

Apostolic Succession

Introduction

I HAVE SUGGESTED SO FAR THAT THE *LIBER PONTIFICALIS* offers a very particular portrait of the Bishop and people of Rome. Further, the text creates a mental map or virtual Rome in the minds of its readers, and invokes the imperial history of the city. The text thereby provides an essential framework for the history of the bishops and the formation of the Christian community in Rome.

The *Liber pontificalis* starts with a Life of St Peter, first Bishop of Rome, which is of fundamental importance in establishing the agenda and aims of the *Liber pontificalis* as a whole. As I explained in the introductory chapter, the Lives after Peter are numbered in sequence in all the earliest manuscripts. The history of Rome is presented as a continuous sequence of its bishops. Their time in office, therefore, as well as the ostensible exactitude in recording the length of the vacancy between popes, creates a new Petrine chronology of Roman time. This new chronology also reflects a particular understanding of the history of the bishops of Rome as an unbroken succession of Christian leaders from St Peter onwards. When first written, the succession record was for half a millennium, but then was extended by the continuators of the *Liber pontificalis* for a further three centuries. Many manuscripts of the *Liber pontificalis* add names to the papal list at least until the series of biographies was resumed in the twelfth century. The fourteenth-century *Gesta episcoporum* attributed to Jacques Zeno (Brussels, Bibliothèque royale MS 14814), and the fifteenth-century *Vitae pontificum* of Bartolomeo Platina in their turn drew on the original *Liber pontificalis* of the earlier

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Lives and followed their format.¹ Papal historians thereafter invariably included the *Gesta pontificum* and sequential lists of the popes in their compilations.² All these continuators thus reinforce, in the historiographical genre and format they adopted, the potency of the apostolic succession.

The prefatory letters purporting to be from Jerome to Pope Damasus further enhance this Petrine chronology, for the history is presented as a response to a request to the pope 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.

Damasus responds that he is sending Jerome ‘what I have been able to find out about its history’.³

These two prefatory letters are in all the earliest complete manuscripts. However improbable the connection with Damasus and Jerome claimed for the initial compilation of the *Liber pontificalis* may appear to modern readers, this is a classic way to claim authority and enhance the link with an older tradition.⁴ The association is one that is familiar from the explanatory letters *Plures fuisse* and *Novum opus* exchanged between Damasus and Jerome about the latter’s translation of the Bible, included in the prefatory material in many Bible and Gospel manuscripts throughout the middle ages.⁵ The association with Damasus as a promoter of a history of Christian Rome may also have been given greater plausibility

¹ See Bauer 2006 and Märtl 2016–18. ² For a useful survey see Franklin 2017.

³ *LPI*, p. 117; trans. Davis, *Pontiffs*, p. 1: *ut actus gestorum a beati Petri apostoli principatum usque ad vestra tempora, quae gesta sunt in sedem tuam, nobis per ordinam enarrare digneris; quatenus vestra humilitas sentire cognoscat, qui meruit episcoporum supradictae sedis martyrio coronari, vel qui contra canones apostolorum excessisse cognoscatur . . . Tamen quod gestum est quod potuimus repperire nostrae sedis studium.*

⁴ See Grafton 1990. Jerome’s Latin translation and continuation of Eusebius’s *Chronicon* as a resource for the authors of the *Liber pontificalis* is considered in McKitterick 2015.

⁵ See for example Paris, BnF lat. 8850 fols 1r–4r and 4r–6r, accessible in digital facsimile on the Gallica website (<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8452550p/f21.image>), and see Cain 2009, pp. 43–52.

by the visibility of his epitaphs for the martyrs in Rome itself, for Damasus was the pope who had promoted the memory of particular Roman martyrs in his campaign of inscribed epitaphs in ‘memory theatres’ around the city of Rome.⁶ Damasus also commissioned the Vulgate Latin translation of the Bible from Jerome. Jerome himself was an historian as well as translator, exegete, and theologian.⁷ The letters have the further function of underlining the effort made by the sixth-century compiler(s) to draw on a range of historical sources and earlier histories to create the new narrative, and reminding the readers thereof. A suggestion by means of these letters that the project may have been conceived during Damasus’s pontificate is consistent with serial authorship and augmentation of other historical texts in late antiquity, not least Jerome’s Latin version of Eusebius’s *Chronicon* and Rufinus’s edition of Eusebius’s *Historia ecclesiastica*. As intimated in the previous chapter, moreover, the letters may also be a subtle way of affirming papal involvement in the narrative project of the *Liber pontificalis* itself.⁸

Frankish copyists of the *Liber pontificalis* made much of these prefatory letters attributed to Damasus and Jerome. The late eighth-century scribe of the St Amand copy of the *Liber pontificalis*, Leiden, VLQ 60, for example, elaborated this association with a dramatic orchestration of decorated initials, fancy capitals, and title pages over four pages at the beginning of the codex. The initial letters provided for the Life of Peter, moreover, are reminiscent of the incipit pages of many early medieval Gospel books. The prefatory letter exchange at the beginning of the *Liber pontificalis* thus effectively presents the text as a continuation of the Gospels and Acts of the Apostles, with a particular focus on Peter and his successors. Acts itself was the foundation story for the Christian movement and is generally credited to St Luke, quite apart from serving as an inspirational model for early medieval writers of historical narrative.⁹

⁶ For a critique of the spectrum of interpretations of Damasus’s work see Denzey Lewis 2018, Sághy 2000, Curran 2000, pp. 148–56, and Maskarinec 2015. For the notion of ‘memory theatre’ see Trout 2003 and 2015.

⁷ Kelly 1975 and Kamesar 2013. ⁸ See above, p. 9.

⁹ See Rothschild 2004 and Parker 2013.

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As I stressed in the previous chapter, the earliest section of the *Liber pontificalis* was composed in the middle of the fourth decade of the sixth century. The first section of the *Liber pontificalis* charted the transformation of a small, persecuted Christian minority in Rome into a strong institution, and drew on the combined resources of historiography, liturgy, and law to effect the transformation in the bishop's status. The text thus appears to be an opportunity seized both to offer an historical interpretation of Christian Rome and to adopt a particular political position. By emphasizing the strength of the papacy's traditions, the text provided a wider and longer context for the conditions of the 530s. The very production of the *Liber pontificalis*, quite apart from its content, belies the customary assumption challenged above, that the papacy remained politically subordinate to the Eastern Empire even while asserting its ecclesiastical primacy.¹⁰ I have proposed that the *Liber pontificalis* can be seen as representing a deliberate emulation of the style of Roman imperial biography and a dramatic Christianization of Roman history. If also seen as a continuation of the Acts of the Apostles, with its emphasis on Christian teaching and community, the *Liber pontificalis* becomes a further episode in the foundation story of Christianity, now decisively relocated in Rome. In this respect one might also reflect on the degree to which the *Liber pontificalis* provides an epitome of the thinking about the Bishop of Rome's role up to each author's own day.

Despite the plurality of authorship over 300 years and the potential for many different perspectives, moreover, there is a notable thematic and narrative consistency in a text manifestly designed to assert the popes' upholding of Christian orthodoxy, the provision and organization of pastoral ministry, and the particularities of the pope's role in Rome and the Western church, as well as in relation to Byzantium. The *Liber pontificalis*, as I have already emphasized, is ostensibly a repository of factual information, but actually offers very particular representations of the popes and the city of Rome, and very far from disinterested

¹⁰ See above, pp. 20–5. For discussion of the historical context I am grateful to colleagues involved in the Universität Frankfurt SFB 1095 Schwächerdiskurse und Ressourcenregime, led by Hartmut Leppin and Christian A. Müller, for their comments on a seminar paper in Frankfurt, 7 June 2017. See also McKitterick 2018c.

narrative strategies in its deployment of information. As well as the topographical transformation I highlighted in the previous chapter, the *Liber pontificalis* offers a history of the early Christian community in Rome as a steady organizational process in which the emergence of episcopal leadership is central. Yet I suggest too that the *Liber pontificalis* reflects, in however opaque a manner, an important indication of a very diverse community, the vulnerability of the Christians within the pre-Constantinian city of Rome, and, above all, the multilayered identity of Rome in late antiquity and the early middle ages. The specific use of, and careful selection from, its textual sources to do this are significant, as we shall see in this chapter. It is within this sixth-century ideological, historical, and textual context, therefore, that the Life of Peter in the *Liber pontificalis* and the importance of the apostolic succession need to be considered.

