

**INSIGHTS AND REMARKS ON THE BIOGRAPHY OF PASCHAL I (817-824) IN THE *LIBER PONTIFICALIS*****Andrea Antonio Verardi**

Sapienza-Università di Roma/Pontificia Università Gregoriana

e-mail: andreaantonio.verardi@uniroma1.it

Received: 23 Feb. 2017 | Revised: 29 March 2017 | Accepted: 26 April 2017 | Available online: 21 June 2017 | doi: 10.1344/Svmma2017.9.16

**Resum**

Attraverso una rilettura delle principali fonti franche e romane utili per la ricostruzione delle vicende relative al pontificato di papa Pasquale I (817-824), l'autore propone l'ipotesi che la biografia presente nel *Liber Pontificalis* romano sia stata redatta sia per rispondere ad alcune accuse mosse dagli oppositori del papa in città e all'interno del mondo franco, sia che la costruzione della figura di Pasquale (monaco ma anche sovrano misericordioso) possa corrispondere alla caratterizzazione che negli stessi anni è usata anche per la rappresentazione dell'imperatore Ludovico il Pio, indicando quale spunto per il prosieguo della ricerca la possibilità di individuare e analizzare puntualmente questi rapporti con per chiarire gli influssi e le implicazioni culturali e ecclesiologiche.

**Paraules clau:** Ludovico Il Pio, Sacro Romano Impero, Papato Altomedievale, Fonti, Biografie storiche

**Abstract**

Through a reinterpretation of the main Frankish and Roman sources for the reconstruction of the events related to the pontificate of Pope Paschal I (817-824), the author puts forward the hypothesis that either his biography in the *Liber Pontificalis* was written to answer the accusations made by both his opponents in the city and in the Carolingian world, or that the construction of Paschal's figure (a monk, but also a merciful sovereign) may correspond to the characterization that in those same years was also used to portray Emperor Louis the Pious. The author also indicates as a starting point for further research the possibility of accurately analysing these relationships in order to clarify their cultural and ecclesiological influences and implications.

**Key Words:** Louis I, Emperor (778-840), Holy Roman Empire, Early Medieval Papacy, Sources, Historical Biography

## Foreword

Ascended to the Chair of Peter about a year after the end of the long and troubled pontificate of Leo III,<sup>1</sup> Paschal I certainly constitutes a peculiar case in the panorama of the pontiffs of the Carolingian era.<sup>2</sup> He has in fact enjoyed a certain fortune in terms of the number of studies devoted to his figure, thanks to the survival of a series of monuments of great value highlighting his strong commitment to artistic munificence in the city of Rome, such as Santa Prassede and Santa Cecilia.<sup>3</sup>

In spite of his importance as a sponsor of major ecclesial buildings, more far-reaching factors make his pontificate still difficult to read: the well-known dearth of documents concerning the city of Rome for the period in question, which proves a rather insurmountable obstacle; the all-pervading Carolingian presence, which, regarding Italian and, in particular, Roman issues, has often acted almost as a distorting lens with respect to the forces actually at work; and, of no less importance, the undeniable partiality of many of the sources available to us, a well-established problem to which I will often return as part of this contribution.<sup>4</sup>

It was for these reasons that, about a year ago, an informal seminar consisting of meetings and visits to sites linked to Paschalian activity was launched on the initiative of a group of art historians (Antonella Ballardini, Giulia Bordi, and Carles Mancho) and several other fellow historians whose contributions are gathered in this issue. The aim of this seminar is to arouse interdisciplinary reflections on Paschal's pontificate in order to reconsider its scope and, where possible, to clarify those aspects that have remained marginal for specialized historiography—which is sadly the case even for the most recent debates, often polarized by artistic 'over-representation'. The intentions of this informal research group included the desire to share a common research approach by systematizing individual skills and specializations. The end goal is thus to favour a more lucid and wide-ranging assessment of the pontiff's figure and activity, reconsidering it according to the complexity of the context in which he lived and worked.

The text presented here is in part the first result of this process. This will appear immediately clear to the reader, who, in the following pages, will rather find the report of a work in progress than a mature text. Therefore, this paper does not attempt to present a conclusive study, but a personal re-interpretation of some of the sources related to Paschal's pontificate on the basis of some of the requests made by my colleagues at this early stage of the project.

---

<sup>1</sup> For an outline of Leo III's pontificate, see DELOGU 2000.

<sup>2</sup> For a biographical profile of Paschal I, see PIAZZA 2000; VERARDI 2014.

<sup>3</sup> For an attempt at a comprehensive analysis of Paschal I's pontificate, see GOODSON 2013.

<sup>4</sup> For an insightful and synthetic interpretation of the problem of Roman and Frankish sources for this period, see CAPO 2014a and 2014b.

In an attempt to answer some of our questions about Paschal I's figure and pontificate, I will proceed by proposing an examination of the extant narrative sources, trying to gauge them against the backdrop of the broader context of institutional and cultural relations among the forces at play, mainly the papacy, Rome, and the Franks. To this purpose I will first analyse a series of historiographical sources dating back to the middle of the ninth century, namely the *Annales Regni Francorum* (hereinafter ARF) and the two biographies of Louis the Pious, written respectively by Thegan of Trier, and by an anonymous author usually called "the Astronomer." Next I will turn to a text of central importance for our research topic, the Roman *Liber Pontificalis* (hereinafter, LP), and I will finally put forward a few interpretive hypotheses and point out some of the possible future avenues for further research.<sup>5</sup>

This choice obviously favours a specific type of texts to the detriment of others. I am well aware of the value that documentary sources have for a comprehensive analysis of Paschal's activity as a pontiff, such as the two letters sent to him by the monk Theodore the Studite between 817 and 818 regarding the iconoclastic controversy (STUDITA: 175-178, 313-316),<sup>6</sup> or Paschal's contentious letter to Emperor Leo V. However, my objective is not to outline a biography of the pontiff but to study the way in which his pontificate was interpreted and narrated by what surely were partial sources, which nonetheless still merit further consideration.

