

Representing the space of papal government at the time of Lothar I: the claim of *fines Romani*

by Maddalena Betti

Studying the extent of the physical space over which papal policy was implemented between the late eighth and ninth centuries is extremely complex. The sources are ambiguous and difficult to interpret: the territory over which the popes claimed to exercise their jurisdiction was not necessarily that over which they actually managed to enforce their authority, especially after the fall of the Lombard kingdom; the practices of papal government on their territory are elusive and lacking continuity. Historiography oscillates between an either overplaying or underplaying both the papal political activity in this territory, and the consistency of papal policy. I will deal with the problem of the representation of physical boundaries of papal territory in the biographies of the popes included in the *Liber pontificalis* during the years of the Emperor Lothar I's rule. Before doing so, I will dwell on the break represented by 774, the year when the lives of the popes lose their narrative sections and are reduced to a list of reports on building interventions and papal donations for the benefit of Roman churches. From 774 onwards, therefore, the action of the popes is limited to the Roman urban space. I will then deal with the lives of Paschal I (817-824), Sergius II (844-847) and Leo IV (847-855), to show how the authors of the three lives attempted, first covertly and then more openly and clearly, to address the question of how the papal territory outside Rome is actually defined in political terms.

Middle Ages; 8th-9th centuries; Rome; Italy; Lothar I; Pope Paschal I; Pope Sergius II; Pope Leo IV; *Patrimonium sancti Petri*; *Liber pontificalis*.

Abbreviations

LP = L. Duchesne, *Le Liber Pontificalis. Texte, introduction et commentaire*, 2 vols, Paris 1892.
MGH, ARF = *Annales regni Francorum inde ab a. 741 usque ad a. 829, qui dicuntur Annales Laurissenses maiores et Einhardi*, ed. F. Kurze, Hannover 1895 (MGH, SS rer. Germ., 6).
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 Karolorum, 2).
MGH, Epp. III = MGH, *Epistolarum Tomus III*, ed. E. Dümmler *et al.*, Berlin 1892 (Epistolae Karolini aevi, 1).

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1. Introduction

Reviving the question of the “political” borders of the territory subjected to papal authority during the years of the Emperor Lothar I means, first of all, dealing with highly debated and controversial historiographical issues. The subject of my essay is indeed a main part of the complex question of the origins of the “State of the Church” (Stato della Chiesa), familiar to Italian historians since the sixteenth century, an issue which emerges at regular intervals, provoking diverging interpretations¹. We can legitimately refer to the “State of the Church” with complete certainty only from the pontificate of Innocent III onwards – on this point the consensus is unanimous. Everything else has been questioned, beginning with the legitimate definition of the “State of the Church” before the “State of the Church” (*Patrimonium sancti Petri?* Republic of Saint Peter? *Terra sancti Petri?*), and continuing with periodisation, which is the identification of the fundamental stages of a presumably linear and coherent process through which the popes would have assumed temporal power over a specific territory².

In recent decades, if on the one hand the narrative of the origins of the “Papal State” proposed by Thomas Noble³ has in some respects been affirmed itself as the dominant account, on the other, epistemological and methodological critical aspects have been reasserted. The legitimacy of the notion of “Papal State” itself before the twelfth or thirteenth century has been debated, and the idea of the papacy as an institutional reality with a stable identity, capable of broad, linear and enduring political programmes, has been disputed⁴. On several occasions, we read of an overestimation of the pontiffs’ political capacity and of the stability of the Papal state formation⁵.

This is the opinion of Marios Costambeys, who more than others seems to have been able to seek new approaches, to investigate the sources differently and, hence, to attempt new reconstructions of the history of Central Italy, especially in the years of the Carolingian transition⁶. In particular, Costambeys emphasised the inadequacy of the *Liber pontificalis*, a source on which – in his opinion – the reconstruction of events up to the year 774 relies recklessly and excessively, and he reiterated that the Franco-papal agreements are not to be considered constitutional acts of political status (and thus defining papal borders) but rather the expression of the papal claims that had already emerged in the *Liber pontificalis* and papal letters⁷. Instead, he focused on the records of the abbey of Farfa, emphasising how the trends of donations

¹ See Arnaldi, *Origini del dominio*.

² See Arnaldi, *Lo stato della chiesa*.

³ Noble, *The Republic of St. Peter*.

⁴ See Classen, *Karl der Große*, and Classen, *Italien zwischen Byzanz*.

⁵ For instance, Nelson, *Making a difference in eighth-century politics*, p. 179, or Bolton, *Papal Italy*.

⁶ Costambeys, *Power and Patronage*.

⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 306-307.

to the monastery, before and after the immunity granted by Charlemagne, actually allow us to understand the changes in the political balance of the border region of Sabina, and also to reflect more cautiously about the supposed papal territorial expansion in Sabina, a privileged area for its documentary richness but also for the stimulating contributions of Pierre Toubert that have enabled a prolific cycle of regional studies⁸. Costambeys reassesses the idea of a papal territorial expansion in Sabina, supposedly developed during the pontificate of Hadrian I – with a real definition of the political border with a “Carolingianised” Duchy of Spoleto – and then curbed, from 817 onwards, due to the diplomas in favour of Farfa issued by the Emperor Louis the Pious⁹. He rather assumes that individual pontiffs, especially Hadrian I, together with Roman families, acted as «“private” patron-proprietar(s)»¹⁰ towards Farfa through competing with the dukes of Spoleto and the local aristocracies to obtain additional property rights (but also public control of the territory) in Sabina. Here the drawback becomes apparent: the general ambiguity in the sources, firstly the papal ones, which bring together on the one hand the theme of *restitutiones* of patrimonies donated to the Roman Church, and then illegitimately usurped by new owners (Lombards?), and on the other territorial claims (with the configuration of borders)¹¹. Are we facing a planned “patrimonial” or political expansion? Can we distinguish between these two types of expansion?¹² And finally, how is this expansion managed (if at all), and on which territories?

My essay stands at the margins of the major issues I have tried to outline in this brief introduction. Moreover, its purpose is not to define the borders of the territories governed by the popes in the first decades of the ninth century¹³. The aim is rather to offer a reflection on how the territory claimed to be papal territory was represented during a specific period, namely the decades following the death of Charlemagne, with a focus on the years of the Emperor Lothar I (822-850). This reflection will be based, despite Costambeys’ warnings – though these refer to the decades before the advent of Lothar – on the papal biographies of the *Liber pontificalis*, which I have systematically investigated when taking part in the creation and implementation of the LaCPI database (Languages and Agents of Carolingian power in Italy), a prosopographical database created as part of the research activities promoted by the

⁸ Toubert, *Les structures du Latium*.

⁹ See Arnaldi, *Alle origini del potere temporale*, pp. 47-56; Gasparri, *Il ducato di Spoleto*; Toubert, *Les structures du Latium*, pp. 941-945 and 950-953; Marazzi, *Un laboratorio della dialettica*.

¹⁰ Quotation from Costambeys, *Power and Patronage*, p. 288.

¹¹ On this ambiguity see Bertolini, *Il problema delle origini del potere temporale* and Arnaldi, *Alle origini del potere temporale dei papi*.

¹² This distinction is unacceptable according to Costambeys, *Power and Patronage*, p. 307.

¹³ A definition of the borders in Toubert, *Les structures du Latium*, pp. 938-960; Toubert, *Il Patrimonio di San Pietro e Arnaldi, Le origini del patrimonio di San Pietro*. See also Sennis, *Un territorio da ricomporre*.

2017 PRIN project *Ruling in Hard Times. Patterns of power and practices of government in the making of Carolingian Italy*. The biographies I found most useful for my purpose are those of Paschal I (817-824), Sergius II (844-847) and Leo IV (847-855).

2. *The Liber pontificalis: the silence after 774*

First of all, it is necessary to start with a general consideration of the *Liber pontificalis*. The collection of the lives of pontiffs before 774¹⁴ – and so up to the first part of the biography of Pope Hadrian I (772-797) – represents a source characterized by a great abundance of historical data, especially in relation to the Lombards¹⁵. In particular, the authors of the first part of the life of Hadrian offer an account of Charlemagne's victorious campaign in Italy and its consequences in Central Italy. They insist on the presentation of a Lombard kingdom collapsing internally and providing important chances for the Church of Rome: foremost among these is the report that the Spoletini submitted to Hadrian I and that the entire Duchy of Spoleto was subjugated «sub iure et potestate beati Petri»¹⁶. The historical section of the life ends with an account of Charlemagne's visit to Rome at Easter 774, culminating with the description of his donation to the Church of Rome, related to the donation Pope Stephen II had received twenty years earlier from Pippin, and with the bare news of the capture of Pavia by Charlemagne¹⁷.

What is interesting to note is that the editors of the life of Hadrian I (772-797) did not hesitate to report the alleged contents of Charlemagne's donation, apparently with the intention of preserving its memory. It was therefore a specific choice aimed at connecting the biography of Hadrian I to a real constitutive act of a new papal territoriality, shared both at the Lateran and at the centres of Frankish power¹⁸.