St Peter

To appreciate the diversity of the content of the Life of Peter it may be helpful to compare it with the formulaic structure and details of most of the papal biographies in the earliest section of the text. As I explained in the previous chapter, each Life contains at the outset standard details 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, regularly from Life 34 of Silvester I at least, the bishop's patronage of building activity in Rome.

Let us compare in particular the lives of two third-century popes, Lucius and his successor Stephen I. In the case of Lucius, born in Rome, son of Porphyrius, who held the see 'three years, three months, and three days', the extra information supplied is that he was exiled, and entrusted the leadership of the church to Stephen before he was beheaded under the Emperor Valerian. In Stephen's case, also born in Rome, the son of Jovius, who held the see 'six years, five months, and two days', the text supplies the extra information that he was martyred, but while he was bishop issued a decree about ecclesiastical vestments. The final formulaic information provides the number of ordinations of

deacons, priests, and bishops any pope performed, his death, and the length of the vacancy before the next pope took office. Thus, Lucius ordained four priests, four deacons, and ‘for various places seven bishops’, and was buried in the cemetery of Callistus on the Via Appia. The bishopric was then vacant for thirty-five days. Stephen ordained six priests, five deacons, and ‘for various places three bishops’, was also buried in the cemetery of Callistus, and the bishopric was vacant for twenty-two days before Pope Sixtus II, described as having been born in Greece and formerly a philosopher, succeeded him.

By contrast, the Life of St Peter has a strikingly full catalogue of extra information, though this has the character of a carefully judged summary rather than an assembly of mere scraps. It can be baldly presented schematically as follows:

SUMMARY OF THE LIFE OF ST PETER IN THE *LIBER PONTIFICALIS*

Name and *natio*: Peter, son of John from Bethsaida in Galilee,

Length of reign: bishop twenty-five years, two months, and three days,

Writings: wrote two Epistles and Mark’s Gospel, and confirmed all four Gospels.

Co-workers: He ordained Linus and Cletus as co-bishops;

Event: he debated with Simon Magus;

Provision for succession: he consecrated Clement as his successor;

Death: he was martyred under Nero,

Burial: and buried on the Vatican hill.

Ordinations: He ordained three bishops, ten priests, and seven deacons.

It should be noted from this summary that there is no reference to St Paul in this Life of Peter, but I have discussed elsewhere the *Liber pontificalis*’s narrative strategy concerning St Paul and its interesting contrasts and subtle comparisons, omissions and understatements.¹¹

I consider the topics in Peter’s life now in turn.

Name and *natio* and Comparison with Jerome’s *De viris illustribus*

At the beginning of the Life, Peter is described as apostle and *princeps apostolorum*, an Antiochene, the son of John, from the village of Bethsaida in the province of Galilee, the brother of Andrew. The ideological

¹¹ McKitterick 2013a.

implications of the designation of Peter as *princeps apostolorum* ('first' or 'prince of apostles') do not need spelling out,¹² but the *Liber pontificalis* is here repeating more or less verbatim the description of Peter from Jerome's *De viris illustribus*. Jerome's text was written c.392, deliberately emulating Suetonius's *De viris illustribus*, and with the aim of demonstrating the great number of excellent Christian writers who 'founded, built, and adorned the church'. Of the 135 ecclesiastical *scriptores* in Jerome's text, it is significant and fitting, in relation to the association the *Liber pontificalis* author created with Jerome, that St Peter is the first.¹³ Jerome included Peter's origins and that his brother was Andrew, though Jerome had added other elements not taken over by the *Liber pontificalis* author, such as the story about Peter's crucifixion upside down. Jerome also expanded Peter's career to include his preaching to Jews in Pontus, Galicia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia before he arrived in Rome in the reign of Claudius.

The *Liber pontificalis*, however, continues with the information that Peter first occupied the episcopal *cathedra* at Antioch for seven years before arriving in Rome. Although the *Liber pontificalis* states that Peter went to Rome when Nero was Caesar, it immediately contradicts itself when it then states that he occupied the episcopal *cathedra* for twenty-five years, two months, and three days, and was bishop in the time of Tiberius, Gaius (Caligula), Claudius, and Nero. In this respect, the *Liber pontificalis* fills in the time between Peter's escape from prison as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles and his death. The *Liber pontificalis* author may have been attempting to reconcile one tradition about Peter's martyrdom under Nero with the length of reign offered in a source or sources similar to, but not the same as, the fourth-century Roman 'Chronograph of 354'; it differs slightly from the latter (twenty-five years, one month, and nine days), a source about which I shall have more to say in the following chapter.¹⁴

¹² Scholz 2006 and Borgolte 1995.

¹³ Jerome, *De viris illustribus*, ed. Bernouilli, p. 6, and ed. Richardson, pp. 1–2.

¹⁴ As guides to the vast literature on St Peter see Vinzent 2014, Eastman 2015, and Demacopoulos 2013.

Texts by Peter

Peter's writings are described next. Peter is credited with the writing of two epistles 'called catholic' (*quae catholicae nominantur*).¹⁵ This is of course important for the further confirmation of the canonical status of both the Epistles 'of Peter'. The First Epistle in particular, a rallying cry for all Christians, appears to have been widely acknowledged as part of the New Testament canon from the third century onwards, even if its origin and Petrine authorship are no longer regarded as certain.¹⁶ The confirmation of the canonicity of this epistle was also taken from Jerome's *De viris illustribus*.

Again, the *Liber pontificalis* author does not include Jerome's itemization of the various apocrypha associated with Peter, such as the *Acta* of Peter (despite the use Jerome himself had clearly made of it!) or the so-called Apocalypse of Peter, the text of his 'preaching', and the *Judicium*. In what appears to be an allusion to 1 Peter 5.12, where Peter refers to Mark as his 'son', the *Liber pontificalis* does relate, however, that Peter also wrote the Gospel of Mark 'because Mark was his hearer and his son by baptism'. The *Liber pontificalis*'s author echoed both Jerome and Eusebius–Rufinus in this, for Rufinus had retained Eusebius's discussion of Mark's Gospel in the widely disseminated Latin translation made in the early fifth century of Eusebius's original Greek text. The claim that St Mark's Gospel, now understood by modern scholars to be the earliest of the four Gospels, really represents Peter's recollections of Christ's ministry, thus making him the ultimate source of Mark's text, is still uncertain, and robustly rejected as a proposition by some. So too, many doubt whether Mark's Gospel was actually written in Rome by a member of the new generation of Christians.¹⁷ Others have been less dismissive.

¹⁵ *LPI*, Life 1, p. 118.

¹⁶ Three of the earliest extant witnesses to these Epistles, in the Old Latin and the Vulgate, are Italian: Naples, Biblioteca Nazionale Lat. 2 (Vindobon. 16) fols 42*, 43–56, 71–5, written in sixth-century half-uncial but palimpsested, probably at Bobbio in the eighth century (*CLA* III, 395); Paris, BnF lat. 6400G, fols 131–45 (*CLA* V, 566), in fifth-century uncial; and the sixth-century Victor Codex that was written apparently for Victor of Capua (541–54) but was in Fulda by the eighth century, Fulda, Landesbibliothek, Codex Bonifatianus 1 (*CLA* VIII, 1196). See Houghton 2016, pp. 176–81.

¹⁷ Gamble 1995, p. 57.

