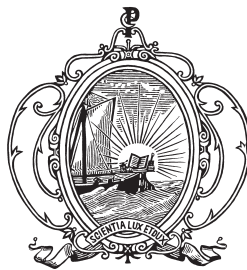


STUDIA PATRISTICA

VOL. LXXI

Including papers presented at the Conferences on
Early Roman Liturgy to 600 (14.11.2009 and 27.02.2010)
at Blackfriars Hall, Oxford, UK

Edited by
J. DAY and M. VINZENT



PEETERS

LEUVEN – PARIS – WALPOLE, MA

2014

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Liturgy and Laity in Late-Antique Rome: Problems, Sources, and Social Dynamics

Mark HUMPHRIES, Swansea, UK

ABSTRACT

That Christianity in late antiquity developed by means of interactions with local cultures and societies has long been understood, but hitherto scholars have only rarely investigated the extent to which such interactions influenced the evolution of the liturgy. This question is particularly urgent for our understanding of the early Roman liturgy because recent decades have witnessed a revolution in what is known about the development of the fabric and society of Rome between antiquity and the middle ages, largely as a result of new archaeological investigations. This renders much earlier work on the social context of the early Roman liturgical developments outdated. The purpose of this paper is to introduce liturgical scholars to the wealth of this new evidence from Rome, to outline how it has sparked a re-evaluation of Roman society between the fourth and seventh centuries, and to suggest ways in which this new knowledge can be brought to bear on efforts to trace the evolution of the early Roman liturgy.

Introduction

According to Jerome, in his famous letter to Eustochium on the correct deportment of females devoting themselves to God, a striking episode occurred sometime in the early 380s at the great basilica of St Peter on the Vatican hill outside Rome.¹ Since this remarkable event is particularly revealing of the use of church spaces by the laity, it bears retelling in some detail. Amid the splendour of the church, a particular ritual was in progress in which the city's rich Christians, attired in splendid clothes and attended by their domestic slaves, distributed alms to their more unfortunate brethren. Among those disbursing gifts was a Roman matron, whom Jerome refuses to name lest he be suspected of writing a satirical attack, but whom he nevertheless describes as the most noble lady in Rome, suggesting that she might easily have been identified by Eustochium. Such distributions of alms were by this date quite routine, but on this particular day something shocking happened: one aged, impoverished, and ragged woman, having received one gift of alms from the *grande dame* had the

¹ For the date of the letter (383/384), see J.N.D. Kelly, *Jerome. His Life, Writings, and Controversies* (London, 1975), 100-1.

temerity to rejoin the queue seeking a second disbursement of charity. The action was too much for the Roman matron to bear: across the basilica, the sound of a slap rang out, and the ragged pauper sprawled bloodied on the pavement.² This anecdote presents us with a surprising image of St Peter's in late antiquity, for whatever else we might imagine the basilica in the late-fourth century to have been, it is hardly as a venue for violent confrontations between the destitute and the rich.

The purpose of this article is to explore the wider context of the episode narrated by Jerome by offering commentary on the activities of the laity in Rome's late-antique churches. While the fracas between the matron and the beggar is likely an extreme example, it nevertheless suggests that the spaces inside the city's churches were ones into which urban social dynamics intruded, and where displays of social status were as prominently displayed as they were in other parts of the city, such as its public spaces and within aristocratic houses.³ In other words, churches like St Peter's were venues not only for the celebration of liturgical ceremonial, but also places where the grubby reality of social life could be acted out too. Since it is precisely in the understanding of social dynamics that our knowledge of Roman society in late antiquity has progressed remarkably in the last twenty years, it is hoped that this contribution will provide liturgical scholars with insights into the social context – or, better, plural contexts – in which the liturgy of the Roman Church developed.

The analysis will proceed along the following lines. It will begin (§I) by sketching significant ways in which our understanding of the social history of late-antique Rome has been revolutionised in recent decades, particularly through the discovery and analysis of a wealth of new archaeological data. As a result, we now have an immeasurably more nuanced picture of the metropolitan milieu amid which the Roman Church's liturgy will have developed. In an effort to argue for the relevance of such advances for liturgical scholarship, the next section (§II) will summarise insights that can be derived from the analysis of cities other than Rome, and which suggest that the social context of the liturgy, and particularly what can be deduced about the role of the laity, is a line of investigation worth pursuing. As §III will show, however, this is a difficult task to undertake for Rome itself on account of the nature of the sources for the Roman liturgy up to *circa* 600 and their often opaque nature

² Jerome, *Ep.* 22.32: '*Vidi nuper – nomina taceo, ne saturam putes – nobilissimam mulierum Romanarum in basilica beati Petri semiviris antecedentibus propria manu, quo religiosior putaretur, singulos nummos dispertire pauperibus. Interea – ut usu nosse perfacile est – anus quaedam annis pannisque obsita praecurrit, ut alterum nummum acciperet; ad quam cum ordine pervenisset, pugnis porrigitur pro denario et tanti criminis reus sanguis effunditur.*' For discussion, see R. Finn, *Almsgiving in the Later Roman Empire. Christian Promotion and Practice, 313-450* (Oxford, 2006), 205-14, esp. 206-7 on the episode described by Jerome.