What is even more important is that, after the somewhat unclear description of a remarkably vast territorial dominion – *civitates* and *territoria* south of a “border” designated by the line Luni-Monselice, the Exarchate of Raven-

¹⁴ See Gandino, *La storiografia, prima e dopo il 774*, p. 366.

¹⁵ This is true for the lives from Pope Zachary to Hadrian I (until 774) (with the exception of the life of Paul I). See Gasparri, *Italia longobarda*, pp. 154-160.

¹⁶ LP, I, pp. 495-496. The story of Hildebrand appointed duke by Hadrian I is presented in Gasparri, *Il ducato longobardo di Spoleto*, pp. 112-114. Costambeys is very critical about the veracity of the information, which in his opinion was completely manipulated. See Costambeys, *Power and Patronage*, pp. 301-302.

¹⁷ LP, I, p. 498. The life of Hadrian I is the only source of the territorial claims of the Church of Rome – neither the diploma of Charlemagne (774) nor the *promissio Carisiaca* of Pippin (754) have reached us. The contents were partly included in the interpolated *pactum Hludovicianum*, a diploma issued by Louis the Pious to Paschal I (817). On the pact and further territorial confirmations see Stengel, *Die Entwicklung des Kaiserprivilegs für die römische Kirche*.

¹⁸ Biographies of eighth-century popes are especially intended for a Carolingian readership. This is well demonstrated by Verardi, *The Liber Pontificalis in the age of Charlemagne*.

na, the provinces of Venetia, Istria and the Duchies of Spoleto and Benevento (as well as Corsica) – the life of Hadrian I changes completely in its tone: the historical account comes to an end, whereas the biography is reduced to a list of donations made by Hadrian to Roman churches, his restoration projects and administrative initiatives¹⁹.

Such an interruption of the historical account is not limited to the second part of the life of Hadrian I. Later lives, except for that of Leo III, are almost devoid of consistent historical accounts, at least until the life of Sergius II (844-847). This marks a clear change of course, coinciding with the presentation, however simplified, of an important territorial expansion project that claimed to be validated by official documents but which – as we know from other sources – was completely disregarded.

The possible reasons for the silence of papal biographers after 774 are a topic of debate. What is clear is that the *Liber pontificalis* no longer seems to be the place to preserve the memory of the territorial achievements or alleged achievements of the Roman Church. There is no evidence, for example, of the negotiations for the political control of Sabina, a priority topic in the correspondence between Hadrian I and Charlemagne between 774 and 781, nor of the related conflicts with the abbey of Farfa, resolved in favour of the latter by Louis the Pious and Lothar in the first decades of the ninth century²⁰.

3. *The life of Paschal I (817-824): the space of the donations*

We now turn to an analysis of the biography of Paschal I. Only through non-Roman sources do we know that Paschal I had rather sustained international relations with both the Frankish and the Byzantine world. His policy also caused tensions within the Roman urban society involving the highest members of the Lateran administration²¹. All this is omitted in the biography; there is no mention even of Lothar's coronation in Rome (823) nor – and this is even more surprising – of the so-called *pactum Hludowicianum*, which is the diploma that Louis the Pious issued in favour of the newly-elected Paschal. In that diploma, the «provinces, urbes et civitates, oppida atque castella, viculos ac territoria simulque et patrimonia» – located in the Roman duchy, in Roman and Lombard Tuscia, in Campania (the historical region that coincides with southern Latium) and in Sabina²² – were placed under papal jurisdiction (with the expression in «iure, principatu atque ditone»).

¹⁹ According to L. Duchesne, the second part of the life was written in later editions, drawing on and selecting information from the registers of the papal *vestiarium*, while the first part is considered as completed in 774: LP, I, pp. CCXXXIV-CCXLV.

²⁰ On papal control over Sabina and the tensions with Farfa, see Marazzi, *Un laboratorio della dialettica*.

²¹ On Paschal I, Delogu, *Profilo di Pasquale I*.

²² MGH, DD LdF, n. 125, pp. 312-320.

The life of Paschal has been supposed to be an institutional “narrative”, written under the influence of the officials involved in the revolt against the pontiff. In order to avoid inevitable negative judgments on Paschal I, his life would therefore have been drawn up with an emphasis on his munificence, and thus by selecting data from the records of the *vestiarium*, the office in charge of managing the papal treasure²³. The hypothesis is entirely sustainable²⁴. Nonetheless, the absence of any mention of the *pactum Hludovicianum* seems strange, especially considering the space that the account of Charlemagne’s donation occupies in Hadrian I’s life. Moreover, it is certain that the archives of the Roman Church included a copy of the *pactum Hludovicianum*, clearly because it was recognised as having great founding value, but it did not reappear until the eleventh century, undoubtedly interpolated (after being incorporated) into the *Collectio canonum* drafted by Cardinal Deusdedit. Maybe the text read at the Lateran in 817 was different from the interpolated one that has survived to this day, and did not meet the territorial expectations of Paschal and his closest collaborators? Or was it a deliberate choice not to make public those documents that set boundaries claiming to be still subject to negotiation? Unfortunately, this question is destined to remain unsolved, not least because the original contents of the *pactum* remain hypothetical.

