

## BOOK REVIEW

*The Invention of Peter: Apostolic Discourse and Papal Authority in Late Antiquity.* By GEORGE DEMACOPOULOS. *Divinations: Rereading Late Ancient Religion.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013. Pp. 262. Hardcover, \$69.95. ISBN 978-0-8122-4517-2.

There has been a flurry of publications over the course of the last several decades that contribute to a revisionist history of the so-called “rise” of the papacy (long treated in narratives of Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages as inexorable and inevitable) and that deliberately eschew the institutional focus that dominated earlier treatments of the Roman bishop’s rise to prominence.<sup>1</sup>

Additionally, such recent studies attempt to avoid the besetting sin of papal historiography, namely, anachronistic readings of the historical record that import later developments of the prominence, reach, and claims of the Roman See into earlier centuries where they have no place. Such distortion has been an issue at least since the first compositions of papal biographies, the agenda-driven *vitae* of the *Liber Pontificalis*, written in the heat of the controversy of the Laurentian schism in the sixth century, and it continued in the Carolingian collections of sources. The misrepresentations in our sources continue to present a challenge to all subsequent historical study that would seek to engage the past in critical terms. The move in recent scholarship away from easy and anachronistic readings of the “rise of the papacy” is, therefore, a salutary one. Indeed, it is not only salutary, but necessary if any genuine historical understanding of the late antique papacy is to be achieved. In “seeking to move beyond papal teleology,” as Cooper and Hillner point out, one question that must be answered is, “[H]ow do the specific needs of

<sup>1</sup> A partial list of English language publications would include: K. Cooper and J. Hillner, eds., *Religion, Dynasty, and Patronage in Early Christian Rome, 300-900* (Cambridge, 2007); K. Bowes, *Private Worship, Public Values, and Religious Change in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, 2008); K. Sessa, *The Formation of Papal Authority in Late Antique Italy: Roman Bishops and the Domestic Sphere* (Cambridge, 2012). See also, especially for non-Anglophone scholarship, M. Costambeys, “Review article: Property, ideology and the territorial power of the papacy in the early Middle Ages,” *Early Medieval Europe* 9 (2000) 367–396.

the Roman bishops, as evidenced in the texts they generated in the sixth century--the *Liber Pontificalis* and the *Collectio Avellana*--distort our understanding...?"<sup>2</sup>

George Demacopoulos, author previously of *Five Models of Spiritual Direction in the Early Church* (Notre Dame, 2007), sets out in his most recent book, *The Invention of Peter*, to do just that, not only in the sixth century but in the fifth as well (the majority of the book covers 440-604—that is, Leo to Gregory). Rather than work around papal sources, he works in them, but without what Cooper and Hillner call “institutional teleology.”<sup>3</sup> He instead questions their rhetoric rather than taking it at face value. In particular, he treats one aspect of the late antique papacy that has cried out for critical investigation and revision: the invocation of Petrine *auuctoritas* and its attendant rhetorical, and even syntactical, formulation.

In terms of methodology, Demacopoulos gestures in the Introduction (3) toward Michel Foucault and his *Archaeology of Knowledge*, but never refers to him after the introduction and does not have an entry for him in the Bibliography.<sup>4</sup> Mention of Foucault so early on leads one to expect a highly theoretical study, but it is not. Observation of this fact is a compliment rather than censure, for one does not have to navigate the often turgid prose of cultural criticism, which can sometimes be illuminating but is almost never laconic and transparent. Still, in contextual terms, a broad survey early on in the book of the dynamics of late antique Christian discourse (inclusive of words, rituals, and material productions) would have been helpful for the reader’s orientation as to how the particular “Petrine discourse” under investigation fits into more general late ancient discursive patterns. Demacopoulos notes that he does not do this (170), but it would have strengthened the book’s usefulness in comparative terms.

Demacopoulos’ basic thesis is simple, straightforward, elegant, and provocative: “[M]any of the rhetorical escalations of Roman privilege, almost always dressed in Petrine robes, emerged at the very time that the authority of the Roman bishop was being challenged by others” (11; he shows the same to be true of the development of the title “Ecumenical Patriarch” in the East in the sixth century).

<sup>2</sup> K. Cooper and J. Hillner, “Introduction,” in *Religion, Dynasty, and Patronage in Early Christian Rome*, 7 (emphasis mine). They speak specifically there of the distortion of the understanding of patronage in late antique Rome. I use the quote here to speak to the issue of distortion more broadly.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>4</sup> Though aspects of Foucauldian analysis are surely mediated through Averil Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1991), to whom Demacopoulos explicitly acknowledges his indebtedness in the Conclusion (169; cf. 192 n.8); and Elizabeth Clark, *History, Theory, Text: Historians and the Linguistic Turn* (Cambridge, MA, 2004).

That is, he argues that the use of the “Petrine discourse” is usually a sign of weakness and insecurity rather than strength and confidence in diplomatic and ecclesiastical relations, such that there is an inverse correlation between the boldness of the Roman bishop’s rhetorical posturing and his “actualized or actualizable authority” (171). That this was true in the cases of Popes Leo, Gelasius, and Gregory becomes especially clear in what follows.