Joosten, for example, has commented not only on the grammatical interference of a Semitic language and Aramaic in the language of the text, but also on what he refers to as the frequent ‘use of lexical Latinisms in the original Greek text’. These he interprets, nevertheless, not as an indication of an author from Roman Palestine or Alexandria writing Greek in Rome. Instead he regards them as merely a sign that the author, probably of modest social status, had ‘no feeling for *belles lettres*’ but had simply repeated common Latin colloquialisms used in contemporary ‘vulgar Greek’. Joosten suggests that such borrowings from Latin were too widespread in colloquial Greek to make Mark’s usage significant.¹⁸

In the *Liber pontificalis*, the claim for Peter’s association with the Gospel of Mark functions as a further strengthening of the elevation of Rome as the continuation of the Christian evangelism inaugurated at Pentecost. One further indication of a strand of tradition that associates Peter with St Mark’s Gospel is the so-called shorter ending of Mark’s Gospel, with the language slightly garbled, in which allusion is made to statements made by ‘those with Peter’: ‘But those who were also with the boy (a misreading for *Petro*/Peter?) told in brief everything which they had been instructed’ (*Omnia autem quaecumque praecepta errant et qui cum puero erant breviter exposuerunt*).¹⁹

To audiences in Rome, however, even without an authorial link to Peter, Mark’s Gospel may well have been more familiar for its strong representation of the life and ministry of Jesus as the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies, and for its narrative in the very first chapter of John the Baptist’s teaching, the baptism of Jesus, and Christ’s calling of Simon, later called Peter, and his brother Andrew from their work as fishermen on the Sea of Galilee. It is probably from the reference in this Gospel to the healing of Peter’s mother-in-law (Mark 1.30), furthermore, that a story about Peter having a daughter was later extrapolated in such texts as the *Acta* of Nereis and Achilleis. This may have contributed to the

¹⁸ Joosten 2013, pp. 39–41.

¹⁹ Houghton 2016, pp. 160–2 and p. 210. Only one extant manuscript of the pre-Hieronymian Old Latin version preserves this ‘short ending’. It is ‘VL 1’, that is, Turin, Biblioteca Nazionale Universitaria 11163 (G.VII.15), thought to have been written in Africa, in fourth-century uncial (*CLA* IV, 465).

identification reported in the early eighth century of relics from the cemetery of Achilleis and Nereis in Rome as those of Petronilla, a supposed daughter of Peter.²⁰ Mark's narrative, furthermore, has a strikingly strong presence of Peter, with Peter as a witness to many of the miracles, and present at many of the key events, not least the meeting of Jesus with Elijah and Moses, the reproach to Peter in the Garden of Gethsemane, Peter's denial of Christ, and the message from Christ to Peter and the other disciples, sent via Mary by the angel in the tomb, on Easter morning after the Crucifixion.

The *Liber pontificalis* makes the further claim that Peter was responsible for confirming the content of all four Gospels: 'later he was the complete source of the four gospels – when he was questioned, Peter confirmed them by his testimony. Whether in Greek, Hebrew or Latin they are in agreement, and it was by his testimony they were confirmed'.²¹ This sixth-century Roman understanding of the composition of all four Gospels and Peter's confirmation of the validity of their account of the career, Passion, and teaching of Christ are significant reminders of the emergence of the written word within the Christian movement; these texts constituted a crucial element in Christian identity. Their propagation was perceived as a central task for all Christian evangelists.²² The dissemination of core Christian texts also applied to the Pauline and catholic epistles. The *Liber pontificalis* author appears here to have absorbed information from Eusebius in the Latin version of his *Historia ecclesiastica* made by Rufinus, where he explains that those who heard Peter preach in Rome

were not satisfied with just listening but all of them begged his disciple Mark to write down what he was preaching, that they might have a permanent record of it and be able to continue reflecting on his words at home and away. Nor did they stop begging him until they got what they

²⁰ LPI Life 92, c. 13, p. 420 and note 26, p. 424. For Petronilla see above, p. 43 and below, p. 211.

²¹ LPI, Life 1, c. 2, p. 118: *Post omnem quattuor evangeliorum fontem quae ad interrogationem et testimonio eius hoc est Petri firmatae sunt dum alius Grece, alius Ebraice, alius Latine consonant tamen eius testimonio sunt firmatae.*

²² See Gamble 1995, and Hurtado and Keith 2013.

wanted. This is why the gospel ‘according to Mark’ came to be written. Peter, when he discovered through the Holy Spirit that his spiritual property had been filched from him, was delighted by the faith they had shown thereby, and considering their devotion, he confirmed what had been done and handed on the writing to the churches to be read permanently . . . Papias adds that Peter, in his first letter, which he writes from the city of Rome, and in which he calls Rome ‘Babylon’ figuratively, mentions Mark when he says, ‘the chosen one in Babylon greets you, as does Mark my son’.²³

The *Liber pontificalis* recast Eusebius’s account in a way that reinforced the fundamental aspects of Peter’s role as Bishop of Rome. In every respect the author of the *Liber pontificalis* augmented his sources or offered a different perspective on the information they contained. The subsequent direct reference to Antioch and the allusion to Mark are perhaps also to be taken as an oblique reference to Alexandria. This might be taken, moreover, as a subtle enhancement of Rome’s relationship with that see and what Philippe Blaudeau has referred to as Rome’s ‘géo-ecclésiologie’.²⁴ In this respect, with the implied superiority of Rome over Antioch and Alexandria, two of the principal patriarchal sees of late antiquity, it might also be read as echoing the sixth clause in the account of the Council of Nicaea, that Rufinus offered in his translation and extension of the *Historia ecclesiastica* of Eusebius. Rufinus notes Alexandria’s responsibility for Egypt and the Bishop of Rome’s charge of the suburbicarian churches of Italy.²⁵

²³ Eusebius–Rufinus, *Historia ecclesiastica* 2.15.1, ed. Mommsen, pp. 139–41: *ita ut cottidie audientibus eum nulla umquam satietas fieret unde neque auditio eis sola sufficit, sed Marcum discipulum eius omnibus precibus exorant, uti ea, quae ille verbo praedicabat, ad perpetuam eorum commonitionem habendam scripturae traderet, quo domi forisque in huiusmodi verbi meditationibus permaneret nec prius ab obsecrando desistunt, quamquae oraverant imperarent et haec fuit causa scribendi quod secundum Marcum dicitur evangelium. Petrus vero, ut per spiritum sanctum religioso se spoliatum conperit furto, delectatus est fidem eorum per haec devotionemque considerans factumque confirmavit et in perpetuum legendam scripturam ecclesiis tradidit . . . Papias qui et hoc dicit quod Petrus in prima epistula sua, quam de urbe Roma scribit, meminere Marci, in qua tropice Romam Babylonam nominavit cum dicit ‘Salutat vos ea, quae in Babylone electa est et Marcus filius meus’; trans. Amidon, p. 78.*

²⁴ Blaudeau 2012a and 2012b.

²⁵ Eusebius–Rufinus, *Historia ecclesiastica*, ed. Mommsen, p. 969; trans. Amidon, p. 388.

Most of the details of Peter's career so far could be culled from the Acts of the Apostles, the Epistles of Peter, the Chronograph of 354, the *De viris illustribus* of Jerome, and the *Historia ecclesiastica* of Eusebius–Rufinus. All these texts were available in Italy from at least the fifth century. All reinforce the authority and standing of Peter, and by implication of the city of Rome over which the *princeps apostolorum* presided, in relation to the rest of the Christian world. By offering the *Liber pontificalis* as an implicit continuation of the Acts of the Apostles, and by presenting Peter as the apostle who was the final guarantor responsible for the truth of the Gospel texts, therefore, the *Liber pontificalis* author neatly made Rome and its first bishop into instrumental safeguards and champions of both Christian identity and the texts underpinning it.