It seems, therefore, that the life of Paschal I is the least appropriate source to add useful elements to the issue of the extent of a papal territory still being defined. The biography, in fact, appears as a list of news on the building activities and donations ordered by the pontiff for the benefit of the Roman basilicas, structured in editorial blocks that follow the indictional cycle²⁵. Therefore, the sphere of action of Paschal I is made out to be the city, both urban and suburban.

However, I would like to focus on a few reports in the life, which are usually barely mentioned by scholars, but which are interesting for my purpose. In the list of churches receiving gifts from the treasury, kept at the *vestiarium*, there are at least three non-Roman (i.e. non-urban) cases that are worth reflecting on.

The first information concerns the donation of a chalice and paten of great value to the church of St. Peter in Centumcellae (Civitavecchia)²⁶. This report can be related to a specific context: the embassy to the Franks in 821, led by Bishop Peter of Civitavecchia and the *nomenclator* Leo²⁷. The memory of Paschal’s donation would thus testify to a special relationship of the Church of Rome with the Church of Civitavecchia. However, it also confirms a strong

²³ On the writing process of the papal biographies, see among others Geertman, *Documenti, redattori*; Bougard, *Composition, diffusion* and more generally McKitterick, *Rome and the Invention of the Papacy*, pp. 1-19.

²⁴ Verardi, *Il papato alla prova dell'impero*, pp. 28-29.

²⁵ In detail, Ballardini, *Dai gesta di Pasquale I secondo il Liber pontificalis*.

²⁶ LP, II, p. 59 (indiction 821-822).

²⁷ See MGH, ARF, p. 155.

connection of the papacy with the centre: in the life of Gregory III (731-741), we read that the pope had the collapsed walls of Civitavecchia raised²⁸; and in a letter from Hadrian I addressed to Charlemagne in 776, we read that the pontiff, in order to combat the plague of merchants known as *Graeci*, who traded in Christian slaves, did not hesitate to have their ships anchored «in portu civitatis nostrae Centumcellensium» set on fire²⁹.

The news of the special donation to the church of Civitavecchia is not neutral: the centre and its church are included, improperly but functionally, in a network of exclusively “Roman” beneficiary institutions, created by the munificent action of the pope, to reaffirm the “Romanity” of the precious maritime port of Civitavecchia, located on the border between Roman and Lombard Tuscia.

Even more interesting are the other two examples of non-Roman donations: not surprisingly, they are both connected with the controversial territory of Sabina. The first concerns a large donation of precious textiles to adorn the church of the monastery of San Salvatore Maggiore, located – it is explicitly stated in the source – «in territorio Reatino»³⁰. The monastery, like Farfa, founded by the Lombards and benefiting from immunity by Charlemagne, is already mentioned in the *Liber pontificalis* as the place where the powerful primicerius Christopher, protagonist of the troubled election of Pope Stephen III (768-772), was supposed to have retired³¹.

The other report, placed before the traditional close of life, concerns the donation of a valuable *vestes* to the church of Santa Maria in Vescovio in Sabina, the very seat of the episcopal church of Sabina³².

The two reports betray the great attention Paschal I paid to the Sabina region. However, the biographers do not explain the circumstances of such extraordinary donations which, in a forceful but symbolic way, juxtapose the Sabine episcopal church and the Lombard monastery of San Salvatore Maggiore with the Roman churches.

It is evident that we are in the context of an intense dispute with the abbe of Farfa, as the Farfa documents testify. Unfortunately, the compilers of the life of Paschal do not go any further; their objective, deliberate and not accidental, is to leave a trace of papal action on the territory of Sabina in its broadest sense. This may have been the manifestation of a certain intolerance with respect to the *terminatio*, set in 781 by Charlemagne’s legates, the abbots Itherius and Magenarius, between the Roman and Lombard Sabina (that of Rieti, which remained part of the Duchy of Spoleto) of which Hadrian I wrote

²⁸ LP, I, p. 421. On Gregory III, Delogu, *Gregorio III*.

