Papa as ‘bishop of Rome’

by JOHN MOOREHEAD

Medieval historians confronted with the Latin word papa may be tempted to translate it unthinking as ‘pope’. Certainly the word has been restricted to the bishop of Rome for much of the history of the Church, and its application to this bishop is of long standing. It occurs in an inscription from pre-Constantinian Rome,¹ in a letter despatched to Rome by the fathers of the Council of Arles in 314, which is addressed ‘dilectissimo papae Silvestro’ and goes on to style Silvester ‘gloriosissime papa’,² and in the acts of the first Council of Toledo which met in 400, where language is used which implies that the bishop of Rome, and he alone, was papa.³ But in the early Church it generally seems to have been felt that the word could be applied to other bishops as well. A striking indication of this is furnished by a letter sent to Cyprian of Carthage by the priests and deacons of the Roman Church itself, which refers to him

A draft of this paper was read to the Early Medieval Seminar meeting in the Institute of Historical Research, London, in November 1983, and I am grateful to the suggestions made by those present, in particular Dr Janet Nelson. The themes discussed in it have never received satisfactory treatment; among the literature the most helpful discussions are R. Labanca, Il Pape, Turin 1903, 1–92 (a work more of erudition than analysis); P. de Labriolle, ‘Une Enquête de l’histoire du mot “Papa”’, Bulletin d’ancienne littérature et d’archéologie chrétiennes, i (1911), 215–26, republished with few alterations as ‘Papa’, Nomenclature Latinitatis Mediae Aevi (Bulletin du Cange), iv (1928), 65–75; E. von Dobuschütz, Das Aktenbuch Gelati, Leipzíg 1912 (= Texte und Untersuchungen, xxxvii. Heft iv), 296–32; P. Batiffol, ‘Papa, Sedes Romana, Apostolatus’, Rivista di archeologia cristiana, ii (1925), 99–110 at pp. 99–103; H. Leclercq, ‘Papa’, Dictionnaire d’archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie, ii (1957–1957), 1111. They are touched on, in a manner not entirely helpful, by Walter Ullmann, The Growth of Papal Government in the Middle Ages, 3rd edn, London 1979, p. 32 ff.

1 J. B. de Rossi, Inscriptiones Christianae Urbanae Romae septimae saeculo antiquiores, i, Rome 1861, 482. The application of Terrullian’s phrase ‘bonus pastor et benedictus papa’ (De pudicitia, 15) to a bishop of Rome has been denied by T. D. Barnes, Terullian, Oxford 1971, 247.

2 Corpus Christianorum Series Latina (hereafter cited as C.C.S.L.), cxlviii.

3 Exspectantes pari exemplo quid papa, qui tu ne est, quid sanctus Simplicianus Mediolanensis episcopus reliquisque ecclesiarium rescriptis sacerdotis...constituimus earn...pressum illis per papam vel per sanctum Simplicianum communio redidit a curis nostri et principum, i.e. episcopat mistakes to his error, ed. J. Vives, Barcelona 1963, 32]. See the brief discussion in Henry Chadwick, Priscillan of Avila, Oxford 1976, 184.
as papa. Sidonius Apollinaris, who became bishop of Clermont in 489, felt free to address his confères among the Gallic episcopate by the same title, apparently indiscriminately, and was himself so addressed. Even in the Christian world of the twelfth century, 'pope' has remained the title of the patriarch of Alexandria, while in modern Greek παπας denotes a parish priest. Nevertheless, in the Western Church the application of this title to bishops other than that of Rome was not to last. In the following pages I propose to consider the stages by which the word papa came to be applied frequently, and apparently exclusively, within the Roman Church to its own bishop, and to discuss a change towards a concept of office implied by the way the title was applied. I shall then offer some tentative suggestions as to some of the stages of the diffusion of the word papa in the sense of 'bishop of Rome' beyond the Roman Church and conclude with a discussion of the possible significance of the evidence presented.

We may begin by examining the terms used to describe bishops of Rome in a series of six synods which were held at Rome between 465 and 532. The proceedings of the first four of these synods tend to employ similar terminology. The first of them, held during the pontificate of Hilary, opens with a list of those present; at the top of the list is 'viro venerabili Hilari papa'. We are then presented with a speech made by Hilary, now described as 'episcopus ecclesiae catholicae urbis Romae'. His later contributions to the discussion are all introduced by the phrase 'Hilarus episcopus ecclesiae urbis Romae synodo praesidens dixit'. On four occasions the business of the synod was delayed when all the bishops and priests broke into remarkably long series of acclamations, but only once did they bestow a title on Hilary, that of 'dignus papa, dignus doctor'. The proceedings of the three following synods, which were presided over by Felix III in 487–8, Gelasius in 495 and Symmachus in 499, refer to the presiding bishops in very similar language, which suggests that the chancery of the Roman Church was using a set of standard formulae. The synod of 465 was the only one at which the bishop of Rome was hailed as papa, although in the proceedings of the synod of 499 we meet the expressions 'papa incolumne' and 'transitus papa'. More importantly, however, the synod of 465 is unique in the expression 'Hilaro papa' which stands at the head of the list of dignitaries present.