³ A classic description, roughly contemporaneous with Jerome's letter, is provided by the historian Ammianus Marcellinus 14.6 and 28.4.

when it comes to investigating the role of the laity. The next section (§IV) will argue nevertheless that the revised understanding of the social dynamics of late-antique Rome can be seen in various ways to provide an essential context for our picture of the evolution of the Roman *ecclesia* and its ceremonial in the centuries between the reign of the emperor Constantine at the beginning of the fourth century and the pontificate of Gregory the Great at the turn of the sixth and seventh. On the basis of this understanding, the final part of the article (§V) ventures to provide an outline of the ways in which the grand spaces of the city's basilicas provided a stage on which was played out, not only great liturgical ceremonial, but also various social dramas. This article makes no pretensions to provide a comprehensive analysis of lay involvement in the liturgy of late-antique Rome; that would be beyond its scope. Rather, it aims chiefly to offer a set of questions and suggested approaches that liturgical scholars may find useful in their continuing analysis and re-evaluation of the Roman liturgy at a crucial stage of its evolution.⁴

I. Late-antique Rome: New Evidence, New Approaches

In beginning with new approaches to, especially, the archaeology of Rome in late antiquity, I do not want to suggest that liturgical scholars have ignored completely this physical context for the liturgy. Far from it, some central contributions have been sensitive to the possibilities it offers. Consider, for instance, Thomas Mathews' classic elucidation of the *Ordo Romanus Primus* in the light of observable chancel arrangements in Rome's early medieval churches; or John Baldovin's tracing of the history of the city's stational liturgy, which aims to see it in the context of the physical fabric of the city; or, even more recently, Alan Doig's expert analysis of the physical spaces of Rome's late-antique churches as the stages upon which the mighty drama of the liturgy was performed.⁵ Even so, it seems to me that liturgical scholarship has not necessarily kept pace with the profound changes that have overcome our understanding of late-antique Rome since about 1990 – for that period has witnessed nothing less than a revolution in terms of the frameworks within which the city's physical and historical development in late antiquity has come to be understood.

⁴ Similarly, the notes are designed to direct liturgists towards the most important recent studies of late-antique Rome.

⁵ T.F. Mathews, 'An Early Roman Chancel Arrangement and its Liturgical Function', *RivAC* 38 (1962), 73-95; J.F. Baldovin, *The Urban Character of Christian Worship: The Origins, Development and Meaning of Stational Liturgy*, OCA 228 (Rome, 1987), 143-66; A. Doig, *Liturgy and Architecture: from the Early Church to the Middle Ages* (Aldershot, 2008), 23-7, 28-9, 37-44, 85-94; note also the wide-ranging analysis of J.H. Kilde, *Sacred Power, Sacred Space: An Introduction to Christian Architecture and Worship* (New York and Oxford, 2008), esp. 47-52.

To set these changes in context, let me present in outline the customary character of depictions of late antique Rome before that revolution. Some sense of their general tendency can be deduced from the following summary of the situation, offered in 1961 by Richard Krautheimer, that doyen of scholarship of the transition from ancient to medieval Rome. Krautheimer was making his remark in the context of describing architectural endeavours under pope Xystus III (432-440), and it is cited here because it exemplifies an influential scholarly tendency, as is witnessed by the fact that it has been quoted with approbation by later scholars. The sketch of Xystus' Rome offered by Krautheimer runs as follows:

The Empire in the West had collapsed. The emperor in Ravenna was a mere shadow. The Eastern emperor, powerful though he was, was distant and uninterested. The Roman aristocracy, pagan to the last, was gone as a political force. The only power left in Rome was the papacy.⁶

In brief, studies of the development of Rome in late antiquity (and particularly of the fifth century) have regarded it as the period in which the Roman Church came to exercise complete dominance over metropolitan society.⁷

That they should do so is perfectly comprehensible for a number of reasons. The fifth century witnessed, after all, significant traumatic events at Rome such as its sack by the Goths in 410 and the Vandals in 455: these are episodes that have been taken as emblematic not only of the demise of the ancient city, but also of its Empire. In addition to mapping so apparently neatly onto the history of events, the traditional interpretation of Rome's evolution can be explained also by consideration of the nature of the sources upon which it depends. In terms of written evidence, reconstructions of Rome in the fourth and early-fifth century could depend on secular, classicising accounts such as the letters of the senator Symmachus or historical narratives such as those found in the surviving books of Ammianus Marcellinus or in the extensive fragments of Olympiodorus of Thebes. By the time we move into the middle decades of the fifth century and beyond, however, we become much more dependent (if not exclusively so: texts such as Cassiodorus' *Variae* and Procopius' *Wars* tell us a great deal) on ecclesiastical writings, such as papal letters and sermons or the *Liber Pontificalis*. Up until the 1990s, a similar tale might have been deduced from the physical fabric of late-antique and early medieval Rome, knowledge

⁶ Richard Krautheimer, 'The Architecture of Sixtus III: A Fifth-Century Renaissance?', in M. Meiss (ed.), *De Artibus Opuscula XL. Essays in Honor of Erwin Panofsky*, 2 vols. (New York, 1961), I 291-302, 301; similar views can be found in a number of Krautheimer's later works, such as *Three Christian Capitals: Topography and Politics* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1983), and *Rome, Profile of a City 312-1308* (Princeton, 1980). For a later endorsement, see M.R. Miles, 'Santa Maria Maggiore's Fifth-Century Mosaics: Triumphal Christianity and the Jews', *HTR* 86 (1993), 155-75, 155, citing Krautheimer's 1961 assessment as authoritative.

