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## The First Pontiff: Pope Damasus I and the Expansion of the Roman Primacy

Thomas J. McIntyre

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# The First Pontiff: Pope Damasus I and the Expansion of the Roman Primacy

by

Thomas J. McIntyre

(Under the direction of Timothy M. Teeter)

## ABSTRACT

This purpose of this thesis is to examine the extent of the agency Pope Damasus I demonstrated in the expansion of papal primacy and exaltation of the Roman See. Damasus reigned as bishop of Rome from A.D. 366 until 384. To answer this question, the research for this thesis focuses on involvement, of Damasus in contemporary theological disputes, his appropriation of Roman geography and his Latin language initiatives, both liturgical and Scriptural. Research was conducted first by consulting primary sources. These included the writings of Damasus himself, particularly his epigraphs, as well as epistolary correspondence. A key component of the research was also comparison and contrast of a number of historical narratives of the pontificate of Damasus. Other primary sources included works, primarily epistolary, of a number of the pope's contemporaries, who collaborated with him in varying degrees. All primary sources were read in light of recent scholarship and historiography, the conclusions of which were critically evaluated. Ultimately, Damasus demonstrated a significant amount of agency in increasing the power of the papacy at a pivotal moment in its history. This fact has been largely overlooked by scholars but is slowly gaining recognition.

Index words: Damasus I, papacy, Late Antiquity, Theodosius I, Early Christianity, Rome,

THE FIRST PONTIFF: POPE DAMASUS I AND THE EXPANSION OF THE ROMAN  
PRIMACY

by

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B.A., Georgia Southern University, 2012

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Georgia Southern University in Partial

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MASTER OF THE ARTS

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The First Pontiff: Pope Damasus I and the Expansion of the Roman Primacy

by

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Electronic Version Approved:  
Spring 2015

## DEDICATION

To my beloved wife Nancy-Leigh, who patiently endured my writing of this thesis while planning our wedding as well as my largely fruitless yet nevertheless relentless quest to view the epigrams of Damasus *in situ* during our honeymoon.

*Ad maiorem Dei gloriam.*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank my advisor, Dr. Timothy Teeter for recommending the topic of Damasus to me and providing advice and mentorship while reading, editing and rereading numerous drafts. I would also like to thank Professor Rebecca Littlechilds for responding to my e-mail inquiry as well as Dr. Marianne Sággy for doing the same and also graciously allowing me to use one of her forthcoming papers as a source. I am indebted to Professor Diane Fruchtman for pointing out an earlier reference to Damasus as *pontifex*. I would also like to thank my parents, in-laws and most especially my wife for putting up with me while I was writing this thesis, encouraging my work and from time to time providing me with locations in which to complete my work.

#### NOTE ON EDITIONS AND TRANSLATIONS

Unless otherwise noted, the Latin text of the *Epigrammata Damasiana* is taken from the 1895 edition compiled by Maximilian Ihm.

All translations of the Latin, unless otherwise noted, are the work of the author.



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## CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

## Biography

Damasus I was the thirty-seventh bishop of Rome. He reigned from 366 until 384 A.D, during a period of swift, monumental change for the Christian Church. In his lifetime, Damasus saw Christianity go from a viciously persecuted minority sect to the state religion of the Roman Empire. Damasus was born sometime between the years 304 and 306, during the Great Persecution, perhaps in the diocese of Hispania, territory which fell under the jurisdiction of the Western, and junior, Augustus Maximian.<sup>1</sup> The persecution in the west was not as fierce as that in the east, under Diocletian and Galerius, but there were nonetheless a significant number of martyrs. The persecution undoubtedly had a formative impact on the young Damasus. Years later, when Damasus composed the epigram for the tomb of the martyrs Marcellinus and Peter, he recalled hearing the story of their execution from the man who carried it out.<sup>2</sup> Around the same year that Damasus was born, Maximian abdicated and his Caesar Constantius Chlorus succeeded him. As befit his new position within the Tetrarchy as Augustus, Constantius added Spain to his territories of Gaul and Britain.<sup>3</sup> Constantius had always been more lenient toward the Christians than his imperial colleagues, thus with his accession, the persecution effectively ended in Spain.<sup>4</sup> Two years later, Constantius died at Eboracum (York), while on campaign against the Picts, after which his troops acclaimed his son Constantine as emperor. During the

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<sup>1</sup> The death of Damasus can be securely dated to A.D. 384. Because Jerome states that the pope was “nearly eighty” at the time of his death, his birth year was most likely sometime between A.D. 304 and 305

<sup>2</sup> *Epigrammata Damasiana* XXVIII.i-ii. *Triumphos percussor retulit Damsaso mihi, cum puer essem*. “Your executioner reported your triumph to me, Damasus, when I was a boy.” This thesis uses the numbering of the epigrams used by Antonio Ferrua in *Epigrammata Damasiana*, 1942.

<sup>3</sup> T.D. Barnes, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982) 196-197

<sup>4</sup> Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, rev. ed. ed. Andrew Louth, trans. G.A. Williamson, (London: Penguin Books, 1989), VIII.xiii.

childhood of Damasus, Constantine conquered his rival Maxentius at the Battle of Milvian Bridge and subsequently issued the Edict of Toleration that legalized the practice of Christianity.

In 325, when Damasus was about nineteen or twenty, Constantine convened the Council of Nicaea. The council formally anathematized Arius and condemned his teaching that the Son was of a “different essence” than the Father. Nevertheless, Arianism was far from dead. Constantine himself was baptized on his deathbed by Eusebius, the Arian bishop of Nicomedia. Eusebius heavily influenced Constantine’s son and eventual sole heir Constantius II, who supported the Arian cause and exiled the staunch defender of Nicene orthodoxy, Athanasius of Alexandria. Sometime between 355 and 356, Constantius also exiled Liberius, the bishop of Rome, to Thrace for not supporting the condemnation of Athanasius. Damasus served Liberius as a deacon and the crisis following the banishment would have dramatic repercussions for him, even after he became pope himself Damasus would have to deal with some form of the Arian heresy through almost the entirety of his pontificate. It was not until Theodosius the Great (I) became emperor in the East that the tide turned officially against Arianism. Theodosius, with his western colleagues Gratian and Valentinian II, issued an edict in 380 that decreed that the Nicene faith would be the official state religion of the Roman Empire. The degree of influence that Damasus had directly on this imperial act is a matter of some debate, but the decree explicitly identifies the acceptable religion as that “which is now professed by the pontiff Damasus.”<sup>5</sup> Only four years later, Damasus passed to his eternal reward.

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<sup>5</sup> *Codex Theodosianus* XVI.i.2

## Significance

Damasus witnessed the beginning of the triumph of Nicene Christianity over paganism and Arianism. As was the case with his participation in the Altar of Victory controversy, Damasus played a mostly supporting role to notables such as Athanasius, Ambrose and Jerome in various crises. His was not a force of personality that shaped his century. But his confident assertions of Roman primacy, when they were necessary, established a precedent, at least in the West, of looking to the Roman see as a guarantor of orthodoxy. When Damasus believed that these assertions were being challenged by the East, he acted quickly to ensure the prerogatives of the bishop of Rome.

