

# CHURCH AND SOCIETY IN LATE ANTIQUITY ITALY AND BEYOND

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Claire Sotinel

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## **PUBLISHER'S NOTE**

The articles in this volume, as in all others in the Variorum Collected Studies Series, have not been given a new, continuous pagination. In order to avoid confusion, and to facilitate their use where these same studies have been referred to elsewhere, the original pagination has been maintained wherever possible.

Each article has been given a Roman number in order of appearance, as listed in the Contents. This number is repeated on each page and is quoted in the index entries.

## FOREWORD

The papers gathered here are all concerned, in one way or another, with interactions between Christian churches and Roman civil society, mainly in Late Antique Italy. The question of Christianisation is examined first through the agents in historical situations, then through the places in which religious practices were carried out, and finally in the perspective of distant relations between people and places.

The first section has its own unity. It gathers together a group of articles concerned with the controversy of the Three Chapters and the person of pope Vigilius. The research that I carried out over a long period on the city of Aquileia in Late Antiquity very soon led me to take an interest in this much neglected debate, which had important repercussions in the Adriatic region, since the churches of Northern Italy separated themselves from the Roman communion for some decades. Several of these studies were carried out in the course of the work which led to the publication of my *Identité civique et christianisme. Aquilée du IIIe au VIe siècle*, Rome, 2004. Thus the article 'Pontifical authority and imperial power in the reign of Justinian: pope Vigilius' (I) originated in the need to clarify the circumstances that gave rise to the schism of Aquileia. But I gradually came to appreciate the importance and interest of the controversy over the Three Chapters. Three of these articles were published by the Ecole française de Rome; I owe an immense debt of gratitude to this institution which received me into its ranks in 1990, and its director at the time, the late Charles Pietri, who was also the first supervisor of my doctoral work.

The second section brings together a series of articles published as complements to one of my principal activities, the Christian prosopography of Italy, to which I contributed first as a student of Charles Pietri's, later as a member of the team. The first three papers in this section form the *disiecta membra* of a coherent study, representing an attempt to use prosopographical evidence in a historical manner. As a comparison of the volumes of *Prosopographie chrétienne du Bas-Empire* with those of *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire* quickly shows, clerical prosopography provides a tool which is very different from its imperial equivalent. In Christian prosopography the hierarchy of offices is much less precisely fixed, genealogies are less frequent or, mostly, don't exist. This is not to say that *PCBE* cannot serve as a sort of *Who's who* of the clergy of Late Antiquity. The studies presented here are intended to suggest that a careful use of even fragmentary evidence often allows us to

sketch the outlines of a social history of the clergy. The new understanding of the social setting of bishops presented here is only in part due to the Italian focus adopted; it owes much to the prosopographical method, which tends to limit the importance of a few famous sources and to give a more important place to relatively insignificant persons. H.-I. Marrou, announcing the joint French and British project of a prosopography of the Late Empire, entertained the hope of rehabilitating the ‘foot-soldiers of history’. Failing quite to reach the foot-soldiers, these articles on the Italian episcopate show that the inclusion of the NCOs represents a notable extension of our knowledge of Late Antique Christians. For all these papers I am profoundly indebted to the team which produced the *Prosopographie chrétienne du Bas-Empire. Italie*, and in the first place, to Luce Pietri who took over the direction of the project from 1991. In a sense these studies are simply utilizations of the mass of material brought together in these volumes. They also owe much to colleagues and friends who have given me opportunities for formulating my reflections in print, particularly Rita Lizzi for organising a conference in Perugia on elites in Late Antiquity (VIII: ‘The bishops of Italy in Late antique society: a new elite?’).

The last article in this section (IX: ‘The Christian gift and its economic impact in Late Antiquity’) does not follow exactly the same method. But it shares with the previous papers the attempt to bring together evidence to help us understand the functioning of clerical society, concerning itself specifically with the economic activities of bishops. This also goes beyond the limitation of the enquiry to Italy, and represents a fusion of work directly inspired by prosopography and research on *Les frontières du profane dans l’Antiquité tardive*, carried out over four years with Eric Rebillard, for a series of conferences whose proceedings have been published in 2010.

From persons it is easy to pass to the places they occupied, the more so as places were often the objects of competition between Christians, the most active of Late Antique communities, and other inhabitants of the Roman world. The emergence of places of cult is one of the most visible facets of the power-relations between Christianity and the other religious practices in the Empire, and their study is especially fascinating because it involves a highly varied range of sources, from the monuments themselves to the texts which describe them, occasionally by inscriptions. The astonishing wealth of recent discoveries, made since archaeologists have started to take an interest in later periods, has greatly enhanced our knowledge of Late Antique towns. This is at the same time a subject that raises great difficulties, perhaps because it has long been viewed in mainly apologetic perspectives. This question has long interested me, but I had not considered it except in a very particular instance in connection with a text of Zeno of Verona (X: ‘*Locus orationis* ou *domus Dei*? Le témoignage de Zénon de Vérone sur l’évolution des églises [*tractatus* II, 6]’) until Eric Rebillard and

Michel Narcy encouraged me to reflect on it more systematically, on the occasion of a congress organised by the CNRS (XI: 'The end of pagan holy places in the West: problems and method'), a study continued in 'Places of Christian worship and their sacralization in Late Antiquity' (XII). The final paper in this section (XIII) is a study of a very particular case, that of the church of St Felix *in Pincis*. This is part of a larger enquiry, conducted under the direction of Vincent Jolivet, on the occupation of the Pincian Hill in Late Antiquity. This case-study will be complemented by eventual publications on the *domus Pinciana* and its transformations in the fifth century.

This field of research is still at the centre of my current work. Apart from publication of the excavations of the Late Antique *domus Pinciana*, I continue to work on the material indications of Christianisation in Western towns. The object of my primary interest, however, is now that of which the last section of this volume contains the first results: a study of the circulation of information in Late Antiquity. This project has its origins in a colloquium organised at the Institut Ausonius de Bordeaux by Laurent Capdetrey and Jocelyne Nelis-Clément on the circulation of information in Ancient States (XIV: *La circulation de l'information dans les Eglises*). Such a project necessarily extends beyond the geographical frontiers of Italy, and, as it develops, is bound to embrace the whole imperial area. I have continued to explore this from various points of view, and these studies as a whole will contribute to a book on which I began work while enjoying the excellent conditions offered by a Visiting Fellowship of All Souls College, Oxford, in 2008. The papers here printed concern exclusively the circulation of information within the Christian churches, and provide a privileged view-point from which to analyse the relations of Christians with the society in which they live.

Some of the papers here were originally published in English; some have been left in their original French version, and several have been translated for this volume. The translations have not been revised to bring the papers up to date, except by including a few bibliographical indications, especially for works originally noted as being in the press at the time of original publication. This work of translation would not have been possible but for the help of Robert Markus, to whom I wish to express boundless gratitude. His intellectual influence will also, I hope, be apparent in several of the studies presented here. I wish also to thank John Smedley and Lindsay Farthing of Ashgate Publishing for their invaluable help, and all the colleagues and friends who have shared with me the intellectual adventure of exploring Late Antiquity.