4 Cyprian, ep. 30 (Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticon Latinorum (henceforth cited as C.S.E.L.), iii. 549 l. 2; 555 l. 16).
5 Sidonius, ep. 6.1 to 9.10 passim, with 4.2. A similar tendency operates in the correspondence of Ruricius of Limoges (d. c. 507): ep. 2.7, 2.16; with ad Ruricius 4.3.
6 Hilary, ep. 13 (Epistulae Romanae pontificum, A. Thiel (ed.), i, Braunsberg 1886, 159–63; the phrase 'dignus papa, dignus doctor' occurs at the foot of 163).
8 M.G.H., Auct. Ant. xii. 403 l. 28, 404 l. 18.
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participants. The proceedings of all the synods use a similar expression, but in all the others the personal name follows the title papa. We may assume that the proceedings of the synod of 465 are aberrant in this detail.

When we return to the report issued by the synod of October 502, we find quite a different phraseology being employed. This is hardly surprising, for Pope Symmachus was not present, the synod having been called to judge him during the turbulent days of the Laurentian schism. But beyond the differences arising from Symmachus' absence from the chair, the terminology is peculiar. In correspondence with the assembled bishops before they issued their report, the Ostrogothic king Theoderic styled Symmachus episcopus, whereas the bishops, writing to Theoderic, termed him papa and pontifex, and in their report on Symmachus the bishops display a marked reluctance to describe him as episcopus. The word only occurs at the very end of their report, which lays down that clerics who had withdrawn from their bishop were to give satisfaction to their bishop. The obverse of this tendency is a marked readiness to apply to Symmachus the title papa, which they do on 11 occasions. The title is clearly being used frequently, but it will be as well to enquire into the sense in which it is being used. On one occasion the word occurs in the expression 'venerabili papa Symmacho apostolica sedis praesul'; and on another 'Symmachus papa sedis apostolica praesul'. In these formulations the words apostolica sedis are dependent on praesul, not papa; when the bishops thought of Symmachus in terms of his occupying the see of St Peter they did not think of him as papa. Indeed, it would seem that the bishops did not see the word papa as denoting an office, for on five occasions they refer to 'papa Symmachus', and to 'Symmachus papa' only twice. Rather than a name qualifying a title, we are confronted by a title qualifying a name, just as the proceedings of the synods of 487–8, 495 and 499 introduce the bishop of Rome at the head of the list of participants by the word papa followed by a personal name.

The synod of October 502, then, was marked by a very intensive use of the word papa, to the almost total exclusion of the word episcopus. Perhaps the reluctance to use the latter word was connected with the presence within Rome of another bishop, Peter of Altinum, whom Theoderic had

1 Another occasion on which the name comes after the title is in the expression 'issu domini mei beatissimi papae Gelasii' (Collectio Aureliana, op. cit. 487).
2 M.G.H. Auct. Ant. xii. 426–37. Modern scholarly opinion generally dates this meeting of the synodus palmaris to 502, although its editor for the M.G.H., Theodore Mommsen, supplied 501.
3 The best general account of the schism is that of E. Caspar, Geschichte des Papsttums, Tubingen 1853, 87–129.
4 Ibid. 426 l. 19; 422 l. 8, 11.
5 Ibid. 422 l. 24 (papa); 433 l. 13 (pontifex).
6 Ibid. 423 l. 4, 6.
7 Ibid. 426 l. 10; 431 l. 11.
8 Ibid. 427 l. 4.
9 'Papa Symmachus': M.G.H. Auct. Ant. 426 l. 10, 15; 427 l. 12; 428 l. 6; 432 l. 10; Symmachus papa': 428 l. 14; 431 l. 11. For the sake of completeness I list the other occurrences of the word papa: 427 l. 6; 429 l. 1, 10; 432 l. 4.
appointed *visiatar* of the Church of Rome,18 but the enthusiasm for the use of *papa* seems to answer to a personal feeling for Symmacus. With this in mind we may consider the proceedings of our final synod, that of November 502.19 They closely follow the usage of the earlier synods, presided over by bishops of Rome, but there are some points of interest for our inquiry. We may note the use of *praeul* with ‘sedia apostolicae’,20 whereas *papa* is used almost personally, for the proceedings include the phrase ‘admonitioe beatiissimi viri papaes nostri Simplicii’,21 the connotation of the word in its position before the name being strengthened by the personal pronoun. Finally, at least one of those present at the synod seems to have envisaged the possibility of there being *papae* other than that of Rome, for Bishop Laurence of Milan is reported as having twice qualified *papa* by *romanus*.22

