Introduction

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'In all ages, whatever the form or name of government, be it monarchy, republic, or democracy, an oligarchy lurks behind the façade.'[1] With these words Sir Ronald Syme began his landmark investigation into the lively political networks of the late Republican noble families of the city of Rome, families who drew their power from ancestry and landed wealth as much as from the political process. This statement holds gradually less true for their successors at the end of antiquity, who struggled to maintain their position in the face of set-backs such as civil war in Italy in the 470s and 480s, and again from 534 to 554. The fifth and sixth centuries saw a progressive erosion of the landed wealth of Rome's aristocratic families. While they had long resisted the centralizing instincts of Rome's principal land-owner, the emperor, new pressures and opportunities led the Roman aristocracy to seek a more cooperative relationship with Rome's bishop, whose ever greater *ex officio* holdings came to rival those of the emperor, and were more secure in the face of political upheaval. If this strategy of cooperation was largely successful, however, its success brought with it the eventual waning of Roman memory where the aristocracy was concerned.

During late antiquity, the urban fabric of the city of Rome was the result of efforts by three categories of patron: senators, emperors, and bishops (although individual patrons could belong to more than one category). The western senatorial elite based in Rome were the principal beneficiaries, along with the emperor himself, not only of Italy's status as a destination for tax revenue, but also of their own standing as international land-owners. Unlike their Constantinopolitan counterparts (or later aristocracies in Italy), Roman senatorial families often owned land right across the span of the empire. This meant that rents collected, along with other private business interests, allowed them to skim the surplus off the economies of the imperial provinces. Since the senatorial aristocrats based in

[1] Syme 1939: 7.

Rome were second only to the emperor in the extent of their land-holdings, the progressive loss of access to wealth situated beyond their Italian base had far-reaching repercussions in both east and west in addition to Rome itself.

If Rome stood as the emblem of their power, the city was also the principal stage upon which the wealth of empire could most visibly be displayed. Three factors altered the balance of this economy of senatorial consumption at the end of antiquity. The loss of the provinces, especially Africa in 439 (with its private and tax revenues and above all the grain ships which brought the *annona* every autumn to feed Rome's *plebs*), had already meant that Rome no longer benefited from the same surplus and could no longer sustain the accustomed magnificence. Indeed, the population of Rome seems to have declined dramatically in the fifth and early sixth centuries, probably as a result of the loss of the *annona*,[2] compounded by disease (such as the arrival of the plague in 541–2 and again later in the century).[3] Yet worse, however, was the destruction of the infrastructure which might have allowed Rome and other cities of the peninsula to rebuild economic networks.

Senatorial families had always sought to sustain and enhance the city's health and splendour, and at the same time to leave a trace of their own role in doing so. But the old habits of senatorial self-commemoration had been challenged. In an important article of 1997, Werner Eck showed that once the *princeps* had appropriated the prerogative of public building it was virtually impossible for families to achieve a lasting impact on the urban landscape of Rome. Furthermore the life-cycle of senatorial dynasties was short: families on the wane were replaced by a constant influx of *homines novi*, a process which lent vitality to the city's economy[4] at the same time as it made self-commemoration difficult for the families themselves. Across the empire, senatorial families were required to maintain a residence in the imperial city, and up to the time of Theodosius II (d. 450) they were also required to request explicit permission from the emperor when they wished to be absent from the city.[5] Their persistent presence, and their requirement for lavish premises, gave Rome a specific character as the city of the Senate, but under the Empire this character was overlaid by the more visible interventions signifying imperial *praesentia*.[6]

[2] Wickham 2005: 34. [3] Christie 2006: 500–2; Liebeschuetz 2001: 53–4.
[4] Eck 1997: 189–90. [5] Salzman 2002: 72.
[6] Veyne 1990: 386–92; Garnsey and Saller 1987: 149–50. For repercussions of this monopoly on the classical patronage system see Johnson and Dandeker 1989: 238–9.