CLAIRE SOTINEL

*Paris*  
*28 June 2010*

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## ABBREVIATIONS

ACO	<i>Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum</i> , Berlin, 1914–
BEFAR	Bibliothèque des Ecoles françaises d’Athènes et de Rome
CC	<i>Corpus Christianorum</i> , Turnhout, 1953–
CCSL	<i>Corpus Christianorum, Series Latinae</i> , Turnhout, 1953–
CEFR	Collection de l’Ecole française de Rome
CIL	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</i>
Coll. Avell.	<i>Epistulae Imperatorum Pontificum aliorum inde ab a. CCCLXVII usque ad a. DLIII datae Avellanae quae dicitur collectio</i> , O. Günther ed., CSEL 35, Wien, 1895
CSEL	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum</i> , Wien, 1866–
CTh	<i>Codex Theodosianus. Theodosiani libri 16 cum constitutionibus sirmondianis</i> , T.H. Mommsen, P. Meyer eds, Berlin, 1905
Diehl	E. Diehl, <i>Inscriptiones Latinae christianae Veteres</i> , 3 vols, Berlin, 1925–31
ICI	<i>Inscriptiones christianae Italiae septimo saeculo antiquiores</i> , Bari, 1985–
ICVR	<i>Inscriptiones christianae urbis Romae septimo saeculo antiquiores, nova series</i> , Rome–Città del Vaticano, 1922–
Jaffé	<i>Regesta Pontificum Romanorum ab Condita Ecclesia ad Annum p. Ch. n. 1198</i> , P. Jaffé, Löwenfeld, Kalten, Berlin, 185 (2d ed. by Löwenfeld, Kaltenbrunner, and Ewald, Leipzig, 1885–88)
LP	<i>Liber Pontificalis</i> , texte, introduction et commentaire par Louis Duchesne, t. 1, Paris, 1886
MEFR	Mélanges de l’Ecole française de Rome
MEFRA	Mélanges de l’Ecole française de Rome – Antiquité
MGH	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica</i> , Hanover, 1826–
MGH AA	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Auctores Antiquissimi</i>
MGH Ep	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Epistulae</i>
MGH SRL	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Scriptores rerum Langobardicarum et Italicarum saec. VI–IV</i> , G. Waitz ed., Hanover, 1878

- PCBE *Prosopographie Chrétienne du Bas Empire*. 1, *Afrique*, A. Mandouze dir., Paris, 1982; 2, *Italie*, Ch. & L. Pietri dirs, Rome, 1999–2000
- PG *Patrologia Graeca cursus completus*, J.-P. Migne ed., Paris, 1857–86
- PL *Patrologia Latina cursus completus*, J.-P. Migne ed., Paris, 1844–64
- PLRE *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*. 1, A.D. 260–395, A.H.M. Jones, J.R. Martindale, J. Morris, Cambridge 1971; 2, A.D. 395–527, A.H.M. Jones, J.R. Martindale, Cambridge, 1980; 3, A.D. 527–641, J.R. Martindale, Cambridge, 1992
- SC Sources Chrétiennes, Paris, 1941–
- TLL *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae*, Leipzig–München, 1900–
- TRE *Theologisches Real Enzyklopädie*, Berlin–New York, 1977–2004

# I

## Pontifical Authority and Imperial Power in the Reign of Justinian: Pope Vigilius\*

Of all sixth-century popes, and perhaps of all popes in Christian antiquity, Vigilius is the one whose biography is the most complicated. Occupying the see of Peter during the years of the Gothic wars, he was involved in the last christological controversies of the sixth century, the episode known as the affair of the Three Chapters.<sup>1</sup> But the contradictions in the psychological portrait yielded by a reading of the sources are even more striking than the complexities of these theological disputes. While alive, Vigilius was the object both of the loyalties of the faithful and – even more – of implacable hatreds which have affected the historiography. Several historians and chroniclers of the sixth century speak of pope Vigilius – an honour not shared by many of his predecessors – but these texts almost all belong to the history of the Three Chapters controversy, and all the authors are self-proclaimed witnesses for the prosecution: Liberatus of Carthage and Facundus of Hermiane, African clerics persecuted for their fidelity to the Three Chapters which Vigilius ended up anathematising;<sup>2</sup> the deacon Pelagius, who mercilessly condemned the bishop whom he was to succeed;<sup>3</sup> the author of the life of Vigilius in the *Liber pontificalis*, lost among the events he recounts;<sup>4</sup> Victor of Tunnunna, who

\* 'Autorité pontificale et pouvoir impérial en Italie byzantine au temps de Justinien: le pape Vigile', *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome Antiquité* 104 (1992), pp. 439–63.

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<sup>1</sup> The present enquiry deals only with the sequence of events. For a summary account of this subject, see E. Amman, 'Trois chapitres', in *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, 15/2, cols. 1868–1924.

<sup>2</sup> Liberatus Carthaginensis Diaconus, *Breniarium causae Nestorianorum et Eutybianorum*, *Patrologia Latina* (PL) 68, 969–1050; Facundus Episcopus Hermianensis, *Pro defensione trium capitulorum libri XII*, (*Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina* [CC] 90A). He is also the author of a pamphlet *Contra Mocianum Scholasticum* and an *Epistula fidei catholicae in defensione Trium Capitulorum*, published in the same volume.

<sup>3</sup> Pelagius Diaconus, *In defensione Trium Capitulorum*, ed. R. Devréesse (Studi e Testi LVII), Rome 1932.

<sup>4</sup> The *Liber pontificalis* (LP) is here referred to in the edition by L. Duchesne, Paris, 1886.

wrote his chronicle in the exile to which Justinian's anger had condemned him.<sup>5</sup> The Acts of the fifth ecumenical Council pile vilification on a pope whom the conciliar fathers were to depose in their seventh session.<sup>6</sup> Nothing can be more Byzantine than the tangle of these polemical sources; they take delight in multiplying secret interviews, apocryphal letters, texts repudiated by their authors, contradictory reports. The narrative sources thus constitute a substantial indictment, but the pope's letters preserved in the canonical collections, the texts emanating from schismatic communities in Northern Italy and related sources, inscriptions, dedications, liturgical prefaces, invite a critical reading which allows for more nuances in the pope's portrait.

On the other hand, the figure of Vigilius is also at the centre of lively debates apart from those over the Three Chapters. In his person the very idea of the apostolic succession is made dubious, because he did not accede to the pontificate until after the forced deposition of his predecessor, whom he would go on to cause to starve to death. Moreover, the incoherence of Vigilius's policies would support polemical arguments in debates over the dogma of papal infallibility. A remarkable article by Mgr Louis Duchesne, published in the *Revue des Questions Historiques* in 1885 opened a debate more concerned with the first Vatican Council than with the Council of Constantinople in the sixth century.<sup>7</sup> Finally, the temptation to subject these tortuous policies, following the example of the ancient historians, to a moral judgement, has weighed too heavily on the historiography.

The object of the present enquiry is not only to rehabilitate a controversial personality, even if one is sometimes tempted to take the side of the defence in a case where only the prosecution seems to get a hearing. Independently of questions of doctrine relevant to an assessment of his pontificate, Vigilius was the pope of the reconquest of Italy by Justinian. Since the pontificate of Simplicius, the bishops of Rome held their office while being subject to the authority of Arian kings who intervened little in the government of the Church. With the distant emperors in the East they had turbulent relations,

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<sup>5</sup> Victor Tonnennensis Episcopus, *Chronica, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Auctores Antiquissimi (MGH AA)* 11, pp. 179–206.