### **1. *The presence of Paschal in Frankish narrative sources.***

When on 24 January 817 the monk and presbyter Paschal was elected as pope after the death of the 'peacemaker' Stephen IV, the complex Roman situation, which had witnessed the clash of the different social components of the city due to the unscrupulous politics of his predecessor Leo III, seemed to enjoy a relative tranquility.

Most Frankish sources document the election of the new pontiff in a fairly neutral manner, albeit in slightly different ways. For instance, the ARF—which were written before 829 and are the main text for the reigns of Pepin III and Louis the Pious (741-829),<sup>7</sup>—record the succession to the Chair of Peter by emphasizing the lawfulness of the whole procedure, "post completam et solemniter ordinationem," indicating immediately afterwards that the newly elected pope had promptly sent a letter, a "excusatoriam [...] epistolam," in which he accounted for his own attitude at the time of the election.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> With respect to the text presented at the *Grata Più delle stelle* meeting, held in Rome on 17-18 November 2016, I have decided not to publish the sections relating to the Roman and Frankish context. Although useful for a broader understanding of the on-going processes of the period, these seemed overly interpretive, and therefore risked being somewhat constraining for the development of a possible collaborative research project, to which my brief paper only intends to add a modest contribution.

<sup>6</sup> On this topic, see MERCATI 1901: 227-235; see also the more recent ENGLÉN 2003: 268-278.

<sup>7</sup> On this topic, see COLLINS 1998: 191-213; McKITTRICK 2000: 162-174; for a more general approach, see McKITTRICK 2004.

<sup>8</sup> In fact, with the clear intention of self-representing himself as completely foreign to any pre-election plots, Paschal insists on his unwillingness to become pontiff, which had materialized in his multiple refusals before accepting the position.

The story of Paschal's election is also reported in the two biographies of Louis the Pious, written respectively by Thegan of Trier (around 836), and by the author called "the Astronomer" (whose text was written around 840).<sup>9</sup> On the one hand, Thegan's work merely reports the news of Paschal succeeding Stephen after the death of the latter, who is described in praising terms (TEGANUS: 372); on the other hand, the second biography, which follows the ARF almost to the letter, narrates the episode while underlining the lawfulness of the episcopal election, clarifying the generic expression "post completam solepniter ordinationem," and including a brief description of the procedure during which Paschal was raised to the papal dignity, "cleri electione et populi adclamatione" (IBIDEM).

Following the account of the election, the ARF go on to report the news of the embassy sent by the pope to the emperor to close a *pactum*, as their predecessors had done before them. Also in this case, Louis's two biographers seem to have different stances: whereas Thegan is completely silent on the matter, the Astronomer remains faithful to his source while offering his own point of view. In contrast to the institutional description of the ARF, which only refers to an embassy sent for the ratification of a pact, the Astronomer points out that the confirmation of the agreement and the requests preceding it took place "pacti et amicitiae more praecessorum suorum," thus enhancing the harmony between the two parties.<sup>10</sup>

While the absence of references to Paschal's election procedure and to the *pactum* in Thegan's work is somewhat surprising, this is not because of the central role that these two episodes were granted neither by the ARF nor by the Astronomer, for said texts were merely interested in emphasising the 'validating' role of the emperor in the election. In fact, it is well known that their aim was to testify to the transfer of the right of confirmation of the papal election from the Byzantine Emperor to the Franks, a process that was already under way during the pontificate of Paul I (PARAVICINI-BAGLIANI 2013: 16-17).

The description of the *pactum* between the Pope and the emperor deserves a separate discussion. As has already been noted, it is present both in the ARF and in the Astronomer's text, but not in Thegan's work, for which the Frankish-Papal understanding seems to have been completely fine-tuned during the pontificate of Stephen IV. In fact, in Thegan's narration said period appears as the highest point of imperial and Frankish ascendancy over the Bishop of Rome.

As for the pact in question, this was the famous *Pactum Hludowicianum*, the agreement probably reached by Louis the Pious and Stephen IV to try to find a solution to the unrest that had affected

---

<sup>9</sup> On the original texts see TREMP 1990: 691-700; an introduction including a translation can be found in NOBLE 2009: 95-155.

<sup>10</sup> On the importance given to concepts such as *amicitia* in the mutual relations between the two institutions, see FRIED 1991: 234 et seq.

Rome during the pontificate of Stephen's predecessor, Pope Leo III, and that Paschal would confirm by means of the embassy he sent immediately after his election.<sup>11</sup>

After this first phase of consolidation of the relations between the Franks and the papacy in line with the procedures already established during the previous pontiff, there is not another reference to Paschal's papacy until 821. On this occasion both the ARF and the Astronomer's work recount the existence of two papal embassies. The first one was formed by Peter, bishop of Civitavecchia, and by the *nomenclator* Leo, who met the emperor—*celeriter* according to the ARF—in Nijmegen, near the river Meuse. The second legation was sent in May of that same year and was formed by the *superista* Florus and the *primacerius* (chief notary) Theodore. It was probably organized on the occasion of the wedding of Emperor Lothair I—Louis the Pious's son—which was held “apud Theodonis villam” (now Diedenhofen), and for which they brought “magnis muneribus” (ARF: 161; ASTRONOMUS: 402).

Thegan also remains silent about these two embassies, in fact, it is at this point that he inserts two long chapters to describe the figure of Louis (Ch. 19-20) to which I will shortly return, followed by nine chapters (Ch. 21-29) devoted to Louis's decision to raise his son Lothair to the throne, the disputes that followed, and some military undertakings of the emperor (in Britannia and against the *orientales Slavos*).

While the contacts between the Frankish world and the papacy seem to have been rather superficial in the previous phases—bearing in mind that relations were probably more frequent than what the historiographic sources suggest—Roman events became central during the years 823-824, which marked on the one hand the concluding period of Paschal's pontificate, and on the other the first imperial intervention in the city.