The waning of the emperor's involvement in Rome brought opportunities for the city's aristocracy, though the blessing was never unmixed.

With the rise of legal privilege granted to Christian bishops, the urban landscape acquired yet another layer of symbolic meaning. The increasingly Christian senatorial class probably saw the powers granted to the church in the fourth and fifth centuries as a new opportunity to establish continuity for their acts of patronage.[7] In this they were more than successful, since many of the foundations in question still stand today, and are still actively in use. But there is an irony: the price of continuity was the virtual disappearance, over time, of the evidence of the lay acts of patronage so crucial to the development of early Christian Rome. Once the patronal families had died off, their memory was eroded in favour of a grand narrative of the emerging Roman episcopacy, even where their foundations had in fact survived.

Up until 534, the senatorial aristocracy in Italy were able to continue more or less as they always had where the eternal city was concerned. This year marks the beginning of Justinian's attempt to recapture Italy from Theodahad, the Amal ruler of Italy who had murdered the Amal princess and imperial protégée Amalasuintha. The Gothic Wars, as they came to be known thanks to Procopius' account, marked a watershed in Italy. Up through the reign of Theoderic the Great (d. 526) and the regency (brought into jeopardy by her son's death in 533) of his daughter Amalasuintha, Ostrogothic rule had offered a peaceful end to the Italian wars of succession of the early 470s;[8] with the invasion of Belisarius on Justinian's behalf in 534, destruction and disease began, swiftly and decisively, to erode the infrastructure of the Italian cities.[9] As Chris Wickham has put it, 'Italy thus fits the old storyline of "the barbarian invasion destroying the Roman world" better than most regions do, with the proviso that it was the *Roman* invasion that caused the Gothic war.'[10]

Although the scope of the present volume extends from 300 to 900, it pivots on this single dramatic phase of change in the sixth century. It is one of its contentions that the relationship between the city and her aristocracy changed dramatically as a result of the failure of the Ostrogothic experiment, and the resulting Gothic Wars. At the same time, this period sees a new experiment, one with far-reaching consequences: a 'media revolution'

[7] Ward-Perkins 1984: 239–41; Smith 2003: 151.
[8] Moorhead 1992: 78–80 on the *civitas* ideology of Theoderic; see also Amory 1997: 112–20 on the comparatively peaceful cohabitation of Goths and Romans up to the death of Athalaric.
[9] Brown 1984: 6–7. [10] Wickham 2005: 36.

centred on the rise of the Roman bishop as the central mediator of Rome's memory. Some time ago Michael Clanchy argued in an influential study that in England immediately following the Norman Conquest[11] new relationships of authority and obedience, and new technologies for defending older claims to autonomy, were articulated through new kinds of record-keeping. A similar process, we suggest, was in play in early sixth-century Rome.[12]

The bishop of Rome, implausibly, emerged the winner from the Ostrogothic–Byzantine crisis. Up to the death of Theoderic, a pivotally important group of popes found themselves having to navigate between the Scylla of an Arian king and the Charybdis of a succession of theologically demanding Eastern emperors along with their senatorial supporters in the city of Rome. The Gothic Wars did not improve this situation: popes were imprisoned and assassinated as a result of the escalating chaos. At the same time, inspired improvisation by successive sixth-century bishops led to the development of a new vision of episcopal authority and new forms of documentation and self-presentation. In the second half of the sixth century, during the last period of imperial rule in central Italy, these gains were consolidated on terms appropriate to Italy's (and Europe's) post-Roman future.