²⁹ MGH, Epp. III, ep. 59, p. 585; Gasparri, *I mercanti nell’Italia longobarda e carolingia*, p. 42.

³⁰ LP, II, p. 59 (indiction 820-821).

³¹ LP, II, p. 63 (indiction 823-824).

³² LP, II, p. 63 (indiction 823-824).

to Charlemagne,³³ and besides, a *terminatio* specifically reiterated and described in detail in the *pactum Hludowicianum*³⁴.

In conclusion, in the life of Paschal I we identify information that goes beyond the dominant narrative strategy, typical of the lives following that of Hadrian I, which assumes the action of the pontiff to be entirely Roman-centric. Through the instrument of extraordinary donations, we step out of the urban context to identify beneficiary agents located on an alleged northern border which was particularly disputed during the pontificate of Paschal I.

4. *Sergius II, first and second redaction: the space of invasions (and that of avidity)*

We now proceed to the life of Sergius II (844-847), clearly different from those preceding it. Indeed, the text, at least in the first part, is characterised by historical narration. The editors of the life provide an extensive account of the expedition to Rome of Louis II, sent by Lothar to investigate the legitimacy of the election of Sergius II, the council organised to judge the pontiff, then the coronation of Louis II as king of the Lombards and, finally, the oath sworn by the Romans to the Emperor Lothar³⁵. After the historical section follows the information on the special donations that the pontiff made to the churches, deaconships and monasteries of Rome.

The narrative of the expedition of Louis II is useful for our purpose. The journey to Rome of a ruler or emperor, with either peaceful or hostile intentions, is a recurring theme in the *Liber pontificalis* and a somewhat standardised one, according to a precise rituality that takes place in both urban and extra-urban space. The hostile arrival of Louis II in 844 recalls the arrival of Charlemagne in Rome at Easter 774, as described in the life of Hadrian I³⁶. Starting from Pavia, Charlemagne crosses the districts of Tuscia and then encounters the *Roman iudices*, sent by the pontiff, thirty miles away; one mile from the city, the *scholae* of the Roman militia and the crowd acclaiming him as an exarch or patriarch, and finally, the pontiff, at the top of the stairs of St. Peter's, with whom he moves inside the basilica to the *confessio* of St. Peter's, the final stage of the journey. The interesting thing is that, before the meeting

³³ MGH, Epp. III, ep. 69, p. 599 (May-September 781); on *terminatio* in Sabina, Toubert, *Les structures du Latium*, II, pp. 942-943. Gasparri, *La frontiera in Italia*.

³⁴ MGH, DD LdF, n. 125, p. 317-318: «Eodem modo territorium Sabinense, sicut a genitore nostro Karolo imperatore beato Petro apostolo per donationis scriptum concessum est sub integritate, quemadmodum ab Itherio et Magenariorum abbatibus, missis illius, inter idem territorium Sabinense atque Reatinum definitum est». This insertion was removed from the text of the *privilegium Ottonianum* (962).

³⁵ This report in LP, II, pp. 87-89.

³⁶ On the *adventus* of Charlemagne in Rome, see LP, I, pp. 496-497. On the stages in the *adventus* of Charlemagne in 774 and Louis II in 844, compared to those of Berengar in 915 (in the *Gesta Berengarii*), see Bougard, *Le couronnement*, pp. 336-341.

at thirty miles, a frontier enabling the Roman officials to probe Charlemagne's intentions, the information about the crossing of Tuscia is completely neutral. However, in the case of Louis II's journey, we are faced with a different situation³⁷. Louis' army does not have a starting point but enters *in oras Bononiae civitatis* and, from there, proceeds to devastate the territory by perpetrating violence on the inhabitants of the city and the countryside³⁸ after he meets the Roman *iudices* sent by the pontiff nine miles from the city, and again one mile away, the *scholae* of the Roman militia; Louis II is greeted by the pontiff at the top of the stairs of St. Peter's Basilica and then the two of them cross the gates together to reach St. Peter's *confessio*. What is interesting here is the fact that the *adventus* of Louis is represented as a punitive military expedition; in this context, the editors of the life describe the episodes of violence resulting from the violation of a real political frontier that is claimed to coincide with the *civitas* of Bologna.

Bologna is never mentioned in the lives of the popes prior to Sergius II but is explicitly mentioned in the *pactum Hludovicianum* among the *civitates* of the Exarchate of Ravenna returned to papal authority³⁹. Furthermore, Bologna appears several times in the *Codex epistolaris Carolinus*, especially in reference to the alleged plots, denounced by Pope Hadrian I to Charlemagne, hatched by the Archbishop of Ravenna Leo to gain control of the cities of Emilia, particularly Bologna and Imola⁴⁰. It is important to point out that, for the first time in the life of Sergius II, Bologna is mentioned as a *civitas* marking a supposed frontier between the *regnum Italiae* and papal political lands. It is therefore the narrative of an expedition/invasion that generates the evocation/creation of a frontier.

