, 305/06–306/07) makes a reference to the establishment of the *tituli* in Rome 'for the baptism and repentance of many converts from paganism',[18] and Miltiades (Life 33, 310–14) decreed 'that none of the faithful should on any account fast on Sunday or Thursday because the pagans kept these days as a holy fast'.[19] That Christians with variant beliefs were also to be found in Rome is clear from the reference in the life of Eusebius (Life 32, c. 308) that he 'discovered heretics in Rome and reconciled them by the laying on of hands'.[20] Eusebius' successor Miltiades is said to have discovered Manicheans (possibly the same group as Eusebius' *heretici*) in the city, and this group is referred to in subsequent 5th-century lives as well (Gelasius, Life 51, 492–96; Hormisdas, Life 54, 514–23) (*LP* I, 255 and 270).

The mixed nature of communities in Rome in terms of origin is undoubted, but the *Liber Pontificalis* suggests that the population of Rome was both far more diverse and very much more accustomed to coexistence than is usually imagined. Even if no more pagans in Rome are mentioned in our sources by c. 530, the memory of them was present in many respects, and many of the daily rhythms of life in Rome, as well as the topography, were instances of continuities probably taken completely for granted (see Humphries 2007; Marazzi 2000). In the 6th century, as indeed in the 4th and 5th, there are indications that groups from Palestine, Syria, Egypt, Greece, Dalmatia and northern Africa were settling in Rome, quite apart from the conglomerate of peoples generally referred to as 'Goths'. There were also visits by pil-

grims and exiles, some of whom never left and who died in Rome, and the increasing attraction of Rome to people from Sicily, Spain, Sardinia and elsewhere in the Italian peninsula as a basis for a clerical career. If one looks only at the origins claimed for the first 59 popes in the *Liber Pontificalis*, 29 are given origins in the various regions of Rome, but of the rest, 11 come from elsewhere in Italy (Campania, Albano, Tuscany, Tiburtina, Samnium), 2 from Sardinia and 17 from outside Italy (the Holy Land, Syria, Spain, Dalmatia, Africa, Greece). Of the ten described as Greek, two seem to have had Jewish fathers. The *Liber Pontificalis* took the international origins of its clergy in Rome completely as a matter of course: one of the messages the text conveys is that they had become Roman and were entirely eligible to become bishops. Nor should one forget the community of Jews in Rome, as Leonard Rutgers has established in past work and his current excavation project.[21] It is perhaps pertinent too to remember the famous complications of conversion in relations with Jews and gentiles mentioned in Paul's letter to the Galatians, and that Peter's first work in Rome may have been within the Jewish community in the city.

The representation of religious communities in the *Liber Pontificalis* is rather less obvious. Emperors or consuls form part of the chronological framework for each new bishop's reign, at least up to the time of Liberius (Life 37, 352–66), and by implication it is the pagan emperors or their officials who are responsible for so many of the early bishops' deaths, or, as the text has it, being 'crowned with martyrdom'. All the lives before the baptism of the emperor Constantine recorded in Life 34 of Pope Silvester present the community of Christians in the city as a small and vulnerable group, sometimes tolerated and sometimes persecuted. The text is carefully constructed to promote the status of the 'monarch bishop' among the many Christian groups in Rome and gives only the merest hint that there might have been divisions and divided loyalties. Thus, Hippolytus is mentioned simply as a priest who happened to be sent into exile by the imperial authorities at the same time and to the same place as Bishop Pontian (Life 19, 230–35),with no hint of the alternative leadership approach to the Christian life that Hippolytus had offered (Brent 1995; see also Curran 2000; Dunn 2016). Similarly, there is a very understated allusion to the challenge Novatian offered to the leadership of the bishop of Rome in the time of bishops Fabian (Life 21, 236–50) and Cornelius (Life 22, 251–53) (*LP* I, 148, 150–01; see also Gülzow 1975; Papandrea 2008). In both instances

what are essentially rivalries are embedded in stories of the pope's martyrdom, with an added distraction in the life of Cornelius provided by the complicated story of the translation of the bodies of saints Peter and Paul from the Via Appia to new resting places on the sites of their respective executions (see McKitterick 2013, 95–118).