In March or April 823, both the ARF and the Astronomer's account record how Louis sent his son Lothair to Italy. According to the former, he had been appointed by his father to “*iustitia faceret*” (ARF: 160), a task that the young man would continue to perform upon returning to Pavia after his Roman interlude (IBID.: 161). As for the Astronomer, this author offers a more complex picture of the doubts of the young emperor on how to resolve certain issues, which he first wanted to discuss with his father (ASTRONOMUS: 414).

---

<sup>11</sup> In my opinion, the general veracity of this document, which has only survived within eleventh- and twelfth-century canon law collections, does not pose major problems. Although its fidelity can be questioned on some points, in essence it seems to fully reflect the aims of the two institutions and the depth of the relations established between them at the time. The pact, which takes the form of a privilege, is composed of two parts. The first one recognizes the ownership rights of Saint Peter, his vicar Paschal, and his successors over a series of territories, including islands, some of which once belonged to Lombards and Byzantines. In addition, it recognizes their exclusive jurisdictional rights within the *Patrimonium sancti Petri*, while clearly denying those prerogatives to imperial authority. The second part of the pact grants the citizens of Rome freedom to bury the deceased pope and to proceed to the episcopal election without external intervention, simply on the understanding that the new pontiff will notify the emperor in office of his election. On this matter, albeit maintaining a different opinion, see GOODSON 2013: 29 et seq.

It is on the occasion of this travel to Italy at the behest of his father that both texts insert Lothair's journey to Rome, which took place at the explicit request of Paschal I, and during which the pontiff crowned him Emperor in St. Peter's on Easter Day.<sup>12</sup>

Thegan also provides a rather partial reconstruction of these events. In fact, he exclusively mentions that Lothair was sent to Italy, adding that he was accompanied by his mother, but remains silent about the journey to Rome and, above all, about the coronation. Also in this case, the lack of information seems to me to be motivated by the fact that he considered the question of succession as completely resolved without papal intervention in 817, given that Louis had associated his firstborn son with the empire (TEGANUS: 210).

In both the ARF and the Astronomer's work the coronation of Lothair is followed by the account of the events that took place in Rome after the departure of the young emperor, namely, the imprisonment and execution of the *primacerius* Theodore and the *nomenclator* Leo at the Lateran. These sources also claim that this had happened because the two were faithful to the emperor and that, according to the reports that reached France, it was the Pope who gave the order (ARF: 162; ASTRONOMUS: 416-418).

In order to monitor the situation and ascertain the reliability of these accusations, the emperor sent a delegation composed of Adalungus, the abbot of the monastery of Saint-Vaast, and Count Hunfrid of Chur, which the pontiff tried to avoid in vain by sending a legation formed by John, bishop of Silva Candida, and Benedict, archdeacon of the Apostolic See (ARF: 162, ASTRONOMUS: 416-420).

This episode marks the return of Roman events to Thegan's text, albeit from the author's own point of view. Although the protagonists are the same, he does not mention neither the papal attempt to block the dispatch of officials by the Emperor nor the very causes that made that mission necessary (TEGANUS: 218). In fact, his reconstruction is decidedly positioned against the Romans: unlike the ARF and the Astronomer's account, who clearly speak of two factions in conflict, one of which is represented as pro-imperial, for Thegan it was the 'Romans' who had been 'insolent' to their bishop, accusing him of murder.

The description of the final part of the story also takes on a somewhat different dimension in these three sources. All of them concur that the pope resolved the affair of the accusations through the canonical procedure of the *purgatio*, that is, through the convocation of a synod in which he admitted his sins and absolved them himself. However, whereas Thegan describes the procedure followed by the pontiff in detail, assuring readers of its canonical lawfulness,<sup>13</sup> the other two

<sup>12</sup> Both sources provide practically the same account, ARF: 160-161; ASTRONOMUS: 414.

<sup>13</sup> TEGANUS: "Qui supradictus pontifex cum iuramento purificavit se in Lateranensi patriarchio coram supradictis legatis et populo Romano, cum episcopis XXXIV, et presbyteris et diaconibus quinque."

texts present a decidedly more complex picture. According to the ARF and the Astronomer, the papal initiative, however canonically correct, did not allow the emperor's envoys to ascertain the validity of the accusations. Moreover, they add that by doing so the pontiff had taken the side of the material authors of the murders—which the Astronomer, differentiating himself from his source, defines as *de familia sancti Petri*—who would have been acting in his defence. The same text then explains that according to the pontiff they had indeed acted justly, punishing those who had sullied themselves with the *crimen* of lese-majesty.<sup>14</sup>

These two sources recount that the Pope then sent a new embassy to the emperor, which would prompt Louis to abandon his desire for revenge, according to the ARF, as an act of mercy. However, the Pope never learned about the imperial decision because he died in the meantime.<sup>15</sup>

Be that as it may, all three texts show that this question had not been completely resolved. Thegan claims that, at the death of the pontiff, the hostility against him would have materialized in the opposition of the Roman people to his burial in St. Peter's, a situation that was solved thanks to the intervention of the new pontiff Eugene II. For the other two sources it was still the aftermath of the Paschalian repression in the city that held the stage, which would only end thanks to a new imperial intervention with the support of the new pontiff. Without missing the opportunity to express strong criticism on the actions of both Paschal and Leo III, these texts recount how this joint intervention made possible the return of exiles to the city and restored the properties that had been unjustly confiscated.<sup>16</sup>

Summing up what has been said so far I believe that we can assert, without fear of error, that Roman issues were certainly not at the centre of attention of Frankish annalists nor of Louis the Pious's later biographers. The references to the pontificate of Paschal are relatively few and far between, which is nonetheless understandable given the difficult situation that the Frankish kingdom was undergoing.

