

The two versions of the life of Pope Sergius II in the *Liber pontificalis*. Anti-Frankish feeling in Rome after Louis II's expedition of 844

by Maddalena Betti

The analysis of the two versions of the life of Pope Sergius II (844-847) published by Louis Duchesne in his edition of the *Liber pontificalis* aims at identifying and discussing the tools developed by the Lateran to illustrate the relationship between the Apostolic See and Carolingian power at the time of the Emperor Lothar. I will first present the two versions of the life of Sergius and their circulation, then highlight the rhetorical strategies employed by the author to diminish the political significance of Louis II's journey to Rome (844). Secondly, I will refer to the second part of the so-called Farnesianus version of the life of Sergius II. In this particular section, the author, before the incomplete report of the Saracen raid on the mouth of the Tiber and the sack of S. Peter's Basilica (846), critically describes the pontificate of Sergius II, dominated by the negative figure of the pontiff's brother, Benedict, who imposed his tyranny over Rome and its territory on behalf of the emperor (most likely as a *missus* on the imperial side). In this regard, it is interesting to evaluate which are the concealed arguments introduced here to represent the alleged effects of the application of the *Constitutio Romana* (824) on the socio-political structures of the city and on the history of the Roman Church, to offer a hypothesis on the context of the composition of this version of the life of Sergius II. In particular, I will dwell on the denouncing of the simoniacal heresy, shown to have been triumphant during the pontificate of Sergius II, as sign of the re-emergence in Rome of a theme particularly strongly felt among the Carolingian reformers, and one which can perhaps be most associated with the pontificate of Sergius' successor Leo IV (847-855).

Middle Ages; 9th century; Carolingian Italy; Rome; Pope Sergius II; Pope Leo IV; Saracens; *Liber pontificalis*; Codex Farnesianus; simony.

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Abbreviations

LP = L. Duchesne, *Le Liber Pontificalis. Texte, introduction et commentaire*, 2 voll., Paris 1892.

MGH, Capit. I = MGH, *Capitularia regum Francorum*, I, ed. A. Boretius, Hannover 1883 (Legum sectio, II/1).

MGH, Capit. II = MGH, *Capitularia regum Francorum*, II, ed. A. Boretius – V. Krause, Hannover 1897 (Legum sectio, II/2).

MGH, DD LdF = *Die Urkunden Ludwigs des Frommen*, ed. T. Kölzer – J.P. Clausen – D. Eichler – B. Mischke – S. Patt – S. Zwierlein, Wiesbaden 2016 (Diplomata Karolinorum, 2).

MGH, Epp. V = MGH, *Epistolarum Tomus V*, ed. E. Dümmler *et al.*, Berlin 1899 (Epistolae Karolini aevi, 3).

MGH, Epp. VIII = MGH, *Epistolarum Tomus VIII/1*, ed. E. Perels, Berlin 1939 (Epistolae Karolini aevi, 6).

1. Introduction

The *Liber pontificalis* consists of a sequence of biographies of the bishops of Rome, composed either step by step when the pontiff was still alive, or immediately after his death¹, with the exception of those biographies included in the first writing stage dating back to the first half of the sixth century. These lives follow a predetermined form and are characterized by clear parallelisms in structure and content. However, each of them stands out for its peculiarities. Identifying and studying these peculiarities in the sections reserved for the narration of historical events, allows us to grasp the point of view put forward in the Lateran *palatium*. In practice, this meant the group of clerics and high-ranking lay people who held the most prestigious positions of the articulated and complex Roman pontifical administrative machine². Nevertheless, it is necessary to keep in mind that each single life is also an individual part of a book which, despite its complex genesis, was indeed conceived as a whole, with its own precise internal logic. The *Liber pontificalis*, out together by the officers employed at the *scrinium* and the *vestararius*, was in fact tasked with establishing the official memory of the papal party³, represented a multifunctional memory provided for both internal purposes in the *palatium* and also intended for the external public⁴. It was therefore a text aimed at those wishing to know the history of the papacy itself as an institution over time, that of the prestigious Roman churches which were the destination of pilgrimages, and finally that of the city of Rome, proud of its past, and its protagonists, the latter included the popes, but also the clergy, the aristocrats and the Roman people. It is difficult to establish whether the authors of the individual lives were all equally aware of the value of the work they were contributing to

¹ For all the issues related to the genesis, composition and dissemination of *Liber pontificalis*: Bertolini, *Il «Liber pontificalis»*; Noble, *A new look*; Capo, *The «Liber pontificalis»*; Verardi, *La memoria legittimante*; McKitterick, *Rome and the invention of the papacy* and the miscellaneous volume, fresh off the press, *Das Buch der Päpste - Liber Pontificalis*.

² For the papal administration, see Toubert, *Scrinium et palatium*.

³ The problems of the authorship of papal biographies are not easy to solve, nor is the relationship of the authors of the lives with the popes – both the protagonists of the biography and their successors – clear. There is also no reliable information on how the suitability of a life was established for copying and dissemination outside the Lateran and who was responsible for it.

⁴ The unitary nature of the *Liber Pontificalis* is highlighted, for example, by Herbers, *Das Buch der Päpste*.

augment – to produce not only administrative information but also a coherent attempt to interpret events in a long-term historical perspective. What is certain is that they consciously followed a precise path, traced by their predecessors through the elaboration and repetition of the same format, which was rigid but allowed for variations.