Rather more particular in its implications for both the claims being articulated on the Bishop of Rome's behalf in the *Liber pontificalis*, and the author of the *Liber pontificalis's* access to other texts, however, is the paragraph relating to Peter's debates with Simon Magus. It is on these and their implications that I shall focus for the next section of this chapter.

Peter and Simon Magus

The *Liber pontificalis* relates that Peter 'held many debates with Simon Magus, both before the emperor Nero and before the people, because Simon was using magical tricks and deceptions to gather those whom Peter had gathered into Christ's faith. When their disputes had lasted a long time, Simon was struck down by God's will.'²⁶ Sixth-century readers accustomed to doctrinal arguments may well have registered the appositeness of a story about 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. They may also have been familiar with the far fuller details about the career and nefarious teachings of

²⁶ LPI, Life 1, c. 4, p. 118: *Hic cum Simone mago multas disputationes habuit tam ante Neronem imperatorem quamque ante populum ut quos beatus Petrus ad fidem Christi adgregabat, ille per magias et deceptiones segregabat. Et dum diutius altercarent, Simon divino nutu interemptus est;* trans. Davis, *Pontiffs*, p. 2.

Simon Magus available in other texts, not least the Acts of the Apostles, of which the *Liber pontificalis* makes such a brief summary. The main point of presenting Peter in debate with the arch-heretic Simon Magus appears to be to reinforce the role of the Bishop of Rome as the champion of orthodoxy from the outset.

The most famous work of heresiology compiled in late antiquity is probably the vast *Panarion* of Epiphanius.²⁷ Epiphanius had been in Rome in 382 with Paulinus and Jerome to attend Damasus's council. His text is often described as an encyclopaedia of heresies. In it, Epiphanius aimed to convert and protect Christians and provide them with antidotes against the serpents and beasts of the heretics. His sects begin with Adam and extend into the fourth century AD. There are twenty sects identified in the pre-Christian period and sixty after Christ. The first sect in the latter category is that of Simon Magus and his followers. Epiphanius's structure was consistent: he first provided the sect's name and relation to preceding sects; he then summarized its beliefs and practices before refuting them, emphasizing their noxiousness and making comparisons with other nefarious beliefs.

Although it is conceivable that the *Liber pontificalis* author was familiar with the *Panarion*, it is more likely that he was drawing, just as Eusebius–Rufinus had drawn in the *Historia ecclesiastica*, on the earlier catalogues and descriptions of heresies in the *Syntagma* of Hippolytus of Rome, pseudo-Tertullian's *Praescriptio haereticorum*, a third-century epitome of the *Syntagma*, and by Irenaeus of Lyon.²⁸ The *Contra haereses* of Irenaeus indeed, written c.190, originally in Greek but only extant in a defective Latin translation, is thought to have been addressed to readers in Rome. It appears to have been the fullest account of Simon Magus, and the presence of the text is attested in Italy by the sixth century. It is Irenaeus who thought of Simon Magus as the father of all heretical sects. While the definition of Simon Magus's beliefs and teaching are supplied in these encyclopaedias of heresies, fuller accounts of the debate between Simon and St Peter in Rome are to be found in the *Acta Petri*, probably originally compiled in Greek in Asia Minor in the second century but

²⁷ Epiphanius of Salamis, *Panarion*, ed. Williams, 1 (sects 1–46). See also Kim 2015.

²⁸ Irenaeus of Lyon, *Contra haereses*, ed. Unger and Dillon, 1.23, pp. 81–4.

translated into Latin, possibly in North Africa, in the third or fourth century.²⁹

It is the latter that survives in a Vercelli manuscript of the seventh century, presumably based on an earlier exemplar. It is consequently sometimes known as the *Actus Vercellenses*. Hilhorst suggested that the *Acta* were copied into the original compilation with the pseudo-Clementine *Recognitiones* in order 'to complete a dossier about the confrontation between the apostle Peter and Simon Magus, with a greater focus on magic and trickery than had been provided by either Irenaeus or Epiphanius'.³⁰

The *Acta* is a six-part drama, as follows: in preparation for the competition with Simon Magus and Peter, Paul leaves Rome. Simon Magus comes to Rome and disrupts Paul's missionary work. God then sends Peter to Rome to prevent the ruin of Christianity in the city. Peter arrives in Rome. Simon is staying at the house of the senator Marcellus, who was a lapsed Christian. Peter sends a talking dog to the house and Simon receives a challenge to a debate in the Forum. Peter prays for strength in his competition with Simon and addresses the Christians of Rome. Marcellus has a dream, the Forum debate takes place, and the Roman official Agrippa gives Simon and Peter a man to kill and revive. Simon kills him by whispering something in his ear, but Peter raises him from the dead. Simon flees. Peter prays to Christ to make Simon fall. Simon breaks his leg and dies. It is the emphasis on magic that is echoed by the *Liber pontificalis*. The *Liber pontificalis* also seems to take over the element of verbal debate between Simon and Peter from Hippolytus, rather than the competitive display of strength in a miracle contest related in the *Acta*. By paring down the details so drastically, the *Liber pontificalis* also contrives to highlight the involvement of the imperial authorities, if not the emperor himself, and the people of Rome in discussion and disputes between the Christians and pagans in Rome within a context of conversion.

²⁹ Bremmer (ed.) 1998; Vercelli, Biblioteca Capitolare CLVIII (*CLA* IV, 468a) and compare Turner 1931, who favoured the third/fourth century as the date of composition. On the manuscript see Döhler 2017, pp. 3–6. For a summary of the legends see also Ferreiro 2005, pp. 55–81 and Demacopoulos 2013.

³⁰ Hilhorst 1998.

The Succession: Linus and Cletus

Peter's pastoral work in Rome is briefly described in the context of his ordaining two bishops, Linus and Cletus, to be 'present in Rome to provide the entire sacerdotal ministry for the people and for "visitors" while Peter himself was free to pray and preach, to teach the people'.³¹

Despite the reference to Peter's appointment of Linus and Cletus as his co-workers, both Linus and Cletus were counted formally in most subsequent papal succession lists as Peter's immediate successors in sequence rather than as his assistant bishops. In a possible attempt to reconcile conflicting traditions, the sixth-century author of Life 4 of Clement is then careful to explain that Linus and Cletus are recorded before Clement because they were ordained bishops by the *princeps apostolorum* himself in order to provide the sacerdotal ministry.³² Clement, however, was given the management of the church by Peter, who is quoted in Life 1 as saying to Clement: 'As the power of government, that of binding and loosing, was handed to me by my lord Jesus Christ, so I entrust it to you.'³³ This is of course an allusion to Matthew 16.19: 'I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.' It is significant that the choice for the Roman Gospel Lectionary reading for the feast of St Peter on 29 June was also precisely this text.³⁴

The pastoral role of the bishop remains a crucial consideration: Peter's admonition to Clement concludes that Clement is 'to ordain those who are to deal with various cases and execute the church's affairs', and echoes the description of Peter's ministry in suggesting that Clement should 'not be caught up in the cares of the world but ensure you are

³¹ LPI, Life 1, p. 118; trans. Davis, *Pontiffs*, p. 2: *Qui praesentialiter omne ministerium sacerdotale in urbe Roma populo vel supervenientium exhiberent beatus autem Petrus ad orationem et praedicationem populum erudiens*; Loomis 1916, p. 5, offers 'strangers' for 'visitors' as a translation of *supervenientium*.

³² LPI, Life 4, p. 123.

³³ LPI, Life 1, p. 118; trans. Davis, *Pontiffs*, p. 2: *Sicut super mihi gubernandi tradita est a domino meo Iesu Christo potestas ligandi solvendique, ita et ego tibi committo*.