The evidence discussed in the preceding two paragraphs comes from the Roman Church at the time of the Laurentian schism. It gives the impression that the period may have been important in the evolution of the sense attached to the word *papa*, and it will be helpful at this point to turn to the works of a writer who was involved in the affairs of the schism. The deacon Ennodius, later to become bishop of Pavia, was a staunch supporter of Symmachus. Among his works the most important for our purpose is a *libellus* he wrote attacking a pamphlet which impugned the synod of October 502.23 In common with the proceedings of this synod, Ennodius avoids describing Symmachus as *episcopus*.24 On the other hand, he styles him *papa* 13 times. The forms ‘*papa* Symmachus’ and ‘*papam* Symmachus’ each occur once,25 so we cannot say that one or the other form came more naturally to Ennodius. But it is clear that Ennodius, like the synod

19 Ibid. 447 ll. 14, 20; 449 l. 11. Mommsen prints at the beginning of his text of the proceedings ‘Exemplar constitutum facti a domino Symmacho papa de rebus eclesiasticis conservandis’, in accordance with an eighth-century manuscript. One is a little surprised to find the name before the word ‘*papa*’, but Mommsen’s critical apparatus shows considerable manuscript support for expressions in which *papa* precedes the name, and in any case there would seem to be no reason to believe that any of the formulæ go back to the pontificate of Symmachus.
20 M.G.H., Auct. Ant. xii. 445 l. 6.
21 Ibid. 447 ll. 8–10.
22 I cite from the edition of Vogel, M.G.H., Auct. Ant. vii, in which the *libellus* is edited 48–67.
23 Perhaps mention should be made of a theory that Ennodius was to the papacy what Cassiodorus was to the Ostrogothic monarchy, and was responsible for the drafting of documents: W. T. Townsend and William F. Wyatt, ‘Ennodius and Pope Symmachus’, in L. W. Jones (ed.), *Classical and Medieval Studies in Honor of Edward Kennard Rand*, New York 1938, 277–91. But the evidence is scarcely compelling.
24 ‘*Papa* Symmachus’: M.G.H., Auct. Ant. vii. 57 l. 23; ‘Symmachus *papa*’: ibid. 89 l. 5.
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Of October, did not see the word papa as a title, still less as a title which implied the holding of certain powers. Indeed, in the sections of his libellus in which Ennodius enunciates his well-known high doctrine of papal power, the word is conspicuously absent: Symmachus is here one of the successors of Blessed Peter and 'sedes apostolicae præsul', but never papa. Similarly, Ennodius does not term Symmachus episcopus in his other works. He sometimes refers to Symmachus as papa and sometimes as praesul, generally using the latter word in connection with references to the apostolic see.

As does the synod of October, Ennodius gives the impression of using the word papa to apply to the bishop of Rome more frequently than had hitherto. It was doubtless this feature of his style which led his editor Sirmond to suggest in 1611 that Ennodius was the first author to use the word with peculiar reference to the bishop of Rome. In his edition of Ennodius for the Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Vogel expressed support for Sirmond's position, while noting two apparently anomalous instances. He pointed out that in his Life of Epiphanius Ennodius quotes the Visigoth Euric as having addressed Epiphanius as 'venerande papa' and that one of Ennodius' works was addressed 'papae Epiphanii'.

Nevertheless, Vogel implied that little weight should be placed on these two cases: one occurred in reported speech and the other merely in the lemma to Ennodius' first opusculum. But I am not certain that Vogel's 

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84 'Successor'; ibid. 61 l. 38; cf. 62 l. 9; 'sedes apostolicae præsul'; ibid. 53 ll. 16f; 61 l. 37. Ennodius' thought has been discussed by Walter Ullmann, 'Pontifex romanus indicibiliter efficiatur sanctus. Dictatus Pape 25 in retrospect and prospect', Studi Gregoriani, 1 (1959-61), 229-64.

85 Indeed, he seems to avoid using the word of any bishop, preferring such terms as sanctus; pontifex; sacerdos; et even rates. But occasionally he does use it, as in the expression 'sanctus Athanasius Alexandri urbis episcopus' (M.G.H., Auct. Ant. vii. 53 ll. 239) and in a letter to one Luminous which mentions both Luminous' unnamed bishop and the pope (ep. 3.10.3).

86 Ibid., 'Dominus papa noster', ep. 4.31.2; 'dominus papa', ep. 5.13.2; 6.33.2; 7.41.4; sanctus papa', ep. 3.10.41; 'venerabilis papa', ep. 5.24.2. Here and elsewhere I ignore the headings at the top of letters found in the manuscripts, it being unknown when they were supplied.

87 Sede apostolicae praesulm, ep. 5.19.3. As he does in the libellus, Ennodius elsewhere uses the word 'praesul' to suggest the power of the bishop of Rome: 'apostolicae sedis praesulm et omnium paene ecclesiarum gubernaculm tractantem' (M.G.H., Auct. Ant. vii. 12 l. 30). Nevertheless it must be acknowledged that he once brings this word into connection with papa: 'apostolicae sedis beati Petri vel praesulis eius papae auctoritate' (ibid. 14 l. 18).