Although some of them had far reaching effects, the most successful of the achievements of Damasus were those that he accomplished in Rome itself. Most significantly, he wrote a series of epigraphs for the tombs of martyrs and other Christians which allowed him to literally leave his mark on the Eternal City. Whatever their overall literary merit, these inscriptions were part of an attempt by Damasus to demonstrate that intellectual culture was not in the purview of pagans alone. In a similar vein, Jerome began his great project of revising the old Latin translations of Scripture at the urging of Pope Damasus. It was also during the pontificate of Damasus that the liturgy began to be said in Latin. All of these events are modestly significant by themselves, but taken together, they demonstrate a Romanizing trend developing in Western Christianity simultaneous with the Christianization of Rome. Damasus' appropriation of Roman geography, his Latin language initiatives, both scriptural and liturgical, and the epitaphs he wrote and placed in the catacombs were part of a concerted effort to establish Rome as the center of the Christian world, with the bishop at its head. Indeed, the whole of the papacy of Damasus was devoted to maintaining the primacy and expanding the power of the bishop of Rome.

### Ancient Sources

The number of extant primary sources concerning Damasus is surprisingly large, but these are almost entirely concerned with his pontificate. There is extremely little available on the life of Damasus before his ordination to the diaconate, sometime before A.D. 355.

The most important of these primary sources come from Damasus' own hand. A number of his papal decrees are extant, in addition to synodical letters that were written under his papal administration. Damasus wrote most of these in response to various crises that he faced during his pontificate. The sources that have generated the most scholarly interest in recent years are his epigraphs. Damasus fancied himself a poet and composed a large number of epigraphs, which he had inscribed on marble slabs and placed over the tombs of Roman saints, primarily martyrs. These epigraphs, even the ones that Damasus wrote for himself and his family, offer extremely little biographical or historical information on Damasus himself. However, careful study can give insight into the way Damasus saw himself as bishop of Rome, how he viewed the city, and his vision of what the Church had been, was then and would become.

Epistolary collections of a number of contemporaries include letters from Damasus. The most important of these are letters written by and to Eusebius Hieronymus Sophronius, better known as Jerome. Jerome's *Epistulae* include a number of letters that Jerome wrote to Damasus, and a smaller number of letters that Damasus wrote in response. Jerome also mentions Damasus, and their relationship, in letters to others. Jerome also includes Damasus in his non-epistolary work, specifically his *Chronicon* and *De viris illustribus*.<sup>6</sup> One letter of Basil of Caesarea is almost certainly addressed to Damasus and another mentions him by name, although the

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<sup>6</sup> Jerome, *De viris illustribus*, trans Ernest Cushing Richardson, and *Epistulae*, trans. W.H. Fremantle, in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Second Series, vols. 3 and 6, ed. Phillip Schaff and Henry Wace (Grand Rapids, MI: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989). *Chronicon*, trans. Roger Pearse, online ed., [http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/jerome\\_chronicle\\_00\\_eintro.htm](http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/jerome_chronicle_00_eintro.htm). Accessed September 30, 2014.

reference is passing.<sup>7</sup> Ambrose, bishop of Milan, mentions Damasus in a letter that he wrote to the emperor Valentinian II during the Altar of Victory controversy.<sup>8</sup>

Socrates Scholasticus, Sozomen and Theodoret were Byzantine historians who wrote ecclesiastical histories in the century after Damasus. They were contemporaries and their accounts are extremely similar. Sozomen especially borrowed from the work of Socrates Scholasticus. Each historian's work mentions Damasus but does not go into very great detail. Theodoret contains more information on Damasus than the earlier works, including full reproductions of synodical letters.

Another source concerning Damasus that has garnered significant scholarly attention is the *Collectio Avellana*. The *Collectio* is a compilation of documents related to the papacy, specifically on the topic of schism. The scholarly consensus holds that the *Collectio* was completed in the sixth century. Included in the *Collectio* are a number of documents relating to the pontificate of Damasus, specifically to the schism of Ursinus that broke out at the beginning of his reign. Marianne Sághy has referred to these documents, taken as a whole, as the "Ursinian dossier."<sup>9</sup> The dossier is composed of imperial documents, both from the emperors and addressed to them. Most of these documents are imperial rescripts sent to the urban prefect or vicar of Rome that contain orders and instructions for dealing with the schismatics. None of the

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<sup>7</sup> Basil of Caesarea, *Epistulae* LXX and CCLXVI.ii, trans. Blomfield Jackson, in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Second Series, vol. 8, ed. Phillip Schaff and Henry Wace (Grand Rapids, MI: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989).

<sup>8</sup> Ambrose, *Epistula* XVII, trans. H. De Romestin, E. De Romestin, and H.T.F. Duckworth, in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Second Series, vol. 10, ed. Phillip Schaff and Henry Wace (Grand Rapids, MI: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989).

<sup>9</sup> Sághy, Marianne. "Dear Schismatic, Dear Prefect: The Ursinian Dossier of the *Collectio Avellana*," (paper presented at "Emperors, Bishops, Senators: The Significance of the *Collectio Avellana*, 367-553 AD," Rome, Italy, April 1, 2011), 1.

documents are addressed to Damasus directly, nor do any come from his hand. Only one of the rescripts even mentions Damasus by name.<sup>10</sup>

Two other documents in the *Collectio* mention Damasus. Unlike the others, they are not rescripts but are arguably the most important documents in the Ursinian dossier. These documents are the first two in the dossier, the first of which is entitled *Quae gesta sunt inter Liberium et Felicem episcopos*,<sup>11</sup> often shortened simply to the *Gesta*. The *Gesta* is a narrative of the events leading up to the exile of Liberius and the appointment by Constantius II of Felix to take his place. The *Gesta* also deals with the continuing effect of these events on the election and early reign of Damasus, who succeeded Liberius. The exact nature of this short work, and what purpose it served, is uncertain. The author never identifies himself. In her work on the *Collectia Avellana*, Marianne Sághy simply accepts the anonymous status of the author and dates the composition of the *Gesta* to A.D. 368, two years into the eighteen year pontificate of Damasus. Unfortunately, she does not give the reasons for her dating.<sup>12</sup>

The second document in the dossier is entitled *Adversus Damasum libellus precum ad imperatores*,<sup>13</sup> which is usually shortened to the *Libellus precum*. Fortunately, this document provides both the authors and a date for itself. The *imperatores* to which it is addressed are the emperors Theodosius, Valentinian II and Arcadius. This places the date of the *Libellus* sometime between 383 and 392, during which time Arcadius reigned with his father in the East while Valentinian was Augustus in the West. Thus, the *Libellus* was written no later than seven and a

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<sup>10</sup> *Collectio Avellana*, XIII. *De Rebaptizatoribus* a.k.a. *Ordinariorum*

<sup>11</sup> CA I, *Quae gesta sunt inter Liberium et Felicem episcopos* “That which occurred between the bishops Liberius and Felix”

<sup>12</sup> Sághy, “Dear Schismatic,” 2

<sup>13</sup> CA II, *Adversus Damasum libellus precum ad imperatores* “Little Book of Prayers against Damasus to the emperors”



half years after the death of Damasus and possibly even during the last year of his pontificate.<sup>14</sup>

The *Collectio* also includes the imperial response to the *Libellus*, which affirms the orthodoxy of the Luciferian schismatics as well as the authority and dignity of the bishop of Rome.