³⁴ See the full list in the Godescalc Lectionary of c.781, Paris, BnF n.a.lat. 1203, fol. 86r; the antiphon for Lauds and Vespers on this feast is *Tu es Petrus*, cf. csg 359, pp. 123–4.

completely free for prayer and preaching to the people'.³⁵ The ministry entrusted by Christ to Peter and by Peter to Clement is alluded to further in Life 4 of Clement, with the comment that Clement, on St Peter's instruction, 'undertook the pontificate for the governing the church, as the *cathedra* had been handed down and entrusted to him by the Lord Jesus Christ'. That Life adds that 'you will find in the letter written to James (by Clement) how the church was entrusted to him (that is, Clement) by Peter'.³⁶

This reminder of the bishop's pastoral role and sacerdotal ministry in Rome, and the way in which Peter himself determined his succession, augmented by the reference to Christ's injunction to Peter, is further reinforced by the formulaic reference at the end of the Life to the number of ordinations Peter performed: three bishops, ten priests, and seven deacons. Peter's successors continue to extend the body of the clergy. The three bishops are presumably Linus, Cletus, and Clement. Every subsequent Bishop of Rome adds to the numbers of priests. Whether this reference to Peter's ordination of seven deacons could be read as an allusion to the seven regions of Rome to which seven deacons, one for each, were subsequently allocated is possible, but it is to Clement that the creation of the seven regions is credited. Reference to the seven deacons is made soon thereafter in Life 6 of Pope Evaristus (c.100–9), but without specifying any connection to the regions. It is Pope Fabian (236–50) who is said to have 'divided the regions among the deacons and created seven subdeacons who were to watch over the seven notaries so they would faithfully collect the complete acts of the martyrs'.³⁷

The formulaic and repetitive reiteration of the details of pope after pope reinforces the apostolic tradition. Reports of a process of election

³⁵ LPI, Life 1, p. 118; trans. Davis, *Pontiffs*, p. 2: *ut ordinans dispositores diversarum causarum, per quos actus ecclesiasticus profligetur et tu minime in curis saeculi deditus repperiaris; sed solummodo ad orationem et praedicare populo vacare stude.*

³⁶ LPI, Life 4, c. 2, p. 123; trans. Davis, *Pontiffs*, p. 3: *Hic ex praecepto beati Petri suscepit ecclesiae pontificatum gubernandi sicut ei fuerat a domino Iesu Christo cathedra tradita vel commissa tamen in epistola quae ad Jacobum scripta est qualiter ei a beato Petro commissa est ecclesia repperies.*

³⁷ LPI, Life 21, p. 148; trans. Davis, *Pontiffs*, p. 8: *Hic regiones dividit diaconibus et fecit VII subdiaconos qui VII notariis inminarent ut gestas martyrum in integro fideliter colligerent; and compare Life 20, p. 147, which reports that Pope Anteros (235–6) sought the acts of the martyrs from the notaries.*

are rare in the *Liber pontificalis* before the eighth century, at which point election by the whole Roman people in unanimity and concord becomes an important rhetorical strategy.³⁸ In this early period, however, successors to Clement, notably those going to their execution, entrust their responsibilities to one of the priests or deacons in the style of Peter designating his successors. Thus, the *Liber pontificalis* notes that Pope Lucius (253–4) appointed Stephen the Archdeacon, Pope Gaius (283–96) designated Pope Marcellinus, and Pope Stephen I (254–7) in a later interpolation is said to have handed over the sacred vessels or care of the money chest to his archdeacon;³⁹ that person subsequently became Stephen’s successor as Pope Sixtus II.⁴⁰

The *Liber pontificalis* was not the first to display this powerful sense of the past and of a continuing tradition and responsibility that was both maintained and cumulative. The logging of the succession of imperial reigns in relation to those of the popes in Jerome’s Latin translation of Eusebius’s *Chronicon*, and Eusebius’s own insistence on the apostolic origins and succession of the sees of Rome, Antioch, and Alexandria, had established the particular significance of apostolic foundation and succession. A later instance is the *History of the Coptic Patriarchs of Alexandria* in the seventh century, preserved in an eleventh-century Arabic version of the text. It was probably compiled in the context of the Arab incursions into Egypt, for the benefit of the vulnerable Christian community, in order to strengthen their sense of community in the face of adversity.⁴¹ Like the *Liber pontificalis*, the focus is on the leader, the Bishop of Alexandria. In both the *Liber pontificalis* and the history of the Patriarchs, that leadership is given a long and illustrious pedigree in the text, with the claims of a direct line of apostolic succession from St Peter and St Mark respectively.

³⁸ See Daileader 1993, who links it with what he describes as papal political ‘independence’, which he suggests was achieved after 731.

³⁹ *LPI*, Life 24, p. 154; the interpolation is in the eleventh-century manuscript E 1, BAV Vat. lat. 3764.

⁴⁰ *LPI*, Lives 23, 29, and 24, pp. 153, 161, and 154.

⁴¹ *History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church of Alexandria Attributed to Sāwīrus ibn al-Muqaffa’*, Bishop of el-Ashmunain, ed. and trans. Evetts, 1, fasc. 2 and 4; 5, fasc. 1; 10, fasc. 5 (Paris, 1904–14). I am grateful to Christian Sahner for conversation about this text.

The Burial of St Peter

Thus far, the details so deftly summarized in the Life of Peter have identifiable sources. The account of Peter's burial on the Vatican Hill, however, is one of the most puzzling contradictions in the text. The note in St Peter's Life is apparently unequivocal: Peter's burial is recorded as follows: 'he was buried on the Via Aurelia at the temple of Apollo, close to the place where he was crucified, and to Nero's palace on the Vatican, and to the triumphal territory, on 29th June'.⁴² This may be a somewhat clumsy attempt to report the status quo in the sixth century, given the significance of the Life and Peter in the text as a whole. One cautionary note to be voiced here is that none of the extant manuscripts containing the full text of Peter's Life is earlier than the late seventh century. We cannot be certain that it was Peter's burial, as distinct from his death, that was located on the Vatican Hill in the sixth-century original. The early epitomes known as the Felician and Cononian, however, both refer to his burial being close to the place where he was crucified. In Life 22 of Pope Cornelius (251–3), moreover, the pope is described as taking up the bodies of both Paul and Peter 'from the catacombs' (*de catacumbas*) at night and putting the bodies close to the places of their execution, that is, respectively, on the Via Ostiensis and with the bodies of the holy bishops at the Temple of Apollo on the Mons Aureus on the Vatican Hill at Nero's palace on 29 June.⁴³ The contradictions between this story of a third-century translation of the apostle Peter's relics, presumed to be from the Via Appia to the Vatican Hill, the *Depositio martyrum* in the Chronograph of 354,⁴⁴ the reference in the Life of Pope Damasus (366–84) in the *Liber pontificalis*, to the catacombs (*ad catacumbas*) as being the place where the bodies of the apostles Peter and Paul lay,⁴⁵ and the ambiguous archaeological evidence in the Vatican necropolis itself, have of course been discussed many times, among others by

⁴² LPI, Life 1, c. 6, p. 118; trans. Davis, *Pontiffs*, p. 2: *Qui sepultus est via Aurelia, in templum Apollinis, iuxta locum ubi crucifixus est, iuxta palatium Neronianum, in Vaticanum, iuxta territorium triumphalem, III kal. Iul.*

⁴³ LPI, Life 22, p. 150.

⁴⁴ Chronograph of 354, LPI, pp. 1–12. Divjak and Wischmeyer 2014.

⁴⁵ LPI, Life 39, p. 212.

Jocelyn Toynbee and John Ward-Perkins, Engelbert Kirschbaum, Henry Chadwick, Paolo Liverani, and most recently by Nicola Camerlenghi.⁴⁶ The precise relationship between the original burial place, the third-century translation, and the construction of the basilica of St Peter and the apostle's *confessio* remains ambiguous. Certainly, by the time St Peter's basilica was built in the fourth century, there was an established tradition of the presence of Peter's relics at the site.⁴⁷

What can be said here is that the claim made in the Life of Peter served to enhance the status of St Peter's basilica and the shrine of St Peter. Although it anticipates a later translation, and credits this to a third-century pope, when considered in the context of the entire Life of St Peter in the *Liber pontificalis*, and its role in setting the themes of the text as a whole, the placing of Peter's body on the Vatican Hill has the effect of instantly locating and confirming the major cult site of the saint for its readers.