88 Quoted by Vogel, op. cit. 400; s.v. 'papa'. Sirmond's suggestion seems to lie behind some odd assertions, such as the statement in the New Catholic Encyclopedia that Ennodius urged that the title papa be restricted to the bishop of Rome (v. 444); there is no evidence for this. The most recent discussion is that of Adolf Lübbe, 'Die Konzilien-Geschichte der Benedikt des Ennodius', Anuario Historiae Conciliarum i (1969), 15-36 at pp. 25-7.

89 Via Epiphanii, M.G.H., Auct. Ant. viii. 91 (95 l. 25).


dismissal of these two references is justified. Even if one of them only occurs in a speech, there is every reason to believe that it represents the usage of Ennodius, almost certainly the author of the speech as it appears in his work. And it cannot be accidental that both these applications of the word are to Epiphanius of Pavia, for Epiphanius was something of a hero to Ennodius, whose biography dwells at length not only on his holiness but on his successful career and political savoir faire. If we accept that the connotations of papa at this time were personal rather than juridical, its use to describe Epiphanius would have been natural for an admirer such as Ennodius. We may also note that Ennodius describes Symmachus as 'papa Romanus', which, as does the usage of Laurence of Milan at the council of November 502, seems to imply that there could be papaes other than the one who sat in Rome.  

Hence we may conclude that the extensive use of the word papa by the synod of October and its defender Ennodius was not of necessity related to a move to restrict its application to the bishop of Rome, and that it conveyed no implication that the person to whom it was applied held any office which was defined by the term. Rather, its use during the pontificate of Symmachus may be seen as standing in a tradition of using the word to denote affectionate respect. Already in the Passio of Perpetua and Felicitas we find Bishop Optatus of Carthage and the priest Aspasius addressed: 'Are you not our papa? Are you not also our priest?' Prosper was able to address Augustine as 'papa beattissime, pater optime', and such usages of the word with personal pronouns can easily be documented in the Roman Church. A survey of correspondence preserved in the Collectio Avellana indicates several dozen occasions on which Leo is termed papa, and only once does the word come after his name. It is as if, rather than there being an office of 'Pope' to which Leo had succeeded, there was a title of 'Father' which he had earned. He would have been something like a modern clergyman whose parishioners address him as 'Father' of...
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'Pastor', although his formal title is 'the Reverend'. The same may be said of Symmachus. The term *papa* which was so frequently applied to him did not refer to an office.

But this situation was not to last. If a personal title is repeated often enough it can come to denote an office, and the evidence at our disposal suggests a dramatic shift in the way the word was used within the Roman Church during the sixth century. The first pope to be described as *papa* in the *Liber pontificalis* is Felix III (483–92), and from him until Hormisdas (514–23) all occurrences of this word are immediately before the names of popes. But in the account of John I (523–6) a change sets in, for the forms 'papa Iohannes' and 'Iohannes papa' are both used. The next accounts to employ the word *papa*, those of Boniface II (530–2) and Agapitus (535–6) both prefer to locate it after the name, and from the time of Silverius (536–7) the name always precedes the word *papa*. Any discussion of the usage of the *Liber pontificalis* of this time is complicated by the problem of the origin of this document, but there is now general agreement with Duchesne's position that a first redaction took place during the pontificate of Hormisdas and that the accounts of Hormisdas, John and Felix were added by the author responsible for the earlier material or by another hand; we may presume that later accounts were written, one by one in general, during the pontificates of immediately succeeding popes. We seem, then, to be faced with a sudden change in the period of the late 520s and 530s. The practice of placing the title *papa* before the name of the pope had been followed as early as 434 by Vincent of Lérins, but as far as I can determine he is unique for his period in this regard; he certainly antedates the usage of the Roman Church itself by roughly a century. This usage was not immediately accepted by all within that Church, for the cleric Arator, in two poems he wrote concerning his *De actibus apostolorum*, which we know to have been publicly