The contents analysis of a single life is therefore appropriate, though it is also necessary to consider the whole series of biographies among which it is situated⁵. Thus, my investigation of the life of Sergius II starts from a comparison with the papal biographies belonging to the last editorial phase of the *Liber Pontificalis*, that devoted to the ninth-century popes, with particular attention being paid to the lives preceding it and the ones immediately following it⁶.

2. *The life of Sergius II in context*

The life of Sergius II sets itself clearly apart from those which precede it. For the first time, in fact, its author(s) do(es) not avoid recounting the relationships between the pontiff, the Emperor Lothar and his son Louis. It is because of this that the life of Sergius II is a rich object of study for reflecting upon the Franco-papal relationship and, in particular, on the representation of this relationship from the Roman side.

Discussion of the relationship between the Apostolic See and the heirs of Charlemagne is largely absent from the lives of Sergius II's predecessors⁷. From the life of Hadrian I (772-795) onwards, which starts with the narration of historical events, and even more decisively in the life of Leo III (795-816), papal biographers begin to show an almost exclusive interest in news concerning the actions of the pontiffs in terms of building work, and the gifts they offered to the Roman churches⁸. The life of Paschal I (817-824) attracted the attention of scholars because it reported in detail on a wide-ranging programme of a highly symbolic value, which included, on the one hand, the restoration and re-construction of the city's places of worship and, on the other, the recovery of the martyrs' relics and their translation within the city⁹. Conversely, the life of Paschal I doesn't make reference to the success of the *Pac-*

⁵ This necessity is also well explained in Verardi, *Il Liber Pontificalis Romano*, p. 181.

⁶ On the lives of the ninth-century popes see Herbers, *Agir et écrire*; Bougard, *Composition, diffusion et réception*; Unger, *Der «Liber pontificalis»*; Bon – Bougard, *Le «Liber pontificalis» et ses auteurs*.

⁷ On the representation of the Carolingians in the sources produced in Italy, see Noble, *Talking about the Carolingians*.

⁸ On this change in the redaction of the lives of the *Liber* (the ensuing study, however, aims exclusively at dating the report on building activities and donations), Geertman, *More veterum*, p. 2 and *passim*.

⁹ See Goodson, *The Rome of Pope Paschal I*. An interesting reading of the biography of Paschal I in Verardi, *Spunti di riflessione*.

tum Ludovicianum, a privilege that Louis the Pious sent to the newly-elected pope to confirm his exclusive prerogatives over Rome and its Duchy, the Roman *Campagna* and Tuscia, and to renew the donations relating to the Exarchate, the Pentapolis, Sabina and the cities of Lombard Tuscia, and of the Duchy of Benevento¹⁰. We do not find in it any mention of Lothar's coronation as emperor, which took place in S. Peter's in 823; nor any account of the tensions that followed the papal condemnation of some Roman high judges for being too close to Lothar¹¹. Such an absence of historical narration also characterises the life of Gregory IV (828-844). Building campaigns and donations are mentioned in it almost exclusively without reference to his disputed election and his journey to France to try to restore peace between Louis and his sons. The choice made by the biographers to eliminate any explicit reference to the relations of the Apostolic See with the Carolingian authorities was strategic and aimed at not disturbing such relations. These were still in the process of being defined, with an increasingly present Carolingian power, with which it was necessary for the popes to come to terms. The life of Eugene II (824-827) is also anomalous and remains incomplete, perhaps at the stage of a mere draft¹². It is no coincidence, in my opinion, that the unfinished form concerns precisely the life of the pontiff who accepted the *Constitutio Romana*, a pact which mainly regulated the imperial intervention in papal elections and established its supervision of justice and administration in the territories under papal jurisdiction. The difficulties of this biography – already evident in its genesis, and even more so in its transmission – were probably due to its author's attempt to veer away from such "neutral" lives as that of Eugene's predecessor Paschal I, and to provide an account of this tricky episode from a Roman point of view instead. The evidence which suggests that such an attempt was made lies in a passage, totally out of context, found at the end of this very short life. This passage was originally a wide-ranging narrative section dealing with the context in which the *Constitutio Romana* came into being, namely the tension between some Roman aristocrats, accused of acting on behalf of Lothar, and Pope Paschal. In fact, Eugene II is said to have granted economic reparations to certain Roman *iudices* who had returned to Rome after their exile in France¹³. This information has parallels in the Frankish sources (the *Annales regni Francorum* and the *Vita Ludovici* by the Astronomer) and in the prologue of the *Constitutio Romana* in which, in addition to establishing the inviolability of those who were *sub speciali defensione* on the

¹⁰ For the *Pactum Ludovicianum*, Noble, *The Republic of St. Peter*, pp. 148-153, 299-308; see the edition in MGH, DD LdF, n. 125, pp. 312-320.

¹¹ Such information is provided instead by the Frankish sources, mainly the *Annales regni Francorum* and the two biographies of the Emperor Louis, written respectively by Thegan and the anonymous Astronomer.

¹² On the Life of Eugene II, see Verardi, *Il papato alla prova dell'impero*, pp. 30-31.