The telegraphic format of the first Life in the *Liber pontificalis* appears to have assumed not only a familiarity with the traditions associated with St Peter and the topography of the city, but a knowledge, in sixth-century Rome at least, of the various Latin versions of the texts that supplied the information: Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, the Acts of the Apostles, the Gospel of Mark and two Epistles of Peter, the letters of Clement, the *Contra haereses* of Irenaeus, the *Syntagma* of Hippolytus, the pseudo-Clementine *Recognitiones*, the *De viris illustribus* of Jerome, the *Chronicon* of Eusebius–Jerome, the *Acta Petri*, and the *Historia ecclesiastica* of Eusebius in Rufinus's edition and Latin translation. All these were available in Latin by the sixth century. There is no reason to suppose that they were not available to the writers of the *Liber pontificalis*, and there are besides clear instances of these texts having been used. These texts were presumably also available to other writers and thinkers in sixth-century Italy, but the *Liber pontificalis* authors chose to construct a very different text from

⁴⁶ Chadwick 1957, Toynbee and Ward-Perkins 1956, Kirschbaum 1959, Liverani and Spinola 2010, Camerlenghi 2018, pp. 23–40. See also Bowersock 2005 and Brandenburg 2011a.

⁴⁷ I have discussed the story of Peter's initial burial and translation in the context of a wider consideration of the significance of the representation of St Peter's basilica in the *Liber pontificalis* in McKitterick 2013b.

these resources in comparison with the work of their contemporaries.⁴⁸ In this respect the text of the Life in the *Liber pontificalis* could even be described as a mnemonic, acting as a prompt or a representative summary of the rich traditions associated with the *princeps apostolorum*. For readers unfamiliar with this range of texts, the *Liber pontificalis* could be regarded as an ingenious distillation of a wealth of older traditions.

This first Life of Peter thus contrives to offer many of the facets of Christian identity subsequently developed further in the rest of the text: Peter's teaching; his organization of the clergy; the sharing of the stories of the Gospels and the placing of these texts as both central to the Christian faith and confirmed by the *princeps apostolorum*; the recognition of both Epistles of Peter as part of the New Testament canon; the dramatic affirmation of faith in the face of imperial persecution by Peter because he was martyred; his disputation with Simon Magus and rejection of the latter's heretical views as an indication of the maintenance of an accurate and orthodox Christian faith; Peter's provision for his succession; Rome's primacy in relation to the ancient sees of Antioch and Alexandria; and Peter's major cult site in Rome.

The Early Christian Community in Rome

The Life of Peter and the subsequent Lives of his successors in themselves offer a further common history and Christian identity, especially for the people of Rome. In the next section of this chapter I wish to suggest that the *Liber pontificalis* provides an authoritative narrative about the Christian community and its bishops in the time of the pagan Roman emperors, as well as under the leadership of Pope Silvester and his successors in the aftermath of the conversion of the Emperor Constantine.

Again, the sparseness of the narrative has to be set against the wealth of interpretations of new excavations, burial practices, the development of martyr cults, liturgy and ritual, the variety of pagan as well as Christian experience and communities, processes of conversion and Christianization, the diversity of social organization, and the very gradual nature of

⁴⁸ See above, Chapter 1, pp. 25–35.

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.⁴⁹ Recent studies have very convincingly disrupted the old but improbable notions of a neat displacement of homogenized pagans by united Christians in both physical and institutional terms with the conversion of Constantine at the beginning of the fourth century. This makes the version of events offered in the *Liber pontificalis* all the more fascinating.⁵⁰

A dominant theme in the lives of the thirty-three popes before Pope Silvester and the conversion of the Emperor Constantine is their championing of the Christian faith. The most obvious manifestation of this is the recurrent resistance to state power on the part of the Christians in Rome, a phenomenon described even more generally by Burrus and Lehmann as ‘a public stance of political resistance to empire’.⁵¹ The consequences of such resistance were grim. Of those thirty-three popes before Silvester, the *Liber pontificalis* records twenty-four as being crowned with martyrdom (*martyrio coronatur*): Peter, Linus, Cletus, Clement, Evaristus, Alexander, Sixtus I, Telesphorus, Anicetus, Victor, Callistus, Urban, Pontian, Anteros, Fabian, Cornelius, Lucius, Stephen I, Sixtus II, Felix I, Eutychian, Gaius, Marcellinus, Marcellus.

Only rarely are others besides the bishop mentioned. Peter was crowned with martyrdom along with Paul (c. AD 67);⁵² the priest Eventius and the deacon Theodulus died alongside Pope Alexander (c. AD 110); The priest Maximinus accompanied Pope Anteros (235–6); after Pope Fabian’s death (236–50), the priests Moyses and Maximus and the deacon Nicostratos were imprisoned.⁵³ Pope Urban (222–30), praised for his teaching and the number of converts to Christianity he had achieved, suffered death along with many others.⁵⁴ Bishop Marcellus

⁴⁹ Wienand (ed.) 2015, Burrus and Lehmann 2012, Cameron 2011; Bonamente, Lenski, and Lizzi Testa (eds.) 2012; Lizzi Testa (ed.) 2013; Salzman, Ságghy, and Lizzi Testa (eds.) 2015; Behrwald and Witschel (eds.) 2012, and Guidobaldi and Guiglia Guidobaldi (eds.) 2002.

⁵⁰ I draw in the next few paragraphs on a paper delivered in Helsinki in November 2016, McKitterick in press b.

⁵¹ Burrus and Lehmann 2012, p. 7. ⁵² *LPI*, Life 1, c. 6, p. 118.

⁵³ *LPI*, Lives 1, 7, 20, 21, pp. 118, 127, 147, 148.

⁵⁴ *LPI*, Life 18, p. 143 (the dating in the time of Diocletian does not correspond to either the list of consuls or of emperors): *Hic sua traditione multos convertit ad baptismum et*

(305/6–306/7), according to the *Liber pontificalis*, 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.’⁵⁵ From there, ‘his entire clergy came and rescued him at night’.⁵⁶

Both Pope Cornelius (251–3) and Pope Sixtus II (257–8) were killed in the Decian persecutions. Six members of Sixtus’s clergy were killed at the same time: the deacons Felicissimus, Agapitus, Januarius, Magnus, Vincent, and Stephen. After Sixtus’s passion, his archdeacon Laurence suffered the same fate, along with Claudius the subdeacon, Severus the priest, Crescentius the reader and Romanus the doorkeeper. Pope Gaius (282–95), noted as a member of the Emperor Diocletian’s family, was nevertheless martyred along with his brother Gabinius the priest.⁵⁷ The most extreme case of persecution in the *Liber pontificalis* is recorded in Life 30 of Marcellinus (295–303). During the reigns of Diocletian and Maximian, the *Liber pontificalis* alludes to the horrific scale of the killing: ‘when there was so great a persecution that within thirty days 17,000 persons of both sexes were crowned with martyrdom as Christians in various provinces’.⁵⁸

Again, the *Liber pontificalis* may be summarizing other, fuller accounts of the fifth and early sixth centuries, such as the *Gesta martyrum* and *Passiones*.⁵⁹ A hint of the further details such sources may have contained is suggested by some of the later manuscripts of the *Liber pontificalis*, such

credulitatem, etiam et Valerianum, nobilissimum virum, sponsum sanctae Ceciliae; quos etiam usque ad martyrii palmam perduxit et per eius monita multi martyrio coronati sunt; trans. Davis, *Pontiffs*, p. 7.