The ways in which these three texts refer to the events of Paschal's pontificate reveal their different stances. Whereas the ARF and the Astronomer—which was probably influenced by the position of the ARF, the main source for the years in the question—decidedly oppose the pontiff, Thegan's work is instead characterized by a decidedly anti-Roman view. These brief considerations would of course require much more space and attention—for instance interpreting the different positions in light of the production contexts—but given the interpretive purpose of this short contribution I thought it interesting to put them forward here.

---

<sup>14</sup> ARF: 162; ASTRONOMUS: 416-420. On the use of the concept of *crimen* of lese-majesty, see HAGENEDER 1981: 55-79.

<sup>15</sup> IBID.

<sup>16</sup> References to this issue are also present in the *Costitutio romana* of 824.

## 2. *The Roman point of view: Paschal in the biography of the Liber Pontificalis.*

In comparison to the Frankish context, which provides at least two different accounts of the events relating to Paschal's pontificate, the Roman situation is characterized by the near absence of contemporary testimonies. In fact, with only two other exceptions, the main source is the monodic narration offered by the LP. The first of such exceptions is the interesting, albeit difficult to use reference present in the Roman *continuatio* of the *Historia Langobardorum* by Paul the Deacon, which, in the form of an annal, reports the following for the year 823: "Paschalis quoque Apostolicus potestatem, quam prisci Imperatores habuere, ei (Lothario) super populum Romanum concessit." The second reference is found in the 825 account of Lothair's journey to Italy and the oath that Pope Eugene II made him take on behalf of the Roman people.<sup>17</sup>

As is known, most of the copies of the third continuation of the LP conclude with the biography of Pope Adrian II. Only in five cases does the compilation reach up to the late eighth century, going on to include Paschal's biography, and only one of these manuscripts can be dated to the ninth century.<sup>18</sup> However, this should not lead to the conclusion that the circulation of this text in Carolingian circles was poor. Many of the codices that preserve both the first and second continuations (F and K) and the most ancient versions of the third are dated between the end of the eighth century and the middle of the ninth.<sup>19</sup> Likewise, the interest of the main intellectuals of the Frankish court in the LP and their use of citations from it are also more or less known depending on the case.<sup>20</sup>

It is not unreasonable to think that the authors of the papal biographies of this period were aware that Frankish emperors and the members of their entourage could well be among the readers of their works, in addition, of course, to the complex Roman society of the time. Indeed, the panorama outside the city very much matched that of the Frankish world during these years. In contrast, the context inside Rome—which is sometimes difficult to read—included not only the well-known factions, namely the nobility and the *fideles* of the *familia sancti petri*, but also the episcopal and parish clergy, Latin and Greek monks, and inhabitants from different regions of the empire. Most of the time, this heterogeneous *romanitas* had in the pontiffs its most illustrative representatives.<sup>21</sup>

In this sense, Paschal's biography, as well as those immediately preceding and following it, seems to me to perfectly reflect the complexity of the contemporary situation of the papacy and its relations inside and outside Rome.

<sup>17</sup> The text is contained on fol. 214r of a single twelfth-century manuscript, MS Pal. Lat. 927, most probably produced in Verona.

<sup>18</sup> Paris, BnF, MS Lat. 5516: <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b525065958>

<sup>19</sup> LP: I-II.

<sup>20</sup> VERARDI 2016: 35 et seq; more specifically on this period, see VERARDI, in press.

<sup>21</sup> For an overview of Roman society, see MARRAZZI 2001: 41-69; CAPO 2014b.

Traditionally, the text opens with an indication of the *natio* of the pontiff (*Romanus*), the name of his father (an otherwise unknown *Bonosus*), and an indication of the length of his pontificate (*ann. VII mens. dies XVII*). Following this introduction, we find a brief text outlining the career and moral traits that led the newly elected pontiff to the Chair of Peter; a section that appears for the first time in the LP in the biography of Gregory II (715-731), but that from Adrian I onwards is almost constant. In the case of Paschal, this outline also served as an implicit confirmation of the lawfulness of his election, for he had gone through his whole clerical *cursus* within the Lateran patriarchy (LP: 52).

According to this section he was educated since childhood within the Lateran patriarchy, acquiring liturgical skills and being instructed in the Holy Scriptures. Specifically, his training covered psalmody and the spiritual meaning of the Scriptures, and he proved to be perfect in everything, so much so that he was first consecrated subdeacon and then *honorifice* presbyter.

This information on the clerical *cursus* of the pontiff is then followed by a section written with the aim of inserting the character within an ‘imaginary’ ideal of moral traits that pontiffs had to possess. According to his biographer, Paschal is saintly, chaste, pious, innocent, gracious in his eloquence, devout, full of modesty, and munificent in giving his own possessions for alms to the poor. He also maintained pious conversations with men consecrated to God and monks, and distinguished himself in daily prayer and fasting (IBID.).

These descriptions were not completely innovative but appeared as a sort of panegyric praise whose use was intensified in the LP from the second half of the seventh century onwards, becoming customary in the biographies of the eighth century and introducing small variations to the standard form from time to time in order to minimally adapt it to the profiles of the different popes.

From Stephen IV’s biography onwards (816-817), it seems that yet a new section was added to this introductory information, which just as those preceding it, was meant to confirm the exceptional qualities of the future pontiff but also, and I would say above all, to show his alignment and continuity with his predecessors. Thus, it was Leo III who had first noticed the virtues of the presbyter Paschal, so much so that he placed him at the head of the monastery of San Stefano Maggiore at the Vatican, in which he acted as a true reformer, “*moderando correxit exemplum bene vivendi in subditis et correctio pietatis religiosius exornaret,*” dealing with pilgrims, and secretly distributing alms among the poor (IBID.). Therefore, Paschal was presented as a character who had not only been educated as a cleric within the Lateran, following the steps of a *cursus* that had led him to the honour of the presbyterate, but had also proved himself as the *corrector* of one of the city’s most important monasteries—one of the four that had the task of guaranteeing liturgical service to the tomb of the Apostle Peter—acting as a reformer (the repeated use of terms within the semantic field of the word ‘correction’ seems to be clearly going in this direction).