There is also a second version of the life of Sergius II, the so-called Farnesian version probably written during the pontificate of his successor, Leo IV⁴¹. This second text offers an original narrative section regarding the alleged misrule of Pope Sergius II and his brother Benedict, and the Saracen invasion culminating in the sack of St. Peter's Basilica⁴². Once again, the account of the invasion provides territorial consistency to papal dominion, the *respublica* as it is defined, which is no longer just a city but a political territory violated and plundered⁴³. In addition to the island of Corsica, ruled by Count Adalbert, who restrained the Saracen threat on behalf of Rome (it should be recalled that Corsica was among the territories promised and/or granted by Pepin, Charlemagne and Louis the Pious to the popes), the text refers to a generic network of *subiectae civitates* suffering the Saracen threat; the *litus*,

³⁷ On the expedition of Louis II to Italy see Gantner, *A King in Training?* and Noble, *Talking about the Carolingians*, pp. 27-34.

³⁸ LP, II, p. 87.

³⁹ MGH, DD LdF, no. 125, p. 317.

⁴⁰ *Codex carolinus*, ep. 49, p. 568; see Savigni, *I papi e Ravenna*, p. 336.

⁴¹ See Betti, *The Two Versions*.

⁴² Published in LP, II, pp. 97-101.

⁴³ LP, II, p. 99.

i.e. the coast near the *civitas* of Ostia, is specified as “Roman”; the cities of Ostia and Porto, which the Romans, together with the *scholae* of the Saxons and Frisians, tried to recover in vain, are considered Roman as well. Thus, the Saracen invasion sheds light especially on the space affected by the military operations put in place, belatedly, to deal with the raids that preceded the attack on the Roman basilicas outside the walls.

A generic territorial consistency is also mentioned several times in the previous section, dedicated to the misrule of the pontiff and his brother Benedict. The editors denounce the forced expropriations of the properties of both monasteries and private individuals, *aut infra Romam aut extra*. «Extra Romam» is the papal territory, deprived of its riches due to the greed of the pontiff's brother: it is a vast *spatium* containing *urbes illi subditas et castella et maritima et finitiva illorum*. The spatial dimension that characterises the Farnesian version of the life of Sergius II is further developed in the life of Leo IV.

5. *Leo IV (847-855): a territory to be defined*

The life of Leo IV contains more articulate narratives⁴⁴, interspersed with extensive reports on the restorations and donations to Roman churches⁴⁵.

The traumatic episode of the desecration by the Saracens of the basilicas of Peter and Paul (846) is among the main themes of the life. At each indiction, biographers detail the restoration work, embellishments and lavish donations in favour of St. Peter's that Leo IV provides – it is constantly repeated – to compensate for the outrage suffered by the basilica. This extraordinary munificence does not exhaust the pontiff's action against the Saracens. Biographers also write that Leo IV personally attended to the restoration of Rome's city walls and ensured the protection of the saints over the city by supervising numerous saints' body translations within the city walls. They continue by adding that he was able to withstand a new Saracen attack by sea, intervening in person at the naval battle in front of Ostia that sanctioned the victory of the Neapolitans over the Saracens (848-849); finally, they mainly attribute the credit to Leo IV for the construction of the walls in defence of St. Peter's basilica (*civitas Leonina*).

Leo IV is credited with a very dynamic attitude: he generates city spaces by taking part in building sites and leading ordinary and extraordinary processions. Leo IV is also described on the move outside Rome: this narrative element, original if compared to the lives of his immediate predecessors, serves to emphasise papal jurisdiction over the visited centres. He is also seen in Ostia, praying while the naval battle between the Saracens and the Neapol-

⁴⁴ The theme of the *Patrimonium Petri* in the life of Leo IV in Herbers, *Leo IV.*, pp. 274-296.

⁴⁵ LP, II, pp. 106-133.

itans – sided with the Roman cause – rages: a stratagem to claim victory and to emphasise the Romanity of the coastline threatened by the Saracens.