The final source for Damasus is the *Liber Pontificalis*, or Book of the Popes. The *Liber* is a biographical chronicle of every bishop of Rome from Peter until the fifteenth century. It contains a dedication, ostensibly made by Jerome to Damasus, and Jerome was long considered to be the author of the sections up until that of Damasus. Scholarship has effectively demonstrated the dedication to be a forgery, part of an early medieval tradition of pseudepigraphy and the sections attributed to Jerome have been dated to the sixth century.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Sághy dates the *Libellus precum* to 383 or 384, the last two years of the pontificate of Damasus. For some reason, Kate Blair-Dixon, whom Sághy cites in her paper on the Ursinian documents, applies the date of 368 not to the *Gesta* but to the *Libellus Precum* ("Memory and authority in ancient Rome,"72). This dating is simply not possible, because the reign of Arcadius did not begin until A.D. 383.

<sup>15</sup> Andrew Cain, *The Letters of Jerome: Asceticism, Biblical Exegesis and the Construction of Christian Authority in Late Antiquity*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 67.

## Historiography

Modern historiography on Damasus is a pool that is wide but not particularly deep. The most extensive work that deals specifically with Damasus is Ursula Reutter's *Damasus, Bischof von Rom(366-384): Leben und Werk* published in 2009.<sup>16</sup> It is written in German. There are no currently published monographs on Damasus in English.

Dennis Trout is an expert on Late Antique epigraphy who has completed extensive work on the epigraphs of Damasus. This work has culminated in *Damasus of Rome: The Epigraphic Poetry* which will be released in November of 2015.<sup>17</sup> Trout previously published two articles, "Damasus and the Invention of Christian Rome" and "From the *elogia* of Damasus to the *acta* of the *Gesta Martyrum*: Re-staging Roman history" that focus directly on the epigraphs of Damasus.<sup>18</sup> Like Trout, the work of Marianne Sághy focuses primarily on the cultural value of the epigrams of Damasus.<sup>19</sup> She has also completed work on the documents in the *Collectio Avellana* that pertain to the schism between Damasus and Ursinus. With this scholarship, Trout and Sághy take their place at the forefront of current scholarship on Damasus.

Recent monographs that include information on Damasus have invariably not focused on Damasus but included him as part of a larger theme. For example, Peter Brown includes

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<sup>16</sup> Ursula Reutter, *Damasus, Bischof von Rom, (366-384)*, Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum 53, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009).

<sup>17</sup> Dennis E. Trout, *Damasus of Rome: The Epigraphic Poetry*, Oxford Early Christian Texts. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

<sup>18</sup> Trout, "Damasus and the Invention of Early Christian Rome," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 33, no. 3 (Fall 2003): 517-536; "From the *elogia* of Damasus to the *acta* of the *Gesta Martyrum*: Re-staging Roman history," *Attitudes Toward the Past in Antiquity. Creating Identities: Proceedings of an International Conference held at Stockholm University, 15-17 May 2009*, Stockholm Studies in Classical Archaeology 14, ed. Charlotte Scheffer and Brita Alroth (Stockholm: Stockholm University Press, 2014)

<sup>19</sup> Marianne Sághy, "Martyr Cult and Collective Identity in Fourth Century Rome," *Identity and Alterity in Hagiography and the Cult of the Saints*, Series Colloquia, ed. Ana Marinković and Trpimir Vedriš, (Zagreb, Croatia: Croatian Hagiography Society, 2010): 17-35; "Renovatio Memoriae: Pope Damasus and the Martyrs of Rome," in *Rom in der Spätantike. Porträt einer Epoche*, ed. Manfred Fuhrmann, (Artemis and Winkler, 1998): 247-261; "Pope Damasus and the Beginnings of Roman Hagiography," *Klaniczay Festschrift: Essays Published in Honor of Tibor Klaniczay*, (Hungary: Balassi Kiado, 1994).

Damasus as part of his study on the relationship between early newly legalized Christianity and the wealthy Roman aristocracy.<sup>20</sup> Damasus is also an important character in Alan Cameron's *Last Pagans of Rome*.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, scholars have also tended to limit their study of Damasus to his connections with more notable contemporaries, particularly Jerome, Ambrose and even Athanasius. Damasus receives fleeting mentions in T.D. Barnes' *Athanasius and Constantius*.<sup>22</sup> J.N.D. Kelly and Andrew Cain deal with Damasus in more detail in their respective works on Jerome and his letters but both ultimately remain focused on their better known subject.<sup>23</sup> Neil McLynn's *Ambrose of Milan* is in the same vein.<sup>24</sup> There is significant scholarly work on Damasus but it is almost exclusively within the context of wider themes and in the shadow of more famous personages. Scholarly articles partially remedy this situation as there are a significant number devoted solely to some aspect of the pontificate of Damasus. However, the longest articles also fall into the same pattern as the monographs. Two articles, by McLynn and Jacob Latham respectively, deal with the violence in the wake of the election of Damasus but within the wider context of Late Antique religious violence.<sup>25</sup> Justin Taylor's article provides valuable insight on the role of Damasus in the controversies of the Eastern church. Taylor however once again only examines Damasus in light of his relationship with another figure: in this case, Basil of Caesarea.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Peter Brown, *Through the Eye of the Needle: Wealth, the Fall of Rome and the Making of Christianity in the West* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

<sup>21</sup> Alan Cameron, *The Last Pagans of Rome* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>22</sup> Timothy D. Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius: Theology and Politics in the Constantinian Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

<sup>23</sup> J.N.D. Kelly, *Jerome: His Life, Writings and Controversies* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1975); Cain, *The Letters of Jerome*.

<sup>24</sup> Neil McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan: Church and Court in a Christian Capital*, The Transformation of the Classical Heritage, Vol. 22 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

<sup>25</sup> McLynn, "Christian Controversy and Violence in the Fourth Century," *Kodai: Journal of Ancient History* 3, 15- (Tokyo: 1990): 15-44; Jacob Latham, "From Literal to Spiritual Soldiers of Christ: Disputed Episcopal Elections and the Advent of Christian Processions in Late Antique Rome," *Church History* 81, no. 2 (June 2012): 298-327.

<sup>26</sup> Justin Taylor, "St. Basil the Great and Pope Damasus I" in *Downside Review* 91 (1973), 186-203, 262-274.

This lack of scholarly attention is surprising because many scholars of the papacy, including Eamon Duffy, John W. O'Malley and Roger Collins, consider Damasus to be a pivotal figure.<sup>27</sup> The majority consensus has been that the papacy reached an unprecedented level of power under Damasus. However, most scholars see the increase in the power of the papacy as somewhat inevitable. Few see Damasus as an agent of this rise in prominence. This is likely the result of the piece-meal approach to scholarship of Damasus. Examining the various aspects of the pontificate of Damasus in light of each and as part of coherent whole, it becomes clear that Damasus demonstrated an agency in these matters. Through various initiatives, Damasus directly influenced an escalation of papal power that continued unabated for over a century.