<sup>6</sup> E. Schwartz, *Acta conciliorum oecumenicorum (ACO)* IV/1: *Concilium universale Constantinopolitanum sub Iustiniano habuitum* (Berlin, 1971).

<sup>7</sup> L. Duchesne, 'Vigile et Pélage', in *Revue des questions historiques*, XXXVI, 1884, p. 369. Response by Dom Chamard, *ibid.*, XXXVII, p. 540, and reply by Duchesne, *ibid.*, XXXVII, p. 579. The long article by F. Savio, 'Il papa Vigilio', in *Civiltà cattolica*, 1903, limits itself to the debate over whether Vigilius was worthy of being pope.

though they acted with a fundamental independence, pursuing in a basically favourable context a policy of maintaining the autonomy of the religious authority in relation to the secular powers, while cultivating a nostalgia for the Christian Empire, an attitude which for a long time did compromise them in the eyes of their Gothic masters. But when Vigilius became pope, the conditions for the re-establishment of this Christian Empire were achieved, because the Byzantine armies had reconquered the greater part of Italy. The question raised by the vicissitudes of Vigilius's eventful pontificate is that of the place of the papacy in the Byzantine Empire. To attempt a biography without polemical intent allows us to trace the outline of a policy which raises the whole problem of relations between Rome and Constantinople, between episcopal *auctoritas* and royal *potestas*, in the last decades of imperial Italy.

Without neglecting the complicated episodes of the pope's enforced absence from Rome during eight years, we need to evaluate the other elements of a policy which aimed above all at the restoration of Italy now that it was again fully part of the Empire. The sources at our disposal have to be used with discretion: the pope's correspondence,<sup>8</sup> the polemical literature, abundant from 550, which is in general violently opposed to him, and the posthumous sources which amount almost to a systematic *dammatio memoriae*. Vigilius is the first pope never to have enjoyed a reputation for holiness.

### The Man Who Wanted to be Pope

Vigilius was born into the Roman aristocracy. His father Iohannes held the office of Praetorian Prefect before 527,<sup>9</sup> and his brother Reparatus was Prefect of the City in 527,<sup>10</sup> both under the Gothic monarchy. They both belonged to

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<sup>8</sup> Vigilius's letters are dispersed in a variety of sources: some are conserved in the *Collectio Avellana*, in *Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* (CSEL) 35. The Arles collection of letters is published in *MGH Epp.* 3, Berlin, 1892. The letters concerned with the Three Chapters have been edited by E. Schwartz, either in *Vigiliusbriefe* (*Sitzungsberichte der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-historische Abteilung*, 1940, 2 [*Vigiliusbriefe*]), or in *ACO*, 4/2. Some others are printed only in *PL* 69.

<sup>9</sup> His father is mentioned as deceased by Cassiodorus in a letter addressed to Rusticus in 527. As a friend of Ennodius of Pavia, who mentions him at the beginning of the sixth century with the titles of *magnitudo* and of *sublimitas* (Ennodius, *Ep.* 2, 1 and 4, 2), Iohannes is *consularis campaniae* in 507/511 (Cassiodorus, *Variae* 3,27 and 4,10). He ended his career as Praetorian Prefect (Cassiodorus, *Var.* 9, 7. See IOHANNES 67, *PLRE* 2, pp. 609–10.

<sup>10</sup> Rusticus was appointed Prefect of the City by Athalaric: Cassiodorus, *Var.* 9, 7.

the large group of aristocrats of provincial origin which benefited from the Gothic kingdom's need for competent high functionaries.<sup>11</sup>

In 530 Vigilius was a deacon at Rome. Pope Boniface officially designated him as his successor, in a synod which met in the basilica of St Peter, when all the clergy signed a document validating this designation. But Boniface was contested in his office: he had been elected by a minority of the clergy and founded the legitimacy of his claim to it on the fact that he had been designated by his predecessor, Felix IV; schism was avoided only through the death of his rival, Dioscorus, twenty three days after his election. The overwhelming majority of the clergy whom Boniface got to endorse his choice of Vigilius was surely opposed to this procedure, perhaps as well as to the pope and to his candidate. They successfully proved the validity of their opinion, since a little later Boniface convoked another assembly, at which the senate took part, in which he annulled his previous decisions and solemnly consigned to the flames the act designating Vigilius.<sup>12</sup> Vigilius's attitude on this occasion is unknown. It is often thought that Boniface's first choice had been the result of the intrigues of an ambitious deacon, whose subsequent career was to display the strength and persistence of his desire to be bishop of Rome. But the qualities which commended Vigilius to the pope were the same as those that had commended Boniface to his predecessor: acceptability to the Gothic ruling power, while belonging to a powerful family that would allow him a certain independence.

Boniface's *volte-face* effectively prevented Vigilius from succeeding him immediately; it is not known whether he offered himself for election on the death of the pope in 532. The long vacancy of two and a half months before the election of John II reveals division among the clergy. The new pope was – unusually – a Roman presbyter. One can conjecture that he was the candidate of the party of Dioscorus,<sup>13</sup> who had secured the annulment of Vigilius's designation. Mgr Duchesne suggested that it was his manoeuvring that inspired the letter that king Athalaric addressed to pope John in 533, in which

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<sup>11</sup> Ch. Pietri, 'Aristocratie et société cléricale en Italie chrétienne au temps d'Odoacre et de Théodoric', in *Mémoires et Études de l'École française de Rome (MEFR-A)* 1981/2, pp. 420–40.

<sup>12</sup> *LP* 1, 281. cf. L. Duchesne, 'La succession du pape Felix IV', in *MEFR* 3, 1883, pp. 239–66.

<sup>13</sup> In effect 62 of the 63 presbyters of Rome had voted for Dioscorus, while Boniface found weightier support among the deacons.

he recalled forcefully that it was forbidden to intrigue to obtain the pontificate. This conjecture has the support only of psychological likelihood.<sup>14</sup>

At the start of 536 Vigilius – who had no more succeeded John II than he had Boniface – was at Constantinople. The *Liber pontificalis* says that he held the office of *apocrisiarius*, that is to say that he was the pope's permanent legate.<sup>15</sup> This is a puzzling statement, for it is not certain that the office existed before the end of Agapitus's pontificate. It is indeed certain that the see of Rome had no regular representation at Constantinople during the Acacian schism. The reports of John I's visits to the emperor make no mention of a resident representative at the capital, whereas the Westerners who accompanied the pope, who it seems were all laymen, stayed at the court.<sup>16</sup> Liberatus of Carthage says that Agapitus designated the deacon Pelagius as *apocrisiarius* on the eve of his departure from Constantinople in April 536, without indicating whether he was creating a new office or replacing Vigilius, who is still given only the title of deacon.<sup>17</sup> On the other hand the *Liber pontificalis* goes on to contradict itself referring to Vigilius, in the same entry, as *archidiaconus*.<sup>18</sup>

If he was not *apocrisiarius*, was Vigilius a member of the pontifical delegation sent to the East by king Theodoric to demand from the emperor a cessation of the military offensive in Italy? One fact suggests a doubt about this: at the council called by the emperor to confirm the judgements of Agapitus – who had died since – against the bishop of Constantinople Anthimus, there were present two deacons (one of them Pelagius), some lectors, and five bishops, who seem to compose the whole of the Western delegation;<sup>19</sup> but Vigilius, who was still at Constantinople and a frequenter of the court, as the sequel shows, did not take part.<sup>20</sup> We can thus be certain that Vigilius was at Constantinople in the spring of 536, with the rank of a deacon of the Roman

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<sup>14</sup> Duchesne, 'La succession' (above, n. 12), p. 241. Cassiodorus, *Var.* 9, 15 (*MGH AA* 12, pp. 279–80).