The sixth century was the 'tipping point' connecting two processes: the waning of imperial and aristocratic gestures of 'conspicuous consumption', and the waxing of ecclesiastical institutions as a mechanism through which bishops could establish continuity of culture and historical memory. From this point forward, the evidentiary record becomes increasingly coloured by the initiative of the city's bishop. Put simply, the principal reason for this is a book. The first half of the sixth century witnessed the production of a collection of popes' lives, the *Liber Pontificalis*, from Peter up to Felix IV (526–530). Compiled initially around 530 during the regency of Amalasuintha, according to its most distinguished analyst, Louis Duchesne, the *Liber Pontificalis* was to be regularly continued until the late ninth century and came to dominate the narrative landscape of this period.[13] We suggest that it is no accident that the precious but immensely

[11] Clanchy 1979.

[12] Other scholars of late antiquity, Charles Hedrick and Doron Mendels, have published important studies involving technologies of memory and information management in late antiquity while this collection was in preparation, and we have benefited from their insights although our source material and method differ in points of detail. Hedrick 2000; Mendels 1999.

[13] For the composition context of the *Liber Pontificalis* see Duchesne 1955: xxxiii–xlviii and 7–9; Davis 2000: xii–xvi. For an alternative view of the dating of the first part, attributed to not earlier than the seventh century, see Mommsen 1898: xviii. On the dating problem see also Geertman 2003.

problematic sources produced in the early sixth century – especially the *Liber Pontificalis*, but also the *Collectio Avellana*, a collection of papal and imperial letters of the fourth to sixth centuries[14] – record an intense effort on the part of the Roman bishops to establish the Roman episcopacy as an autonomous institution free of control by emperor or senate, at the same time as they record a largely successful attempt to control the shape of Roman memory.

The waning of aristocratic visibility has to be reassessed on the following lines: does it simply reflect a decline in the *production* of the sources, such as letters and inscriptions, on which study of aristocratic strategies traditionally depends? Or does it reflect selective *transmission* of the sources? Since the libraries which survived the end of antiquity were all based in ecclesiastical institutions, the relationship between the narrowing of aristocratic source production on the one hand, and the ecclesiastically biased preservation of texts on the other, is of course virtually impossible to establish.

Up to the late fourth century, the agency of the aristocratic families based in Rome is still widely documented and has consequently attracted much attention.[15] It is perhaps not surprising that scholarship for this period often has focused on either the continuities of secular munificence, most notably games, or Christian withdrawal from social expectations, but less on aristocratic material support for Rome's Christian community.[16] Some of these fourth-century figures may in fact have been 'picked up' by monastic librarians because of their role as characters in the pageant of ecclesiastical history. Quintus Aurelius Symmachus, for example, *praefectus urbi* in 384, whose letter-collection has come down to us, was an antagonist of Ambrose and the target of a diatribe by Prudentius – the *Contra Symmachum* – as well as being the ancestor of a dynasty whose power did not diminish in Rome until the Gothic Wars at the earliest, and who were known for supporting the early Roman monasteries.

In the succeeding generations, however, our evidence – particularly epigraphy – becomes thinner and thinner.[17] By the eighth century, we have only three secure epigraphical records of lay patronage in the city of Rome: a donation of rural estates to the church of S. Maria in Cosmedin by the *dux* Eusthatius, the foundation of the church of S. Paulus (today's S. Angelo in Pescheria) by the *primicerius* Theodotus, and a donation to the

[14] Ed. O. Günther (1895) *Epistulae imperatorum pontificium aliorum*, 1. CSEL 35. Leipzig.
[15] Arnheim 1972; Matthews 1990; Näf 1995; Schlinkert 1996; Niquet 2000; Salzman 2002.
[16] See for example Smith 2003; Lim 1999: 265–81; Curran 2000: esp. 260–320.
[17] See Barnish 1988. On epigraphy see De Rubeis 2001.

church of S. Maria in Cosmedin by the *notarius* Gregorius.[18] Again, it is not clear whether this decline in epigraphic production reflects simultaneous decline in aristocratic patronage, or is simply an expression of the changes in epigraphic habit due to economic hardship and rising illiteracy. It seems, however, that at least the area of monumental inscriptions, alongside the according scriptural pattern, was gradually appropriated by the Roman bishop.[19]