Later accounts of disputed elections, such as the challenge to Damasus by Ursinus and his supporters, to Boniface II by Eulalius and to Symmachus by Laurentius, have all too often been seen in exclusively political terms as 'Roman factions' (Blair-Dixon 2007; Wirbelauer 1993, 417–27). The political dimension is of course important; such factions may have included enthusiastic partisans and family members, but they also might have been the outcome of disagreements over a spectrum of interpretations of Christian life, organisation and liturgical practice as well as doctrine. The presence of Arians in Italy from the beginning of the 4th century (and not just among the 'Goths'!), the problems created by the Donatists, the 5th-century references to Manichaeans in Rome, the occasional references to unspecified 'heretics' culminating in the detailed sequence of adopted positions now lumped together as the 'Acacian schism', and the recurrent differences of opinion between those adhering strictly to the Chalcedonian definition of the Trinity and those who chose not to do so, all added to the rich stew of opinion and argument in Rome.

When it mentions any of this, the *Liber Pontificalis* does so as part of a bishop's triumph over error. The text presents the early Christian history of Rome as if it solely concerned the bishop and as if there were complete clarity about the definition of orthodoxy. The earlier and insistent catalogue of bishops killed by pagan emperors because they were steadfast in their Christian faith acts as the essential underpinning of their role.

For the most part these very early lives record the bishops making rulings 'for the whole church' ('et constitutum de ecclesia fecit'; Pius, Life 11, c. 145)[22] and organising the institutional structure of the Christian community in Rome with the division of the regions supervised by deacons (Fabian, Life 21, 236–50). But compare the careers of Peter (Life 1, c. 64 – c. 67) and Dionysius (Life 26, 260–67), the creation of the *tituli* (Evaristus, Life 6, c. 100) and Marcellus (Life 31, 3053/306–306/307), and the *cursus honorum* or succession of ecclesiastical grades for the clergy (Gaius, Life 29, 282–95; Hyginus, Life 10, c. 140). The text also constructs a chronology for various liturgical innovations

about the rituals and rhythms of the Christian year, such as the insertion of the Gloria and Sanctus in the Mass, attributed to Xystus I (Life 7, c. 120); a Mass on Christmas Eve, credited to Telesphorus (Life 9, c. 130); the public ordination of clerics in the presence of all the faithful, decreed by Zephyrinus (Life 16, 198/199–217); and Victor's decisions concerning Easter being celebrated on a Sunday and the length of the season of Lent (Life 15, c. 195; for fuller details see McKitterick 2017b). Some specifically refer to the people of Rome. Alexander (Life 7, c. 110), for example, is said to have decreed the blessing of the salt for sprinkling in the dwellings of the people.[23]

The impression is created of a small, beleaguered and rather impoverished community, with a bishop and a loyal group around him maintaining some kind of foothold and gradually imposing an institutional structure in a mostly hostile environment. The entourage executed with Xystus II (Life 25, 257–58), in particular, looks like the personnel of just one small establishment (*LP* I, 155). On a number of occasions the bishop, on going to meet his fate, explicitly entrusts one of his priests or deacons with taking over his responsibilities in the style of Peter designating his successors. Thus Lucius (Life 23, 253–54) appoints Stephen the archdeacon and Gaius (Life 29, 283–96) designates Marcellinus. In a more oblique allusion, Stephen I (Life 24, 254–57) hands over the sacred vessels or care of the money chest, and the person receiving this, Xystus II, subsequently becomes his successor. The formulaic reiteration of the ordinations carried out by each bishop, however creative the numbers may be, acts as a symbol of successful and continuous recruitment not merely to the ranks of the faithful but to those serving the Church and people.

The creation of an institutional structure and liturgy orchestrated exclusively by the bishop in Rome, but for the whole Church, was designed to affirm the antiquity of the Church in Rome and the apostolic underpinning of all its arrangements, administration, structure, liturgical ritual and clerical office even before the conversion of Constantine and the legal recognition of Christianity within the Roman empire. As already stated above, the text is manifestly concerned to promote the status of the 'monarch bishop' among the many Christian groups in Rome and gives no indication of any of the tensions within the Christian communities of Rome discussed by Allen Brent (1995). The papal history offers a retrospective history of the early Christian Church of Rome as if it solely concerned the bishop.