<sup>15</sup> *LP* 1, p. 292, line 1.

<sup>16</sup> Procopius, *De bello gothico* 1, 4, 21–4; Constantine Porphyrogenitos, *De caer.* 87.

<sup>17</sup> Liberatus, *Breniarium* 22 (*PL* 68, 1039d).

<sup>18</sup> *LP* 1, p. 293, line 5.

<sup>19</sup> *Conc. Constantinopol. (536)*, *Coll. Sabbatica* 5, *ACO* III, pp. 126–213.

<sup>20</sup> The later testimony of Gregory the Great complicates the question: in a letter of August 592, whose addressees are unknown, he says that Vigilius, while he was at Constantinople (*in urbe regia constitutus*), had promulgated a sentence of excommunication against Theodora and the *acephaloi* at the time when Rome was under siege. But Gregory is addressing supporters of the Three Chapters who claimed the memory of Vigilius in support of their refusal of the Roman communion. He uses his correspondents' own arguments against them, though the precise

church, though he seems to have had a status different from that of the other members of the Italian clergy. It is not possible to be more precise about his official position while residing in the imperial city.

Vigilius is one of the rare Roman aristocrats whose change of allegiance from loyally serving the Gothic kingdom to become solid supporters of the Byzantine restoration can be fairly precisely traced. In his case this reversal took place during his residence in Constantinople. Pope Agapitus had been forced to leave Rome on a mission without any specifically religious purpose, paying his own travelling expenses.<sup>21</sup> By contrast, the Westerners attending in Constantinople were treated with deference;<sup>22</sup> Vigilius himself was certainly a counsellor to whom the empress Theodora listened. On the other hand, he was a witness of the debate between the imperial couple and the pope over the case of Anthimus. Since his arrival in the capital the pope refused to greet archbishop Anthimus, suspected of miaphysite sympathies, whose accession to the see of Constantinople had been secured by Theodora's favour, since he had been bishop of Trebizond.<sup>23</sup> After trying, by persuasion and by threats, to get the pope to yield to his views, Justinian in the end accepted that Anthimus be deposed in favour of the irreproachably orthodox Chalcedonian Menas. These events could have strengthened Vigilius's high regard for the pontificate and his confidence that the Roman church had more to gain from cooperation with the Empire than with a Gothic kingdom now openly hostile to Catholics. It is certainly from this moment that Vigilius, who had been represented as the rightful successor of the first pope of Germanic origin, Boniface, and of Felix IV, a candidate imposed by Theodoric, came to be close to the Byzantine imperial power.

All the sources agree in asserting that Vigilius did not leave Constantinople until after Agapitus's death. But the precise narrative of the course of events is again full of contradictions. Liberatus claims that Vigilius, before leaving the imperial city, had concluded a secret pact with Theodora, undertaking

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events he alludes to cannot be identified, even though Vigilius had never formally condemned Theodora.

<sup>21</sup> The financial position of the Roman church at the start of 536 did not allow the costs of the embassy to be met. The king in the end consented to advance the necessary funds, but required that sacred vessels be deposited as surety.

<sup>22</sup> Liberatus, *Breviarium* 21 (PL 68, 1059).

<sup>23</sup> Canon 23 of Nicaea formally forbade the transfer of a bishop to another see.

to restore Anthimus, Theodosius and Severus,<sup>24</sup> in return for a large sum of money and a letter addressed to Belisarius demanding that he get Vigilius to be consecrated as bishop of Rome. Liberatus notes that at the time of these secret dealings the question of the pontifical succession was thought in Constantinople to be open and that Vigilius did not know of Silverius's election until his arrival in Italy. This sequence presupposes that the deacon departed at the latest in the early summer of 536, because Silverius was consecrated on 8 June of this year,<sup>25</sup> but at this moment Belisarius was not yet in Italy. Moreover, Liberatus is certainly mistaken in placing the interview between Vigilius and Belisarius at Ravenna, because this city did not return to Byzantine authority until after Vigilius's accession to the pontificate.<sup>26</sup> Even on the closest chronological sequence of events Vigilius could not have met Belisarius before November 536, the date at which the Byzantine general succeeded in taking Naples. Liberatus, who has a habit of recounting secret interviews about which one wonders how he could have known, does not appear to be very trustworthy in the details of his narrative.<sup>27</sup>

The *Liber pontificalis* gives a different version. According to this Vigilius, designated as *archidiaconus*, was still in Constantinople at the moment when the news of Silverius's accession to the pontificate arrived. He is said to have advised the empress to write to the new pope asking him to restore Anthimus to his see, a request to which Silverius proudly replied: *Domina Augusta, ego rem istam facturum nunquam ero, ut reuocem hominem hereticum in sua nequitia damnatum*. It was not until after this exchange of correspondence that Vigilius would have been sent to Italy, carrying a letter from the empress demanding that Belisarius depose Silverius. The *Liber pontificalis* claims, improbably, to quote

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<sup>24</sup> Theodosius of Alexandria, supporter of the miaphysite Severus of Antioch, had been elected as successor of Timothy IV in 535, removed from the see of Alexandria in 538 by Justinian: Duchesne, *L'Église au VI<sup>e</sup> siècle*, pp. 91–101.

<sup>25</sup> It is hard to see what reason the emperor might have had to delay so long to concern himself with the pontifical succession. Vigilius's absence from the council of May 536 could even allow us to envisage his departure at this time; but this hypothesis runs into other difficulties.

<sup>26</sup> Liberatus, *Breniarium*, 22.

<sup>27</sup> E. Schwartz judges that the story of collusion between Theodora and Vigilius to destroy Chalcedonian orthodoxy is not trustworthy. 'After 536 Theodora had no need of the pope of Rome to do what she wanted. To satisfy her taste for intrigue it was enough that no new Agapitus should occupy the see of Peter.' *Vigiliusbriefe*, pp. 58–9.

this letter: *ecce ibi habes Vigilium archidiaconum et apocrisarium karissimum, qui nobis pollicitus est reuocare Anthimum patriarcham.*<sup>28</sup>

Mgr Duchesne writes that 'Liberatus recounts these events in the same spirit, sometimes in the same terms. If he adds or omits some matter of detail, such a difference in no way precludes the agreement of the two accounts; each confirms and supplements the other.'<sup>29</sup> But there are insurmountable differences in the chronology of the two texts. Liberatus's narrative is basically the likelier of the two: wishing to control an episcopal succession whose political significance is so important seems much less unlikely than wishing to depose a pope, something almost unprecedented;<sup>30</sup> but the chronological problem seems unresolvable. Justinian can hardly have convoked a council in June to confirm the deposition of Anthimus in order to please the Roman clergy and then have contemplated the deposition of the bishop of Rome, in order to secure Anthimus, so risking losing the support of the Roman Catholics in time of war. Such a scheme seems altogether too Byzantine, even for an emperor.