Along with the news of the battle of Ostia, due to their geographical contiguity, can be connected the more extensive narrative concerning the *civitas* of Porto. As early as 848, the interest of the pope towards the site is confirmed by the news of a rich donation to the church of Santa Ninfa. Around 852, the centre is the subject of a complex manoeuvre hatched by the pontiff: provided with new defensive walls and gates, Porto was ceded, along with a whole series of properties belonging to the Roman Church, to Corsican refugees, chased from their territories by the Saracens, in exchange for full loyalty to the successors of Peter and the Roman people⁴⁶. The episode firstly allows us to portray the pontiff exercising public powers equal to those exercised by the Roman emperors. I also mark the pontiff's interest in the population of an intended "papal" Corsica; and it indicates a desire to rationalise and to control the Roman littoral space through the identification of a centre to which the Apostolic See attributes a special *status* through a *concessio* for the benefit of the newly settled community⁴⁷.

In the life of Leo IV, the pontiff's actions also define part of the northern frontier of the papal dominion by focusing on the border centres between Roman and Lombard Tuscya.

What is interesting here is the episode of the *ex-novo* foundation of the *civitas*, Leopoli-Cencelle, which was supposed to receive refugees from the port of Centumcellae (Civitavecchia), by then in decay, according to biographers, because of continued Saracen raids⁴⁸. The new centre was located in the Tolfa mountains, an inland area, twelve miles from Civitavecchia⁴⁹. The biographers of the life of Leo IV write then that the centre was provided with two churches, to which the pontiff donated liturgical furnishings and books, and with fortified walls and gates. They also report that Leo visited Leopoli-Cencelle and celebrated the dedication of the *civitas* by carrying out a procession along the walls, blessed with holy water (the rite, which took place on 15th August 854, is the same as the one for the dedication of the *Civitas Leonina*). The financial investment on the one hand, and such a symbolic representation on the other, suggest that the new centre was perceived to be crucial in the

⁴⁶ LP, II, pp. 216-217. On the episode Herbers, *Leo IV.*, pp. 246-252; see also Marazzi, *Le città nuove*, p. 268.

⁴⁷ There is an interesting hypothesis suggesting that the choice of Porto was conditioned by the memory of its election to the municipal rank of *Civitas Flavia Constantiniana* by the Emperor Constantine (Marazzi, *I nuovi insediamenti*, p. 268).

⁴⁸ LP, II, pp. 131-132. See Marazzi, *Le città nuove*, pp. 266-267.

⁴⁹ Since 1994, the Sapienza University (Rome) has conducted regular excavation campaigns in the archaeological area of Leopolis-Cencelle. Extremely useful, historical and archaeological summary: Bougard – Pani Ermini, *Leopolis-castrum Centumcellae*.

control of the frontier which separated Roman Tuscia from the former Lombard one, later belonging to the *regnum Italiae*⁵⁰.

The northern border was already the main concern of Leo IV at least two years before the foundation of Leopoli. In fact, the biographers of Leo IV write that between the 27th of June 852 and December 853, the pope financed the renovation of the walls of Orte and Amelia, damaged by the threat of generic *latrones*⁵¹. They also account for the donation of a very precious robe to a church in Blera, a *civitas* that is repeatedly mentioned in the lives of the eight-century popes as a relevant border centre dispute with the Lombards⁵². In conclusion, the life of Leo IV reveals his strong interest in the north-western frontier of papal dominion. This interest is expressed in a variety of ways, through the valorisation of places perceived as frontiers, genuine access points to papal territories. Further confirmation of Leo IV's interest in the north-western frontier can be found in a diploma of the pontiff – lost in its original form and probably a forgery, but handed down in a diploma of Innocent III of 1207 – to Bishop Virobono of Tuscania, in which the boundary line between Roman and Lombard Tuscia is clearly drawn⁵³.

Further traces of a territorial issue beyond the northern frontier can be found, again taking into account the places mentioned in the life, outside the Roman urban space. It is interesting to note the multiple donations for the benefit of Subiaco⁵⁴. The interest, confirmed by the news of Leo IV's journey to Subiaco, mentioned in the *Chronicon Sublacense*, is not motivated in the life. It has been related, however, to the attention the pontiff showed towards the sanctuaries sacked by the Saracens in 846, but also, possibly, to the strategic position of the monastery, located on the eastern border of the papal territorial domination⁵⁵.

Finally, two other donations seem to be associated with the definition of the southern frontier, in the wake of the narrative strategy developed in the life of Paschal I. Generous papal gifts are in fact destined for the churches of the *civitates* of Terracina⁵⁶ and Fondi⁵⁷, which become the last Roman-papal bastions in the south, and will actually be at the centre of the territorial quarrels with Gaeta from the second half of the ninth century⁵⁸. One needs to emphasise here how the biographers, by introducing Terracina and Fondi, betray

⁵⁰ The same applies to Bougard who emphasises the proximity of the Leopolis site on the one hand to the bishopric of Tuscania and on the other to Corneto (Tarquinia) in Bougard – Pani Ermini, *Leopolis-castrum Centumcellae*, p. 132.