⁵⁵ *LPI*, Life 31, c. 3, p. 164; trans. Davis, *Pontiffs*, p. 13: *Hic coartatus et tentus eo quod ecclesiam ordinaret et comprehensus a Maxentio ut negaret se esse episcopum et sacrificiis humiliari daemoniorum. Quo semper contemnens, deridens dicta et praecepta Maxenti, damnatus est in catabulum.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 164; trans. Davis, *Pontiffs*, p. 13: *mense autem nono noctu venerunt clerus eius omnis et eruerunt eum noctu de catabulo.*

⁵⁷ *LPI*, Life 29, p. 161; trans. Davis, *Pontiffs*, pp. 11–12: *propter filiam Gavini presbiteri.*

⁵⁸ *LPI*, Life 30, c. 2, p. 162; trans. Davis, *Pontiffs*, p. 11: *intra XXX dies XVII milia hominum promiscui sexus per diversas provincias martyrio coronarentur Christiani . . . Ab eodem die cessavit episcopatus ann. VII m. VI d. XXV persequente Diocletiano Christianos.*

⁵⁹ Dufourcq 1900–7, Lanéry 2010, and Gioanni 2010.

as BAV Vat. lat. 3764 of the eleventh century, in which the scribes added extra names of martyrs. According to this manuscript, with Stephen I (254–7) in prison before execution, for example, were nine priests, two bishops (Honorius and Castus), and three deacons (Sixtus, Dionysius, and Gaius).⁶⁰ As already mentioned, it was while he was in prison that Stephen designated one of the deacons, Sixtus (Pope Sixtus II), also later martyred, as his successor.⁶¹ Another hint of knowledge of other sources on the part of the *Liber pontificalis* author is indicated in the account of the dispute between Pope Cornelius and the Emperor Decius, in which Cornelius (251–3) refers to letters he had received, containing not treasonable words but ‘spiritual advice for redeeming souls’.⁶² The letters thus alluded to were from Cyprian and are still extant.⁶³

The resting places of the bodies of these papal martyrs, like that of St Peter, are meticulously recorded and became in due course cult sites attracting pilgrims. The *Liber pontificalis* may even have had as one of its aims to play a definitive role in claiming these resting places for the martyrs and creating a legitimating pedigree for them. The author or authors of the *Liber pontificalis* may have intended his or their work to function in some respects as a pilgrim guide, giving an outline of the circumstances and location of the various Roman martyrs to whom their devotion was to be directed.⁶⁴ Clement (*c.*95) for example, was buried in Greece but his body was brought back to Rome.⁶⁵ The cemetery of Callistus harboured a concentration of papal bodies, namely, Sixtus, Fabian, Lucius, Stephen, Dionysius, Felix, Eutychian, Gaius, Eusebius, Miltiades, and Julius,⁶⁶ possibly all in the chamber now known as the Crypt of the Popes, for which Pope Damasus commissioned the scribe and stonecutter Filocalus to inscribe one of Damasus’s verse epitaphs.⁶⁷

⁶⁰ See below, p. 193. ⁶¹ *LPI*, Life 24, p. 154. Mommsen, *LP*, p. 33 and above, p. 73.

⁶² *LPI*, pp. 150–1; trans. Davis, *Pontiffs*, p. 9: *Ego de corona Domini litteras accepi, non contra rempublicam, sed magis animas redimendas.*

⁶³ Cyprian, *Epistolae*, ed. Clarke and Diercks, and Bevenot 1961.

⁶⁴ McKitterick 2006, pp. 46–51. ⁶⁵ *LPI*, Life 4, p. 123.

⁶⁶ Blaauw 2016, Picard 1969, and Borgolte 1995.

⁶⁷ Gray 1956, Morison 1972, pp. 94–5, Cardin 2008, pp. 16–18, Trout 2015, and Denzey Lewis 2018.

Similarly, the sanctity of other Roman cemeteries, some provided by the popes, others apparently the gift of pious laymen and women such as the cemeteries of Praetextatus on the Via Appia and of Priscilla on the Via Salaria,⁶⁸ was enhanced by the presence of martyred popes and their clergy.⁶⁹ In the cemetery of Praetextatus, for example, were buried the six deacons executed at the same time as Pope Sixtus II (257–8), as well as Pope Urban (222–30). Laurence was buried in the cemetery of Cyriaces on the Ager Veranus in the crypt with many other martyrs,⁷⁰ and Pope Eutychian (275–83) was said to have buried 342 martyrs in various places with his own hands.⁷¹ Pope Zephyrinus (198/9–217) was buried in his own cemetery, near the cemetery of Callistus.⁷² With this careful construction of a topography of sanctity, the *Liber pontificalis* also enhanced the holiness of the successors of St Peter. They too had won the martyr's crown and joined the congregation of saints.

Occasionally there are hints in the text of the reception of new converts to Christianity and how that may have been regulated. There was a community of Jews in Rome, among whom Peter may have worked.⁷³ Pope Pius (c.145), moreover, is credited with a decree 'that a heretic coming from the heresy of the Jews should be received and baptized',⁷⁴ and Pope Victor (c.195) with a decision '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'.⁷⁵ The establishment of *tituli* in Rome 'for the baptism and

⁶⁸ LPI, p. 162; trans. Davis, *Pontiffs*, p. 12: *Et post hoc factum iacuerunt corpora sancta in platea ad exemplum christianorum dies XXV ex iussu Diocletiani.*

⁶⁹ LPI, Life 18, p. 143. ⁷⁰ LPI, Life 25, p. 155. ⁷¹ LPI, Life 28, p. 159.

⁷² LPI, Life 16, p. 139.

⁷³ Rutgers 1995, 2000, and 2009. Currently Rutgers is directing two international projects, one entitled *Reconfiguring Diaspora: The Transformation of the Jewish Diaspora in Late Antiquity* and another excavation project focussing on the origins of Christianity in Rome.

⁷⁴ LPI, Life 11, c. 3, p. 132; trans. Davis, *Pontiffs*, p. 5: *Hic constituit hereticum venientem ex Iudaeorum herese suscipi et baptizari.*

⁷⁵ LPI, Life 15, c. 2, p. 137; trans. Davis, *Pontiffs*, p. 6: *Et constituit ut necessitate faciente, ut ubiubi inventus fuisset, sive in flumine, sive in mari, sive in fontibus, tantum christiano confessione credulitatis clarificata quicumque hominum ex gentile veniens ut baptizaretur.*

repentance of many converts from paganism' is mentioned in the Life of Pope Marcellus (305/6–306/7).⁷⁶ A further indication of the variety of belief among the people of Rome in the fourth century is the decree attributed to Pope Miltiades (310–14) forbidding the faithful to fast on Sundays or Thursdays 'because the pagans kept these days as a holy fast',⁷⁷ Pope Eusebius (c.308) is said to have 'discovered heretics in Rome and reconciled them by the laying on of hands'.⁷⁸ One group at least of these 'heretics' is specified as Manichaeans in the Lives of Eusebius's successors, Popes Miltiades, Gelasius (492–6), and Hormisdas (514–23), though Samuel Cohen has suggested that 'Manichaean' may have functioned as a general label for heretics by the sixth century.⁷⁹

The *Liber pontificalis* portrays a cosmopolitan population as well as one with a great diversity of religious belief. The memory of pagans at least was preserved in some aspects of the daily rhythms of life in Rome as well as the topography.⁸⁰ Throughout the fourth century, many pagan traditions and sacred sites were maintained, at least until the repressive decrees of Theodosius. Groups from Palestine, Syria, Egypt, Greece, Dalmatia, and North Africa, as well as those referred to collectively as Goths, settled in Rome.⁸¹ Pilgrims and exiles, and men from Sicily, Spain, Sardinia, and elsewhere in the Italian peninsula in pursuit of a clerical career also converged on Rome. The international profile of Rome's clergy was taken for granted. I mentioned how many popes are claimed as Roman or from Italy in the *Liber pontificalis* in the previous chapter. Even so, seventeen of the first fifty-nine popes were immigrants from Christian communities in the Holy Land, Syria, Spain, Dalmatia, Africa, and Greece. Of the ten popes described as Greek, two seem to have had Jewish fathers. Their very inclusion in the *Liber pontificalis* and their

⁷⁶ LPI, Life 31, c. 2, p. 164; trans. Davis, *Pontiffs*, p. 12: *propter baptismum et paenitentiam multorum qui convertebantur ex paganis.*

⁷⁷ LPI, Life 33, c. 2, p. 168; trans. Davis, *Pontiffs*, p. 13: *Hic constituit nulla ratione dominico aut quinta feria ieiunium quis de fidelibus agere, quia eos dies pagani quasi sacrum ieiunium celebrabant.*

⁷⁸ LPI, Life 32, p. 167; trans. Davis, *Pontiffs*, p. 13: *Hic hereticos invenit in urbe Roma quos ad manum inpositionis reconciliavit.*

⁷⁹ LPI Lives 33, 51, and 54, pp. 255 and 270, and Cohen 2015.