⁷ Compare, for example, W. Ullmann, *A Short History of the Papacy in the Middle Ages* (London, 1972), 16-27, explaining the dominance of the papacy as a consequence of imperial weakness.

of which was dominated by the construction of major basilicas, such as, in the fifth century, Santa Sabina or Santa Maria Maggiore.⁸ The latter was one of those signal contributions to Rome's developing ecclesiastical topography erected under Pope Xystus III, to which Krautheimer devoted his analytical powers in his 1961 study. It occupied a commanding position on the Esquiline hill, in a region hitherto mainly occupied by gardens (*horti*) and devoid of major monuments of the imperial age.⁹ The basilica's massive proportions and luxurious mosaics speak volumes about the economic resources of the Roman Church under Xystus.¹⁰ Moreover, it seems to speak also of the increasingly dominant leadership role of the Church in Roman society. In the midst of the mosaics on the triumphal arch that rose within the basilica over the altar sanctuary was an inscription facing down the nave of the church that recorded its dedication, XYSTVS EPISCOPVS PLEBI DEI ('bishop Xystus to the people of God').¹¹ Santa Maria Maggiore thus stands at the head of a number of churches where the bishop of Rome appears alone as the dominant earthly figure, much as Felix IV (526-530) does in the apse of SS. Cosmas and Damian or, even more emphatically, Paschal I (817-824) in a series of churches such as Santa Prassede, Santa Cecilia in Trastevere, and Santa Maria in Domnica.¹² The evidence of churches like those built by Xystus seemed to affirm the dominant position of the papacy in fifth-century Rome and to present a persuasive picture of what Krautheimer and others surmised to have been a fairly rapid eclipse of secular, classical, imperial Rome by its Christian, medieval, papal successor.

With the benefit of hindsight, this now seems a rather naïve interpretation. That this should be so results from the astonishing insights to Rome's development provided by a rich seam of archaeological evidence quarried at Rome over the last two decades, which has fundamentally altered our understanding of the city's development of Rome in the transition from antiquity to the Middle Ages.¹³ Given the constraints of space, however, a few examples will have to stand as exemplary of a much wider set of contributions.

⁸ The tendency to focus attention on church architecture persists: H. Brandenburg, *Ancient Churches of Rome from the Fourth to the Seventh Century*, Bibliothèque de l'Antiquité Tardive 8 (Turnhout, 2004), an outstanding and richly illustrated account.

⁹ R. Volpe, 'Il suburbia', in A. Giardina (ed.), *Roma antica* (Rome and Bari, 2000), 183-210, 199-200; also L. Richardson, jr., *A New Topographical Dictionary of Ancient Rome* (Baltimore, 1992), 195-204 *passim* for the various *horti*.

¹⁰ F. Marazzi, 'Rome in Transition: Economic and Political Change in the Fourth and Fifth Centuries', in J. Smith (ed.), *Early Medieval Rome and the Christian West. Essays in Honour of Donald A. Bullough*, The Medieval Mediterranean 28 (Leiden, 2000), 21-41, 35-6.

¹¹ A.M. Yasin, *Saints and Church Spaces in the Late Antique Mediterranean. Architecture, Cult, and Community* (Cambridge, 2009), 131-2.

¹² C.J. Goodson, *The Rome of Pope Paschal I: Papal Power, Urban Renovation, Church Rebuilding and Relic Translation, 817-824* (Cambridge, 2010), 52-3, 149-58.

¹³ For critiques of the 'Krautheimer thesis', see M. Humphries, 'From Emperor to Pope?' (2007), 21-6, and C.J. Goodson, *Rome of Pope Paschal I* (2010), 81-90. For a review of the literature up

Among the most important of the excavations are undoubtedly those at Crypta Balbi in the southern Campus Martius. These afforded not only a view of a continuous slice through the city's history, showing shifting patterns of occupation and usage from antiquity to the modern period, but also yielded a range of stratigraphically datable pottery assemblages that have allowed for more secure chronological interpretations of other excavations in both Rome itself and central Italy generally.¹⁴ In terms of the shifting political topography of Rome, there has been a particularly important set of explorations in the imperial fora, the great public piazzas built to the north of the old Forum Romanum by Julius Caesar (died 44 BC) and a succession of emperors from Augustus (27 BC-AD 14) to Trajan (AD 98-117). These have shown that the development of Rome's monumental centre in late antiquity did not follow a simple, straightforward, and common trajectory of decline, but rather one that was instead altogether more complex and variable. Thus, for example, the Forum of Augustus was already quite dilapidated by about 500, and was even being used as a quarry for building material; by contrast, the adjoining Forum of Trajan seems to have retained its monumental aspect throughout late antiquity (and would continue to do so until its destruction by an earthquake in the ninth century), and several items of evidence – such as statue bases for imperial grandees and evidence for the posting of imperial laws there – suggest it remained a major focus of activity in the public life of the city even while adjacent buildings were allowed to fall into disrepair.¹⁵

Yet it is not only the case that these excavations have yielded new evidence demanding interpretation: rather, by providing a radically different picture of our understanding of what the city of Rome looked like in late antiquity, such discoveries have encouraged a wholesale reassessment of other sources to which historians have long had access, and, with that, a significant reappraisal of the city's evolution in this crucial period. Clearly the picture formerly posited of a sudden and catastrophic collapse of the city's secular institutions and fabric now needs to be moderated, to allow for significant continuities alongside some striking instances of decay. So too, in terms of social dynamics, we are now able to construct a picture that allows more room for the activities of

to 2000, see M. Humphries, 'Constantine, Christianity, and Rome', *Hermathena* 171 (2001 [2003]), 47-63. Since then, the most important contributions include R. Meneghini and R. Santangeli Valenzani, *Roma nell'altomedioevo. Topografia e urbanistica della città dal V al X secolo* (Rome, 2004); K. Cooper and J. Hillner (eds), *Religion, Dynasty, and Patronage in Early Christian Rome, 300-900* (Cambridge, 2007); L. Grig and G. Kelly (eds), *Two Romes: Rome and Constantinople in Late Antiquity* (New York, 2012). The most stunning presentation of this new evidence remains the sumptuously illustrated exhibition catalogue S. Ensoli and E. La Rocca (eds), *Aurea Roma. Dalla città pagana alla città cristiana* (Rome, 2000).