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<sup>27</sup> Eamon Duffy, *Saints and Sinners: A History of the Popes*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015); John W. O'Malley S.J., *A History of the Popes: From Peter to Present* (Plymouth, UK: Sheed and Ward, 2010); Roger Collins, *Keeper of the Keys to Heaven: A History of the Papacy* (New York: Basic Books, 2009).

## CHAPTER II

### THE ELECTION OF DAMASUS

#### Pre-Election Life

The place of the birth of Damasus is a matter of some debate. The *Liber Pontificalis* describes Damasus as *natione Spanus*, but gives no birthplace.<sup>28</sup> Tillemont concluded that he was born in Rome to Spanish parents.<sup>29</sup> However, due to the mention of Spain in the *Liber*, the Spanish cities of Madrid, Argelaguer and Tarragona, as well as the Portuguese cities of Guimarães and Idanha-a-Velha, have claimed Damasus as a native son.<sup>30</sup> Of these, Idanha-a-Velha has the best attested to tradition, although it is unclear when this tradition emerged. A chapel dedicated to Saint Damasus is located in the village of Idanha-a-Velha, but it was not constructed until 1743.<sup>31</sup> At any rate, if Damasus was not born in Rome, his family must have relocated to Rome during his childhood. His father Antonius served first as an archivist than as a presbyter in the *titulus* of the martyr Saint Lawrence.<sup>32</sup>

Being the son of a presbyter would have made Damasus well-connected when he followed his father's footsteps into the ministry. According to the *Gesta*, Damasus served as a deacon prior to his election as bishop and had been ordained prior to the exile of Liberius, sometime between 355 and 356.<sup>33</sup> Although the *Gesta* is the only source that states that Damasus was a deacon, there is no reason to question the claim. None of the other extant sources give him an alternate rank. At this time, deacons worked more directly with the bishop than presbyters did.

<sup>28</sup> *Liber Pontificalis* XXIX. ed. and trans. Louise Ropes Loomis, 1917

<sup>29</sup> Sebastien Nien deTillemont, *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire ecclésiastique des six premiers siècles*, Vol. 6., 386.

<sup>30</sup> "Pope Damasus I (c.305-384)," *O Portal da Historia: Biografias*  
<http://www.arqnet.pt/portal/biografias/saodamaso.html> Accessed January 27, 2015.

<sup>31</sup> "Capela de São Dâmaso devolvida à Paróquia de Idanha-a-Velha," Município de Idanha-a-Nova. [http://www.cm-idanhanova.pt/divulgacao/arquivo\\_noticias/noticias\\_2014/capela\\_s\\_damaso.aspx](http://www.cm-idanhanova.pt/divulgacao/arquivo_noticias/noticias_2014/capela_s_damaso.aspx) Accessed January 27, 2015.

<sup>32</sup> *Epigrammata* LVIII.i-ii.

<sup>33</sup> *Quae gesta sunt inter Liberium et Felicem Episcopos*, II. <http://www.fourthcentury.com/index.php/avellana-1-latin>

The *Didascalia Apostolorum*, an anonymous document most likely from the third century, states “The bishop and the deacons are to be of one mind, you are to diligently shepherd the people, doing so with one accord. You are to be one body, father and son, for you are the likeness of the Lord. The deacon is to make known all things to the bishop, just as Christ does to his Father.”<sup>34</sup> Given this experience and the knowledge that came with it, it was deacons, rather than presbyters, who were more likely to succeed to the episcopate.<sup>35</sup>

If Liberius ordained Damasus to the diaconate, then his ordination would have taken place at some point after May 22, 352. However, the *Gesta* states that Damasus initially followed Liberius into exile.<sup>36</sup> While this could simply be a dramatic demonstration of diaconal devotion for the exiled pontiff on the part of Damasus, it is more likely that Damasus was a close assistant of his predecessor. As such, he most likely held a high rank among the Roman clergy, which would be unlikely for a deacon ordained as recently as four years before. This, as well as Damasus’ age (he would have been around fifty at the time of Liberius’ exile), make it more likely that he was ordained prior to the election of Liberius.

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<sup>34</sup> *Didascalia Apostolorum* II.xliv.2-3<sup>a</sup>, trans. Lawrence J. Johnson, in *Worship in the Early Church: An Anthology of Historical Sources*, Vol. 1 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009)

<sup>35</sup> Stanley Morison, “An Unacknowledged Hero of the Fourth Century, Damasus I, 366-384,” *Classical, mediaeval and Renaissance studies in honor of Berthold Louis Ullman*, vol. 1, ed. Charles Henderson Jr. (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1964), 241

<sup>36</sup> CA II.ii

## The Liberian Controversy

The exile of Pope Liberius by the emperor Constantius II in A.D. 355 was certainly the defining moment in the ecclesial career of Damasus. The actions taken by Damasus during the crisis would have significant repercussions especially when Damasus himself succeeded Liberius as bishop over a decade later.

From the time of Constantine's death in 337, his middle son Constantius II proved the most capable of his three heirs. Constantius was also the most influenced by Eusebius of Nicomedia, the Arian bishop who had baptized Constantine on his deathbed. Thus, Constantius favored Arianism, which was more dominant in his domain of the eastern empire.<sup>37</sup> His brothers in the West, Constantine II and Constans, supported the doctrine of Christianity affirmed at Nicaea. In the East, Constantius contended with the redoubtable Athanasius of Alexandria, perhaps the staunchest defender of Nicene orthodoxy.<sup>38</sup> Constantine himself had exiled Athanasius toward the end of his reign on trumped up charges, and Constantius banished him once more in A.D. 339.<sup>39</sup> Athanasius spent this second exile in the West, where Julius, the bishop of Rome, received and supported him by means of "commendatory letters."<sup>40</sup> Four years later, in A.D. 343, Constans called a council at Sardica, over which Hosius of Cordova presided. Hosius had been a close advisor of Constantine since the campaigns against Maxentius. He had been present at Nicaea, where he had championed the cause of the *homoousion*, but had been

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<sup>37</sup> Sozomen insists that Constantius actually held to the same beliefs as his brethren, but was confused by wording. "The Emperor Constantius was deceived by this distinction; and although I am certain that he retained the same doctrines as those held by his father and brother, yet he adopted a change in phraseology, and instead of using the term "homoousios," made use of the term "homoiousios." Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica* III.xviii, rev. Chester D. Hartranft, in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Second Series, vol. 11, ed. Phillip Schaff and Henry Wace (Grand Rapids, MI: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989).

<sup>38</sup> For a detailed modern summary of the conflict between Athanasius and Constantius see Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*.

<sup>39</sup> Socrates, I.xxxv, II.xi; Sozomen, II.xxviii. in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Second Series, vol. 11, ed. Phillip Schaff and Henry Wace (Grand Rapids, MI: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989).