As a result of the uneven availability of textual sources, reciprocal influence between archaeologists and historians is an urgent desideratum. An increase in the quantity and quality of archaeological data since the 1980s, especially thanks to the excavation of the Crypta Balbi in the southern Campus Martius, has revolutionized, and in a way 'normalized', our understanding of Rome's evolving urban fabric in this period.[20] We now know that Rome's civic infrastructure supported a surprising continuity of daily life and economic activity through the disruptions of the fifth, sixth, and seventh centuries.[21] New interest in infrastructural elements such as residential building, trade and manufacture, and the road network can only be welcome. Rome has historically been viewed as virtually *sui generis*, with the declining economic activity of urban elites, and new organization of urban space accounted for almost entirely in terms of the rise of the bishop, rather than with refeence to issues which help us to understand late Roman urbanism in general, such as the decline of institutions of civic self-government, new forms of urban finances, or the changes in the importance and locations of trade and manufacture.[22] On these grounds it has been argued, for example, that Rome was the exception to a general rule that ecclesiastical building projects usually had to rely on accessible space rather than 'driving' late Roman and early medieval urbanism.[23]

Owing to the rapid turnover of new discoveries we will probably lack a synthetic survey of Rome's material culture in this period for years to come, although Neil Christie's *From Constantine to Charlemagne* (2006) now offers a valuable starting-point for historians wishing to navigate the ever richer archaeological scholarship. For the analysis of Christian polity, a

[18] De Rubeis 2001: 118–19, n. 10; 119, n. 11 a, b; 118, n. 9.
[19] De Rubeis 2001: 108. [20] Arena and Delogu (2000).
[21] See, for example, Coates-Stephens 1996, 1997; Meneghini and Santangeli Valenziani 2001a; Santangeli Valenziani 2000; Augenti 2000; Manacorda 2001.
[22] For similar and related questions on late antique and early medieval urbanism see e.g. Rich 1992; Christie and Loseby 1996; Lepelly 1996; Brogiolo and Ward-Perkins 1999; Brogiolo, Gauthier, and Christie 2000; Burns and Eadie 2001; Lavan 2001; Liebeschuetz 2001.
[23] Gauthier 1999.

number of excellent comprehensive studies exist, most notably Charles Pietri's masterly *Roma Christiana* and Richard Krautheimer's influential *Rome: Profile of a City, 312–1308*,[24] though both are now well out of date.[25] The prime concern of these studies was to chart the growth of Christian Rome's primary institution, the papacy, and to a greater or lesser degree they are guided by the teleological paradigm of the *Liber Pontificalis*. Still uncharted, therefore, is the role of lay elites and institutions in the Christianization of the city, and the often lively collaboration between lay and ascetic or clerical institutions.

In seeking to move beyond papal teleology, the present volume will centre on two questions. The first concerns the sources: how do the specific needs of the Roman bishops, as evidenced in the texts they generated in the sixth century – the *Liber Pontificalis* and the *Collectio Avellana* – distort our understanding of the relationship between Rome's three principal sources of patronage – emperor, bishop, and aristocratic laity – during our period? Second, what role can we uncover for the aristocratic laity themselves? Our study of the role of the Roman aristocracy in effecting the urban fabric of Rome draws on methodological premises that also underlie, for example, Michele Salzman's study exploring the Christianization of the late Roman aristocracy not as a top-down process originating from the emperor, but as a more diffuse development generated by the aristocrats themselves.[26]

In responding to both of these questions, we must resurrect a debate about the private ownership of church land. While a German tradition following Stutz, and made popular by Friedrich Prinz, saw the *Eigenkirche* or lay-owned ecclesiastical foundation as tending to result from Germanic influence after 476, French twentieth-century scholarship, following Lesne and Gaudemet, tended to lay emphasis on private foundations in the Roman period as the starting-point for ecclesiastical property.[27] Our own work tends to support the 'Roman' view of private foundations.[28] By comparison to the well-known contributions of Pietri and Krautheimer, our starting-point therefore has been to look at the needs and forms of lay patronage from the perspective of the aristocrats themselves rather than seeking antecedents for medieval forms and institutions. Where direct