¹³ LP, II, p. 69: «Huius diebus, Romani iudices qui Francia tenebantur captivi reversi sunt, quos in parentum propria ingredi permisit et eis non modicas res de patriarchio Lateranensi prae-buit, quia erant pene omnibus facultatibus destituti».

papal or imperial side, the entire first chapter of the capitulary is dedicated to the widows and orphans of the Roman *iudices* executed in Rome in the very last year of the Paschal's pontificate¹⁴. The attempt to narrate the genesis of the *Constitutio* from the Roman point of view evidently failed; the subject matter must have been deeply divisive. My hypothesis is, therefore, that it was precisely this reason that compromised the writing of Eugene II's life, and marked the return to the model of the "neutral" life of Paschal I, a model followed both for the very short pontificate of Valentinus and then, more clearly, for that of Gregory IV.

The life of Sergius II, which abandoned the tradition of strategic silence, and addressed the issue of the relationship with the Franks, seems to have met with a singular fate. Unlike the life of Eugene II, which survived the draft stage, the life of Sergius II has instead been duplicated: there are, in fact, two official versions written in Rome at the Lateran, which were copied, and circulated regularly beyond the Alps¹⁵. The existence of two distinct narratives from the papal milieu suggests that the drafting of the life of Sergius II provoked some debate in the Lateran about the content it was supposed to include, and that it then underwent a process of rewriting to suit changing historical contexts and political concerns.

3. *The two biographies of Sergius II: the life and the life with its continuation*

The first version of the life of Sergius II was transmitted through very few surviving codices containing the lives of ninth-century popes¹⁶. The author(s) of the text begin(s) with Sergius' origin; they then discuss his education, his ecclesiastical career and, finally, his election as pontiff, which was disputed, and took place without imperial approval, as was by then required by the *Constitutio Romana*. There follows a wide-ranging excursus dedicated, in turn, to the expedition of Louis II and the Archbishop Drogo of Metz's to Rome on behalf of the Emperor Lothar, in which we have an account of Louis II's coronation as *rex Langobardorum*; to the synod presided over by Drogo, to assess the legitimacy of the election of Pope Sergius II; and, finally, to the Romans' oath of fealty to Emperor Lothar. After the historical section, information on the pope's energetic activity in favour of the Roman churches abounds, followed by the canonical information on the duration of the pontificate and the ordinations performed. Why does the life of Sergius, compared to previous

¹⁴ MGH, Capit. I, p. 323: «Constitutum habemus, ut omnes qui sub speciali defensione domni apostolici seu nostra fuerint suscepti impetrata inviolabiliter iusta utantur defensione; quod si quis in quocumque hoc contemptive violare praesumpserit, sciat se periculum vitae suae esse incursum... In hoc capitulo fiat commemoratum de viduis et orfanis Theodori, Floronis et Sergii».

¹⁵ LP, p. IV.

¹⁶ LP, pp. 86-101.

lives, include an extensive narrative of historical events related to the relationship between the Apostolic See and the emperor? The aim of providing a Roman version of events, perhaps at the instigation of the still-living Sergius himself, seems obvious. But it is an ambiguous Roman version of events – not entirely comprehensible without the help of the Frankish sources – which, in fact, distorts the meaning of these events. Louis II's punitive expedition to restore the terms of the *Constitutio Romana*, which had clearly been disregarded on the occasion of Sergius' election, became an opportunity to reaffirm the centrality of the Apostolic See in the *regnum Italiae*. In this version, the Italian bishops and the counts – agents of the Frankish power in Italy – who flanked Drogo of Metz to judge Sergius, and who are explicitly named in the text, are forced to acknowledge their mistake at having claimed to judge the pontiff. Secondly, this version also suggests a Roman primacy over the Frankish Church, represented by Drogo of Metz, but omits to say that Sergius II was forced to grant Drogo the title of vicar of the Frankish Churches North of the Alps, as we read in the *Annales Bertiniani*¹⁷, and instead reports on the pope's judgement on two deposed Frankish archbishops, Ebbo of Rheims and Bartholomew of Narbonne. Lastly, the text uses this opportunity first to highlight the idea of a pope who guides and corrects a still young and inexperienced Louis II¹⁸. Secondly, it presents an image of a resolute pope, who endorses the decision of the Romans not to swear allegiance to Louis II, who had just been appointed king of the Lombards, despite threats and violence¹⁹. This interpretation of the events, which masks the profound discomfort caused at the apex of Roman society by the intrusion of Louis II and Drogo of Metz in Roman affairs, is corroborated by the remarkable conclusion, according to which the departure of Louis II to Pavia was embraced by the Romans with great pleasure, while Pope Sergius II was celebrated as the saviour of the Romans and the restorer of peace²⁰. It is precisely because it took the form of a historical narrative that the life of Sergius II aroused great interest in the *Liber pontificalis* beyond the Alps. Proof of this is the letter from Hincmar of Rheims, in which he begged Egilo, the bishop of Sens, to obtain a copy of the lives of the popes in Rome, starting specifically with that of Sergius II. The reasons for Hincmar's keenness to obtain the life of Sergius II in 866 are suggested in the letter itself, in which references were made to the condemnation of Ebbo,

¹⁷ *Annales Bertiniani*, p. 30. This information is also confirmed in MGH, Epp. V, n. 1, pp. 583-584.