The description of the *cursus* and high moral standing of Paschal (fundamental in establishing the consistency of the path that had led the candidate to the episcopal election), and the account of his relationship with his predecessors—a section added from this century onwards—serve as an introduction to the description of the election procedure which, as a rule, follows immediately in the text of the biographies.

For the author, in fact, it was the “*tanta bonae operationi exempla preecipue longe fama*”—the *dum ergo* at the beginning of this paragraph emphasizes the consecutive nature of the statement—which resulted in Paschal being raised to the Chair of Peter with “*una concordia, una eademque voluntate*,” that is, with a great consensus among the social actors of the city that were entitled to elect him: the clergy, divided into “*sacerdotes seu proceribus autque omni clero*”;<sup>22</sup> the nobility, “*optimatibus*”; and the ranks of the Roman people (LP: 52).

At this point there follows a passage that seems to have been included after Paschal’s death, for it proposes an overall reading of his pontificate. This structure had already been used in the biographies of Gregory II, Zachary and, especially of Leo III,<sup>23</sup> adding clear references to key moments for the representation of each pontiff. In Paschal’s case, the chosen themes are the exercise of justice, equity in the management of government, and his attention to ecclesiastical matters.

Regarding the first two themes, broadly related to justice, the author clearly seems to want to give the image of a pontiff whose juridical skill, both in the canonical and civil fields, could not be questioned. Thus, the Pope was not merely presented as an expert in law but also a promulgator of juridical norms.<sup>24</sup> Likewise, the author highlights his fairness and love for the Roman people, in my opinion, in an after-the-fact attempt to justify Paschal’s behaviour towards the *primacerius* Theodore and the *nomenclator* Leo. In contrast, the ARF and the Astronomer’s account describe Lothair’s intervention upon Paschal’s death as an attempt to restore peace in Rome in agreement with the newly elected Eugene II, given that the people of the city had been ‘corrupted’ by papal *perversitas*. Furthermore, the Astronomer clearly refers to the ignorance of popes and the greed of their magistrates:

Interea cum Hlotarius, ut praedictum est, a patre missus Romam venisset, libetissime atque clarissime ab Eugenio papa susceptus est. Cumque de his que accesserant quereretur, quare scilicet hi, qui imperatori sibique et Francis fideles fuerant, iniqua nece perempti fuerint, et qui superviverent, ludibrio reliquis haberentur, quare etiam tante querele adversus Romanorum pontifices iudicesque sonarent, repertum est, quod quorundam pontificum ignorantia vel desidia sed et iudicium caeca et inexplebili cupiditate [...] (ARF 1895: 162; ASTRONOMUS: 422-424).

<sup>22</sup> On the distinction between priests, *proceres*, and clergy, see DI CARPEGNA 2002: 35 et seq.

<sup>23</sup> On Leo III’s biography in the LP, see HERBERS 2004, and VERARDI in press.

<sup>24</sup> The pontiff’s juridical knowledge is expressed in rather formulaic terms, but the part concerning the pontiff’s activity in this matter presents us with a Rome in which the Pope exercised great judicial power, both in the ecclesiastical and civil arenas, not only by applying pre-existing law, but also by issuing new decrees.

The third key issue belongs to the most exquisitely religious sphere. According to the LP, Paschal stands out for the care and prudence with which he managed the churches of God, dealing with the restoration and embellishment of its buildings, recovering the bodies of the martyrs, and freeing prisoners, even from Iberia, by then controlled by the infidels, and where Louis the Pious himself had carried out raids (LP: 52). Reconstructing something on the basis of references that are often this concise is not always easy or realistically possible, but, as it often happens in the LP, I believe that the choice of ‘adjectives’ is far from random, and may perhaps direct us towards what the author intended to stress. In my view, the “summo studio atque summa prudentia” Paschal showed towards “omnium ecclesiarum Dei” could in some way refer to the pontiff’s initiative both in the evangelization of the Danes and in the complex management of the iconoclastic controversy, about which Paschal was questioned by Theodore the Studite during the first years of his pontificate.<sup>25</sup>

One of the most interesting aspects of this first part, which I believe has the function of offering a brief and concise but directed reading of the entire pontificate, is the fact that it does so by pointing to matters that were probably known to the readers of Paschal’s biography, but which, for obvious reasons of ‘political’ convenience or more obscure editorial choices were not explicitly mentioned.

There is no reference in the biography to the last years of Paschal’s pontificate, the complicated period that preceded his death, and there is no reference either to the events relating to the murders of Theodore and Leo, nor, in a less easily understandable way, to his contacts with the East, to Carolingian interventions, or to his endorsement of the mission of evangelization in Denmark.<sup>26</sup> What prevails in the construction of Paschal’s figure is only the ‘religious’ dimension understood in a broad sense.

With the exception of the news of the fire at Borgo, which must have strongly affected a Roman narrator who almost apologizes for including it in the biography, “sed neque hoc silentio praetereundum esse arbitramur,” the entire life of the pontiff is marked by his munificent interventions. Thus, Paschal appears fostering the construction of new buildings of worship—mainly Santa Prassede, but also the *oratoria* at the Vatican—the restoration of existing buildings—for instance, Santa Cecilia—and always solicitous towards monastic communities, both Latin and Greek, which was a common trait from the biography of Pope Adrian I onwards. Leaving out the emergence of a strong hagiographic component that was also characteristic of the papal biographies of this century, the accounts of pontifical construction endeavours and donations naturally expanded to the detriment of historical information.

---

<sup>25</sup> On this matter, see SALAVILLE 1914: 23-42.

<sup>26</sup> This reference can be found, for instance, in ARF: 163.