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39 'Papa Felix' (*Liber pontificalis* 252 l. 7, 10; note the more formal 'Felix archiepiscopus sedis apostolicae urbis Romae' l. 5); 'papa Symmachus' (260 l. 8; note in the same line 'faux est praesul'; one is not 'made' a *papa* but a *praesul*); 'papa Hormisdas' (270 l. 9, the first reference to a *papa... sedis apostolicae*), 17; 271 l. 16.
40 In addition to 'papa Iohannes' (op. cit. 275 l. 16, 276 l. 1, 11) and 'Iohannes papa' (275 l. 7, 10, 14), note the forms 'Iohannes venerabilis papa' (276 l. 4) and 'beatiissimus Iohannes, episcopus primæ sedis, papa' (276 l. 7).
41 'Bonifatius papa' (*Liber pontificalis* 281 l. 15), 'Agapitus papa' (287 l. 13, 288 l. 4), 'beatiissimus Agapitus papa' (287 l. 14, 288 l. 1f), 'beatus/beatiissimus/sanctus papa Agapitus' (287 l. 19, 20, 288 l. 3).
42 I have checked this by reading all sixth-century material.
43 On the origins of the *Liber pontificalis*, see the classic discussion of Duchesne in the introduction to his edition (vol. i, xxxiii–xlix), with the comments of Vogel (and edn., vol. 3, 3–7). The more recent treatment of O. Bertolini, 'II "Liber Pontificalis"', *La Storografia elementare* (Settimane ci studio del Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo, xvii), Spilatro 1970, 387–455 breaks no new ground on this issue (see 388).
44 *Commentarium* cap. 5, 22 (ed. R. S. Moxon, Cambridge 1915, 24, 130–2). Note too the similar practice among the correspondents of Bishop Desiderius of Cahors, who patronymically styled him 'Desiderius papa' (see below n. 77).
read in 544, seems to apply the word to Pope Vigilius as a personal title. This is a little unexpected within the Roman Church at that date, and it may be that we should take Arator's usage as answering to personal affection for Vigilius. But that the pattern we have examined became standard in the Roman Church is indicated by our next solid block of material bearing on that Church, the writings of Gregory the Great, who consistently places the word *papa* after personal names. In this respect, I would suggest, he was following a practice which had developed during the pontificates of the later Ostrogothic period.

This may be identified tentatively as the period when the word *papa* changed from being a personal title to a term of office within the Roman Church. In the following section of this paper I propose to examine usage outside the Roman Church, with particular reference to two related issues: acceptance of the restriction of the word to the bishop of Rome and its application to that bishop as a title of office. The area of enquiry is vast, and the comments which will be made in no way exhaust the topic. But they may clear away a little of the darkness shrouding an area which, to the best of my knowledge, has never attracted the scholarly attention it deserves.

The correspondence of Cassiodorus forms a worthwhile point of departure. Letters written by him in the period 535–6 show the word being used frequently. It is never used of a non-Roman bishop, but on several occasions it is glossed ‘urbs Romae’, perhaps implying the existence of *papae* of other places; when the word is used without explicit reference to Rome it is always in contexts which are clearly Roman. Cassiodorus tends to place the word before rather than after a personal name.

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48 "Sanctissimae papa Vigilii", *Epistola ad Vigilium* i. 3 (cf. the addressing of his work ‘papa Vigilio’); ‘patri egregio…papae’, *Epistola ad Parthenium*, i. 3. I cite from the edition of Arator by A. P. McKinlay, C.S.E.I. lxiii.

49 This is so even in the case of Leo: Gregory, *Epistolae* (M.G.H., Epistolae, i) 260 l. 4; 360 l. 5; 382 l. 7 (but note the form ‘papa Leo’ in a letter written in the name of Pope Pelagius ii (vol. ii, 443 l. 39); cf. above p. 37 on the overwhelming earlier preference for ‘papa Leo’. So Gregory's letters employ for other popes the forms *Iohannes papae* (vol. i, 212 l. 3), ‘Pelagius papae’ (ibid. 151 l. 23), ‘Vigilius papae’ (ibid. 151 l. 15, cf. vol. ii, 147 l. 9, as well as in a letter of Pelagius ii, ibid. 455 l. 7). Similarly in the Dialogues Gregory writes ‘Iohannis papae’ (3.8.1 with 3.31.4); his one use of the form ‘papa Pelagio’ (3.16.1) may answer to his personal relationship with this man, his immediate predecessor at pope.

50 In letters written during his periods as *quaesator palatii* (507–11) and *magister officiorum* (523–7) Cassiodorus had little occasion to deal with the affairs of the Church of Rome, although we find in the *Variae* the expressions ‘beatæ recordationis…Simplicius’ (M.G.H., *Auct. Ant.* xii. 345.1) and ‘beatissimi papae judicium’ (5.24.4).

51 Ibid. 10.19.4; 10.25.3; 12.20.1; it may be significant that the first two of these references occur in letters to Justinian.

52 Hence 8.24.4 to the Roman clergy; 9.16.1 to the prefect of the city; 9.15.3 to a pope (!); 10.20.3 in a letter to Theodora, in the expression ‘sive sanctissimae papa senatus amplissimus’. By only citing the last of these letters, and failing to take account of context, de Labriolle, ‘Une Esquisse’ 218 is misleading.