¹⁴ D. Manacorda, *Crypta Balbi. Archeologia e storia di un paesaggio urbano* (Milan, 2001).

¹⁵ A thorough account of the excavations in the fora can be found in R. Meneghini and R. Santangeli Valenzani, *Roma nell'alto medioevo* (2004), 175-88.

the laity, and of traditional secular elites in particular (because it is their activities that leave the most prominent traces in the archaeological and documentary record), in the life of the metropolis.¹⁶ Few (if any) scholars would still today view Rome after 400 as a city devoid of an imperial presence and consequently in greater thrall to the church. On the contrary, this was a period when the imperial presence was asserted there with renewed vigour and frequency.¹⁷ Beginning slowly under Honorius (395-423), this process reached a crescendo under his successor Valentinian III (425-455), who spent over a quarter of his long reign in Rome, and for much of the last fifteen of his years on the throne was to be found mainly at the old imperial capital.¹⁸ This presence was certainly matched by a vigorous contribution to Rome's topography, for example, the list of donations by Valentinian and his family to the Roman Church in the *Liber Pontificalis* is the largest for any emperor after Constantine. But Valentinian's building work may have included something other than the by now customary patronage of churches by Christian emperors. Excavations by the École Française at Villa Medici on Colle Pincio, overlooking the northern Campus Martius, have revealed remains of a large palatial building built, as a brick stamp recovered at the site indicates, by the state. A palace under imperial ownership in this area of Rome is known from a variety of late-fifth- and sixth-century texts, such as Cassiodorus and Procopius. The excavators speculated that the property came into imperial ownership after the sack of Rome by the Goths in 410 and that the palace was constructed under Honorius; but given that Honorius' presence in the city was rather meagre, it is just possible that the construction was in fact initiated under Valentinian III.

Moreover, side by side with this renewed imperial interest in the city, we can see the continuing vitality of traditional sectors of Roman society, such as the city's senatorial aristocracy. These two trends are neatly exemplified by the fate on one of Rome's most iconic buildings, but one that seems somehow irrelevant to an image of the late-antique city that stresses the priority of ecclesiastical institutions and construction, and that is the Colosseum. Its inscriptions reveal that it remained an important focus of activity through the fifth century.¹⁹ A palimpsest of monumental texts carved onto the interior face of the balustrade that faces out over the arena record a number of renovations of the amphitheatre

¹⁶ C. Machado, *Urban Space and Power in Late Antique Rome*, DPhil thesis (Oxford, 2006).

¹⁷ A. Gillett, 'Rome, Ravenna, and the Last Western Emperors', *Papers of the British School at Rome* 69 (2001), 131-67; M. McEvoy, 'Rome and the Transformation of the Imperial Office in the late Fourth – mid-Fifth Centuries A.D.', *Papers of the British School at Rome* 78 (2010), 151-92.

¹⁸ For what follows, see the detailed analysis (and citation of sources) in M. Humphries, 'The City of Rome and Valentinian III (425-455). Patronage, Politics, Power', in L. Grig and G. Kelly (eds), *Two Romes* (2012), 161-82.

¹⁹ These texts are now available in a major new edition: S. Orlandi, *Roma. Anfiteatri e strutture annesses con una nuova edizione e commento delle iscrizioni del Colosseo*, Epigrafia anfiteatrale dell'Occidente Romano VI = Vetera 15 (Rome, 2004).

under Honorius and Valentinian III.²⁰ The upper face of the blocks making up this balustrade was also inscribed with texts marking the seating positions of senatorial aristocrats.²¹ This and other evidence, much of it relating to the building of private properties, reveals that the senate, once regarded, like the emperor, as a spent force, remained extremely active in Rome at precisely the same time as popes like Xystus III were building churches.²² Moreover, such concerns can be seen to have survived even after Italy ceased to be ruled by the emperor. Another inscription from the Colosseum (actually there are three surviving copies of it) shows that the building was restored again by Decimus Marius Venantius Basilius, who was consul in 484, eight years after the deposition of Romulus Augustulus (475-476), the last emperor to rule in Italy. The inscription mentions explicitly that this was done at Venantius' own expense (*sum[p]to proprio*).²³ Even at this late stage, the sorts of concerns that had motivated countless patrons to expend their private wealth to the benefit of their cities throughout the classical era were still moving men like Decimus Marius Venantius Basilius.²⁴

In sum, the image now yielded from such considerations seriously calls into question the usual assumption that late antiquity at Rome saw the institutions of non-Christian, secular society stultifying rapidly while institutional Christianity effortlessly slipped into the vacuum thereby created. But what implications does this have for our efforts to understand liturgical development? As will be seen presently, the evidence for lay involvement in the Roman liturgy is perhaps not as voluminous and explicit on such matters as we might wish it to be. Before proceeding further, therefore, let me briefly review some telling evidence from other centres in the Empire that might highlight questions we can use to interrogate what Roman evidence there is.