In fact, what made Paschal's pontificate truly exceptional was not only the recovery of "multa corpora sanctorum" and their transfer within the city (GOODSON 2005) to a new papal edification—Santa Prassede,<sup>27</sup> majestically decorated and placed on one of the main routes of Christian Rome, namely the road axis that connected Santa Prassede, Santa Maria Maggiore, and the Lateran—but also, and above all, the miracle of the apparition and *inventio* of the body of Saint Cecilia. This martyr, who had the honour of being buried beside the popes, was one of the few martyrs mentioned in the most ancient part of the LP, the biography of Urban I, and was the subject of particular devotion in Rome (HARTMANN 2007).

Therefore, summing up this brief and concise rereading, it seems that Paschal's biography completely follows in the footsteps of the previous ones. The expressions used, as well as the overabundance of information relating to munificence to the detriment of historical references, seem to point in that direction. Having said that, however, it still retains a certain interest especially due to the choice of the author to add fundamental traits for the representation of the pontiff to more traditional formulas. As I have tried to point out, I do not believe that the style of Paschal's biography was the result of pure chance, but rather that it responded to the author's intention of avoiding issues that still had widespread repercussions in the city; for instance, the murder and exile of some prominent members of the city's aristocracy was not resolved until the pontificate of Eugene II thanks to the direct intervention of the emperor through his son. Furthermore, it is also possible that the aim of the author's admittedly biased text was to contest the accusations that the opponents of the pontiff had spread, or simply to oppose any 'narration' of the events other than the official Roman Lateran version. This directed selection and construction of the figure of the pontiff is certainly not a novelty, but it remains one of the most significant aspects of the text under consideration. Both Paschal's opponents and the Franks disappear from his biography, together with those events that he shared with them. As a result, Paschal's papacy almost seems an anomalous parenthesis among the biographies recorded in the LP for the complex first twenty years of the ninth century, characterized by a constant intervention of the Franks in Italian and Roman affairs.

### ***3. Between models and multiform realities: Paschal (corrector of monasteries and sovereign) and Louis the Pious (sovereign, proponent of a monastic reform, and abbot). Research hypotheses and conclusions.***

As discussed in the previous paragraphs, it is clear that the sources under study offer deliberately partial and often discordant images of the pontificate of Paschal I. This is the case both when comparing Frankish sources with each other, and more clearly when comparing them with the

---

<sup>27</sup> For a historical and urbanistic study of the Basilica of Santa Prassede, see CAPERNA 2014; for its historical and artistic dimension, see MANCHO 2016; on Paschal's activity as a promoter of buildings of worship, specifically in relation to the LP, see BALLARDINI 1999: 1-64.

biography in the LP. In fact, with the only exceptions of his election and his death, these two groups of texts almost seem to describe two different pontificates.

Certainly, when trying to analyse the ‘interpretations’ that these sources provide for Paschal’s pontificate we cannot overlook their different nature and functions. The aim of the ARF is to offer a collection of the salient events of the Frankish kingdom up to 829, whereas both the Astronomer and Thegan of Trier insert those same events within a more or less homogeneous biographical account whose purpose is to highlight the qualities of Emperor Louis. Finally, the purpose of the LP is to situate the biography of each single pontiff in the wake of his predecessors, in order to validate the lawfulness of his election and his actions, and to safeguard the continuity of the institution he leads. Obviously, in spite of the continuity and rigidity of the chosen structure, the selection of the themes to be included within each individual biography and the methods by which it is produced also respond to context needs that vary over time.<sup>28</sup>

From this point of view, it is easy to understand the fluctuations in the information supplied by these three sources, especially at a time when ideological alignment was so crucial.<sup>29</sup> It is therefore not surprising that the Franks aimed to highlight the emperor’s capacity for action even in papal events. Likewise, the fact that a Roman and ecclesiastical text linked to Lateran patriarchal circles avoided any reference to Frankish intervention that did not respond to the level of autonomy the pontiff had hoped to gain through the ongoing alliance is also to be expected. In fact, it is no coincidence either that in the biographies immediately preceding Paschal’s, the Franks only appear when they assist the pontiff, disappearing when their actions in some way seem to encroach on the jurisdiction that he exercised or wanted to exercise autonomously both in Rome and over the *Patrimonium*.

However, I do not believe that the discrepancies between sources only regards specific events and their selection by intellectuals who belonged to this context. On the contrary, it reflects the competing representations of two institutions that were linked together by an alliance, that of the new Christian empire, which, precisely because it was an ideological translation of political opportunism, based the new system on blurring the lines between religious fervour and the exercise of power.

In light of the ideological complexity of the Christian empire of papal-Carolingian origin, the texts in question, and above all the editorial choices of Paschal’s biographer in the LP, can be seen under a different perspective.

In this way, the construction of Paschal’s biography, with its representation of the pontiff as a holy ‘corrector’ of the monastery of San Stefano takes on an unprecedented value. Paschal appears

---

<sup>28</sup> On this matter, see CAPO 2008; VERARDI 2016.

<sup>29</sup> CAPO 2014a. On the relations between Louis and the pontiffs, FRIED 1991.

as a man who is attentive to the poor and the liberation of slaves—as I have already noted, the reference to Iberia is not accidental—who is capable of recovering and bringing the remains of a multitude of ‘holy’ bodies back within the city walls, and also as a ‘sovereign’ expert in law, respectful of ancient laws, and the advocate of new norms.

However, this kind of characterization was not completely new in this period. The same essential features can be found in a decidedly unexpected way in the more or less contemporary constructions of the figure of Emperor Louis.<sup>30</sup>

In my opinion, this trend is especially exemplified by Thegan’s account of Louis the Pious’s life and by the biography of the monk Benedict of Aniane authored by Ardo Smaragdus (ARDO: 198-220) around 822/823—that is, practically at the same time as Paschal’s biography in the LP—as well as by the also contemporary *Carmen in honorem Hludowici* written by Ermoldus Nigellus (ERMOLDUS).