The first chapter, which takes its starting-point from Otto Zwierlein’s recent study,<sup>5</sup> surveys the diverse stories and legends of Peter and the uses to which they were put in the first through fourth centuries. Here, Demacopoulos covers such issues as the relative lateness of Peter’s connection with Rome; the lateness of the use of Matt. 16 to justify Petrine theological authority and privilege; and, in reference to the Council of Serdica (343), the lateness of the use of the “conceptual formulations of a Petrine or papal privilege” to “justify any kind of jurisdictional or appellate authority for the Roman bishop” (31), which use coincides with the rise in devotion to the cult of Peter in Rome.

Chapter 2 focuses on the widespread but selective use of Petrine language in the sermons and letters of Leo (440-461). Our picture of him is inseparably bound up with the choices of his Carolingian editors, who emphasized “his promotion of Roman authority via Peter” (40), though it becomes clear through analysis that usually in Leo’s writings Petrine privilege is a marker of “diplomatic and theological anxiety” (41). At times, Leo asserted that Peter was present in his person, a theatrical move that is related to what Demacopoulos calls the “Petrine subject,” the use of *Petrus* in the nominative case as a mask for Leo’s own views, on the syntactical level. Leo’s use of Petrine themes comes out most distinctly in his promotion of Rome’s appellate jurisdiction based on the precedent of the Council of Serdica, spuriously included among the canons of Nicea (a use more indicative of desire for jurisdiction than real possession of it), and in papal resistance to Canon 28 of the Council of Chalcedon, which dealt with the relative importance of Rome and “New Rome,” Constantinople, and which was another instance of Rome’s weakness and futility in international relations.

Chapter 3 treats the reign of the understudied Gelasius (492–496) and his dealings with local aristocratic and international audiences. In *Tractate 6*, an inf-

<sup>5</sup> *Petrus in Rom: Die literarischen Zeugnisse* (Berlin, 2010).

fective plea against the continued celebration of the Lupercalia, the Petrine discourse is absent, and yet the text shows his vulnerability relative to local notables. Demacopoulos does not have an explanation for this fact. More investigation would have been useful, because it presents a problem for a thesis that is so compelling more broadly (a similar issue arises in his discussion of *Codex Iustinianus* I.1.8 [125]). For example, in *Epistle* 12 (usually called the *Ad Anastasium*), on the Acacian schism and addressed to the Emperor, Gelasius regularly uses “Apostolic See” rather than “I” as the grammatical subject and includes very forceful claims for Roman prestige at a moment when Rome had very little in the East. Demacopoulos makes a strong case that Gelasius’ international chest-thumping is closely related to an attempt to persuade the local aristocracy, ignorant of Rome’s real reputation in the imperial capital, of his global standing; perhaps this sheds some light on the Petrine absence in *Tractate* 6. Both of these texts are translated by Matthew Briel into English for the first time in the Appendices.

Chapter 4 contains a discussion of the Laurentian schism and the present concerns that shaped the viewpoint of the texts, such as the *Liber Pontificalis*, that emerged from the ensuing pamphlet war between the parties of Symmachus and Laurentius: biography of past popes is used to harness Petrine prestige in the dispute over the rightful claimant to Peter’s chair. The rest of the chapter treats Justinian’s general muting of Roman prestige in favor of Constantinople and the Pentarchy in the *Novellae* and his seemingly contradictory endorsement of Roman rhetoric in other venues: it emerges that this was done when Justinian had something to gain by it for his own purposes.

The book’s final chapter has Gregory (590–604) as its subject. Though his theological works do not use Peter for papal self-aggrandizement, we see new developments in other, non-verbal, areas, namely, the introduction of the required swearing of oaths at the tomb of Peter for papal rectors who were going to be sent to Sicily and the distribution of Peter’s supposed relics for purposes of international diplomacy. On the other hand, Petrine discourse plays an important part in Gregory’s opposition to the Constantinopolitan bishop’s use of the title “Ecumenical Patriarch.” Once again, such rhetoric is increased “in times of international weakness” (162).

The book ends with a Postscript on the seventh-century *Life of St. Gregory of Agrigentum* as veiled papal critique, a Conclusion, the two Appendices mentioned above, Notes, Bibliography, Index, and Acknowledgements (awkwardly written as though they come first; this is presumably not Demacopoulos’ fault, and the Press should pay closer attention to such matters).

Overall, *The Invention of Peter* is a stimulating book with a generally well argued thesis supported by the investigation of texts that usually do not benefit from close literary analysis. The book serves as a reminder of the rich layers of meaning that can be uncovered in these texts and their subtexts, and his analysis allows us to catch a glimpse of the situation of the papacy “on the ground” in the fifth and sixth centuries without the distorting perspective of teleological hindsight.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Some typographical errors: “excellance” for “excellence” (49); “take notice the very first line” should be “take notice of the very first line” (78); “Aoenius” should be “Aeonius” (86); “in early fifth century” should be “in the early fifth century” (121); “of” should be “in” (126); “ecclesiastic” should be “ecclesiastical” and “historiographic” should be “historiographical” (128); “*De belli*” should be *De bello*” (228 n.75); in the Bibliography, the page numbers for H. Chadwick, “St. Peter and St. Paul in Rome,” should be 31-52 rather than 39-51; the journal title in the second entry for M. Costambeys is incorrect (it should be *Early Medieval Europe* rather than *Early Modern Europe*), as is the title of the article itself, included in this review in n.1.