II. Liturgy in Late Antique Urban and Social Contexts

The case of Decimus Marius Venantius Basilius is by no means unique: a wealth of evidence indicates that the populations of late antique cities were as conscious of their honour and status as their predecessors had been in the early imperial era. For countless bishops around the Empire, this presented a problem,

²⁰ S. Orlandi, *Iscrizioni del Colosseo* (2004), 57-159.

²¹ For a convenient list of identifiable individuals, see S. Orlandi, *Iscrizioni del Colosseo* (2004), 568-9.

²² C. Machado, *Urban Space and Power* (2006).

²³ S. Orlandi, *Iscrizioni del Colosseo* (2004), 51-6.

²⁴ For the continuity and change of classical patterns of patronage under the new Christian dispensation, see, on matters of architectural sponsorship, B. Ward-Perkins, *From Classical Antiquity to the Middle Ages. Urban Public Building in Northern and Central Italy A.D. 300-850* (Oxford, 1984), and A.M. Yasin, *Saints and Church Spaces* (2009), esp. 101-50. For wider considerations of social behaviour, see R. Finn, *Almsgiving* (2006), *passim*, but esp. 221-57 on the tensions between classical antecedents and Christian practice.

for all too often such status concerns intruded into their basilicas and could present a distraction to the celebration of the liturgy.²⁵ They fulminated against such displays repeatedly, but perhaps so repeatedly as to suggest that they were being confronted with practices that they could do little to check. A particularly fine example of their objections can be found in the eloquent diatribes of John Chrysostom (c. 347-407), active at Antioch and Constantinople in the late-fourth century and the early fifth. Both were cities with wealthy elites competing for status, for example through splendid houses, attendance at circus games, and participation in civic life and imperial politics.²⁶ But their thirst for competition spilled over into the church, provoking from John a memorable tirade:

Has a rich man entered here, or a rich woman? She does not think about how to listen to the words of God but rather how to display herself ... how she can surpass other women in the costliness of her clothes. ... Indeed, her whole preoccupation is, 'didn't that woman see me? Surely she admired me? Isn't my beauty handsomely set off?'²⁷

But John's most scathing criticism was reserved for the arrogance of men:

In just the same way the rich man enters [the church], displaying himself to the poor man, instilling awe in him with his sartorial equipment, and his many slaves surrounding him to shoo away the crowd. ... Indeed, he considers that because he has come to church, he has graced us and the people – and perhaps even God.²⁸

Here we see modes of lay behaviour in church that closely resemble those of the anonymous Roman matron at St Peter's described by Jerome. Such episodes demonstrate that the liturgy occurred amidst a context in which traditional displays of secular status continued to be made. In some places, however, such concerns for status display were, of necessity, incorporated into the liturgical arrangements of churches. Thus, for instance, at Constantinople the liturgical space within the emperor Justinian's (527-565) great church of Hagia Sophia was arranged not only to accommodate ecclesiastical personnel, but also was one where special zones were reserved for the attendance of the emperor.²⁹ In such ways, the structure of society could come to be enshrined within the structure of the church and the liturgy celebrated within it. But this was by no

²⁵ The best study of this phenomenon is R.F. Taft, *Through their Own Eyes. Liturgy as the Byzantines Saw it* (Berkeley, 2006). For the period to A.D. 400, see also R. MacMullen, *The Second Church. Popular Christianity A.D. 200-400* (Atlanta, 2009), esp. 69-89 on Rome.

²⁶ For Chrysostom's engagement with the problems posed by urban culture, see A.M. Hartney, *John Chrysostom and the Transformation of the City* (London, 2004); for a sophisticated analysis of his dealings with Antioch, see J.L. Maxwell, *Christianization and Communication in Late Antiquity. John Chrysostom and his Congregation at Antioch* (Cambridge, 2006), esp. 144-68.

²⁷ Joh. Chrys., *Hom. in 2 Thess.* 3.3.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ R.F. Taft, *Through their Own Eyes* (2006), 47-56. For the archaeology of the liturgical arrangements, see R.J. Mainstone, *Hagia Sophia. Architecture, Structure, and Liturgy in Justinian's Great Church* (London, 1988), 219-35.

means always an easily managed compromise. On occasion, the presence of the emperor and his court could present challenges to bishops that required some form of liturgical response – and even innovation. According to Augustine, for instance, it was during Ambrose of Milan’s noted stand-off in 384 with the heterodox court of the emperor Valentinian II, that liturgical singing in a form practiced in the East was introduced to the greatest city in northern Italy.³⁰

Such instances, though disparate, serve as a reminder that liturgical developments and practices evolved in a context where the interests of the laity constantly impinged on services in church. In some cases, a kind of accommodation could be reached, as at Hagia Sophia in Constantinople. That case is, of course, *sui generis*, a product of Constantinople’s status as the permanent residence of the emperor and his court from the end of the fourth century and with only brief interruptions for another thousand years. Altogether more common are the complaints (of the sort we have seen from Jerome and Chrysostom) about the activities of various ranks of the laity in church, which indicate that the liturgy was performed in a space fraught with tension, where the celebration of the divine mysteries might at any time be intruded upon by the grubby concerns of the here and now. Given that we have seen that lay society was altogether more vibrant in late-antique Rome than was once assumed, can similar tensions be discerned there also?