<sup>40</sup> Socrates, I.xv; Sozomen, III.x

gradually edged out of influence by Eusebius of Nicomedia. The bishops at Sardica rejected a lengthy creed that the Eastern bishops had sent to them, reaffirmed the creed of Nicaea and demanded the reinstatement of Athanasius to his see.<sup>41</sup> Constantius acquiesced when Constans threatened to go to war with him if he did not.<sup>42</sup>

In A.D. 350, supporters of a usurper named Magnentius assassinated Constans, leaving Constantius II as sole ruler of the Roman Empire.<sup>43</sup> After dealing with Magnentius, Constantius wasted no time in once again exiling Athanasius and threatened him with death should the bishop return to Alexandria.<sup>44</sup> Constantius well remembered the way in which the west had stood against his will in regard to Athanasius and, without his brothers to oppose him, took measures to ensure they did not do so again. The emperor called for a synod to be held in Milan, where the bishops from the east called for a unanimous condemnation of Athanasius. The Italian bishops Eusebius of Vercellae, Dionysius of Alba and Lucifer of Cagliari, joined by the Gallican bishops Paulinus of Treves and Rhodanus of Toulouse, vehemently protested the proposal and succeeded in preventing a vote on the matter. Incensed, Constantius exiled these men along with Hilarius, bishop of Potiers in Gaul, who is sometimes called the “Athanasius of the West.”<sup>45</sup>

While Constantius was busy putting down the revolt of Magnentius, Pope Julius I died and Liberius was elected to succeed him. The west had continually flouted the imperial will, and Constantius remained eager to bring it, particularly Italy, to heel and ensure that Liberius did not emulate his predecessor. To this end, Constantius summoned Liberius to an audience where the emperor ordered the pope to ratify the condemnation of Athanasius, which had been proposed

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<sup>41</sup> Sozomen III.xi-xii.

<sup>42</sup> Socrates II.xxii; Sozomen III.xx.

<sup>43</sup> Socrates II.xxv; Sozomen IV.i.

<sup>44</sup> Socrates II.xxvi; Sozomen IV.ii.

<sup>45</sup> Socrates omits Rhodanus and Lucifer (II.xxxvii); Sozomen mentions that Hilarius, bishop of Potiers in Gaul, was exiled along with them. The author of the *Gesta*, includes Eusebius and Hilarius along with Lucifer and Liberius, but omits Rhodanus, Paulinus and Dionysius. (I)



(and defeated) at Milan.<sup>46</sup> Liberius refused, so Constantius exiled him to Beroea, in Thrace. Constantius then appointed a Roman deacon named Felix to take the office of Liberius.<sup>47</sup>

It is at this point that Damasus enters the narrative. According to the *Gesta*, the Roman clergy, including not only Damasus but Felix as well, took a joint public oath to not accept another bishop of Rome as long as Liberius lived. Damasus even followed Liberius into exile briefly, but quickly returned to Rome. The *Gesta* argues that the clergy “perjured themselves most wickedly and supported Felix” against the will of the people who continued to publicly support Liberius.<sup>48</sup> The *Gesta* is the only source for this incident and is also the only source that describes Felix as an archdeacon. The Byzantine historians do not mention an oath and identify Felix only as a deacon. In the same accounts, Damasus does not make an appearance until his election. Despite this, there is no reason to question the *Gesta*’s identification as there is nothing to contradict it in the other accounts. Archdeacon was not a separate office, but simply the title of the highest ranking deacon in the local church, usually second in authority to the bishop.

There was no small amount of confusion regarding the precise status of Felix or the nature of his papacy. The author of the *Gesta* says very little directly about Felix. He never explicitly calls Felix a heretic but it is clear that he sees the imposition of Felix by the Arian Constantius to be an attack on the true faith. Sozomen actually referred to him as the successor of Liberius, and insists that he “always continued in adherence to the Nicene faith, and that with

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<sup>46</sup> Theodoret *Historia Ecclesiastica* II.xiii, in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Second Series, vol. 3, ed. Phillip Schaff and Henry Wace (Grand Rapids, MI: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989). The location of this conference (as Theodoret calls it) is uncertain. Theodoret gives the location as Milan, while Sozomen states that Constantius summoned Liberius before him when he arrived in Rome (XI.xi), most likely during the state visit mentioned by Ammianus Marcellinus (XVI.x). Socrates makes no mention of a conference.

<sup>47</sup> Sozomen IV.xi, Theodoret II.xiii-xiv, Socrates II.xxxvii. Socrates gives no location for the exile, nor does the *Gesta*.

<sup>48</sup> CA II.ii

respect to his conduct in religious matters he was blameless.”<sup>49</sup> Theodoret wrote of Felix that, “He preserved inviolate the doctrines set forth in the Nicene confession of faith.”<sup>50</sup> Socrates, on the other hand, insisted that Felix received the episcopate only after he accepted Arian doctrine but conceded that “[s]ome however assert that he was not favorable to that opinion, but was constrained by force to receive the ordination of a bishop.”<sup>51</sup>

If Felix was, in fact, the archdeacon of Rome, he would have been second in authority to Liberius and the logical choice to succeed him. In the aftermath of a sudden exile, the Roman clergy may have simply advanced the heir apparent to the episcopate rather than allow the local church to fall into chaos. But Constantius’ preferred method of dealing with recalcitrant bishops, especially those with prominent sees, was to exile them and replace them with bishops who were Arian or Arian sympathizers. No see was more prominent than Rome. Thus, it seems logical that Constantius advanced, or at least highly encouraged the advancement of, Felix because the deacon shared the emperor’s Arian views. That Acacius, the Arian bishop of Caesarea and protégé of Eusebius of Nicomedia, consecrated Felix as bishop would seem to confirm this theory.<sup>52</sup>

However, the *Didascalia* includes an admonition to deacons that “when both of you are of one mind, then through your agreement there will also be peace in the Church.”<sup>53</sup> If this sentiment was held in the west as well as the east (where the *Didascalia* was written), it would be unlikely that Liberius would appoint a known heretic to such an important office as senior deacon in Rome. While it is possible that Felix simply abandoned orthodoxy in order to advance

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<sup>49</sup> Sozomen IV.xi.

<sup>50</sup> Theodoret II.xiv.

<sup>51</sup> Socrates II.xxxvii.

<sup>52</sup> Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*, 118. Barnes theorized that the consecration take place at the imperial court of Milan which fits with the idea of Felix being summoned by Constantius and given his orders.

<sup>53</sup> *Didascalia*, II.xliv.4b.

in rank, the most plausible scenario is that Constantius, convinced Felix that resistance was futile.<sup>54</sup> No doubt using the freshly banished Liberius as an example, the emperor exerted the appropriate pressure to ensure that, at the very least, Felix did not oppose the emperor's Arianizing policies as Liberius had. Arranging for a prominent Arian to be among the consecrators of Felix would further ensure his compliance. Thus, it is possible to harmonize the otherwise conflicting sources. At the same time, this would help explain the vehemence of opposition to Felix exhibited by the Christian population of Rome, as described in the *Gesta*. They saw Felix as worse than a heretic. He was a craven turncoat who buckled under the pressure against which Liberius had stood firm. In contrast, the clergy, including Damasus, would have viewed the situation more pragmatically and most likely accepted Felix as a stopgap measure until Liberius either died in exile or returned. Stanley Morison argued that this was the case. He further hypothesized that Damasus returned to Rome to set up a "caretaker government" to run the church properly while Felix sat as a figurehead on the throne of Peter.<sup>55</sup> The *Didascalia* also states, "The deacon is to be the ears of the bishop, his mouth, his heart and his soul."<sup>56</sup> It would certainly make more sense for an exiled bishop to have his ears and mouth in his city, where they could hear and, more importantly, speak for him. In this case, it would have been the duty of Damasus to return.