¹⁸ For the papal version of Louis II's expedition to Rome, see Gantner, *A king in training?*

¹⁹ On the Romans refusing to swear an oath to Lothar's son and on the subject of the Romans' oath to the emperor, Delogu, *I Romani e l'impero*, pp. 219-221; see also Capo, *Il «Liber pontificalis», la Chiesa Romana*, p. 259 (more generally on Sergius II's relationship with Carolingian power).

²⁰ LP, p. 91: «Tunc vero leti omnes cum coniugibus ac liberis senatus populusque Romanus ingenti peste liberati et iugo tyrannicae inmanitatis redempti, sanctissimus Sergium praesulem velut salutis auctorem ac restitutorem pacis venerabant».

the archbishop of Rheims²¹. The life of Sergius II, a copy of which was sought in Rome, was to be used as further evidence at the synod of Soissons in 866, when the legitimacy of the clerics ordained by Ebbo after his excommunication was being challenged.

The second version of the life of Sergius II is called “Farnesian” because it was transmitted by the codex Farnesianus, a now lost manuscript, identified by Louis Duchesne as E5 (class E is that intended for codices containing the lives of ninth-century popes)²². The codex Farnesianus was discovered by the German humanist Lucas Holste (1596-1661) in the ducal library of the Farnese Palace in Rome, and transcribed by him in parts. In Holste’s time, the codex began with the life of Pope Silverius (536-537), and ended with an unfinished life of Sergius II that was different from the other manuscripts. Holste transcribed the variants and the original part of the newly-discovered life in his printed copy of the *editio princeps* of the *Liber pontificalis* (Mainz 1602)²³. A few years later, the codex Farnesianus was lost²⁴. It was later found again in the ducal library in Parma, thanks to the research carried out by Francesco Bianchini (1662-1729), as part of his work to prepare a new edition of the *Liber pontificalis* under the patronage of Pope Clement XI. Bianchini described the codex’s material appearance, dwelling on the use of the capital uncial letter, and was entrusted with the transcription of some pages reproduced later in volume II of his edition. The Farnesianus studied by Bianchini was probably already missing the life of Sergius II. After Bianchini, all traces of the Farnesianus were definitively lost. This is a serious loss because it would have been one of the oldest manuscripts of the *Liber Pontificalis*, as already confirmed by Mommsen, Duchesne and Lehmann. Moreover, it would have been, not only the oldest manuscript in Group E, dating from the second half of the ninth century, but – as Viricillo Franklin convincingly argues – the oldest known copy of the *Liber Pontificalis* made in Rome²⁵. This would therefore confirm that the “Farnesian” version of the life of Sergius II is also a Roman version of the life of this pope, in the same way as the version known through the other surviving manuscripts is. The text we have of the “Farnesian” life of Sergius II is the one we know thanks to Holste’s transcription, which was not included in the Bianchini edition, but went into the edition of the *Liber pontificalis* by Giovanni Vignoli (1667-1733)²⁶, and was finally included in Louis

²¹ MGH, Epp. VIII/1, p. 194. On the condemnation of Ebbo of Rheims, Knibbs, *Ebo of Reims*.

²² For the Codex Farnesianus, Viricillo Franklin, *The lost Farnesianus manuscript*.

²³ The specimen annotated by Holste is Vat. Reg. lat. 2081.

²⁴ The information on the history of the manuscript is found in Viricillo Franklin, *Reading the Popes*, pp. 620-629.

²⁵ It should be noted here that there is no surviving manuscript of the *Liber pontificalis* made in Rome before the late eleventh century.

²⁶ The Farnesianus continuation of the life of Sergius II can be read in the third volume of the Vignoli edition, published posthumously in 1755, on pp. 59-63.

Duchesne's edition²⁷. The first part of the Farnesianus version of the life of Sergius corresponds to the life found in all the other manuscripts of the *Liber Pontificalis*, with a number of variations in the section dedicated to the gifts to Roman churches and commissioned restorations²⁸. However, the Farnesianus version, instead of ending with the announcement of the foundation of a monastery next to the church of Ss. Sylvester and Martinus, continues with a harsh disapproval of the pontificate of Sergius II. The core issues of the continuation are twofold. In the first place comes the alleged misrule of Sergius, flanked by his greedy brother Benedict, which is denounced. The second point is a detailed though incomplete report of the Saracen invasion of 846, which involved the coast of Latium, and directly affected the basilicas outside the Roman walls²⁹. However, the negative section of the life should not lead to the conclusion that the text is an interpolation produced outside the Lateran. The writing process of papal lives was very complex and layered over the years; it could therefore also include voices from outside the fold, dissatisfied with the choices made by the popes, with possible additions at their death³⁰.

The Farnesianus edition of the life of Sergius did not remain locked in the archives in Rome, but was copied and circulated across the Alps in the same way as the first life did. It was certainly at the base of the abbreviated life of Sergius, contained in the *Opusculum de vitis Romanorum pontificum*, also known as the history of the popes by the pseudo-Liutprand (according to the false attribution proposed by the editors of the *Patrologia Latina*)³¹. The work, a collection of the lives of the popes, supplemented with material on canon law (especially the Pseudo-Isidorian decretals), has been associated with the figure of bishop Benno II of Osnabrück (1068-1088), although his role in the compilation has not yet been clarified³². The Farnesianus version was particularly attractive because its continuation denounced the scandal of simony that characterised the pontificate of Sergius II: such an example from the past could not fail to arouse the curiosity of Benno's circle, decidedly pro-imperial, and committed to the fight against simony in the context of the eleventh century Church reform.