The third account of Vigilius's accession to the pontificate is that of the African bishop Facundus, who is also very hostile to Vigilius. He speaks only of texts written *prius ambitionis impulsu, cum fieri arderet episcopus*, without distinguishing them from those written later, lured by the prospect of gain.<sup>31</sup> The sources are thus in agreement on only the two points: Vigilius's desire to become pope, and the intervention of the Byzantine power in his accession to the pontifical see. Vigilius in any case was not alone in being disappointed by Silverius's election; at the moment of Agapitus's death in Constantinople, Justinian could have thought that he had the situation in Italy well in hand. The embassy he had sent to Theodahad had returned bringing an undertaking by the king to abdicate if the emperor so desired;<sup>32</sup> and the concessions made to Agapitus purchased the goodwill of the clergy towards him. During the Acacian schism the Empire had experienced the political weight exerted by a hostile church; and Justinian had himself been the architect of a reconciliation indispensable at a time when he turned his ambitions towards the West. But at

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<sup>28</sup> LP 1, p. 292. The functions of *apocrisarius* and of archdeacon are in any case not compatible (see note 10).

<sup>29</sup> LP, *Vita Silverii*, p. 294, note 18.

<sup>30</sup> Pope Liberius had in fact been deposed and replaced by Felix, but it had been done by an Arian ruler; whereas Justinian's scrupulous orthodoxy is well known.

<sup>31</sup> Facundus Hermianensis, *Contra Mocianum* 38 (CC 90A, p. 409).

<sup>32</sup> E. Stein, *Histoire du Bas Empire*, 2, 344, citing Procopius, *Bell. Goth.* 1, 6.

the same moment Theodahad made a *volte-face*: he interned the second embassy that had come to arrange the conditions for his abdication<sup>33</sup> and, hearing the news of Agapitus's decease, imposed on the Roman clergy a candidate of his choice, Silverius.<sup>34</sup>

Whatever we are to make of these secret dealings, in March 537 Silverius was deposed, accused of treason to the Byzantines, and replaced by Vigilius. Procopius, who witnessed these events, does not present this deposition as an ecclesiastical plot, but as a political decision linked to the exile of several senators suspected of being supporters of Vitigis, another measure taken by the Byzantine general to secure resistance to Gothic besiegement.<sup>35</sup> The *Liber pontificalis* and Liberatus both accuse Vigilius of having planned the plot by creating false letters over Silverius's signature.<sup>36</sup> But if we note that the pope was not deposed at the time of Belisarius's entry into Rome (December 536) but only after the first months of the siege (March 537), and thus several months after Vigilius's coming within the reach of the general-in-chief, it seems likely that fear of treason played a genuine role. Even if these accusations were based on forgeries, as affirmed by the *Liber pontificalis*, Silverius, as a pope appointed by a Gothic king, and one who had given an oath of fidelity to his successor, could have represented a threat. If Belisarius took the risk of alienating the Roman populace, it was because the threat represented by Silverius was the more serious.

Even though Liberatus says that the new pope was elected in accordance with due formalities,<sup>37</sup> the first months of Vigilius's pontificate were clouded by suspicion about his legitimacy, for Silverius was still alive. Here, too, the sources represent the facts in a polemical manner. The fate of Silverius raises the question of Vigilius's relations with Constantinople.

The *Liber pontificalis* says simply that Vigilius sent Silverius, reduced to the monastic condition, to the island of Ponza, where *sustentavit eum panem*

<sup>33</sup> Procopius, *Bell. Goth.* 1, 7, 11–25; Stein, *Histoire du Bas Empire*, 2, p. 345, note 2.

<sup>34</sup> *LP* 1, p. 290. As Duchesne remarks, the fact that Silverius was only a sub-deacon confirms an intervention from outside the ranks of the clergy in his election. Liberatus does not contradict this, as he gives credence to the accusation later advanced against the pope of treason on behalf of the Goths. Duchesne, *Liber pontificalis* 1, p. 295, on Liberatus, *Breviarium*, 22.

<sup>35</sup> Procopius, *De bello gothico*, 1, 25, 13–14. Procopius mentions only the senator Maximus but indicates that Belisarius's decision was aimed at several.

<sup>36</sup> *LP* 1, p. 293.

<sup>37</sup> Although the continuator of the *Chronicle* of Marcellinus says that Belisarius deposed Silverius as well as ordained Vigilius: Marcellinus *comes*, *Chronica s. a. 537*, (MGH AA, 11), p. 105: *papam Silverium Belisarius ab episcopatu summonit et loco eius Vigilium diaconum ordinavit.*

*tribulationis et aquam angustiae*, and where he died several months later in exile.<sup>38</sup> Liberatus provides a more complicated scenario: Silverius, sent first to Patara in Lycia, had managed to interest the local bishop in his cause, who, moved by his afflictions, alerted the emperor. Justinian, only now made aware of the situation, ordered – according to this account – that Silverius be taken back to Rome for a regular trial, notwithstanding the protests of the Roman deacon Pelagius (appointed *apocrisarius* at Constantinople by Agapitus, and kept in that office since). Belisarius, disobeying the emperor, handed Silverius over to Vigilius, who only then sent him into exile to the isle of Palmaria (one of the Pontic isles) and caused him to die of hunger.<sup>39</sup>

The other accounts are very summary, without, however, being always in agreement. Procopius of Caesarea, in his *Secret History*, says only that it was Antonina, the wife of Belisarius, that had been responsible for the deposition and death of Silverius.<sup>40</sup> The continuator of the Chronicle of Marcellinus speaks only of Belisarius,<sup>41</sup> and Victor, bishop of Tunnunna, incriminates the empress's faction.<sup>42</sup>

There is no doubt that Vigilius, *cui bono fuisset*, participated in the overthrow of Silverius; but the role of political power appears to have been decisive. On the matter of Silverius's exile, some conjectures are possible: the *Liber pontificalis* says that he was clothed in the monastic habit (*uestem monachicam*). There is nothing unlikely about this punishment, as relegation to a monastery was a common penalty for delinquent clergy; nor is exile to the Pontic islands, doubtless at the moment that the pressure of the siege was relaxed and the imperial troops regained control of access to the sea.<sup>43</sup> By contrast, the reports of his departure to Asia without the emperor's knowledge, Justinian's intervention with Belisarius, and Silverius's return and his second exile seem astonishing, the more so as we have no reports of any trace of opposition, or even of discontent, in regard to Vigilius.<sup>44</sup> Silverius died in December 537,

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<sup>38</sup> LP 1, p. 293 and p. 295, note 2.

<sup>39</sup> Liberatus, *Breniarium*, 22.

<sup>40</sup> Procopius, *Historia arcana*, 1, 14 and 1, 27.

<sup>41</sup> Marcellinus Comes, *Chronica*, s.a. 537 (MGH AA 11, p. 105).

<sup>42</sup> *Chronica*, s.a. 542 (MGH AA 11, p. 200).