In the case of Thegan, he inserted a series of chapters outlining the figure of the emperor in the very years for which Roman events disappeared from his narration (817-823). In fact, at the textual level, Chapter 19 is but an abridged combination of Einhard’s description of Charlemagne and, surprisingly enough, of the LP—which I do not think has been noticed neither by editors nor by those who have studied the text—following some passages of Paschal’s biography almost to the letter. Where the Pope was trained in the spiritual sense of the Scriptures, Louis “sensum vero in omnibus scripturis spiritalem et moralem, nec non et anagogen optime noverat.” Moreover, and among many other examples, both of them are portrayed as “tardus ad irascendum et facilis ad miserandum,” a formula that is clearly borrowed either from Leo III’s or from Paschal’s biography.

In the case of Ardo, the central issue was that of Louis’s proximity to monasticism. In 817, the year that marked the beginning of Paschal’s pontificate, Louis placed Benedict of Aniane at the head of all the monasteries of the Empire, participating in the foundation of the monastic centre on the river Inde, which for a while served as a sort of ‘papacy of the monks’, and where the emperor himself would become abbot, “Cesar et abbas simul.”<sup>31</sup> Thus, to an emperor whose figure was loaded with a priestly and monarchical connotations (NOBLE 1974), the author of the LP could have sought to oppose a pontiff with the same peculiarities; a worthy counterpoint within the framework of an imperial and Christian ideology to which both institutions considered to be fully entitled.

---

<sup>30</sup> On the construction of the figure of Louis the Pious in the biographies of the ninth century, see IOGNA-PRAT 2003; DEPREUX 1993. On the biographical genre in Carolingian times in general, see BERSCHIN 1993.

<sup>31</sup> ERMOLDUS: 489. Sulla questione CHIESA 2016; SAVIGNY 2007.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY****Sources****ARF**

PERTZ, G. H.; KURZE, F. (eds.), 1895. *Annales Regni Francorum inde ab. 741 usque ad a. 829, MGH Scriptorum Rerum Germanicarum*, Hannoveræ, Impensis Bibliopolii Hahniani.

**ARDO**

WAITZ, G. (ed.), 1887. “Vita Benedicti abbatis ananiensis et indensis auctore Ardone”, *MGH SS.*, 15/1, Hannoveræ, Impensis Bibliopolii Hahniani: 198-220.

**ASTRONOMUS**

TREMP, E. (ed.), 1995. “Thegan. Die Taten Kaiser Ludwigs – Astronomus. Das Leben Kaiser Ludwigs (Theganus, Gesta Hludowici imperatoris – Astronomus, Vita Hludowici imperatoris)”, *MGH Scriptorum rerum Germanicarum*, 64, Hannover, Hansche: 279-558.

**ERMOLDUS**

PERTZ, G. H. (ed.), 1829. “Ermoldi Nigelli Carmina”, *MGH SS.*, 2, Hannoveræ, Impensis Bibliopolii Hahniani: 464-516.

**LP**

DUCHESCHNE, L. (ed.), 1892. *Le Liber Pontificalis*, II, Paris, Ernest Thorin.

**STUDITA**

Fatouros, G. (ed.), 1992. *Theodori Studitae Epistulae. Prolegomena et Textum Epp. 1-70 Continens*. Band 1. Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae 31. Series Berolinensis, G. Fatouros (ed.), Berlin, De Gruyter.

**TEGANUS**

Tremp, E. (ed.), 1995. “Thegan. Die Taten Kaiser Ludwigs – Astronomus. Das Leben Kaiser Ludwigs (Theganus, Gesta Hludowici imperatoris – Astronomus, Vita Hludowici imperatoris)”, *MGH Scriptorum rerum Germanicarum*, 64, Hannover, Hansche: 168-277.

## References

BALLARDINI, Antonella, 1999. “Dai Gesta di P. I secondo il Liber Pontificalis ai Monumenta iconografici delle basiliche romane di Santa Prassede, Santa Maria in Dominica e Santa Cecilia in Trastevere”, *Archivio della Società romana di storia patria*, CXXII: 1-64.

BERSCHIN, Walter, 1991. “Karolingische Biographie 750-920”, *Biographie und Epochenstil im lateinischen Mittelalter*, 3, (n. Chr.), Stuttgart, Hiersemann: 220-240.

CAPERNA, Maurizio, 2014. *La Basilica di Santa Prassede. Il significato della vicenda architettonica*, Roma, Quasar.

CAPO, Lidia, 2008. *Il Liber Pontificalis, i Longobardi e la nascita del dominio territoriale della Chiesa romana*, Spoleto, CISAM.

—2014a. *Il IX secolo visto da Roma*, Poznan, Instytut Historii UAM: 5-21.

—2014b. *Roma nel IX secolo*, Poznan, Instytut Historii UAM: 23-39.

CHIESA, Paolo, 2016. “L'imperatore dei monaci. Benedetto di Aniane nella Vita scritta da Ardo”, Pagani, I.; Stella, F. (eds.), *Il secolo di Carlo magno. Istituzioni, letterature e cultura del tempo carolingio*, Sismel: 229-246

COLLINS, R., 1998. “The Reviser revised: another look at the alternative version of the Annales Regni Francorum”, Murray, A. C. (ed.), *After Rome's Fall. Narrators and Surces of Early Medieval History. Essays presented to Walter Goffard*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press: 191-213.

DELOGU, Paolo, 2000. “Leone III, papa”, *Enciclopedia dei Papi*, Roma, Istituto per l'enciclopedia Italiana G. Treccani: [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/santo-leone-iii\\_%28Enciclopedia-dei-Papi%29/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/santo-leone-iii_%28Enciclopedia-dei-Papi%29/) [2017/02]

DEPREUX, Philippe, 1993. “Poètes et historiens au temps de l'empereur Louis le Pieux”, *Le Moyen Âge*, 99: 311-332.

DI CARPEGNA FALCONIERI, Tommaso, 2002. *Il clero di Roma nel Medioevo*, Roma, Viella.