²⁷ The Farnesianus variants of the life of Sergius II and its original parts are edited by Duchesne in a synoptic manner with respect to the first version of the life, in the left column on pp. 91-101.

²⁸ For example, the names of the saints transferred from the Roman cemeteries to the restored church of S. Martinus are different. Furthermore, the author of the Farnesianus version used the passage of the translation of the relics to S. Praxedes from the life of Pope Paschal I: this aspect is analysed by Herbers, *Le Liber Pontificalis*, pp. 93-94, but already highlighted in LP, II, p. IV.

²⁹ The basilicas of S. Peter and S. Paul were sacked, as can be seen from the life of his successor, Leo IV. The life of Sergius II, unfinished, describes only the sack of S. Peter's.

³⁰ Another example of a negative life is that of Pope John VII (705-707) examined in McKittrick, *The papacy and Byzantium*, pp. 241-242 and 261. See also Verardi, *Ricostruire dalle fondamenta*, pp. 44-45.

³¹ *Opusculum de vitis Romanorum pontificum*, coll. 1244-1245. For the relations between the Codex Farnesianus, Levison, *Die Papstgeschichte des Pseudo-Liudprand*.

³² On the work in general, Jasper, *Die Papstgeschichte*. See also Orth, *Papstgeschichte im 11. Jahrhundert*, pp. 267-268 e 271-272.

4. *The continuation of the life of Sergius II and the life of Leo IV: a comparison*

As mentioned above, two main successive narrative sections compose the continuation of the life of Sergius in the so-called Farnesianus version. The first, a description of the misrule of Sergius and his brother Benedict, provides a justification for the second, the unfortunately incomplete report of the Saracen sack of S. Peter's Basilica, explicitly interpreted as God's punishment. In some ways, the reading of the author mirrors that of the capitulary, issued in the spring of 847 by Lothar to deal with the Saracen emergency in southern Italy, but the first suggests a different focus in terms of responsibility³³. The capitulary states that God allowed the Saracens to desecrate the Church of Rome, expressly *caput Christianitatis*, in order to punish the sins *in ecclesia Christi* in an exemplary manner. For this reason, the organisation of the military expedition entrusted to Louis II is accompanied by an exhortation to the bishops and abbots of the empire duly to exercise the *correctio* in their dioceses and monasteries³⁴. Rome, therefore, is invaded by the Saracens because the Christians of the entire *ecclesia* have sinned, and those who are supposed to supervise and correct them have not done so. In the continuation of the life of Sergius, the Saracen sack of Rome has a more local dimension instead: God does not punish Rome for the sins of all Christians, but rather in order to overturn the degenerate and intolerable situation in which Rome and its territory found themselves in. The foremost person responsible for the situation was Sergius, who was portrayed again in a bad light at the beginning of the continuation. From being a pontiff with good qualities, according to the ritual rubric introduced after the report of the election in the first part of his life, he had become unfit as a pope due to obvious physical and moral limitations. Benedict was responsible for taking the place of the pontiff, imposing his tyranny, and corrupting both State and Church. All the bishops and churchmen who failed to denounce to the emperor and the king what was happening in Rome were also responsible. Finally, the emperor and the king were responsible – here the accusation is less explicit but implied – for failing to intervene, but instead for legitimising Benedict's tyrannical regime.

The continuation of the life of Sergius clearly has a Roman origin, because it expresses a "Roman" point of view on events³⁵. It was probably written immediately after the Saracen sack, as a reaction to the shock, most likely already at the beginning of Leo IV's pontificate (Sergius II died at the beginning of 847, a few months after the Roman sack). The officials of the Lateran, confirmed, or rather appointed, by the newly-elected pontiff might have been

³³ The comparison between the two sources is already suggested in Duchesne, *I primi tempi dello stato pontificio*, p. 93.

³⁴ MGH, Capit. II, pp. 65-66.

³⁵ See also Vircillo Franklin, *The lost Farnesianus manuscript*, pp. 150-151. For the scholar, this would be a further confirmation of the Roman origin of the Codex Farnesianus.

therefore responsible for the revision of the life of Sergius II and its continuation. It is in fact highly probable that the Saracen invasion of the Latium and the sack of the Roman basilicas might have altered the power relationship between the various groups of Roman aristocrats, who competed for institutional positions in the service of the popes, and that, as a result, Leo IV did not maintain in favour the family groups selected by his predecessor, but preferred to renew his entourage by distributing the highest *honores* to his own trusted men.