<sup>43</sup> Procopius, *Bell. Goth.* 1, 19, 2 and 1, 25, 6. Cf Stein, *Bas Empire* 2, p. 350.

<sup>44</sup> Duchesne remarks that there is no trace of a cult of Silverius at Rome until the fourteenth century (LP 1, p. 295 n. 25), and even at the time of Vigilius's greatest unpopularity not one of his opponents ever championed his predecessor. A now lost inscription discovered in the church of St Pancratius on the Ianiculus refers to Vigilius with the epithet *beatissimo papae*

‘bequeathing to the author of his disgrace an ample legacy of remorse’, as Mgr Duchesne supposes in a fine burst of optimism.

### **The Pope and the Emperor During the First Years of the Pontificate (537–545)**

It is difficult to form a precise idea of the relations between Vigilius and Constantinople during these years. In addition to the secret letters revealed by spiteful authors we also have the pope’s official letters, conserved in the Roman archives. Again, to establish any secure guide-marks we need to proceed by a critical analysis of the sources.

According to Liberatus of Carthage, whose hostility to the pope never slumbers, Vigilius wrote a letter to Theodosius, Anthimus and Severus through Antonina, wife of Belisarius, containing a profession of his miaphysite faith, promising to place himself at their service and asking them to keep their relations secret.<sup>45</sup> To believe in the existence of this letter we would need to suppose that Vigilius was truly a committed Severan, for all such persons were officially condemned not only by the Church but also by the emperor. As all Vigilius’s policies were to run counter to such a commitment, and as no ambition could justify such an aberration, and as the Severans never claimed to have received the least support from the pope, we must reject the authenticity of this letter. The only other attestation of a secret correspondence is Victor of Tunnunna’s slightly different version: according to him Vigilius had written a letter to the empress assuring her of his fidelity to her cause, promising to condemn Theodore of Mopsuestia, Theodoret of Cyrthus and Ibas of Edessa, and requesting that she keep their relations secret.<sup>46</sup> The three theologians who were to be the object of Justinian’s theological cogitations had already appeared together a first time in the conference called by Justinian in 532/3 in which miaphysites and Chalcedonians confronted each other in Constantinople<sup>47</sup> though they were not the subject of any public debate

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(De Rossi, *Inscr. christ.*, 1, 1057, p. 481). Admittedly, the inscription was mutilated before being lost, and the reconstruction of Vigilius’s name from the manuscript (Vallic. G. 28, f. 29) is contestable.

<sup>45</sup> Liberatus, *Breniarium*, 22 (PL 68, 1041).

<sup>46</sup> Victor Tunnunnensis, *Chronica*, s. a. 537 (MGH AA 11, p. 199). Given that Victor’s Chronicle is based on an erroneous chronology this in fact refers to the year 542.

<sup>47</sup> Innocentius Maroniae, *Ep. de collatione cum Seuerianis habita*, ACO 4/2, pp. 169–184.

before 545.<sup>48</sup> We thus encounter the same difficulties in believing Victor's report as in giving credence to the letter spoken of by Liberatus, with the additional problem raised by anachronism. Finally, cardinal Pitra edited in 1858 a profession of faith which he attributed to Vigilius.<sup>49</sup> This is a text of rigorous orthodoxy, whose author cites popes, to whom he refers as his predecessors, down to Agapitus; it specifies that he received Theodoret (of Cyrhus) and Ibas (of Edessa) among the orthodox. Although the author refers to only the four ecumenical councils, this profession of faith can only be subsequent to the condemnation of the Three Chapters and must be attributed to Vigilius's successor, Pelagius. If the author does not cite Silverius and Vigilius among his predecessors, it must be in order to pass in silence over persons who are controversial at the moment when he was seeking to bring the dissident communities back to the communion of the Church.

The first three texts attributed to Vigilius are therefore counterfeit. In fact Vigilius's first genuine letter was not written until after the end of the siege of Rome by Vitigis, and for a restoration of relations between Constantinople and Rome we need to await the decisive victory of the Byzantines over the Goths.

These relations are in fact mutually deferential, but very far from the double-dealing suggested by the complicated history of Vigilius's accession to the pontificate. To some extent they discredit the complex fictions of Vigilius's detractors: on 17 September 540 he wrote two long letters, one to Justinian and one to the patriarch of Constantinople, Menas. Analysis of this correspondence allows us to conjecture that relations between the pope and the emperor had in fact been completely interrupted from 538 to 540, for reasons essentially due to the military situation. Vigilius wrote these letters more than three years after his accession to the pontificate, but only four months after the capitulation of Vitigis. In fact while Justinian sent envoys to Italy to negotiate conditions for the surrender of the Goths, he entrusted

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<sup>48</sup> It is thus impossible to argue that the condemnation of the Three Chapters was part of Justinian's original political projects from the start, because from this conference in 535 onward it was the partisans of orthodoxy who invoked the names of Theodoret and Ibas against their Severian opponents. This conference invalidates the opinion of Victor of Tunnenna (see n. 46), still sometimes given credit. In this sense see J. Meyendorf, *Justinian, the Empire and the Church* (*Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 22) 1968, pp. 59–60, who thinks that Silverius was deposed because he would not condemn the Three Chapters.

<sup>49</sup> J.-B. Pitra, *Spicilegium Solesmense*, IV, Paris, 1858, Prolegomena, III, pp. XI–XXI.

a letter to the pope to one of them, the patricius Domnicus.<sup>50</sup> This letter is now lost, but from the reply we know that Justinian reproached the bishop of Rome for his silence (*taciturnitas*), asked him why he did not support his policies to defend the faith, and was anxious to know if he really was satisfied to see Italy re-integrated into the Empire.<sup>51</sup> We can add to these brief pieces of information that the essential content of Vigilius's letter, apart from his immediate response to the emperor, was a profession of faith. It was traditional since the end of the fifth century – that is to say since the time when the Roman bishops had become subjects of the Eastern emperor – to send such a profession at the time of their accession to the pontificate, in their first letter addressed to the ruler to announce to him the news of their election. What need could Vigilius have had to renew his profession of faith, if he had already sent it? The letter Vigilius sent at the same time to the patriarch of Constantinople, Menas, confirms this impression: the pope had received news of Menas through the patricius Domnicus, rejoicing to hear that he kept the faith of Chalcedon, and in turn sent a profession of faith – a procedure normally adopted to announce a recent election.<sup>52</sup>

Although we need not assume that it was entirely impossible for the pope to send messages to the East, we must recognise that the military situation in Italy between 538 and 540 would have given him ample excuse to refrain from doing so.<sup>53</sup> According to this hypothesis the letter of September 541 would have been the first addressed by Vigilius to the emperor. The letter, it might be noted, inspired cardinal Baronius to write an emotional paragraph about the grace of the pontifical office: after the death of Silverius, who had

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<sup>50</sup> Domnicus was *comes domesticorum*. He had fought in Africa (Procopius, *Bell. Vand.*, 2, 16, 2 and 19, 1). He was sent to Vitigis at the same time as Maximinus, to propose to him a peace treaty based on the conditions that the Goths keep Northern Italy beyond the Po, and half the royal treasure. This proposal was later rejected by Belisarius who thought a more comprehensive victory could have been won (Procopius, *Bell. goth.*, 2, 29, 1). Domnicus returned to Constantinople after September 540.