Ultimately, the people of Rome successfully petitioned Constantius to recall Liberius. Once again, the sources differ in the exact details but can be ultimately reconciled into a consistent narrative. In the words of the ever succinct author of the *Gesta*, "After two years the emperor Constantius came to Rome, he was asked by the people for [the return of] Liberius."<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Socrates seems to allege the former scenario

<sup>55</sup> Morison, 245.

<sup>56</sup> *Didascalia* II.xliv.4a.

<sup>57</sup> *CA* II.iii *Post annos duos venit Romam Constantius imperator; pro Liberio rogatur a populo.*

Going into more detail, Theodoret noted that it was the Christian women of Rome who meet the emperor and presented the petition. Despite their wives threatening to leave them for their cowardice, the men were too terrified of the wrath of Constantius to ask him for the return of their bishop. They believed, however, that the emperor would spare the women.<sup>58</sup> This most likely occurred in A.D. 357, during the state visit of Constantius to Rome that Ammianus Marcellinus reported.<sup>59</sup> Ammianus himself, though, makes no mention of such an embassy. He includes the entire Liberius affair in an earlier section concerned with city of Rome during the prefecture of Leontius.<sup>60</sup> E.D. Hunt has argued that Ammianus includes Constantius' banishing Liberius from Rome, not for any theological reasons, but simply to use the resistance of Liberius as an example of "plain insubordination...a highly placed subject rejecting the will of his sovereign."<sup>61</sup> Similarly, approaching the question from a purely secular standpoint, Constantius could have been motivated to return Liberius due to the unrest of the Roman people. Ammianus mentions that the great esteem in which the Romans held their bishop forced Constantius to order the deportation Liberius from the city under cover of night.<sup>62</sup> Such strong sentiments easily explain another incident, mentioned only in the *Gesta*, where the people of Rome "suspended" a procession that was led by Felix.<sup>63</sup> Jacob Latham argued that the procession in question was part of an effort by Felix to establish himself as legitimate bishop.<sup>64</sup> This sort of civil unrest could

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<sup>58</sup> Theodoret, II.xiv.

<sup>59</sup> Ammianus Marcellinus, *The Later Roman Empire (A.D. 354-378)* XVI.x, 2<sup>nd</sup>. Ed, trans. Walter Hamilton (London: Penguin Books, 1989).Both Barnes (*Athanasius*, 118) and Morison (245) support this date.

<sup>60</sup> Ammianus Marcellinus, XV.vii.

<sup>61</sup> E.D. Hunt, "Christians and Christianity in Ammianus Marcellinus,"*The Classical Quarterly* 35, New Series, no. 1 (1985), 190.

<sup>62</sup> Ammianus Marcellinus XV.vii.

<sup>63</sup> CA II.ii *Quod factum univere populo displicuit et se ab eius processione suspendit.*

<sup>64</sup> Latham," 308.

easily be part of what Socrates and Sozomen describe as seditions, raised by the people of Rome, that compelled Constantius to recall Liberius.<sup>65</sup>

The accounts of Ammianus, Socrates and Theodoret all agree that the actions of Christians of Rome brought about the return of Liberius. The author of the *Gesta* concurs but adds an ominous caveat to the acquiescence of Constantius. “He soon agreed, saying, ‘You may have Liberius, who will return to you better than he was when he departed.’ But this revealed that by his agreement he was extending the hand of treachery.”<sup>66</sup> Frustratingly, there is no further elaboration on this point. Sozomen supplies the details that the author of the *Gesta* omits. Constantius once again summoned Liberius before him and “urged him...to confess that the Son is not of the same substance as the Father.”<sup>67</sup> Sozomen states that the Arian bishops of the East produced a document which condemned the doctrines of Sabellianism, with which Arians often erroneously equated the doctrine of Nicaea.<sup>68</sup> Liberius assented to the document, which included a confession of faith which deliberately omitted the term *homoousias*. In fact, it made no mention of “substance” at all. These creeds were not technically heretical. They did not state false doctrine but neither did they affirm the doctrine of the *homoousion* that had been accepted at Nicaea.<sup>69</sup> Upon this basis, the Arian party “circulated the report that Liberius had renounced the term ‘consubstantial,’ and had admitted that the Son is dissimilar from the Father.”<sup>70</sup> There are also two letters ascribed to Liberius, in which he allegedly repudiates his former support of Athanasius. Historians doubt their authenticity, however, with a number of them concluding that

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<sup>65</sup> Socrates II.xxxviii.

<sup>66</sup> CA II.iii *Qui mox annuens ait habetis Liberium, qui, qualis a vobis profectus est, melior revertetur. Hoc autem de consensu eius, quo manus perfidiae dederat, indicabat..*

<sup>67</sup> Sozomen IV.xv.

<sup>68</sup> Sabellianism could accurately be described as the opposite error from Arianism. It stated that there were not three persons with one divine substance but rather three manifestations of the one. Among its proponents were Paul, bishop of Samosata, and Photinus, bishop of Sirmium, whom Theodoret mentions by name.

<sup>69</sup> Kenneth D. Whitehead, *One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic: The Early Church Was The Catholic Church* (San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 2000), 242.

<sup>70</sup> Sozomen IV.xv.

the letters were forged.<sup>71</sup> Athanasius himself related that Liberius gave way but argued that two years of exile and continual threat of death or torture mitigated much of his guilt in doing so.<sup>72</sup> With this propaganda victory, Constantius allowed Liberius to return to Rome.

The people hailed Liberius as a hero upon his return to Rome. Whitehead argues that this was due to the people not knowing the circumstances for his release. He further points out, “That the imperial party did not immediately proceed to discredit him forever is one of the reasons documentation against him is thought by some historians to have been forged.”<sup>73</sup> Although they differ in details, the accounts of Socrates, Theodoret and Sozomen agree that Constantius, no doubt in an effort to save face, ordered that Felix and Liberius rule the city together as co-bishops. The entire populace rebelled against such an idea. Sozomen stated that the timely death of Felix providentially resolved the thorny situation, while Socrates presented the expulsion of Felix as prior to, and the reason for, the return of Liberius.<sup>74</sup> The author of the *Gesta* makes no mention of the imperial command for joint rule, but agrees that the people cast Felix out of the city. While in the other accounts, Felix goes rather quietly, the author of the *Gesta* reported that Felix attempted to reassert himself and took over the Basilica of Julius but the “entire populace” once again expelled him.<sup>75</sup> Agreeing with Sozomen, the *Gesta* has the whole debacle resolved when Felix dies.<sup>76</sup>

The anonymous author of the *Liber Pontificalis* adds further confusion to the situation by diverging dramatically from the other accounts. He does not question Felix’s orthodoxy and even includes him as a valid pope and successor to Liberius before Damasus. As in the other accounts,

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<sup>71</sup> Whitehead, 241.