The reference to the construction of churches, so dominant a feature of Life 34 of Silvester and in so many of the 5th- and 6th-century papal biographies thereafter (de Blaauw 1994; Verhoeven, Bosman and van Asperen 2016), and their provision for the gatherings of the faithful which were a public display of belonging to particular communities, are all major themes of this early portion of the text.

The Transformation of Roman Topography according to the *Liber Pontificalis*

From Life 34 onwards, the *Liber Pontificalis* includes descriptions of the endowment, building and decoration of church buildings, and the donation of gold, silver and bronze liturgical vessels, lights, screens and silk hangings, in Rome. Many of the details were no doubt derived from the papal account books and estates' registers in the office known as the *vestiarium*. This is all too well known to need repeating here, but Krautheimer's maps give an indication of the scale (Krautheimer 1937–1977, 1980; see also Dey 2021).

Before 500, there were 27 churches within the walls of Rome and seven major basilicas outside the walls, including St Peter's and San Paolo fuori le Mura. Before Constantine's conversion, two popes are credited with building basilicas in Rome. Pope Callistus (Life 17, 217–22) built 'the basilica across the Tiber' and Felix I (Life 27, 268–73) built a basilica on the Via Aurelia, though this information is repeated for Felix II (Life 38, 355–65). One of Peter's earliest successors, Anacletus, is credited with the construction of a 'memorial' to Peter (*LP* I, 141, 158, 211 and 125). Quite apart from Pope Silvester's church and those Constantine is alleged to have erected during Silvester's pontificate, in 336 Pope Mark (Life 35, 336) built two basilicas, one on Via Ardeatina and the other in Rome close to the *pallacinae* (*LP* I, 202). Pope Julius (Life 36, 337–52) built two basilicas – one in Rome close to the Forum, the other across the Tiber which became S. Maria in Trastevere – and three cemeteries (*LP* I, 205). Pope Liberius (Life 37, 352–66) is said to have built the basilica which bears his name close to the market of Livia (i.e. Santa Maria Maggiore) but it was later restored/augmented or was a totally different building built by Pope Sixtus III (Life 46, 432–40): according to the life of the latter, he built the basilica of St Mary 'which the ancients called that of Liberius close to the market of Livia' (*LP* I, 208 and 232). Subsequent popes were no less active: Damasus

(Life 39, 366–84) built two basilicas, one to St Laurence (and a *titulus*) close to the Theatre and the other on the Via Ardeatina, where he was buried (*LP* I, 212). Anastasius (Life 41, 399–402) built a basilica called Crescentina in the second region of Rome on the Via Mamurtini (*LP* I, 218). Boniface I (Life 44, 418–22) 'built an oratory in the cemetery of Felicity', Celestine (Life 422–32) 'dedicated the basilica of Julius in which he presented [many gifts] after the Gothic conflagration'[24] and Sixtus III (Life 46, 432–40) 'built a basilica to St Laurence with the agreement of the Emperor Valentinian'.[25] Leo I (Life 47, 440–61) built a basilica to the bishop and martyr St Cornelius near the cemetery of Callistus on the Via Appia (*LP* I, 239). Hilarus (Life 48, 461–68) built three oratories in the Constantinian basilica as well as two monasteries, two baths and two libraries (*LP* I, 242), and Simplicius (Life 49, 468–83) dedicated the basilica of St Stephen on the Caelian hill in Rome. The same pope built the basilicas of St Andrew the Apostle close to the basilica of St Mary, St Stephen close to the basilica of St Laurence and St Bibiana close to the Licinian palace.[26]

Between Simplicius in the later 5th century and Theodore in the middle of the 7th century, many more popes are credited in the *Liber Pontificalis* with endowing and embellishing churches both within and in outlying districts of Rome. The *Liber Pontificalis* rarely mentions churches built or paid for by ordinary citizens or clergy of Rome. A notable exception is Santa Sabina, for the Life of Sixtus III (Life 46, 432–40) records that in his time the bishop Peter built in Rome the basilica of St Sabina, where he also built a font.[27]