53 ‘Sanctissimae papa Bonifatius’ (*Variae* 9.15.3); ‘apostolicus papa Iohannes’ (9.17.9); but on the other hand ‘sanctus Agapitus urbis Romae papa’ (12.20.1).
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In his Institutiones, which appear to have been first written in about 562,\(^{31}\) he locates the title after the name, while continuing to gloss ‘urbis Romae’.\(^{32}\) Perhaps by this time the word had taken on connotations of office in his mind. In the historical work of the Anonymous Valesianus, which cannot be dated exactly but seems to have been the product of a single author writing in about the middle of the sixth century, the word papa is generally located before personal names.\(^{33}\) A letter of the clergy of the province of Milan sent to Gaul in 552 to explain the conduct of Pope Vigilius during the controversy over the Three Chapters frequently styles him papa. It never glosses the title by a formula such as ‘urbis Romae’ and makes it quite clear that Vigilius’ status as papa was different from that of Datus of Milan, who was episcopus;\(^{34}\) but invariably the title papa comes before the pope’s name.\(^{35}\) One has the feeling that the Church of Milan was prepared to concede the word papa to Vigilius, but not as a title of office, for against the form ‘papa Vigilius’ there is a strong preference for ‘Datus episcopus’.\(^{36}\) The Church of Ravenna did not yield so easily, for we have evidence that its bishops were styled papae until late in the sixth century (although apparently not thereafter),\(^{37}\) and it may be significant that an inscription in Ravenna which refers to Gregory the Great as ‘Gregorius papa’ was put up during the episcopate of a man of Roman origin.\(^{38}\)

In Africa, the developed Roman usage can be shown to have been accepted at an early date. True, the deacon Ferrandus, writing at some time between 532 and 546–7, was able to refer to ‘papa Eulalius’ of Syracuse,\(^{39}\) while the theological writer Facundus of Hermiane (d. 571) quoted without comment an Alexandrian document which mentioned ‘papa nostre Athanasius’.\(^{40}\) The chronicler Victor, who completed his work with the accession of Justin II in 565, was content to describe bishops of Rome as ‘episcopus’ or ‘archiepiscopus’.\(^{41}\) But against these writers we

32 Agapitus papa urbis Romae’ (pref.), ‘Vigilius vir beatissimus papa’ (i. 1.8); ‘sanctus Odarius papa urbis Romae’ (i. 8.1). But in his Expositio psalmorum Cassiodorus addressed Vigilius as ‘pater apostolici’ (pref., C.C.S.L. xcvi 6).
34 M.G.H. Epistolae, ii, 440 l. 25h, 40h; 441 l. 8, 30.
35 E.g. 439 l. 5, 9, 12, 16; so too with Leo, 439 l. 9.
36 ‘Datus episcopus’; 440 l. 19, 26, 40h; 441 l. 30. ‘Episcopus Datus’; 441 l. 8, 33.
37 Corpus inscriptionum latinarum, xi, 272, 275, 285, 304.
38 Ibid. 287. This inscription belongs to the time of Bishop John of Ravenna (Agnellus Quinet Andreae, Codex pontificalis ecclesiae Ravennatis, ed. A. Testi Ruponi, Bologna 1924, 246) who seems also to have addressed Gregory as ‘apostolicum papa’ (ibid. 228); his Roman origin is discussed ibid. 243 with n. 2.
39 PL. lv. 526D.
40 C.C.S.L. xc A. 111.
41 M.G.H., Auct. Ant., xi, e.g. sub an. 557-1, 558.
may set the deacon Liberatus of Carthage, who wrote his *Breviarium causae Nestorianorum et Eutychianorum* some time after 555. Liberatus frequently had occasion to mention bishops of Rome, and while he sometimes refers to them by such titles as ‘episcopus Romanus’ his preferred title is *papa*, which he employs on several dozen occasions. Sometimes the word is qualified ‘Romanus’, as if to imply the possible existence of non-Roman popes, and very occasionally an ambiguous form of words could, if pressed, be held to indicate that a non-Roman bishop was also a *pope*. But Liberatus' frequent references to the eastern patriarchs gave him many occasions where he could have styled them *papae*; never did he do so unambiguously. Further, although Liberatus tended to place the title *papa* before the name of its bearer, it is clear from his description of the pontificate of Silvester that he saw the papacy as an office: one could be ordained or made pope. Liberatus had spent some time in Rome, and may well have picked up his usage there. But we may conclude that for this African, writing not far into the second half of the sixth century, the association of the title *papa* with the bishop of Rome was firm.

The situation in Gaul was quite different. The correspondence of Avitus of Vienne includes letters addressed to the *papae* of Constantinople, Jerusalem and the city of Rome, as well as to ‘*papa* Hormisdas’, who is described as being most worthy of the apostolic see. Avitus died in 518, so his usage is perhaps expected. But councils held in Gaul later in the sixth century used similar language. The Council of Vaison, which met in 529, provided that the ‘nomen domini papae, quicumque sedes apostolicæ praefuerit’ be recited in churches, and went on to refer to ‘sanctus *papa* Urbis’. Similarly, the Council of Marseilles, meeting in 533, used the expressions ‘sanctus et dominus meus *Iohannes* *papa* sedis apostolicae’, ‘epistola sancti Siricii *papae urbis Romae*’ and ‘sancto *Iohanne* apostolico *papa*’. To be sure, in all cases the *papa* involved is the bishop of Rome, but in each case there is a qualifying expression which makes the reference to that particular bishop explicit. The word *papa* must therefore have been applicable to other bishops, and indeed the Council of Tours in 567 twice referred to legislation introduced ‘*a papa* Avito vel omnibus (or relquis) episcopis’, the reference being to Avitus of Vienne. Gregory of Tours (d. 594) wrote in the same way. He felt free to apply the word *papa* to the