III. The Situation at Rome: Sources and Problems

Any effort to reconstruct liturgical developments at Rome in a manner analogous to what can be done for other cities such as those just mentioned (and others could be added to the list) soon comes to grief on the shocking paucity of expansive sources for liturgy in the *urbs aeterna* in the period up to *circa* 600. For good reason, James McKinnon, in surveying the available sources for the development of Roman liturgy between Constantine and Gregory, notes the existence of a ‘silence that characterizes the so-called Dark Ages’, since, apart from occasional shafts of light cast by, for example, the sermons of Leo the Great, we are confronted by a lack of detail that contrasts markedly with other major cities.³¹ Indeed, some of our sources are notoriously concise on precisely those matters about which we would wish them to be more detailed. Consider, for instance, the *Liber Pontificalis*, the great sixth-century chronicle of early papal history. Such a text, we might hope, might give details of ceremonial associated with, to take but one example, episcopal elections at Rome – but for

³⁰ Aug., *Conf.* IX 7.15, with N.B. McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan. Church and Court in a Christian Capital* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1994), 225-6.

³¹ J. McKinnon, *The Advent Project. The Later-Seventh-Century Creation of the Roman Mass Proper* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2000), 77-89 (quotation from p. 77).

the most part, our hope in that regard is usually confounded.³² It is indicative of the wider shortcomings of the *Liber Pontificalis* that we learn much less from it about the violent upheavals that attended the disputed papal election between Damasus and Ursinus in 366 than we do from the hostile pen of the pagan historian Ammianus Marcellinus.³³ Indeed, on the whole the contents of the *Liber Pontificalis* are marked by their formulaic character. Liturgical celebrations are mentioned, such as December ordinations; but beyond that the text is, until it was taken up on a grander scale by later continuators, disappointingly brief.

At other times, we need to be sensitive to the agendas of particular sources, even of quite discursive ones, lest we be misled. A striking example comes from the writings of Gregory the Great. In a homily on *Ezekiel*, he famously pronounces what has often been taken at face value as an obituary for classical Rome: asking where was the senate, and where the people, he responds that that the senate is no more and that the people have gone away.³⁴ But Gregory's rhetoric cannot be taken at face value: this was a homily preached in 593, as the armies of the Lombard king Agilulf were bearing down on Rome – precisely the sort of circumstance that encouraged in Gregory a tendency towards apocalyptic analysis.³⁵ In fact, evidence from elsewhere within the corpus of Gregory's writings demonstrates that even at this late stage some of Rome's secular institutions were still functioning, although almost certainly at reduced capacity. On 25 April 603, just ten years after pronouncing his bleak verdict on Rome's fortunes, we find Gregory participating with the senate in the ceremonial arrival at the city of portraits of the Constantinopolitan emperor Phocas (602-610) and his empress Leontia. The portraits were received by pope and senate at the Lateran; the customary acclamations for the emperor's prosperity were chanted; and then the portraits themselves were taken to the old imperial palace on the Palatine hill and deposited in the oratory of St Caesarius.³⁶ Such a detailed account of the intersection of imperial and ecclesiastical ceremonial for late antique Rome is quite rare, but it provides sufficient hints that the rituals of the Roman Church intersected with those of the laity, and that some more searching through the sources might provide further instances.

Such interactions can be demonstrated in several contexts. One example is that the politics of the Roman Church actively involved members of the laity. It was such laypersons who were at the centre of the mob violence that attended

³² For a guide to the problems, see (with references to other bibliography) M. Humphries, 'From Emperor to Pope?' (2006), 26-9.

³³ Ammianus Marcellinus 27.3, detailing, amongst other things, the 137 deaths in the conflict; in stark contrast *Lib. Pont.* 39.1 makes no mention of this violence, and simply states that the disputed election was resolved by a council of *sacerdotes*.

³⁴ Gregory the Great, *Hom. Ezech.* 2.6.22.

³⁵ R.A. Markus, *Gregory the Great and his World* (Cambridge, 1997), 52.

³⁶ Gregory the Great, *Registrum*, Appendix VIII.

the disputed papal election of 366, which left scores dead. The identity of the individuals on this occasion is not recorded, but later episodes are recorded in more detail. Thus, various factions within the senatorial aristocracy supported rival sides in the disputed papal election between Symmachus and Laurence in 498. From a year later, in the Roman council of 499, we have evidence that many of the city's titular churches were still known by the names of the aristocratic donors who had sponsored their construction. As Julia Hillner has argued recently, evidence such as this – and also the acts of the Roman council of 502 – should be read not as indicating that such lay patrons willingly handed over wealth to the Roman church, but rather that they did so with some sense of misgiving, and sought by various means to maintain a modicum of control over the churches they had endowed.³⁷ Once again, we are presented with a picture of the interaction between church and laity that subverts the traditional picture of Rome as being wholly in thrall to ecclesiastical government, and in which the laity, far from being merely passive participants, played a more active role in ecclesiastical affairs than has usually been assumed. With this in mind, I want to suggest that one strategy that might fruitfully be applied to analysing the development of the liturgy is to see it in the context of the continued vitality of 'secular' institutions, as essayed above.

IV. Roman Churches as Liturgical and Performative Spaces: The Example of St Peter's

In order to provide some focus to the discussion, I will deal here with only one example: back where we began, at the great basilica of St Peter's on the Vatican. The fifth century saw a particular emphasis on the Roman bishop's inheritance of the apostle's mantle as central to Roman ecclesiastical authority, as has long been known from detailed analysis of papal letters, not least those of Leo the Great. In some ways, it is tempting to accept such statements as part of an arc that culminates, around precisely this time, in the assertion of Roman Petrine supremacy.³⁸ But it is important to note that such assertions were not made as alternatives to or replacements for a secular ideal of Rome; on the contrary, they often intersect with it in ways that suggest that the ideology of the Roman Church was interacting with still vibrant secular institutions. Thus, for instance, Leo's formulations of his status as St Peter's successor presuppose a vibrant Roman legal culture,³⁹ while the mosaics decorating Xystus' church of Santa Maria Maggiore have been shown to exploit visual tropes associated with the

³⁷ J. Hillner, 'Families, Patronage, and the Titular Churches of Rome, c. 300-c. 600', in K. Cooper and J. Hillner (eds), *Religion, Dynasty, and Patronage* (2007), 225-61.