That some of these churches date from well after Constantine's reign, and what they represent in terms of new buildings to accommodate a burgeoning cult of saints and an ever increasing Christian population, are not my concerns here. Nor is this the place to consider the questions these buildings raise about architectural convention and precedent, about artistic styles of decoration and portrayal, or about their specific liturgical functions. What is important here is the way the text orchestrates its references to the buildings, and the way the bishop emerges as the primary patron of church-building in Rome.[28] Certainly there are occasional references to the support of wealthy patrons, such as the widow Vestina for the building of a basilica dedicated to the saints Gervase and Protasius (*LP* I, 220), the handmaid Demetrias for the building of St Stephen's basilica (*LP* I, 238), and the *matronae* Priscilla and Lucina, who each gave land for cemeteries. The

latter also made her own house into a *titulus* (*LP* I, 150–01; see also Cooper 1999; Hillner 2007; Kurdock 2007). Independent foundations by the wealthy, such as the priest Peter's foundation of Santa Sabina mentioned above, are rarely mentioned. Above all, however, the *Liber Pontificalis* describes many places which acted as the venues where so many Christians gathered. These churches belonged to their communities, were associated with particular saints who were part of the history of the city and were where the institutionalised liturgical rituals of belonging took place. These churches created a new topography onto which Christian identity could be mapped. The stories behind the saints memorialised by these new churches, moreover, are preserved in the earliest pre-4th-century biographies in the *Liber Pontificalis*. The *Liber Pontificalis* deploys these descriptions as a dramatic narrative strategy not only to insist on the transformation of the topography of Rome as a result of the now Christian emperor's munificence and patronage, but also to highlight the bishops' role as major benefactors thereafter.

The lavish imperial endowments listed in Life 34 of Silvester appear to emphasise the substantial imperial patronage the bishops of Rome now enjoyed, in great contrast to the sorry catalogue of imperial anger and persecution in the preceding lives. Montinaro's recent suggestion that the donations are more likely to reflect the property of the Roman Church in the 6th and 7th centuries, 'only a part of which may have been acquired through imperial generosity' (Montinaro 2015), can be extended still further. The papal claims embodied in the list of revenues and estates are also designed to enhance papal status and authority. Whatever the truth of the figures, the Christian bishops now replaced the pagan emperors in Rome, assisted materially by the recently converted emperors themselves.

So, too, was the provision made by bishops before Silvester for the administration, the organisation of the clergy and the liturgy continued by Silvester and his successors. From Life 34 onwards, in contrast to the defensive mode against persecution maintained by the bishops of Rome until the conversion of Constantine, the text now presents the bishops as on the offensive against heretics of many kinds, such as Eutychians, Nestorians and Arians, and many councils are convened. Frequent statements, announced with the formulaic sentence 'Hic fecit constitutum de omnem ecclesiam', are issued concerning orthodox doctrine just as they had been for administrative matters. Silvester's life

sets the pattern for the subsequent biographies. Not only is he given the credit for convening the synod of Nicaea but he is also allocated a synod in Rome at which many provisions for clerical organisation and behaviour are made.[29]

This first portion of *Liber Pontificalis*, therefore, compiled in the 6th century, sets out the framework for a Christian identity, by implication in the face of challenge from, or at least the existence of, alternatives. All the lives before the first reference to the 'Constantinian basilica' or Lateran provide a summary portrait of a city where Christians lived while their religion was that of a minority sect, sometimes tolerated and sometimes persecuted. The text created a Christian identity associated with Rome, but in the constant reiteration that the bishop was providing decrees for the whole Church, it is also inclusive. It invites other Christians to associate themselves with Roman Christianity and to think of themselves as belonging to a virtual Rome.

One simple but significant manifestation of the success of this is the inclusion of so many Roman saints in the calendars of churches far from Rome. By 781, for example, the calendar in Godescalc's Evangelistary included a number of the Roman bishops and saints announced as martyrs or whose special shrines are mentioned in the *Liber Pontificalis*, such as, in calendar year order, Felix, Pope Marcellus, Prisca, Sebastian, Agnes, Vincent, Agatha, Valentine, Pancras, Pope Urban, Pope Gregory, Pope Leo, Vitalis, Marc and Marcellinus, John and Paul, Peter and Paul, Felix and Simplicianus, Pope Sixtus, Lawrence, Hypollitus, Agapitus, Cosmas and Damian, Cecilia, Crysogonus, and Pope Silvester (see Crivello, Denoël and Orth 2011; McKitterick 2017a).