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63 Schwartz, *Acta*, ii. v, Berlin 1936; e.g. 103 l. 11; 111 l. 26; 120 l. 4.
64 E.g. ‘condemnatus... a Agapito *papa* Romano et Menato Constantinopolitano’; 136 l. 19f.
65 I quote the important phrases: ‘Silverium subdiaconum Hormisdac quondam papae filium elegit ordinandum... flagitavit ut si papa fieret... ut papa ordinaretur... invent. Silverium papam ordinatum’ (136).
66 He had been sent to Rome, along with two bishops, by Reparatus of Carthage during the pontificate of Agapitus (535–6) (P.L. lxxv. 45C).
68 C.C.S.L. cxlviiiA. 79f, Can. 4f.
69 Ibid. 88 l. 22f, 25; 91 l. 119.
70 Ibid. 187 l. 345, 190 l. 415.
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The practice of applying the word papa to non-Roman bishops seems to have lingered throughout the Merovingian period and into Carolingian times. Desiderius of Cahors (d. 655) was very frequently addressed as papa by his episcopal correspondents. As further examples we may note the epigraph of one Genesius, papa of Sidonius' old see of Clermont, the dedication of Marculf of his book of formule to the obscure 'reverendarissimo papa Landesicho,' and the dedication at some time in the eighth century by Ursinus of his account of the Passio of Leudegarius to the 'beatusima papa' Ansoald of Poitiers. As late as the mid-ninth century we find the poet Sedulius Scotus styling various bishops papa. As a final pointer to the speed or slowness of the spread of the word papa in the sense of 'bishop of Rome', we may cite the Anglo-Saxon Bede. In his Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum, written early in the eighth century, Bede nowhere applies the word to any bishop other than that of Rome. Occasionally, particularly when documents are being quoted, we find a qualifying phrase, such as 'urbs Romae,' but there is no hint that cities outside Rome were ever addressed simply as papa.
other than Rome could have papae: for Bede, as for Liberatus of Carthage, a man styled papa must necessarily have been bishop of Rome. This is hardly surprising. Whereas the ecclesiastical parlance of Gaul was an outgrowth of a living, provincial Latin, that of England was imported directly from Rome, and it has already been shown that by the time of the Gregorian mission to Kent the Roman Church was using the word in a way which implied restriction to its own bishop. What is perhaps a little more unexpected is that Bede, again like Liberatus, seems to display a distinct preference for placing the title papa before the personal name of the pope, even though Bede's usage in this regard is by no means consistent. But many of the occasions on which the name precedes the title occur in documents which Bede quotes or in passages of his Historia written in a style distinct from that of the main work, the prefatory letter to King Ceolwulf and the annalistic summary of events which occurs in the concluding chapter. When Bede is writing in his customary style the title generally precedes the name. The case of Gregory the Great is of particular interest, for here Bede's preference for the form 'papa Gregorius' is overwhelming, and his usage at the beginning of a number of chapters indicates that he saw the expression as being interchangeable with 'pater Gregorius'. The devotion of the early Anglo-Saxon Church to the see of Rome, and Gregory in particular, needs no emphasis; would it be reading too much into Bede's usage to see in him a man whose view of the papacy emphasised its paternal care? Bede's usage is reminiscent here of that which prevailed in Rome during the time of Symmachus. But it was not that of the Roman Church of his day, or of Gregory's day. Even among writers from England it was not to last, for Bede's near-contemporary, St Boniface, displays in his letters to Popes Gregory & Gregory II a marked preference for the form 'Gregorius papa'.

This brief enquiry into the spread of the word papa in the sense of 'bishop of Rome' can make no claim to be definitive, but it has at least been suggestive. We have seen that in sixth-century Italy outside Rome it seems to have been used exclusively of the bishop of Rome, except in some inscriptions in Ravenna, with evidence to suggest that it was seen as a personal title rather than a title of office. That the last applications of the title to a non-Roman bishop in Italy occurred in Ravenna need occasion no surprise, given the zeal with which this see guarded its independence.

