

## ROME AND THE INVENTION OF THE PAPACY

The remarkable, and permanently influential, papal history known as the *Liber pontificalis* shaped perceptions and the memory of Rome, the popes, and the many-layered past of both city and papacy within western Europe. Rosamond McKitterick offers a new analysis of this extraordinary combination of historical reconstruction, deliberate selection, and political use of fiction, to illuminate the history of the early popes and their relationship with Rome. She examines the content, context, and transmission of the text, and the complex relationships between the reality, representation, and reception of authority that it reflects. The *Liber pontificalis* presented Rome as a holy city of Christian saints and martyrs, as the bishops of Rome established their visible power in buildings, and it articulated the popes' spiritual and ministerial role, accommodated within their Roman imperial inheritance. Drawing on wide-ranging and interdisciplinary international research, *Rome and the Invention of the Papacy* offers pioneering insights into the evolution of this extraordinary source, and its significance for the history of early medieval Europe.

**Rosamond McKitterick** is Professor Emerita of Medieval History at the University of Cambridge, a Fellow of Sidney Sussex College, and Chair of the Faculty of Archaeology, History and Letters of the British School at Rome. She was awarded the Dr A. H. Heineken International Prize in History in 2010. Her previous publications include *History and Memory in the Carolingian World* (2004), *Perceptions of the Past in the Early Middle Ages* (2006), *Charlemagne: The Formation of a European Identity* (2008), and two co-edited volumes on medieval Rome, *Rome Across Time and Space: Cultural Transmission and the Exchange of Ideas* (2011), and *Old Saint Peter's, Rome* (2013).

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ROME AND THE INVENTION  
OF THE PAPACY

The *Liber pontificalis*

**Rosamond McKitterick**

University of Cambridge



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*To my students in Part II of the Historical Tripos, Special Subject 'B',  
University of Cambridge, 2011–15*

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## Preface

This book is a study of Rome and the popes in late antiquity and the early middle ages through the prism of the narrative known as the *Liber pontificalis*. A chronologically ordered serial biography of the bishops of Rome from St Peter to Pope Stephen V (†891), the *Liber pontificalis* was composed within the papal administration in Rome in the early sixth century, with continuations added in the seventh, eighth, and ninth centuries. It was the act of writing the *Liber pontificalis* that was the invention of the papacy, with a construction of the papal and apostolic past in early Christian Rome that was of seminal importance in the history of Latin Christendom. The *Liber pontificalis* articulates papal ideology and the Petrine succession. This book, therefore, is about the power of a text that shaped perceptions and the memory of Rome, the popes, and the many-layered past of both city and papacy within western Europe in the early middle ages. I offer a new analysis of the content, context, and transmission of this text, its remarkable combination of historical reconstruction, deliberate selection and political use of fiction, and of the complex relationship between the reality, representation, and reception of authority. I examine the text's construction of the Christian past of Rome as a holy city of Christian saints and martyrs, its representation of the way the bishops of Rome established their visible power within the city with the construction and embellishment of many churches and holy places, endeavoured in many respects to emulate the Roman emperors as rulers of the city, and defined their spiritual and ministerial role.

The book is based on the James C. Lydon Lectures in Medieval History and Culture delivered in Trinity College, Dublin in October

## PREFACE

2018. It is a pleasure to record my thanks to TCD for the invitation and generous hospitality during a memorable week in Dublin, and especially to Seán Duffy and Immo Warntjes of TCD, and my audiences there, not least my invited ‘respondents’ Claudia Bolgia, Marios Costambeys, and Mayke de Jong, and all the members of the postgraduate seminar, for their comments, suggestions, and questions. The Dublin lectures, as the culmination of the past decade’s work on this book, also emerged from the final-year undergraduate Special Subject ‘B’ on ‘Rome and its Rulers, 476–769’ that I taught in Cambridge to a succession of cohorts of wonderfully engaged, critically alert, and enthusiastic students. They accompanied me on unforgettable field trips to Rome and my gratitude to them is expressed in the dedication of this book. I should also like to thank Mike Styles and Keith Sykes for making these field trips possible, the former and current Directors of the British School at Rome, Christopher Smith and Stephen Milner, as well as the other members of staff, especially Stefania Peterlini for arranging special visits to sites, and Valerie Scott and Christine Martin for all their help. In the years working on Rome, the early popes, and the *Liber pontificalis*, I have benefitted from the collegiality and hospitality of a number of other institutions in addition to the BSR. My thanks therefore are due first of all to the American Academy in Rome, where I was the Lester K. Little Visiting Fellow in 2011, and to the successive Directors of the AAR, Carmela Virchillo Franklin, Christopher Celenza and Kimberly Bowes; to Rolf Große and the German Historical Institute in Paris, where I was a visiting scholar in 2016, as well as the Institut de recherche et d’histoire des textes in Paris, François Bougard, Michel Sot, Geneviève Bühner-Thierry and Regine Le Jan; and to Marco Stoffella and the University of Verona, where I was guest professor in 2019.