[24] Pietri 1976; Krautheimer 1980. See also Llewellyn 1971; Ullmann 1970.
[25] An interim update to the territory covered by Krautheimer is now available in the collaborative volume Pani Ermini 2000.
[26] Salzman 2002. Salzman's study is a response, above all, to Barnes 1995.
[27] Davis 1976; Stutz 1895, 1938; Prinz 1965; Thomas 1906; Lesne 1910–43; Gaudemet 1958. For a recent treatment in the tradition of Stutz, see now Wood 2006.
[28] Bowes 2002.

evidence is lacking, as it often is, we have sought to understand how both the bishop and lay patrons would have acted according to traditional Roman norms and within traditional social networks. Our guiding assumption has been that where no evidence compels us to do otherwise, we should imagine that Roman aristocrats tended to err in the direction of a self-aggrandizing cultural conservatism, rather than towards slavish anticipation of the possible needs of future popes.

At the same time, in the absence of transmitted lay archives for our period, the evidentiary basis for the precise study of lay ownership of Christian institutions and lay strategies for transmitting those institutions to heirs, whether lay or institutional, poses many problems. The lack of lay archives deposited with the Roman monasteries (such as those donated to Bobbio in northern Italy for example), along with the even more surprising lack of a rich source base for the Roman monasteries themselves in the period before 1100, will always stand as a daunting obstacle, but we must at least think our way around it. Why, for example, did a city so rich in monasteries emerge as so poor in monastic librarianship for the early medieval period? Both the abundance of early monasteries in Rome and the real poverty of the evidence for Roman monasticism emerge clearly in Guy Ferrari's classic compendium *Early Roman Monasteries*, now fifty years old but still indispensable.[29] Ferrari's work brings us to a roadblock.

The disappearance of Roman monastic archives probably does not mean they never existed: this is a point which must be repeated over and over again. Most of our charter evidence for early medieval monasteries elsewhere in Europe is transmitted not through the original *chartae*, often copied onto friable papyrus up to the Carolingian period where Rome is concerned, but through cartularies dating from the eleventh century and even later. Why such collections for Roman institutions either were not produced or do not survive remains an important question.[30] There is almost surely a story of nineteenth-century destruction of archives to be told in the case of at least some of the Roman monasteries.[31]

This last point leads, of course, to the wider problem of the role of laity in our period. It is some years since, in an important article on the ubiquitous early sixth-century political and military figure Liberius the patrician, J. J. O'Donnell called for a new approach to the history of the laity in our period, one which would reach behind the monumentalizing instincts of monastic librarians to the multiplicity of players and points of

[29] Ferrari 1957. [30] Guyotjeanin, Morelle, and Parisse 1993.
[31] See e.g. Bartòla 1989 and 2003. For further discussion, see Costambeys and Leyser in this volume.

view in the sixth-century west.[32] During his own well-documented lifetime, Cassiodorus Senator, chancellor to the Ostrogothic kings and after the Gothic Wars founder of an important monastery, may not, O'Donnell argued, have been so visible or influential a figure as his contemporary the patrician Liberius, a figure about whom we now know very little. The key difference, of course, is that Liberius was not possessed of the historical foresight – or sheer luck – which led Cassiodorus to found a monastic library to preserve his own book collection, and indeed in no small part his own writings, at just the historical moment when other means of transmission were becoming perilously unreliable. But to do justice to the challenge posed by O'Donnell's painstaking reinvestigation of source materials, a conceptual shift is required.