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89 'Bonifatii papaeb urbis Romae' (2.11); 'Severinum papam' (2.19); 'Martini papa' (4.17); 'Sergio papa' (5.17); 'Agathone papa' (5.19). 326.
90 Gregorii papa', Bede, Historia, proem. 6 (cf. 'papa Gregorii' twice on this page); 'Caelestino papa,' (5.24 an. CCCXXXI); 'Gregorius papa' (5.24 an. DXCVI; cf. 'papa Gregorius' an. DCI).
91 'Sancti patris Gregorii' (1.27); 'beati papa Gregorii' (1.28); 'papa Gregorius' (1-29); 'beatus pater Gregorius' (1.30); 'beatus papa Gregorius' (1.32, 2.1); cf. above n. 36.
92 Gregory II is referred to in the expressions 'Gregorii papa' and 'Gregorius papa' (ep. 65, 88; M.G.H., Epistolae, ii, 329, 573); Gregory II in 'Gregorii papa' (ep. 31, 80, ibid. 395, 399). Gregory II is once styled 'beato papa Gregorio' (ep. 16, ibid. 263).
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from Rome; perhaps more interesting is the fact that, by the middle of
the century, another great northern see, Milan, seems to have been
prepared to yield the title to Rome. In Africa, Liberatus was firm in
restricting the title to the bishop of the Roman Church, but in Gaul it is
all too easy to document applications of the title to various bishops
throughout the Merovingian period, and generosity in its application
seems to have lingered into the era of the Carolingians. Bede terms only
the bishops of Rome papa, although his usage suggests that he saw the
term as implying paternal oversight rather than juridical power. With
Boniface we encounter an author whose usage mirrors that of the Roman
Church. In general, non-Roman authors seem to have accepted the
restriction of the word papa to the bishop of Rome much more readily than
its application to that bishop as a formal title. Doubtless a more thorough
search for evidence could lead to the rough outline proposed here being
amended, but it is doubtful whether it would be able to modify the most
outstanding feature of the process sketched, the extraordinary conservatism
in the Frankish Church. Presumably this is connected with Rome's
relatively infrequent contacts with the Merovingian Church; compared
to the Catholic Church in Anglo-Saxon England, that in Francia was left
pretty much to its own devices. Doubtless, too, there should be recognition
of long-standing local traditions which found expression in the liberality
with which Sidonius Apollinaris greeted fellow bishops as papa. But it may
be that another less precisely definable phenomenon should be taken into
account. In a society where political power was often in the hands of local
authorities, and piety was frequently directed towards a bewildering
assortment of local saints, the application of the word papa to local
bishops may have made sense in a way it would not have done in the
English kingdoms.

Finally, it may be suggested that the preceding enquiry casts some light
on the Roman Church itself. Frequent application of the word papa to the
bishop of Rome seems to have originated in circles which formed around
Symmachus. This may seem a conclusion of purely lexicographical
interest, but it does have a more general bearing. It can be put in the
context of the background of the amazing creativity of the Roman Church
at that time, which produced a series of forged documents constituting,
at the very least, an important stage in the development of a legend later
to find expression in the Donation of Constantine, the enunciation of a
theme to become important in Canon Law, 'prima sedes non judicabitur


38 A striking example of this is furnished by a passage in Gregory of Tours. According
to this author, as the saintly Abbot Arelius of Limoges lay dying, a possessed woman cried
out that saints and martyrs were coming together: 'Here is Julian from Brioude, Privatus
from Mende, Martin from Tours and Martianis from Arelius' own city. And here are
Saturninus from Toulouse, and Dionysius from the city of Paris, and others who are now
in heaven.' (Libri historiarum 10.29, M.G.H., SS. rer. Mer., 525).
 developments in the expression of the cult of St Peter and, very shortly afterwards, the redaction of the first edition of the Liber Pontificalis. This seems to have been a time when the Roman Church was extending significantly the way in which it perceived itself. Furthermore, as has been shown, the more frequent use of the word papa was quickly followed by a change in word order, so that the name of the pope came to precede the word papa. This should be seen as more than a mere stylistic alteration. Rather, as has been suggested, it indicates a shift from the perception of a person qualified by a title to that of a title qualified by a person, with the implication of office. It need hardly be said that the history of the late antique and medieval papacy is much more controversial at present, with differences along confessional lines having been replaced largely by differences between those who see papal history in terms of the working out of an ideology and those who see it in more pragmatic terms, as a series of developments which may have amounted to little more than reactions to various circumstances. Obviously the evidence presented in this paper is not enough to swing the balance in favour of either school of interpretation. But it may not be going too far to comment that the growth in the usage of the word papa within the Roman Church took place at a time when various tendencies were at work in that Church which show a heightening of its self-awareness, and that the change in word order which followed is strongly suggestive of an idea of office. To this extent, whatever pressures the coining of the new usage may reflect, it may be seen as becoming part of an inheritance of ideas which, independently of origin, were to govern the way in which the status of the Roman Church was perceived in both Rome and beyond.

89 I quote from P.L. vi. 20, where the expression occurs in the false ‘Synodi Sinuensisar Gesta’.

90 Note the role of St Peter in the thinking of Emodius: he makes a long speech in the liethus (126-129, M.G.H., Auct. Ant. vii. 62-5) and is referred to in connection with the termination of the Laurentian schism (ep. 9:30:4). Symmachus’ supporter Albinus built a church dedicated to Peter, and Symmachus himself conducted extensive building at St Peter’s basilica as well as building hospices at the tombs of Peter, Paul and Laurence (Liber pontificalis, 262f).

91 See above, n. 42.

92 In particular W. Ullmann; see for example his Growth and A Short History of the Popacy in the Middle Ages, London 1972.