My understanding of the early medieval architecture, frescoes, and sculpture of Ravenna and Rome, and my examination across much of Western Europe of the extant early medieval manuscripts of the *Liber pontificalis*, were greatly facilitated by the award of a Leverhulme Emeritus Fellowship for 2018–19 and I should like to thank the Leverhulme Trust most warmly for this generous award and their support.

I should also like to thank the staff of the following libraries for their welcome, and for enabling me to examine the manuscripts of the *Liber*

## PREFACE

*pontificalis* and of related texts in their collections: Berlin, Staatsbibliothek; Bern, Burgerbibliothek; Brussels, Bibliothèque royale; Cambridge, University Library; Cologne, Dombibliothek; The Hague, Museum Meermanno-Westreenianum; Florence, Biblioteca Laurenziana; Laon, Bibliothèque municipale Suzanne Martinet; Leiden, Universiteitsbibliotheek; Lucca, Biblioteca Capitolare Feliniana; Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana; Modena, Biblioteca Capitolare; Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek; Naples, Biblioteca Nazionale; Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France; Rome, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana; Stuttgart, Württembergische Landesbibliothek; Verona, Biblioteca Capitolare; Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek; Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek.

The Dublin lectures were accompanied by many images. Because websites are notoriously volatile and URLs no less so, readers are invited to go to the relevant official websites of the places mentioned in the text, and especially of the libraries (whose full names will be found in the Index of Manuscripts) to find colour pictures of the buildings, frescoes, inscriptions, mosaics, and codices discussed. In quoting from the *Liber pontificalis*, I have used the Latin edition by Louis Duchesne and the excellent English translation made by Raymond Davis, to which only very minor alterations have been made where appropriate.

I am especially grateful to the two anonymous assessors for Cambridge University Press for extremely constructive and helpful criticism, and to my many friends and colleagues who have assisted me, sometimes inadvertently, in the course of writing this book by listening, answering questions, sending me copies of articles, and generally cheering me on, namely, Massimiliano Bassetti, Ralf Behrwald, Christine Carpenter, Donnacha Carroll, Carlo Cedro, Robert Coates-Stephens, Charlotte Denoël, Anna Dorofeeva, Robert Evans, Roy Flechner, Elizabeth Fowden, Federico Gallo, Clemens Gantner, Patrick Geary, the late Herman Geertman, András Handl, Olivier Hekster, Yitzhak Hen, Klaus Herbers, Matthew Hoskins, Caroline Humfress, Ketty Iannantuono, Carola Jäggi, Dennis Jussen, Ira Katznelson, Ann Kelders, Bea Leal, Carlos Machado, Lucy McKitterick, John Mitchell, John Morrill, Rory Naismith, Tom Noble, John Osborne, Sam Ottewill-Soulsby, Renato Pasta, Charles Pierce, Walter Pohl, Richard Pollard, Alastair Reid, Helmut Reimitz,

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Magnus Ryan, Christian Sahner, Michele Salzman, Matthias Simperl, Rick Sowerby, Jonathan Steinberg, Marco Stoffella, Jo Story, Michel Summer, Gaia Elizabeta Unfer-Verre, the late Steven Uran, Andrea Verardi, Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, Immo Warntjes, Chris Wickham, Rowan Williams, and Philipp Winterhager. My special thanks to Mayke de Jong, who has been a wonderful and constant (sometimes daily) sounding board throughout the years over which I have been working on this book and has also read draft versions of chapters and offered excellent advice as well as much appreciated encouragement. Extra thanks are due to the members of various seminar groups and participants in workshops where I presented aspects of this book, especially in Amsterdam, Cambridge (CLANS, GEMS, and the Confraternitas Historica in Sidney Sussex College), Frankfurt, Helsinki, Princeton, Rome, and Utrecht for lively discussion. I remain very grateful for the congenial working environment I enjoy among all my colleagues in Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge.