Conclusion

The narrative in the *Liber Pontificalis* of the early history of Rome provides an indication of the process of the transformation of the city, as well as a view of the culmination of that process, from the specific perspective of the episcopal administration. The narrative consolidated and authorised the institutional leadership of the bishop of Rome. In itself, the text was an instrument for the propagation of a notion of institutional orthodoxy, for it codified doctrine as well as liturgy and the ecclesiastical hierarchy. It set out a means of public (rather than private) articulations of faith in the liturgical rituals to be enacted in purpose-built buildings of great beauty, filled with light, most of which

were provided by the bishop. It expresses a corporate identity. The contents as well as the significant omissions of the *Liber Pontificalis* suggest that it can be conceived of as offering a means of forging a common bond, centred on the bishop at a time of extreme religious and social mixing. It offered the Christians of Rome a foundation for a sense of collective identity and elevated the apostles Peter and Paul as symbols of unity, concord and supremacy. It comprises a series of claims, back-projections, creative reconstructions and justifications after the event for the cohesion of the community of Roman Christians around their bishop and the clergy of Rome. Their distinctive rituals, so crucial a part of their identity, were enacted inside, and in processions between, sumptuous basilicas that were also presented as the work of the bishop. The basilicas altered the city landscape, but the processions between them during the performance of the stational liturgy developed Christianised spaces in the city as well.

An analogy might be made between the *Liber Pontificalis* and the formulation of the history of the Coptic patriarchs of Alexandria in the 7th century, insofar as this is clear from the 11th-century Arabic version of the text. The *History of the Patriarchs* is thought to have been compiled first of all in the context of the Arab incursions into Egypt for the benefit of the vulnerable Christian community, to aid them in forging communal bonds.[30] Similarly, what is essentially the history of a community within the jurisdiction of the bishop of Alexandria is achieved by focusing on the leader, or at least the person whom the authors wished to be seen as the leader. In the case of both the *Liber pontificialis* and the *History of the Patriarchs*, that leadership in its turn was given a long pedigree in the text, not just by claiming a direct line of apostolic succession from St Peter and St Mark respectively, but as the ultimate default in leadership of the many Christian religious communities of Rome. The history of the early Christian community in Rome, in short, is presented as a steady organisational transformation as well as a topographical one. Yet the *Liber Pontificalis* also offers, in however opaque a manner, an important indication of the very diverse community, the vulnerability of the Christians within the pre-Constantinian city of Rome, and, above all, the multi-layered identity of Rome in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages.

Notes

1 Since the paper that became this chapter was presented in Helsinki on 3–4 November 2016, a great deal more has been published in a particularly intense period of interest in early medieval Rome. Parts of this chapter were published by Cambridge University Press as *Rome and the Invention of the Papacy in the Early Middle Ages* (McKitterick 2020c), where particularly the comments on the text known as the *Liber pontificalis* are developed fully. I have added here, moreover, a select handful of pertinent work published since 2017 at the appropriate points.

2 To mention the merest sample, Behrwald and Witschel (2012); Bonamente, Lenski and Lizzi Testa (2012); Burrus (2012); Burrus and Lehmann (2021); Cameron (2011); Lizzi Testa (2013); Salzman and Saghy (2016); Wienand (2015).

3 See the important recent monograph by Salzman (2021).

4 Only a sample of the more recent work can be given here: Bosman, Haynes and Liverani (2020); Grig and Kelly (2012); Harris (1999); Liverani (1998); McEvoy (2010, 2013); Norton (2007); Pelliccioni (1973); Pietri (1976); Rebillard (1994, 283); Rüpke (2008); Sessa (2012); Wirbelauer (1993).

5 In addition to McKitterick (2020c, 171–223), see also McKitterick (2020b).

6 For the historical context, see Arnold, Bjornlie and Sessa (2016).

7 Jerome's Latin translation and continuation of Eusebius' *Chronicon* as a resource for the authors of the *Liber pontificalis* is considered in McKitterick (2015).

8 *LP* I, 143 (the dating in the time of Diocletian does not correspond to either the list of consuls or that of emperors): Hic sua traditione multos convertit ad baptismum et credulitatem, etiam et Valerianum, nobillisimum virum, sponsum sanctae ceciliae; quos etiam usque ad martyrii palmam perduxit et per eius monita multi martyrio coronati sunt; transl. Davis, *Pontiffs*, p. 7.

9 *LP* I, 154. Compare *Liber Pontificalis*, MGH Gesta Pontificum Romanorum 1,1, 33.