In order to test this hypothesis, I propose first of all to identify possible connections between the continuation of the life of Sergius II and the biography of Leo IV in the *Liber pontificalis*, which could therefore be attributed to the same redactional context³⁶. The interpretation of the Saracen sack as given in the continuation of the life of Sergius II appears not to have been accepted in the life of Leo IV; however, the latter is clearly related to the continuation in terms of content. It is precisely the subject of the Saracen sack of 846, described in great detail only in the Farnesianus continuation, which is central to the first part of Leo IV's biography. The pontiff is presented as the one who contributed, with his prayer, towards the shipwreck of the Saracen ships on their way to Africa with the stolen Roman treasures, and who compensated the basilicas of S. Peter's and S. Paul's with valuable gifts, to mitigate the spoliations they had suffered. It is he who, above all, provided for the defence of the city, restoring its walls, and collaborating to the construction of the *civitas leonina*, the city walls protecting S. Peter's. In other words, the continuation of the life of Sergius II constitutes the necessary premise to understand fully the action of Leo IV.

In the life of Leo, Sergius II is only remembered as the pontiff who ordained Leo presbyter of the *titulus* of the Ss. Quattro Coronati. When reporting his death at the same time as the Saracen incursion, the authors of Leo's life absolve Sergius from all responsibility. Nevertheless, it seems clear that, in the life of Leo IV, the pontiff is associated several times with the memory of Leo III, and is thus clearly distinguished from his immediate predecessors. It is in this sense that the information about Leo IV's valuable processional cross donated to the Lateran Basilica, which was supposed to replace the one given by Charlemagne to Leo III, should be interpreted. It is stated in the text that the cross of Charles had been stolen at the time of Paschal I, and that neither Paschal I nor Eugene II nor Valentinus nor Gregory IV nor Sergius II had replaced it³⁷. The list of popes who did not replace the stolen Charlemagne cross casts a shadow over their pontificates. On the other hand, the gift of the new cross seems symbolically to convey the message of a new alliance

³⁶ Edition in LP, pp. 106-134. On the Life of Leo IV in the *Liber pontificalis*, Herbers, *Leo IV*, pp. 18-48. The close relation between the life of Pope Leo IV and the last part of the life of Sergius II is confirmed by stylometric analysis of the two texts: see Bon – Bougard, *Le Liber pontificalis*.

³⁷ LP, p. 110.

with the empire, re-founded by Leo IV and the Emperor Lothar, portrayed together in the new frescoes decorating S. Peter's Basilica³⁸. In the life of Leo IV, the new alliance is expressed especially in the section dedicated to the construction of the walls intended to secure S. Peter's Basilica. The initiative came from Leo IV, who decided to complete a project of Leo III (again, the two pontificates are associated). Lothar contributed to the realisation of the pontiff's idea by offering, together with his brothers, great riches (*non modicas argenti libras*)³⁹. In general, it seems that the life of Leo IV alludes to the reestablishment of a relationship with the empire based on mutual respect⁴⁰.

In the life of Leo IV, the pontiff is represented as the true defender of Rome, of its basilicas outside the walls, and of its territory; this characterisation seems to me a further manifestation of a dialogue between the life of Leo IV and the continuation of the life of Sergius II. Leo IV was actually the anti Sergius II *par excellence* in his defence of the city and its territory. While Sergius (together with his brother Benedict) did not give enough importance to the imminent Arab incursion, and did not bother to organise the defence of the territory⁴¹, Leo IV was ready to face new Saracen attacks because he was vigilant and also because, thanks to his prestige, he was able to coordinate the joint efforts of the Romans, Neapolitans, Amalfitans and Gaetans against the Saracens, thus avoiding even having to depend on the Carolingian military force⁴².

In conclusion, I suggest that the continuation of the life of Sergius II seems to be intrinsically linked to the life of Leo IV: it offers an account of the historical events preceding Leo's election, and allows Leo's actions to be appreciated by contrast with those of his predecessor.

5. *The consequences of the Constitutio Romana: analysis of the first narrative core of the continuation of the Life of Sergius*

The analysis of the first narrative core of the continuation of the life of Sergius II, that is, the one dedicated to the misrule of the pontiff and his brother, throws further light on the context of the writing of the text, which I have previously associated with the advent of the new hegemonic aristocratic group that imposed itself on the Roman scene alongside Pope Leo IV. Above all, in the first narrative core, Sergius II was harshly criticised: his inability to govern was not only due to his suffering from gout (however true this may have been) but – it is stressed – was also a consequence of his moral inade-

³⁸ LP, p. 114.

³⁹ LP, p. 123. In the capitulary of 847, it was Lothar who ordered the construction of the city walls around S. Peter's by arranging a substantial collection of tributes: MGH, Capit. II, p. 66. See also Marazzi, *Le "città nuove" pontificie*, pp. 264-268.

⁴⁰ See already Duchesne, *I primi tempi dello stato pontificio*, p. 96.

⁴¹ In the life of Sergius II, Count Adalbert, *tutor Corsicanae insulae*, warns the pontiff of the imminent arrival of the Saracens, to no avail: LP, p. 99.

⁴² LP, p. 117.

quacy. Because of the political weakness of the pontiff, the Roman *optimates* acted without any control (which is a not so veiled criticism of Sergius II's entourage)⁴³. Among them was the pope's brother, Benedict, who had already usurped the bishopric of Albano. Moreover, he had unrestricted access to the papal coffers, and unashamedly squandered the resources needed to govern the Church and the State on useless building projects. According to the continuation, he strengthened his position of pre-eminence over the city and its territory thanks to the emperor, whom he bribed with numerous gifts.