⁵¹ LP, II, p. 127.

⁵² LP, II, p. 125.

⁵³ Gasparri, *Le frontiere*. Innocent III's diploma is published by Migne in *Patrologia Latina*, CCXV, col. 1236-1242.

⁵⁴ LP, II, pp. 117, 122.

⁵⁵ Herbers, *Leo IV*, p. 278.

⁵⁶ LP, II, p. 122. Terracina also expresses its strong Roman-papal identity in its graphic culture. See De Luca, *La scrittura curiale*.

⁵⁷ LP, II, p. 12.

⁵⁸ See Toubert, *Les structures du Latium*, pp. 948-950.

the pontiff's interest in political events concerning southern Italy. Moreover, in the same biography, Leo IV is represented as the leader of a coalition of the Tyrrhenian cities of Naples, Amalfi and Gaeta as part of an anti-Saracen fight⁵⁹. The interest of the pontiff is justified by the political context, notably the crisis of the Duchy of Benevento, weakened by civil war; the increasingly widespread Islamic presence; the anti-Saracen military campaigns of the Emperor Louis II leading to the recognition by the Lombards of some kind of political authority of the Carolingians in the South of Italy⁶⁰. It was in fact a favourable context in which to revive the ancient papal claims on the south Lombard territory, strengthened by an initial recognition by Charlemagne⁶¹, though later completely set aside. While the biographers of Leo IV do not hesitate to indicate the last papal centres on the border with the Byzantine Tyrrhenian principalities, it is rather peculiar that they do not mention the possible centres that should define the demarcation line with the Duchy of Benevento. The specific desire not to define an alleged "open" frontier would therefore indicate that, at the turn of the 840s and 850s, Leo IV saw an ideal moment for returning to claim, this time successfully, Benevento and its territory, already promised by Charlemagne to Pope Hadrian I.

6. *Conclusions*

The analysis of the lives of Paschal I, Sergius II and Leo IV allows us to observe the increasingly articulated resumption of a territorial issue that had been interrupted in 774, in the middle of the life of Hadrian I. The inclusion in the pontiffs' biography of a patrimonial-territorial donation by Charlemagne, then openly disregarded, makes papal biographers cautious, preferring to limit the historical narrative to a list of building interventions, restorations, embellishments and gifts by the popes for the benefit of strictly Roman churches and monasteries: a rather restricted city space, protagonist of papal biographies, which is reshaped and re-hierarchized with each pontificate.

From the life of Paschal I onwards, biographers have moved beyond the exclusively Roman-centric dimension, while remaining anchored in the narrative structure of the list of special papal donations. Among the beneficiaries of gifts traditionally offered by the pope to a network of Roman churches and/or monasteries are entities located in the border area of the Roman Tuscia and in the disputed Sabina. In the first version of the life of Sergius II, the historical narrative is immediately an occasion for polemics, in a context of the tension with the Emperor Lothar, and indicating the *civitas* of Bologna as the extreme limit of the papal political dominion. In the second version

⁵⁹ LP, II, pp. 117-118. See also Gantner, *New Visions of Community*.

⁶⁰ See Zornetta, *Italia meridionale longobarda*, pp. 240-246.

⁶¹ Bertolini, *Carlo Magno e Benevento*. Also Zornetta, *Italia meridionale longobarda*, pp. 111-128.

of the life of Sergius II, the Farnesian version, the territorial dimension is very present – that is, *civitates* and territories under papal responsibility are mentioned – but more specific geographical references are completely absent. The only clearly visible space is that of the mouth of the Tiber, theatre of the conflicts with the Saracens in 846.

Finally, the life of Leo IV. Here, again, there is a lack of an organic narrative in which the supposed borders of papal political domination are established. However, it is possible to identify the intent to establish a more precise territorial memory by locating border *civitates* involved in different ways in papal action: the pope founds them; the pope visits them; the pope restores their defensive walls; the pope offers special gifts to their churches. The northern border, the extreme limit of Roman Tuscia, is thus clearly visible, delineated through the identification of new and ancient *civitates*; an eastern frontier is mentioned with the repeated indication of Subiaco, and the southern Tyrrhenian frontier is defined with the *civitates* of Terracina and Fondi. The silence concerning the frontier with the Duchy of Benevento, on the other hand, appears to be strategic. It betrays in fact the aspiration to gain at least part of those *civitates* and territories promised by Charlemagne to Hadrian I, thereby taking advantage of the changed political contingencies.

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