³⁸ For a summary: R.B. Eno, *The Rise of the Papacy* (Collegeville, 1990), 102-5.

³⁹ W. Ullmann, 'Leo I and the Theory of Papal Primacy', *JTS* n.s. 11 (1960), 25-51.

classical cityscape of Rome.⁴⁰ Moreover, it is demonstrable that in some significant cases the supremacy claimed so vigorously by various Roman bishops did not in actuality command universal assent, and that in many instances papal authority was reliant on support from the imperial administration.⁴¹ Examination of Rome's churches against a context that does not presuppose a complete papal conquest of Rome's urban space similarly shows that they were places within which the interests of laity and clergy overlapped, and in some cases perhaps even competed.

These considerations can be shown into stark relief by consideration of the Vatican basilica. As Peter's shrine, it might seem to represent *the* prime physical connection between the Roman pontiff and the apostle, upon which the authority of the Roman bishopric depended. Yet there is compelling evidence to show that this basilica was not yet an exclusively papal space, and that it thus points to ways in which we might view the development of the liturgy at Rome as something that was enmeshed in the city's social dynamics. Let us begin with the very fabric of the church itself. It was, of course, vast; a rich endowment begun, most probably, by Constantine at the beginning of the fourth century.⁴² But imperial benefaction of the site did not finish there, and in several significant ways it remained an imperial space. A century after Constantine's foundation, a substantial rotunda was constructed adjacent to the southern transept. This is the structure known in the Middle Ages as the chapel of Saint Petronilla, but by origin it was an imperial mausoleum begun as a dynastic tomb by the emperor Honorius.⁴³ When this rotunda was destroyed in the sixteenth century to make way for the new St Peter's, various imperial burials were found there. One, a red granite sarcophagus, contained a body wrapped in cloth woven from golden thread, and was securely identified by means of inscribed grave objects with the empress Maria, wife of Honorius.

⁴⁰ R. Warland, 'The Concept of Rome in Late Antiquity Reflected in the Mosaics of the Triumphal Arch of Santa Maria Maggiore', *Acta ad Archaeologiam et Artium Historiam Pertinentia* 17 (2003), 127-41.

⁴¹ For ambivalent attitudes to Rome, see the detailed treatment in J.E. Merdinger, *Rome and the African Church in the Age of Augustine* (New Haven, 1997). For the intersections of papal and imperial ambitions, see M. McEvoy, 'Rome and the Transformation of the Imperial Office' (2010), 185-9.

⁴² G.W. Bowersock, 'Peter and Constantine', in J.-M. Carrié and R. Lizzi Testa (eds), *Humana Sapit: Mélanges en l'honneur de Lellia Cracco Ruggini*, Bibliothèque de l'Antiquité Tardive 3 (Turnhout, 2002), 209-17, argued, on the basis of brick stamps from the original fabric recorded at the time of the construction of the present basilica, that the fourth-century church was in fact a foundation not of Constantine but of his son Constans, who ruled Italy from his father's death in 337 until his own ousting in the coup of Magnentius in 350. This has commanded little assent. For the possibility that the church was dedicated not only in Constantine's name, but in that of one of his sons, see A.M. Yasin, *Saints and Church Spaces* (2009), 111-2.

⁴³ M.J. Johnson, *The Roman Imperial Mausoleum* (Cambridge, 2009), 167-74; M. McEvoy, 'Rome and the Transformation of the Imperial Office' (2010), 178-85.

It is likely also that Honorius himself was buried there. So too, very likely, were other members of the western imperial family, including (and in spite of the legendary assumption that she was buried at Ravenna) the great fifth-century dowager empress Galla Placidia, and perhaps also her son Valentinian III. Some of this is surmise, but in at least one instance we have detailed information on an imperial burial here. According to an entry under the year 450 in an anonymous continuation of Prosper of Aquitaine's chronicle, Theodosius, the son of Galla Placidia and her first husband, the Gothic king Athaulf, was reburied in this mausoleum with great ceremony, and with the senate in attendance.⁴⁴

This was, moreover, not the only occasion on which the imperial family participated in ceremonies at St Peter's.⁴⁵ Also in 450, when Valentinian III's entourage arrived in Rome (where it would remain for the next five years), among the very first acts of the emperor and his family was to attend a vigil at St Peter's, very likely that associated with the feast of *cathedra Petri*. We know nothing more about this visit, which is mentioned in a series of letters from Valentinian, Placidia, and Eudoxia to the eastern court concerning the fate of bishop Flavian of Constantinople. But can this have been a unique visit? I would venture to suggest that it was not, but that, rather, it had become by this stage an integral part of any imperial visit to Rome, as much as addressing the senate and people in the Forum Romanum or hosting games in the Circus Maximus. The evidence is slight, but suggestive. When Theoderic, the Ostrogothic king of Italy visited Rome in 500, he did so in a manner calculated to evoke the memory of Roman imperial visits earlier in the century. The chronicle of Theoderic's reign preserved in the Anonymus Valesianus records that when the king came to Rome, one of his first acts was to visit St Peter's.⁴⁶ What I suspect is that such visits to the Vatican were in fact perfectly routine: not only did Theoderic make one, but so too did Valentinian; so too, I would venture, did Honorius on his various visits to Rome – he was, after all, constructing a vast mausoleum for his family adjacent to the church. In the case of Valentinian III, there is one other detail that might be brought to bear. As noted earlier, Valentinian had been a generous donor to the Roman church. In particular, as the *Liber Pontificalis* notes in its life of Xystus III, he had presented 'a gold image with twelve portals, twelve apostles, and the Saviour, decorated with very precious jewels; as an offering for prayers answered, he placed this over the confessio of St Peter'.⁴⁷ No other detail is provided, but the impression