The person of Benedict is only known through the Farnesianus life of Sergius II and is difficult to interpret. The only certain fact is that Benedict's authority was actually recognised by the emperor in some way, though it is not clear exactly what position Benedict held on behalf of the emperor, or what his duties were. In the continuation, Benedict is said to have been granted primacy and dominion over Rome by the emperor and to have created a *monarchia* in Rome⁴⁴. This statement is obscure, and could have reflected an exceptional political situation that was not reported at all in the Frankish sources. For this reason, it seems more plausible that it was a hyperbolic description of a supposed hegemonic title that Benedict would have assumed while holding a legitimate position, presumably in accordance with the *Constitutio Romana*. The most compelling hypothesis is the one proposed by Duchesne, according to which Benedict is to be identified with the *missus* named by the emperor who, according to the fourth provision of the *Constitutio Romana*, had the task of supervising the *iudices'* and *duces'* activities, and who exercised justice in Rome and its territory, assisted by a papal emissary. In case of proven negligence on the part of the judges, the *missi* were obliged to report first to the pope: at that point, the case could be submitted either to the pontiff or directly to the two supervising *missi*; finally, it could be reported by the imperial *missus* to the emperor, who would intervene by sending his delegates to Rome⁴⁵. Duchesne's suggestion is supported by some passages in the continuation of the life of Sergius II. In particular, we read that Benedict exercised his dominion over Rome: «deinceps vero nullum dedit cuiquam ad sensum ut dare aut accipere sive ledi aut iuvare potuisset, nisi per ipsum»⁴⁶. This passage evidently alludes to Benedict's ability to influence the outcome of judicial disputes in Rome and its territory, which would be perfectly compatible with

⁴³ LP, p. 97: «Cum enim esset idem pontifex imbecillis membris ob humorem podagricum, incessu pedum et pene manuum officio carebat; attamen animosus, ore incomptus et convitiis deditus, actu et sermonibus instabilis, leviter omnia faciens. Unde et adnullabant ipsum optimates Romanorum».

⁴⁴ LP, pp. 97-98: «Qui etiam ad domnum imperatorem cum multis munerum copiis adiens, primatum et dominium Romae ab eo petiit et concessisse sibi gloriabatur. Post reversionem vero suam ad tantam perrupit contumaciam et vesaniam, transcensis omnibus, ut monarchiam obtineret Romae».

⁴⁵ MGH, Capit. I, p. 323. On the fourth provision, Bertolini, *Osservazioni sulla "Constitutio Romana"*, p. 735. See also Bougard, *Les Francs à Venise*, pp. 242-243.

⁴⁶ Quotation from LP, p. 98 («only with his assent was it determined whether someone should give or rather receive, could be harmed or rather helped»).

the position of the *missus* supervising Roman justice on behalf of the emperor. In addition, Benedict is said to have misappropriated wealth from the monasteries and from the Romans, using imperial *cartulae* and *praecepta*⁴⁷.

The person of Benedict would therefore embody the successful application of the fourth provision of the *Constitutio Romana*, once it was no longer just a written provision, but an effective one, probably after the synod of 844. Those responsible for writing the continuation of the life of Sergius II did not openly contest the rule, but rather they denounced the harmful effects of its application, through the “construction” of the figure of Benedict and his alleged actions. They thus indirectly expressed the strong Roman resentment towards the imperial intervention in the field of justice in the papal territory⁴⁸. Benedict is portrayed as being responsible for the ruin of the State and the Church, the prelude to the divine punishment in the form of the Saracen incursion. His position seems to have granted him unlimited power, even as far as the opportunity of compromising the integrity of the assets of monasteries or of the Romans with impunity. It also gave him the authority to impose unjustified forced levies that deprived churches, monasteries and individuals, undermining the stability of the city and of its entire territory. In this regard, the passage in the continuation concerning the renovation of the church of Ss. Sylvester and Martinus is emblematic. While in the first part of the life of Sergius the church is described as being in a precarious state, and Sergius II had it rebuilt *ex novo* near the original site, in the continuation we are told that the church, built with wondrous skill in antiquity, was only destroyed by Benedict in order to plunder churches, monasteries and citizens of their possessions under the pretext of its reconstruction⁴⁹.

Benedict was also said to be responsible for the ruin of the Church together with his inept brother. The ruin of the Church is shown through the denunciation of the triumph of simony, the *simoniaca haeresis*, and we are told that the price of an episcopate was set at the astounding price of 2,000 mancuses⁵⁰. The introduction of the simony issue, as previously mentioned,

⁴⁷ LP, p. 98: «Et haec omnia sive in monasteriis sive in populis radicitus cum cartulis et praeceptis imperialibus aut molibus aut rebus exteris».

⁴⁸ Capo, *Iura regni et consuetudines illius*, p. 186.

⁴⁹ LP, p. 98: «Destruerat namque initio suae exaltationis ecclesiam iamdictam beati Martini, quae fuerat opere mirabili antiquitatis constructa, ut sub praetextu istius deiectionis et reaedificationis liberius valeret depraedationes in ecclesiis et in populis peragere». Built on ruins from the second and third centuries, the complex of Ss. Sylvester and Martinus comprised several buildings and churches founded by popes Sylvester and Symmachus and was profoundly modified in the ninth century. Such radical operations could cause disappointment among the faithful. The authors of the continuation thus seem to report on possible local tensions, which arose within the community of the faithful of S. Martino ai Monti. About the structure Davis-Weyer-Emerick, *The early sixth century frescoes*, pp. 3-21.