I should also like to thank Erik Goosman of Mappa Mundi Cartography for drawing the map of the manuscript transmission of the *Liber pontificalis* and Lacey Wallace for permission to use her map of Rome, first published in *Old Saint Peter's Rome* (Cambridge, 2013), and Genevra Kornbluth for her permission to use her photograph of the Lateran Baptistery chapel of San Venanzio mosaic of Pope John IV on this book's jacket. It has been a great pleasure to work with Cambridge University Press, and I am particularly indebted to Liz Friend-Smith, the Senior Commissioning Editor, and to the production team at the Press, especially Jane Burkowski, Amy Lee, and Natasha Whelan, for all their hard work in seeing this book through the press.

I cannot imagine how I could have completed this book without my husband David's never-failing critical interest and encouragement; my final and most heartfelt thanks, as always, are for him.

## Abbreviations

BEFAR	Bibliothèque des Écoles françaises d’Athènes et de Rome
Bischoff, <i>Katalog</i>	B. Bischoff, <i>Katalog der festländischen Handschriften des neunten Jahrhunderts (mit Ausnahme der wisigotischen)</i> , 3 vols I: <i>Aachen–Lambach</i> ; II: <i>Laon–Paderborn</i> ; III: <i>Padua–Zwickau</i> (Wiesbaden, 1998–2014)
BAV	Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana
BAV pal. lat.	Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, palatinus latinus
BAV reg. lat.	Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, codices reginenses latini
BAV Vat. lat.	Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vaticanus latinus
BM	Bibliothèque municipale
BnF lat.	Bibliothèque nationale de France manuscrit latin
BnF n.a.lat.	Bibliothèque nationale de France nouvelles acquisitions latines
CC	<i>Codex epistolaris Carolinus</i> , in the numbering sequence of the manuscript ÖNB 449, ed. W. Gundlach (with different numbering), <i>Codex epistolaris Carolinus</i> , MGH Epp 3, Epistolae merovingici et karolini aevi 1 (Berlin, 1892), pp. 269–653
CCCM	Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Medievalis
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina
CLA	E. A. Lowe, <i>Codices Latini antiquiores</i> , 11 vols + Supplement (Oxford, 1935–71)

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Clm	Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Codices latini monacenses
<i>Corpus</i>	R. Krautheimer, S. Corbett, and V. Frankl, <i>Corpus basilicarum christianarum Romae: le basiliche cristiane antiche di Roma (sec. IV–IX) = The early Christian basilicas of Rome (IV–IX cent.)</i> , 5 vols (Vatican City, 1937–77)
CSEL	Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum
csg	St Gallen Stiftsbibliothek, codices sangallenses
Davis, <i>Pontiffs</i>	R. Davis, <i>The Book of Pontiffs (Liber pontificalis): the Ancient Biographies of the First Ninety Roman Bishops to AD 715</i> , 3rd ed. (Liverpool, 2010)
Davis, <i>Eighth-Century Popes</i>	R. Davis, <i>The Lives of the Eighth-Century Popes (Liber pontificalis)</i> , 2nd ed. (Liverpool, 2007)
Davis, <i>Ninth-Century Popes</i>	R. Davis, <i>The Lives of the Ninth-Century Popes (Liber pontificalis): the Ancient Biographies of Ten Popes from AD 817–891</i> (Liverpool, 1995)
EME	<i>Early Medieval Europe</i>
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
LPI, II	<i>Liber pontificalis</i> , ed. L. Duchesne, <i>Le Liber pontificalis: texte, introduction et commentaire</i> , 2 vols (Paris, 1886–92, repr. 1955)
MEFRA	<i>Mélanges de l'École française de Rome – Antiquité</i>
MEFRM	<i>Mélanges de l'École française de Rome – Moyen Âge</i>
MGH	Monumenta germaniae historica
AA	Auctores Antiquissimi
Conc.	Concilia
Epp	Epistolae
SRG	Scriptores rerum germanicarum in usum scholarum separatim editi
SRL	Scriptores rerum langobardicarum et italicarum
SRM	Scriptores rerum merovingicarum
SS	Scriptores in folio



## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Mommsen, <i>LP</i>	<i>Liber pontificalis</i> , ed. T. Mommsen, <i>Liber pontificalis (pars prior)</i> , MGH Gesta Pontificum Romanorum 1.1 (Berlin, 1898)
MS	manuscript, manuscrit, manoscritto
ÖNB	Österreichische Nationalbibliothek
<i>PBSR</i>	<i>Papers of the British School at Rome</i>
<i>PL</i>	<i>Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Latina</i> , ed. J.-P. Migne
<i>Settimane</i>	<i>Settimane di studio del Centro Italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo</i>
VLQ	Leiden, Universiteitsbibliotheek, Vossiani latini quarto

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