⁸⁰ See Marazzi 2000 and Humphries 2007.

⁸¹ See the prosopography of Goths in Italy in Amory 1997, pp. 348–485.

eligibility to become pope effectively Romanized them. At the same time, the varied backgrounds of these popes is expressive of the expansion of Christianity and reinforces the *Liber pontificalis*'s function as the next instalment in the Acts of the Apostles.

The community of Christians in Rome is not obviously presented as a small and vulnerable group before the conversion of Constantine, but this is certainly what emerges from the text. More crucially, it is the status of the sole bishop among the many Christian groups in Rome that is promoted, with very little indication of the variety and possibly divided loyalties that may have existed between the different groups of Christians. In modern patristic scholarship, this emphasis on a single leader is described as the emergence of a 'monarch bishop'. The alternative leadership and vision of the Christian life offered by Hippolytus in Rome, for example, is not even acknowledged; he was merely mentioned in the *Liber pontificalis* as a priest exiled by the imperial authorities at the same time and to the same place as Pope Pontian (230–5).⁸² Similarly, the challenge Novatian presented to the leadership of Popes Fabian (236–50) and Cornelius (251–3) is barely alluded to, and other *loci* of spiritual authority within Rome are ignored.⁸³ In Rome at the time these may have been strong personal rivalries, but they are subsumed in the narrative of the popes' martyrdom. The story of the translation of Peter and Paul in the Life of Pope Cornelius appears to reinforce the stewardship of their apostolic founders by their successors, and thus enhances still more the authority of the Bishop of Rome.⁸⁴

Disagreements within, or tensions between, communities in the seven regions and twenty-five *tituli* in Rome may have had as much to do with different liturgical practices, emphases in morality and charity, social incompatibility, and doctrinal variation in relation to the Chalcedonian definition of the Trinity, as with the alleged 'political' rivalries within the city. The *Liber pontificalis*, as we saw in the previous chapter, presents us with disputed elections and opposing factions disrupting the elections of

⁸² *LPI*, Life 20, p. 147. Brent 1995. See also Curran 2000, Dunn (ed.) 2015, and Fear (ed.) 2013.

⁸³ *LPI*, pp. 148, 150–1. See also Gülzow 1975, and Papandrea 2008.

⁸⁴ See McKitterick 2013b, and the references cited above, pp. 85 and 86, notes 43 and 47.

Popes Damasus, Boniface II, and Symmachus.⁸⁵ Such accounts, however, highlighting enthusiastic partisans and family members, may well be the same kind of telegraphic and generalized reporting we observed in the Life of Peter, with the Laurentian schism even within the living memory of some readers. The Verona fragment, for example, the alternative version of the Life of Symmachus discussed in Chapter 1, refers to ‘such an enormous and savage disagreement that took hold of the clergy and Roman people that neither the thought of God nor the fear of the king could prevent the factions colliding’.⁸⁶ No reason is given for the disagreement. The narrative mentions at a later stage that some of the senators and bishops went to Symmachus’s defence and more select clergy and senators supported Laurentius. The *Liber pontificalis*’s version also records that clergy and senate were split, though again without indicating why. It then goes to the length of recording the ex-consuls Festus and Probinus and their ‘battle’ with another ex-consul Faustus, and how their malice ‘caused slaughter and murder among the clergy’.⁸⁷ By reinforcing the history of the see and its apostolic origins, the *Liber pontificalis* authors may also be buttressing a case against too much aristocratic interference in the episcopal office.

Any reference to heretics, Arians, Manichaeans, Donatists, and the embattled complications resultant on the Acacian schism with Byzantium between 484 and 519 are generally only alluded to by the *Liber pontificalis* as an aspect of the bishop’s triumph over error and dissent. The bishops had proved themselves steadfast under the pagan emperors and remained the champions of orthodoxy as the sole leaders of the Christian community in Rome. There will be more about how the *Liber pontificalis* contrives to emphasize this in relation to the bishop’s authority below,⁸⁸ but here I wish to emphasize the *Liber pontificalis*’s description

⁸⁵ Wirbelauer 1993, Llewellyn 1976, and Blair-Dixon 2007.

⁸⁶ Verona, Biblioteca Capitolare XXII (20) (*CLA* IV, 490); ed. *LPI*, pp. 43–6 at p. 44; trans. Davis, *Pontiffs*, p. 95: *tantaque clerum ac populum romanum discordia feralis invaserat, ut nec divina consideratio, nec metus regius partes a propria collisione cohiberet*, and see above, pp. 32–5.

⁸⁷ *LPI*, Life 53, c. 5, pp. 260–1; trans. Davis, *Pontiffs*, p. 43: *et caedes et homicidia in clero ex invidia*. On the historical context, the personalities identified here, and details see Wirbelauer 1993 and earlier commentary by Llewellyn 1976 and Moorhead 1978.

⁸⁸ See Chapter 4, below.

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of the institutional structure the bishops introduce to what appears, even from this laconic text, to have been a small, vulnerable, and mostly poverty-stricken community. The bishop had a loyal and steadfast little band of clergy supporting him, though as we have seen, we hear most about them when they are martyred alongside their bishop; the entourage executed with Pope Sixtus II (257–8), for example, looks like the personnel of just one small establishment.⁸⁹

Conclusion

I have argued in this chapter that the *Liber pontificalis* was a determined representation of Rome's anchoring of the Christian faith in the work of the *princeps apostolorum* and his successors in written form. It was a text, moreover, which drew on other traditions which were also in written form. The *Liber pontificalis* embedded the innovations of the sixth-century bishops of Rome in a 500-year-old past. It stressed the inheritance and careful stewardship of a legacy. It provided an example to sustain and instruct those bishops' successors. It reinforced the authority and standing of Peter within the church and by implication in Rome, over which the *princeps apostolorum* presided, in relation to the rest of the Christian world.

I suggested at the end of the previous chapter that the *Liber pontificalis* can be understood as a means by which the perceptions and memory of Rome were reshaped and its past restructured.⁹⁰ A distinctive aspect of many texts in the early middle ages is their dynamic relationship with late antiquity. This is particularly the case with the *Liber pontificalis*, whose 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. As we have seen, the original *Liber pontificalis* and its continuations can be interpreted as an attempt to frame a new identity for Christians within a narrative of the transformation of Rome from pagan to Christian city. In this respect, the text is an essential component of the formation in

⁸⁹ *LPI*, Life 25, p. 155. ⁹⁰ Gantner, McKitterick, and Meeder (eds.) 2015.

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early medieval Europe of cultural memory in the sense defined in the work of Jan Assmann and Aleida Assmann.⁹¹ I have endeavoured to demonstrate how to assess the relationship between the very particular narrative of the *Liber pontificalis* and the realities both of the early stages of the formation of Christian Rome and of the emergence of the bishop or pope as sole leader of the Christian community in Rome. It is to the question of imperial emulation and the representation of the popes as the new rulers of Rome, therefore, that I shall turn in the following chapter.

⁹¹ Assmann, J. 1999/2011; Assmann, A. 1999/2011.