10 *LP* I, 150–01; transl. Davis, *Pontiffs*, 9: Ego de corona Domini litteras accepi, non contra rempublicam, sed magis animas redimendas.

11 *LP* I, 164; transl. Davis, *Pontiffs*, 12–13: Hic coartatus et tentus eo quod ecclesiam ordinaret et comprehnsus a Maxentio ut negaret se esse episcopum et sacrificiis humiliari daemoniorum. Quo semper contemnes, deridens dicta et praecpta Maxenti, damnatus est in catabulum.

12 *LP* I, 164: mense autem nono nocu venerunt clerus eius omnis et eruerunt eum noctu de catabulo.

13 *LP* I, 161; transl. Davis, *Pontiffs*, 11–12: propter filiam Gavini presbiteri.

14 *LP* I, 162; transl. Davis, *Pontiffs*, 12: intra XXX diebus XVII milia hominum promiscui sexus per diversas provincias martyrio coronentur Christiani … Eodem die cessavit episcopatum ann. VII n. VI d.xxv persequente Diocletiano <Christianos>.

15 *LP* I, 162; transl. Davis, *Pontiffs*, 12: Et post hoc factum iacuerunt corpora sancta in platea ad exemplum christianorum dies XXV ex iussu Diocletiani.

16 *LP* I, 132; transl. Davis, *Pontiffs*, 5: Hic constituit hereticum venientem ex Iudaeorum heresae suscipi et baptizari.

17 *LP* I, 137; transl. Davis, *Pontiffs*, 6: Et constituit ut necessitate facient, ut ubi inventus fuisset, sive in flumine, sive in mari, sive in fontibus, tantum christiano confessione credulitatis clarificata quicumque hominum ex gentile veniens ut baptizaretur.
18 *LP* I, 164: propter baptismum et paentitentiam multorum qui convertebantur ex paganis.
19 *LP* I, 168; transl., Davis, *Pontiffs*, 13: Hic constituit nulla ratione die dominico aut quinta feria ieiunium quis de fidelibus agere, quia eos dies pagani quasi sacrum ieiunium celebrabant.
20 *LP* I, 167; transl. Davis, *Pontiffs*, 13: Hic hereticos invenit in urbe Roma quos per manus impositionis reconciliavit.
21 Rutgers (1995, 2000, 2009). Rutgers directed two international projects, one entitled *Reconfiguring Diaspora: The Transformation of the Jewish Diaspora in Late Antiquity* and another excavation project focusing on the origins of Christianity in Rome.
22 'Hic fecit constituta de omni ecclesia' or a variant thereof is a recurrent phrase in many lives: 11 Pius, 16 Zephyrinus, 34 Silvester, 39 Damasus, 41 Anastasius, 42 Innocent, 45 Celestine, 47 Leo, 48 Hilarus, 50 Felix III, 51 Gelasius I (*LP* I, 132, 139, 171, 213, 218, 220, 230, 239, 252, 255).
23 *LP* I, 127: Hic constituit aquam sparsionis cum sale benedici in habitaculis hominum.
24 *LP* I, 227, transl. Davis, *Pontiffs*, 33: hic fecit oratorium in cymeterio sanctae Felicitatis; and 230, transl. Davis, *Pontiffs*, 33: hic dedicavit basilicam Iuli in qua optulit post ignem Geticum.
25 *LP* I, 234, transl. Davis, *Pontiffs*, 35: Fecit autem basilicam sancto Laurenio, quod Valentinianus Augustus concessit.
26 *LP* I, 249. On all this papal building summarised above, see in particular Geertman (2004).
27 *LP* I, 235, though the magnificent inscription in Santa Sabina itself recording Peter's endowment says that Peter was a priest and that the endowment was made in the time of Pope Celestine. For a transcription and description of the inscription, see Webb (2001, 173).
28 In a study that became available to me after I had first delivered the paper on which this chapter is based, a similar argument about a papal monopoly of church building is mounted, on the basis primarily of the inscription evidence, by Behrwald (2016).
29 *LP* I, 171: Hic fecit constitutum de omne ecclesia. Etiam huius temporibus factum est concilium cum eius praeceptum in Nicea Bithiniae.
30 *History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church of Alexandria*. I am grateful to Dr Christian Sahner for conversation about this text.

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