<sup>51</sup> Vigilius *Ep. ad Iustinianum*, *Collectio Avellana*, 92 (*CSEL* 35, p. 348).

<sup>52</sup> Vigilius, *Ep. ad Menam episcopum*, *Collectio Avellana*, 93 (*ibid.*, pp. 354–6). In this letter, as in the letter to the emperor, the pope expressly condemns, among other miaphysites, Severus of Antioch, Anthimus *peruasor Constantinopolitanae ecclesiae*, and Theodosius of Alexandria.

<sup>53</sup> The siege of Rome lasted until the spring of 539. With the exception of the senators exiled by Belisarius at the start of the siege, there are no known civilian lay people or clergy who travelled from Constantinople to Rome or in the reverse direction during this period. Pelagius was still in the imperial city, but it is not known whether he was communicating with Rome. The military personnel sent to Italy as reinforcements did not all go to Rome, and generally did not get on well with Belisarius.

made Vigilius a true pope, 'he utters new speech, prophesies in accordance with the holy Fathers, he is changed into a new man, from enemy to defender, from persecutor to preacher, from blasphemer to confessor, in all things from faithless to faithful'.<sup>54</sup> No satisfactory solution being offered, this amounts to a good statement of the problem.

The content of the letter reveals that relations between the pope and the emperor were those of mutual distrust. Vigilius speaks of 'malicious intermediaries' who had been able to arouse doubts in the emperor's mind. Affirming that defence of the faith does not require any new debate, he seems to reproach the emperor with his theological zeal; he goes so far as to explain to him that the best way he could serve the faith is by doing nothing in the matter. In voicing the wish that Justinian might refrain from attacking the privileges of the see of Peter in any way, demanding that the emperor use his power to intervene only to install in the apostolic see persons who are 'orthodox, pleasing to God and of spotless faith', he gives very clear expression to his anxieties.

The striking and not very prophetic formula in which he thanks God for having given the emperor a soul 'not only imperial, but also priestly', suggests an expression of a wish rather than of a conviction.<sup>55</sup>

### **The Peaceful Years of the Pontificate**

From 538 to 544 Vigilius's pontificate ran a quiet course. His brother Reparatus was one of the few Roman senators who managed to escape from Ravenna before Vitigis executed all the hostages. From Liguria, where he had taken refuge, he returned to Rome during the winter of 537–538, probably at the same time as the other Milanese aristocrats who, accompanying their bishop Datus, fled from the famine that ravaged Northern Italy.<sup>56</sup> After the death of the praetorian prefect Fidelis in the course of a military expedition, Belisarius nominated him for this office; a fact which confirms the favour shown to Vigilius's family. The siege of Rome was definitively lifted in March 538, and the war moved on elsewhere, far in the North. All Vigilius's specifically Roman

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<sup>54</sup> Baronius, *Annales ecclesiasticae, ad. ann. 540*, p. 606.

<sup>55</sup> Vigilius, *Ep. ad Iustinianum, Collectio Avellana 92 (CSEL 35, pp. 348–54)*.

<sup>56</sup> Procopius, *Bell. Goth.* 1, 11, 26 and 1, 26, 2–3. For the arrival of the Milanese at Rome, see also *LP* 1, p. 291.

work, known to us through his letters and some inscriptions, was carried out during this period.

He was engaged in improving the organisation of the Gallic churches, as is attested by the Arlesian letter collection. In the spring of 538 he received a visit from Modericus, an envoy of Theodebert, who consulted him on the question of the matrimonial position of the king, who had married his brother's widow. The pope replied on 6 April 538, but in a letter addressed to Ceasarius of Arles: he imposed a long penance and insisted on the separation of the couple.<sup>57</sup> It is possible that this letter was sent prior to the Frankish king's alliance with the Goths, which would explain the absence of any correspondence between Vigilius and Arles during the following years.<sup>58</sup> On 15 October 543 he wrote to congratulate Auxanius, Ceasarius's successor in the see of Arles, and promised to transmit to him the pallium, a promise delayed by the need to await imperial authorization. On 22 May 545 he sent three letters to Gaul: the first, addressed to Auxanius, conceded to him the use of the pallium; the second, addressed to the clergy and people subject to king Childebert, defined the role that the bishop of Arles was to play as his vicar.<sup>59</sup> The third letter contained instructions to Auxanius on how to resolve the case of a Gallic bishop, Praetextatus, by convoking a council.<sup>60</sup>

This correspondence allows us to see how Vigilius envisaged the policies to be pursued by Rome in Justinian's restored Empire: he resumed the policies of his predecessors aimed at strengthening the links between the Roman and the Gallic churches, as well as re-integrating Provence into the Empire. In his letter to Auxanius of 543 he recommended him to pray for the emperor, for Theodora and for Belisarius, and exhorted him to serve the emperor and, at the same time, king Childebert.<sup>61</sup> Similarly, his letter to the Spanish bishop Profuturus of Braga shows that he also restored the Spanish vicariate. This letter, also written in the spring of 538, deals exclusively with matters

<sup>57</sup> *Ep. Arelatenses* 38 (*MGH Epp.* 3, pp. 57–8) = Jaffé, 906.

<sup>58</sup> During Theodoric's reign Provence belonged to the Gothic kingdom. In 537 Vitigis succeeded in persuading the Goths to cede it to the Franks, in order that his forces might be concentrated against the Byzantines. The Franks took the precaution of getting the emperor to confirm their possession, while acting with full sovereign authority, going so far as to strike coinage – according to Procopius – bearing Theodobert's portrait. In 538 the Franks took the side of the Goths, and in 540 they pillaged Northern Italy on their own account.

<sup>59</sup> *Ep. Arelatenses* 40 (*MGH Epp.* 3, pp. 59–60) = Jaffé, 914.

<sup>60</sup> *Ep. Arelatenses* 42 (*MGH Epp.* 3, pp. 62–3) = Jaffé, 915.

<sup>61</sup> *Ep. Arelatenses* 41 (*MGH Epp.* 3, pp. 61–2) = Jaffé, 913. In the first of his Arlesian letters, before 540, there is no mention of the emperor.

of ecclesiastical discipline. Vigilius encourages Profuturus to unmask the Priscillianists, recalls the Roman discipline concerning the baptism of Arians, and concerning the consecration of places of worship, fixes the date of Easter for 539, formulates the trinitarian formula to be used in baptism, and recalls the principle of the Roman primacy.<sup>62</sup>

When Justinian promulgated, in 542, the edict in which he condemned Origenism, Vigilius, advised by his *apocrisiarius* Pelagius, gave his consent without protesting against the procedure utilised.<sup>63</sup>

His building activities were modest: inscriptions indicate that Vigilius undertook to repair a part of the damage caused by the Goths in the catacombs of the Via Salaria: the tomb of Saints Martialis, Vitalis and Alexander; in the catacomb called 'of the Giordani', the shrine of the martyr Diogenes, and in the catacomb of Trasone, the sepulchre of Saints Chrysanthus and Daira. On the Via Tiburtina he ordered the repair of the decoration of the basilica of Saint Hippolytus.<sup>64</sup> Significantly, the *Liber pontificalis* makes no mention of these enterprises. It mentions only the golden cross that Belisarius had brought back from Africa – another sign of the special bond between the general and the bishop – which Vigilius placed at St Peter's.<sup>65</sup>

Listing these facts is not to seek to represent Vigilius's pontificate as the happiest. The accusations of murder reported by the *Liber pontificalis* are doubtless not authentic – Vigilius is alleged to have killed a notary, hitting him violently, and to have killed his niece's husband by blows – but they show that Vigilius still had his detractors. Nevertheless, the pope does not appear to have incurred general hostility among the people.