<sup>72</sup> Athanasius, *Historia Arianorum* III.xli, in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Second Series, vol. 4, ed. Phillip Schaff and Henry Wace (Grand Rapids, MI: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989).

<sup>73</sup> Whitehead, 242.

<sup>74</sup> Sozomen IV.xv; Socrates II.xxxvii ; Theodoret II.xiv.

<sup>75</sup> CA II.iii

<sup>76</sup> CA II.iv

Constantius exiles and then recalls Liberius. In the *Liber*, however, there is no question of his lapse and he unequivocally acts as an agent of Constantius by persecuting the orthodox clergy. During this same persecution, according to the author of the *Liber*, Constantius ordered the decapitation of Felix for the crime of declaring the emperor to be a heretic.<sup>77</sup> No other sources make such a claim and the spectacular nature of its divergence from every other known account makes its falsehood likely. As for the fate of Felix, most likely the *Liber*'s author conflated Felix with an otherwise unknown martyr of the same name. T.D. Barnes explains the situation by writing simply, "Felix had proven more adept than Liberius at frustrating the emperor's wishes: he retained a reputation for never having sullied the faith of Nicaea, and his name was allowed to stand in the official records of the Roman see as a legitimate bishop, not an interloper."<sup>78</sup>

In an interesting epilogue to the story, Felix has a perpetual place in stone among the bishops of Rome. Any pilgrim who visits the papal basilica of Saint Paul outside the Walls in Rome will undoubtedly notice the medallions along the walls, bearing the portraits of every pope from Peter to the present day. If the pilgrim was to stand between the papal *cathedra* and the tomb of the apostle, he would see the portrait belonging to Pope Damasus I. Facing the medallion, to the right of Damasus is an image of his successor Siricius but to the left of Damasus is an image, not of Liberius, but of Felix II.<sup>79</sup> The painting of these portraits commenced at the order of Pope Leo the Great. Leo reigned at least a century before the earliest accepted date for the writing of the *Liber Pontificalis*. Thus, it is impossible that the inclusion of Felix was influenced by the *Liber*. A devastating fire almost completely destroyed the basilica on July 15, 1823. Whatever could be salvaged was used to rebuild the basilica as identical to the

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<sup>77</sup> LP XXXVIII.iii. *Hic declaruit Constantium filium Constantini hereticum et rebaptizatum secundo ab Eusebio Nicomediense episcopo iuxta Nicomedia, in villa qui appellatur Aquilone. Et pro hoc declaratum ab eodem Constantii praecepto Augusti filii Constantini Augusti martyrio coronatur et capite truncatur.*

<sup>78</sup> Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*, 118.

<sup>79</sup> See figure 1.

original as possible.<sup>80</sup> It is possible that at this time, during which the *Liber* would have been accepted as an authoritative source, the painter added the portrait of Felix. Pope Pius IX, whom di Rossi called “the second Damasus” consecrated the rebuilt basilica on December 10, 1854.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> “The Basilica: Historical Overview,” The Papal Basilica Saint Paul Outside the Walls, 2007, [http://www.vatican.va/various/basiliche/san\\_paolo/en/basilica/storia.htm](http://www.vatican.va/various/basiliche/san_paolo/en/basilica/storia.htm). Accessed January 27, 2015.

<sup>81</sup> Giovanni Battista di Rossi, *La Roma sotteranea Cristiana* (Rome, 1864), frontispiece.



### Conflict with Ursinus

According to the *Gesta*, Liberius pardoned all the clergy who had broken their oaths and supported Felix, which included Damasus. Nevertheless, the Liberian crisis and whatever part Damasus may have played in it would haunt him for the rest of his life. He would deal with the aftermath of debacle for the entirety of his pontificate. When Liberius died in 366, the clergy elected Damasus to succeed him, but a sizable minority contested the election and choose another deacon named Ursinus to oppose Damasus.<sup>82</sup> The author of the *Gesta* wrote that the election of Damasus took place in “the church in Lucinis” while Ursinus was elected in the “Basilica of Julius.” He described the supporters of Ursinus as those “who had been obedient to the faith while Liberius was off in exile” and the partisans of Damasus as the “perjurers” who had accepted the antipope Felix.<sup>83</sup> The choice of words is important as well. The *Gesta* portrays Ursinus as the rightful successor of the steadfast Liberius and vilifies Damasus as following after Felix, a heretical interloper.<sup>84</sup>

The riots that broke out in the wake of the disputed election are easily the most controversial aspect of the pontificate of Damasus. The most cited account of the violence is that of the pagan historian Ammianus Marcellinus.

Damasus and Ursinus, whose passionate ambition to seize the episcopal throne passed all bounds, were involved in the most bitter conflict of interest, and the adherents of both did not stop short of wounds and death...The efforts of his partisans secured the victory for Damasus. It is certain that in the basilica of Sicininus, where the Christians assemble for worship, 137 corpses were found in a

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<sup>82</sup> Variant spellings include Ursinicus and (less commonly) Ursinius. Because Ursinus is the most common spelling in the sources, that will be the spelling maintained throughout this thesis.

<sup>83</sup> CA II.iii

<sup>84</sup> CA II.viii *Sibi Ursinum diaconum pontificem in loco Liberii ordinarii desposcunt...Damasus sibi episcopum in loco Felicis expostulant.* “The demanded Ursinus to be ordained as pontiff in place of Liberius...insisted Damasus himself to be bishop in the place of Felix.”

single day, and it was only with difficulty that the long-continued fury of the people was later brought under control.<sup>85</sup>

The *Gesta* offers a similar account but with much more detail, and not one but three massacres. According to the *Gesta*, an armed force, at the instigation of Damasus and perhaps under his command, broke into the Basilica of Julius and spent three days slaughtering those assembled there.<sup>86</sup> After a week, Damasus gained control of the Lateran basilica, the cathedral of Rome, and there was ordained as bishop. The *Gesta* accused him of subsequently bribing the urban officials of Rome to banish Ursinus and his chief supporters and opposing those who remained with “various beatings and bloodshed.” Included in this group are seven unnamed presbyters whose exile Damasus attempted to arrange. A group of Ursinian partisans interrupted the banishment and took the presbyters to safety in the Basilica of Liberius, which apparently served as the headquarters of the Ursinian faction.<sup>87</sup>

According to the *Gesta*, Damasus then ordered a second attack, this time against the Liberian basilica. It might have initially been intended to simply recover the seven presbyters, but it swiftly escalated into another killing frenzy. “They broke down the doors and set fire underneath it, then rushed in and ransacked the building. Some members of his household, when they were destroying the roof of the basilica, were killing the faithful congregation with the tiles. Then all of Damasus’ supporters rushed and killed a hundred and sixty of the people inside, both men and women.”<sup>88</sup> Scholars usually identify “basilica of Liberius” as the “basilica of Sicinnius” mentioned by Ammianus, based on the similarities in each account, primarily the number of casualties given.<sup>89</sup> The survivors of the assault fled to the cemetery of Saint Agnes on the *Via*

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<sup>85</sup> Ammianus Marcellinus XXVII.iii.11-13

<sup>86</sup> CA II.v

<sup>87</sup> CA II.vi

<sup>88</sup> CA II.vii

<sup>89</sup> The *Gesta* lists 160 confirmed casualties, but also states that many more were killed. Ammianus lists 137 dead.