⁴⁴ Continuation to Prosper in the *Codex Reichenaviensis*, c. 12 (*MGH Chron. Min.* I 489): 'Theodosius cum magna pompa a Placidia et Leone et omni senatu deductus et in mausoleo ad apostulum Petrum depositus est'.

⁴⁵ For what follows, see in detail M. Humphries, 'The City of Rome and Valentinian III' (2012).

⁴⁶ *Anonymus Valesianus* 65.

⁴⁷ *Liber Pontificalis* 46.4.

given is one of a lavish gift, located, moreover, in a prominent location on the central axis of the basilica. If we take the evidence cumulatively, an interesting image emerges: St Peter's was a church founded by an emperor, it was the site of an imperial mausoleum, and was now graced with a lavish imperial monument in honour of Jesus and the twelve apostles; it was also, very likely, an early port of call on the routine itinerary of the imperial court visiting Rome. Taken together, the evidence suggests that St Peter's was by no means a purely papal space, but very emphatically an imperial one too.

This may help us to understand other aspects of the basilica's use in late antiquity. For not only emperors saw it as a place for display, but so too other members of the laity. Consider, for instance, that most active of fourth-century Roman aristocrats, Sextus Petronius Probus, buried at St Peter's in a tomb inscribed with a detailed record of his stellar career as an imperial official.⁴⁸ Consider too Jerome's pugilistic Roman matron. More modestly, consider also a certain Lucillus and his wife Ianuaria, who specified in their epitaph that they were buried 'before the main entrance, at the second column in the portico, as one enters from the left on the men's side'.⁴⁹ The arrangement described in this epitaph is confirmed by other sources, such as the depiction of pilgrims at St Peter's (and indeed at other Roman churches) on the Pola casket, a fifth-century ivory reliquary, which shows men and women occupying different aisles in the basilica.⁵⁰ St Peter's, then, was a site where the honour and status of the laity – from emperors to aristocrats to more humble types – was on display. Any consideration of the sorts of liturgy performed there need to take account of this fact: that the liturgy was performed in a space thronged with the laity, and the laity saw the basilica as a place where they could assert their social position.

This is very evocative of the sort of chancel arrangements within churches that Thomas Mathews elucidated from the *Ordo Romanus Primus*.⁵¹ He demonstrated persuasively that the disposition of the laity in the church mirrored their social status, with members of the elite having reserved for them spaces close to the altar sanctuary, and receiving communion from the hands of the highest members of the clergy, including the pope himself; the *Ordo* also indicates that men and women occupied different sides of the church. Considering this in the context of the other evidence for the presence of the laity at St Peter's, we can perhaps now see not only *how* social dynamics influenced the performance and form of the liturgy as described in *Ordo Romanus Primus* and implied in extant chancel arrangements; rather, considering the continued vitality of 'secular' Roman society throughout late antiquity, we can also begin to appreciate *why* this was the case.

⁴⁸ *Inscriptiones Christianae Urbis Romae* n.s. II 4219 a-b.

⁴⁹ *Inscriptiones Latinae Christianae Veteres* 2127.

⁵⁰ R. MacMullen, *The Second Church* (2009), 88-9.

⁵¹ T.F. Mathews, 'Early Roman Chancel Arrangement' (1962).

V. Concluding Thoughts and Future Possibilities

The issues addressed in this article have been approached unashamedly from the perspective of a historian, not a liturgist. It has been my brief to outline ways in which our understanding of the physical fabric and social and cultural context of the city of Rome have been revolutionised in the last two decades: I hope that liturgists will find such details not only interesting, but also useful for their elucidations of liturgical developments as part of a dialogue between clergy and laity. At the same time, however, this article offers an invitation to liturgists to collaborate with historians. The study of the early Roman liturgy up to the time of Gregory the Great is a topic that, although largely untapped in historical analysis, has a great deal to offer historians of the city in late antiquity. It concerns a set of ceremonial developments that must surely be central to the interests of any historian seeking to understand the interactions between social activity and physical fabric at Rome in these transitional centuries. As such, it is well placed to answer a perceived need amongst historians of late-antique and early medieval Rome that was voiced a decade ago by Federico Marazzi, and which is gradually being answered in a variety of ways. Marazzi remarked: ‘The time has come to produce a model for late antique Rome that goes beyond the divisive confrontation between two polarities, the classical and the Christian.’⁵² This present paper has at best offered only the most meagre of responses to such a *desideratum*, and has only suggested ways in which we might grope towards such responses by examining the liturgy as a manifestation of interactions between secular and ecclesiastical Rome. Nevertheless, it is hoped that this article has demonstrated that a quest for such answers is a worthwhile undertaking, and is likely to yield results that fizz with potential. It is, moreover, a task in which liturgical scholars are uniquely placed to make a signal contribution from which historians will certainly learn a great deal.

⁵² F. Marazzi, ‘Rome in Transition’ (2000), 40.