The high point of Vigilius's pontificate, the promise of what he might have become, is beyond doubt the spring of the year 544. In the City, held by the Byzantines, the pope received the homage of a poem by the sub-deacon Arator, who had versified the Acts of the Apostles. In the public recitation of this poem, authorised by the pope, one can see simultaneously an affirmation of the dignity of the Roman see, the desire to perpetuate the City's cultural

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<sup>62</sup> Vigilius, *Ep. ad Profuturum Bracarenensis* (PL 69, c. 19–20).

<sup>63</sup> Vigilius took no active part in this condemnation, whereas Pelagius played a large part.

<sup>64</sup> A. Ferrua, 'I lavori del papa Vigilio nelle catacombe', in *Scritti vari di epigrafia e antichità cristiana* (Bari, 1991) pp. 332–8 = *La civiltà cattolica* 118 (1967) vol. 2, pp. 142–8.

<sup>65</sup> *LP* 1, p. 296 and n. 6.

traditions in their Christian guise, and the concord between pope, clergy, people and the aristocracy.<sup>66</sup>

### The Beginnings of the Affair of the Three Chapters

Towards the end of the year, the situation deteriorated. In Italy the Goths, now under the leadership of Totila, were pressing the Byzantine armies dangerously hard.<sup>67</sup> The real threat, however, came from the imperial court. At Constantinople, Justinian published an edict against the person and the writings of Theodore of Mopsuestia, the writings of Theodoret of Cyrillus, hostile to Cyril of Alexandria, and the letter to bishop Maris attributed to Ibas of Edessa, collectively known as the 'Three Chapters'.<sup>68</sup> This decree had its roots in the debates over the unity of the nature of Christ, but also raised the question of the authority of the Council of Chalcedon, because the last two of the bishops indicted were among the participants.<sup>69</sup> Justinian obtained the signatures – albeit given with reluctance, or on condition that the pope ratify the condemnation<sup>70</sup> – of the bishops of the East. Among the Westerners present at Constantinople the emperor encountered strong opposition.<sup>71</sup> As the court-intrigues at Constantinople return at the forefront, Vigilius's biography becomes extraordinarily complicated: on 25 November 545, he is said to have been taken by the imperial police, while celebrating mass in the church of Sta Cecilia in Trastevere.<sup>72</sup> Vigilius then made a stop in

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<sup>66</sup> C. Sotinel, 'Arator, un poète au service de la politique du pape Vigile', in *MEFR*, 101, 1989, 1, pp. 818–20.

<sup>67</sup> Stein, *Bas-Empire*, 1, pp. 571–8.

<sup>68</sup> The text printed in *PG* 86, c. 267–73 is doubtless not the original, now lost: R. Devrèsse, *Essai sur Théodore de Mopsueste* (Studi e testi, 141), p. 206, n. 1.

<sup>69</sup> It has long been held that the opening of this affair was due to the Origenists' dark plotting, and that the emperor allowed himself to be convinced that a further concession would bring the miaphysites back to unity. Milton V. Anastos has shown in 'The immutability of Christ and Justinian's condemnation of Theodore of Mopsuestia' in *Dumbarton Oaks papers* 6, 1951, pp. 125–64, that the emperor's theology was much less opportunistic. It is impossible to enter into this debate in this biographical investigation.

<sup>70</sup> Facundus Herimianensis, *Pro defensione trium capitulorum*, III, 1, (*CC* 90a, p. 121).

<sup>71</sup> The deacons Pelagius, Anatolius and Stephanus, the latter now *apocrisarius*, and the bishop of Milan, Datus, were all in Constantinople at this time.

<sup>72</sup> *LP* 1, p. 297. Victor of Tununna says only that the emperor *Vigilium Romanorum episcopum subtiliter compellit ut ad urbem regiam properaret* (s. a. 542, *MGH AA* 11, 201). The Milanese

Sicily, where he stayed a long time; he went on to ordain priests and deacons for Rome, and appointed two members of the clergy to carry out his office in Rome: the deacon Ampliatus to carry out the temporal administration, and the bishop Valentinus to govern the clergy.<sup>73</sup> Vigilius sent them off to Rome with a consignment of supplies for the City, retaken by Totila and exhausted by the siege. But the convoy was captured by the Goths, the clergy massacred, except for Valentinus, who was brought into Totila's presence and condemned to have his hands cut off.<sup>74</sup> In Sicily Vigilius also received embassies to encourage him to resist Justinian's will. The Roman *apocrisiarius* Stephanus and the bishop of Milan, Datus, informed him that they had broken off communion with Menas, who had subscribed to the condemnation of the Three Chapters.<sup>75</sup> An embassy sent by the bishop Zoilus of Alexandria expressed his regrets at having signed the emperor's decree.<sup>76</sup> The deacon Ferrandus of Carthage placed his theological expertise at his service.<sup>77</sup> Finally Vigilius left Sicily in the autumn of 546. On October 14 he was at Patras, where he consecrated Maximian as bishop of Ravenna, with the emperor's consent.<sup>78</sup> In the course of his journey he was informed that the provinces of Africa and Illyricum and Sardinia were also opposed to the condemnation of the Three Chapters.<sup>79</sup>

### **Confrontation between Pope and Emperor: Sojourn in Constantinople (547–555)**

Vigilius arrived in Constantinople on 25 January 547, and was magnificently received, as had been his predecessors, John II and Agapitus.<sup>80</sup> He was installed in the palace of Placidia, which had become the normal residence

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clergy, informed by their bishop Datus, say that Vigilius had not truly come to Constantinople, but that he was, rather, taken there by force (E. Schwartz, *Vigiliusbriefe*, pp. 18–25).

<sup>73</sup> *LP* 1, p. 297. Later on the deacon Pelagius, back from Constantinople, carried out the duties of Ampliatus. It seems that during the last years of Vigilius's pontificate it was a priest, whose epitaph has survived, who exercised the functions of vicar.

<sup>74</sup> Procopius, *Bell. Goth.* 3, 15.

<sup>75</sup> Facundus Hermianensis, *Pro defensione trium capitulorum* 4, 3, 4 (CC 90A, p. 122).

<sup>76</sup> *Id.*, *Pro def.* 14, 4, 8 (CC 90a, p. 124)

<sup>77</sup> Ferrandus Diaconus Carthaginensis, *Ep. ad Anatolium et Pelagium* (PL 67, 923).

<sup>78</sup> Agnellus, *Liber pontificalis ecclesiae Ravennatis* 70 (MGH SRL, p. 326).

<sup>79</sup> Facundus, *Pro def.* 4, 3, 5 (CC 90a, p. 122).

<sup>80</sup> *LP* 1, pp. 297–8; for Agapitus in Constantinople, see above, pp. 5–6