It has taken a figure of the intellectual stature of Robert Markus to establish a vocabulary, drawn from the patristic sources themselves, through which a problem of this magnitude can be approached. In a chain of publications from *Saeculum* in 1970[33] to *The End of Ancient Christianity* in 1990, Markus developed a radical rereading of the works of Augustine of Hippo which could lay the foundation for an understanding of what Markus somewhat alarmingly called 'a defence of Christian mediocrity'.[34] Thus the role within the church of non-ascetic householders, whether married or unmarried, was a critical pastoral topic during the fifth and sixth centuries, and one central to an appreciation of the lines of tension within the polity of any major Christian city. The 'core values' of the laity, on this reading, centred on an idea of *mediocritas* as a virtuous temperance in the pursuit of excellence. This lay Christianity dismissed the excesses of the ascetic movement as a sign of moral imbalance rather than excellence in virtue.[35] The senatorial Roman laity can only be understood if this deep commitment to *temperantia* is appreciated.[36]

Fundamental to the Markus reading of Augustine is a watershed in Augustine thinking, based on his rereading, in the 390s, of the letters of St Paul. This 'watershed' led the bishop to reject the increasingly popular late fourth-century idea of a 'two-tiered' church, in which an elite of one kind or another (whether ascetic or Donatist, Pelagian, or Manichaean) tolerated the 'excess baggage' of its patent spiritual inferiors. This 'intellectual landslide' – Peter Brown's vivid phrase for the same development[37] – led

[32] O'Donnell 1981. [33] Markus 1970, 2nd edn 1988. [34] Markus 1990: 45.
[35] See, for example, the classical attitudes to virtue without moderation as intrinsically invalid, discussed in Francis 1995 and North 1966.
[36] Central here is Hunter 1987. [37] Brown 1967, cited in Markus 1990: 50.

Augustine to re-evaluate the place of the married in the Christian polity, arguing that the ascetic elitism of a Jerome or an Ambrose could only be counter-productive. When learned aristocrats resisted the agenda of bishops or of the ascetic party, they tended to do so not out of cold-footedness or because they preferred 'paganism' to 'Christianity', but rather because they believed, along with Augustine, that a Christianity out of step with the philosophical tradition on *temperantia* could not be true to Christian values.

Thus, Markus reminds us, Augustine comes to assert that 'Both sorts of faithful belong within the one Church and both are called to serve God in faith and love. All who seek to follow the Lord are within his flock: "and the married are certainly able to follow His footsteps [*vestigia*], even if their feet do not fit perfectly into the footprints, yet following the same path".'[38] This was Augustine's re-affirmation of the central Christian tradition. We will see below that Augustine's view of the relationship between ascetics and the married played a concrete role in the ascetic decision-making of aristocratic Roman women such as Demetrias and Melania the Younger.[39]

The present volume draws on recent work by members of the Centre for Late Antiquity at the University of Manchester. This work has sought to understand the lay, clerical, and ascetic populations of the city of Rome at the end of antiquity as interacting in an atmosphere more fluid than the institutional teleology claimed by the official ecclesiastical sources. Most importantly, we have aimed at re-establishing the link between the Roman church's resources and the local elites. The difficulty, hitherto, of synthesizing the fragmentary and arcane evidence has encouraged historians to assume that the ascetic tendency that rose to prominence within Christianity in this period was hostile to the worldly family and, by extension, to its property, that to be 'authentic' in their vocation ascetics could only reject, and never collaborate with, the 'earthly' institution of the biological family. One of our starting-points has been to try to move beyond the reductionist view that sees lay patrons as acting *either* out of faith *or* in accord with social or other objectives, and ascetics as *either* genuinely ascetic *or* closely associated with the continued possession of wealth. We will see below in Kate Cooper's chapter that at least some senatorial ascetics saw property ownership as a form of stewardship on behalf of the church.[40]

[38] Markus 1990: 46.
[39] See the contributions of Anne Kurdock and Kate Cooper in this volume, and in addition Cooper 2006.
[40] On the 'false problem' of reductionism see Cooper 2005a.