ENGLÉN, Alia, 2003, “La difesa delle immagini intrapresa dalla chiesa di Roma nel IX secolo”, *Caelius I. Santa Maria in Dominica, San Tommaso in Formis e il Clivus Scauri*, Roma: 257-284, in particolare 268-278.

FRIED, Johannes, 1990. "Ludwig der Fromme, das Papsttum und die fränkische Kirche", Godman, P.; Collins, R. (ed.), *Charlemagne's Heir. New Perspectives on the Reign of Louis the Pious (814-840)*, Oxford, Oxford University Press: 231-273.

GOODSON, Caroline, 2005. "The relic translation of Paschal I: transforming city and cult", Hopkins, A.; Wyke, M. (ed.), *Roman Bodies. Antiquity to the eighteenth century* London, British School at Rome: 123-141.

—2013. *The Rome of Pope Paschal I. Papal Power, Urban Renovation, Church Rebuilding and Relic Translation, 817–824*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

HAGENER, Othmar, 1983. "Das crimen maiestatis, der Prozeß gegen die Attentäter Papst Leos III. und die Kaiserkrönung Karls des Großen", Mordek H. (ed.), *Aus Kirche und Reich. Studien zu Theologie, Politik und Recht im Mittelalter. Festschrift für Friedrich Kempf zu seinem fünfundsiebzigsten Geburtstag und fünfzigjährigen Doktorjubiläum*, Sigmaringen, Thorbecke: 55-79.

HARTMANN, Gritje, 2007. "Paschalis I. und die heilige Cäcilia. Ein Translationsbericht im Liber Pontificalis", *Quellen und Forschungen aus italienischen Archiven und Bibliotheken*, 87: 36-70.

HERBERS, Klaus, 2004. "Das Bild Papst Leos III. in der Perspektive des Liber Pontificalis", Niederkorn-Bruck, M. (ed.), *Erzbischof Arn von Salzburg*, Wien, Oldenburg: 137-154.

IOGNA-PRAT, Dominique, 2003. "La construction biographique du souverain carolingien", *Annexes des Cahiers de linguistique et de civilisation hispaniques médiévales*, 15: 197-224.

MANCHO, Carles, 2016. "Pascal Ier: Autorité pontificale et création artistique à Rome au début du IXe siècle. Quelques notes", Poilpré, Anne-Orange (ed.), *Faire et voir l'autorité pendant l'Antiquité et le Moyen Âge: images et monuments, actes de la journée d'étude tenue à Paris le 14 novembre 2014 à l'Institut national d'histoire de l'art*, Paris, site de l'HiCSA: 71-96. [http://hicsa.univ-paris1.fr/documents/pdf/PublicationsLigne/JE%20Poilpre%20Autorite%202016/04\\_Mancho.pdf](http://hicsa.univ-paris1.fr/documents/pdf/PublicationsLigne/JE%20Poilpre%20Autorite%202016/04_Mancho.pdf) [2016/05]

MARRAZZI, Federico, 2001. "Aristocrazia e società (secolo VI-XI), Vauches, André, (ed.), *Roma Medievale*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2001: 41-69.

McKITTERICK, Rosamond, 2000. "Political Ideology in Carolingian historiography", Hen, Y; Innes, M. (eds.), *The Use of the Past in the Early Middle Ages*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press: 162-174.

—2004. *History and Memory in the Carolingian World*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

MERCATI, Giovanni, 1901. “La lettera di Pasquale I a Leone V sul culto delle sacre immagini”, *Note di letteratura biblica e cristiana antica. Studi e Testi*, 5: 227-235.

NOBLE, Thomas F. X., 1976. “The monastic Ideal as a Model for Empire”, *Revue Bénédictine*, 86: 235-250.

—2009. *Charlemagne and Louis the Pious*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press.

PARAVICINI-BAGLIANI, Agostino, 2013. *Morte e elezione del papa. Norme, riti e conflitti. Il Medioevo*, Roma, Viella.

PIAZZA, Andrea, 2000. “Pasquale I santo”, *Enciclopedia dei Papi*, Roma, Istituto Per l’enciclopedia Italiana G. Treccani: [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/santo-pasquale-i\\_\(Enciclopedia-dei-Papi\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/santo-pasquale-i_(Enciclopedia-dei-Papi)/) [2017/02].

SAVIGNY, Raffaele, 2007. “L’immagine del santo fondatore nelle Vitae di Benedetto di Aniane e di Adalardo di Corbie (secolo IX)”, Fangarezzi, R., Golinelli, P., Orselli, M. A. (eds.), *Sant’Anselmo di Nonantola e i santi fondatori nella tradizione monastica tra Oriente e Occidente*, Roma, Viella: 109-180.

SALAVILLE, Sévérien, 1914. “La primauté de saint Pierre et du Pape d’après saint Théodore Studite (759-826)”, *Échos d’Orient*, 17/104: 23-42.

TREMP, Ernst, 1988. *Studien zu den Gesta Hludowici imperatoris des Trierer Chorbischofs Thegan*, MGH Schriften, 32, Hannover, Hahnsche Buchhandlung.

—1990. “Thegan und Astronomus, die beiden Geschichtsschreiber Ludwigs des Frommen”, Godmann, P.; Collins, R. (eds.), *Charlemagne’s Heir. New Perspectives on the Reign of Louis the Pious (814-840)*, Oxford, Roger: 691-700.

VERARDI, Andrea Antonio, 2014. “Pasquale I santo”, *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, 81, Istituto Per l’enciclopedia Italiana G. Treccani: [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/papa-pasquale-i\\_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/papa-pasquale-i_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/) [2017/02].

—2016. *La memoria Legittimante: il Liber Pontificalis e la chiesa di Roma nel VI secolo*, Roma, Istituto Storico Italiano per il medioevo, 2016.

—in stampa. “A proposito della biografia di Leone III nel Liber Pontificalis Romano”, *Archivium Historiae Pontificie*, 50.