⁵⁰ LP, p. 98: «Vigebat autem in istius pontificis tempore et fratris eius, idest per triennium, haeresis nefandissima Simoniaca, et in tantum viguit ut publice venundarentur episcopata, et qui plus daret ille susciperet episcopatum. Et ad tantam aviditatem deducti sunt ut duo milia mancuses venundaretur episcopium et eo amplius, si possint dantis invenire copiam. Et nullum onus ecclesiasticum ab illis sine pretio dabatur».

contributed to the success of the Farnesianus version of the life of Sergius II in the eleventh century, when it was summarised and included in the *Opusculum de vitis Romanorum pontificum*. To be using simony in Rome to represent the ruin of the Roman *ordo ecclesiasticus*, however, is of great relevance for the mid-ninth century. The censuring of simony re-emerged in Rome as a topical issue at the Roman Council of 826: the second canon on simony is derived directly from the Carolingian capitularies, as are most of the canons of that Roman Council. Indeed, the entire council is to be interpreted as an attempt to revive the pope's image – immediately after the promulgation of the *Constitutio Romana* – as a leader in promoting Church reform, in competition with Louis the Pious and his reformist collaborators⁵¹. Simony was a recurring issue for the Carolingian reformers, as part of a broader proposal to reconfigure the episcopal office⁵², and, as a result, the theme made a comeback at the Apostolic See, which aimed to play the role of supreme judge in judicial matters concerning ecclesiastics. In this regard, it is worth remembering that in 847 the newly-elected Pope Leo IV was involved in the lawsuit brought against five Breton bishops accused of simony by Duke Nominoe, who wanted to remove them⁵³. The actions of Nominoe, denounced to the pontiff by a delegation of Breton bishops, were stigmatised in a letter written in the name of Leo IV, which has been preserved along with 40 other letters from the pontiff, for its high legal value⁵⁴. What is relevant here is that the pontiff and his collaborators were presented with the issue of simony as a way of obtaining a Roman answer to the problem. It is therefore reasonable to assume that, at the beginning of the pontificate of Leo IV, when the continuation of the life of Sergius II is supposed to have been written, simony was the subject of study and debate in the *scrinium* of the Lateran.

Finally, it is possible to reflect further on the choice of using simony to denounce the ruin of the Roman Church as a consequence of Benedict's interference, which was thus perceived to be the practical result of the Frankish imperial authority in Rome. Besides the censure against simony expressed by the Fathers and in the Councils, the natural authority on the subject was certainly – and especially in Rome – Gregory the Great. It was Gregory the Great who had developed and articulated the problem of the simoniacal heresy by applying it to the practice of selling and buying the sacraments and the three degrees of ecclesiastical ordination⁵⁵. As well as preaching to the bishops about the importance of fighting against simony, Gregory had made a personal commitment to eradicate the practice where it was most scandalous. What

⁵¹ For the council Noble, *The place in papal history of the Roman synod*.

⁵² Patzold, *Redéfinir l'office épiscopal*. On simony in the Carolingian age, the fundamental and isolated research by Schieffer, *Zum Umgang der Karolingerzeit mit Simonie*.

⁵³ For the context of the event, Herbers, *Leo IV*, pp. 320-336. See also Flechner, *Aspects of the Breton Transmission of the «Hibernensis»*.

⁵⁴ MGH, Epp. V, n. 16, p. 75.

⁵⁵ See Rizzo, *Papa Gregorio Magno*. See also Markus, *Gregory the Great*, pp. 171-174.

is interesting here is that among the 54 letters written to eradicate simony, 17 concern Gaul, the simoniac context *par excellence* that Gregory knew and monitored. The recovery of Gregory the Great's letters on simony – certainly helpful in dealing with the scandal of the Breton church – helped to revive, during Leo IV's pontificate, the image of a Gallic Church affected by simony from the beginning. For all these reasons, the choice of simony in the continuation of the life of Sergius II is not as neutral as it seems. First, it served to return the weighty accusation that simony was also lurking in Rome, as expressed on several occasions by Alcuin in order to strike at the credibility of Pope Leo III⁵⁶. Instead, simony, it was suggested, was a highly contagious form of Frankish practice, afflicting the episcopates of Gaul, associated first with Merovingian, and then with Carolingian power. This view was held, in his commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, by Paschasius Radbertus, for instance, when he wrote about simony having never been defeated *in Gallis*⁵⁷. To show the Roman ecclesiastical *ordo* as being subverted by simony was therefore not only a specific indictment of Sergius and Benedict's misrule, but also a denunciation of the transmission to Rome of corrupt and particularly contagious practices especially characteristic of the Frankish Church. Such a transmission of corrupt practices would then be a further, utterly reprehensible, consequence of Benedict's regime, and through him, of the impact of Frankish imperial authority in Rome.

⁵⁶ Schieffer, *Zum Umgang der Karolingerzeit mit Simonie*, pp. 118-120; see also Costambeys, *Alcuin, Rome*.

⁵⁷ Paschasius Radbertus, *Expositio in Matheo*, p. 1026.

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