*Nomentana*, and Damasus sent a final assault against which claimed the lives of many.<sup>90</sup>

Ammianus stated that Viventius, the urban prefect of Rome, was unable to quell the riotous unrest in the city and withdrew from the city to the countryside. Ammianus implies that this withdrawal allowed the partisans of Damasus to secure the episcopacy for him.<sup>91</sup> The author of the *Gesta* alleged that Damasus bribed the same Viventius, whom he describes as a “city judge,” to banish Ursinus and his allies from Rome.<sup>92</sup> He further relates that following the attack on the *Basilica Liberii*, the Ursinians continued to gather there, and sent numerous petitions to the Emperor Valentinian describing the villainy of Damasus. These petitions convinced Valentinian to allow Ursinus and his supporters to return to Rome.<sup>93</sup>

The emperor communicated his order to Vettius Agorius Praetextatus, the urban prefect of Rome, in a rescript that the compiler of the *Collectio Avellana* preserved as the fifth document in the Ursinian dossier.<sup>94</sup> The author of the *Gesta* stated that simple piety prompted Valentinian to order the return of the exiles.<sup>95</sup> The implication is that because Valentinian was pious, he found cause with the Ursinians. Indeed in the rescript, Valentinian writes that “the gentleness of our own nature and of religion itself” compels him and his colleagues to “take pity” on the Ursinians. Whatever piety Valentinian may have had took the form of him offering clemency to the Ursinians, rather than joining their cause. Additionally, he states that “contemplation of the law” motivated him to recall the exiles, indicating that he thinks the punishment may have been

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<sup>90</sup> CA II.xii

<sup>91</sup> Ammianus Marcellinus XXVII.iii.14.

<sup>92</sup> CA II.vi Why the author refers to Viventius as a *Iudicem Urbis* (“judge of the city”) instead of prefect is unclear.

<sup>93</sup> *Gesta*, IX.

<sup>94</sup> CA V, *Licet iusta*.

<sup>95</sup> CA II.x *voces ergo plebis ad Ualentinianum principem sunt delatae, qui pietate commotus reditum concessit exulibus* “Therefore, the voices of the people, having been delivered to the princeps Valentinian, who provoked by piety, allowed the return of the exiles.”

overly harsh but not altogether undeserved.<sup>96</sup> This is especially clear in the last part of the rescript, where Valentinian orders “most severe sentences” for anyone who continues to disturb the peace upon returning to the city.<sup>97</sup>

The next document in the dossier is another rescript ordering Praetextatus to return the *basilica Sicinnii* to Damasus.<sup>98</sup> This is the most convincing piece of evidence that Valentinian was not on the side of the Ursinians because the loss of the basilica would have been a critical setback for them. Scholars generally identify the *basilica Sicinnii* with the *Getas’s basilica Liberii*, which served as the center of Ursinian opposition, a sort of “anti-cathedral” for the antipope. The basilica served the purpose of being a conventional military-type stronghold, as indicated by the *Gesta*, but more importantly it held significant symbolic power because Liberius had ordered its construction. Jacob Latham has argued that the Ursinians took the basilica in the first place to legitimize the episcopal claim of Ursinus, and their continued support of him following his exile.<sup>99</sup> The Ursinians saw Ursinus as the rightful successor of Liberius, and thus the rightful occupant of the buildings built on the order of Liberius and the places that he frequented. By returning the basilica to the control of Damasus, Valentinian was, perhaps inadvertently, symbolically affirming the validity of the claims of Damasus to be the rightful successor of Liberius.

Less than a year later,<sup>100</sup> Valentinian apparently changed his mind regarding the Ursinians and issued a third rescript that banned the Ursinian faction from Rome. There is no

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<sup>96</sup> CA V, *Licet iusta*

<sup>97</sup> CA V, *Quo tranquillitas reformata turbetur, severissima in eos sentential proferatur*. “The most severe sentence is imposed on he who, having been transformed, disturbs tranquility.”

<sup>98</sup> CA VI, *Dissensionis auctore*

<sup>99</sup> Latham, 311-12. Latham pioneered the term anti-cathedral. It is the best way of putting into the words the precise function that the basilica served for the Ursinians.

<sup>100</sup> The rescript is addressed to Praetextatus, who served as *praefectus Urbis* for only thirteen months.

mention of Ursinus himself, only his “allies and ministers.”<sup>101</sup> The author of the *Gesta* reported that by this time, Ursinus had already “hurried into exile of his own accord” on November 14. The author explicitly tries to make parallels between Ursinus and the sufferings of Christ, writing that Ursinus “having committed no crime...gave himself into the hands of wicked men.” Despite the author of the *Gesta*’s oxymoronic assertion that the self-imposed exile of Ursinus was “by order of the emperor,” there is no separate extant rescript banishing Ursinus from Rome. The author of the *Gesta* could have been referring to the same rescript when he reported that Ursinus left Rome. However, this is unlikely. The author of the *Gesta* dates the departure of Ursinus from Rome to November 14, while Valentinian issued the rescript concerning the followers of Ursinus on January 14.<sup>102</sup> He attributes Valentinian’s change of heart concerning Ursinus and his followers to bribery of Valentinian’s court advisors by Damasus.<sup>103</sup>

Bereft of their basilica and bishop, the Ursinians gathered instead in the cemetery of St. Agnes on the Via Nomentana. The *Gesta* records that they “were celebrating services without the clergy.”<sup>104</sup> The lack of clergy indicates that these took place sometime after the issuance of Valentinian’s rescript banning the supporters of Ursinus from Rome, which is clearly targeted at clergy. The *Liber Pontificalis* indicated that Liberius had lived in the cemetery for some time after his return to Rome, before the expulsion of Felix. By choosing another site associated with Liberius, the Ursinians were continuing the claim of their leader to be the rightful successor of Liberius. Latham notes that the Latin word used by the *Gesta*’s author to mean a liturgical service, is *statio*, which more often means a military outpost. He argues that the goal of the strife between the factions of Damasus and Ursinus was an effort to maintain the legitimacy of the

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<sup>101</sup> CA VII, *Ea nobis. Ursini sociis ac ministris*

<sup>102</sup> CA VII, *Data pridie Idus Ianuar.* “Having been given on the day before the Ides of January”

<sup>103</sup> CA II.xi *Redemit omne palatium* “He bought all the palace”

<sup>104</sup> CA II.xi

claim of each to the episcopate by physical occupation of key Liberian sites.<sup>105</sup> It is for this reason that Damasus sent armed forces to attack each successive site that the Ursinians occupied, including the cemetery of Saint Agnes.<sup>106</sup>

Valentinian reiterated this command in a rescript to Quintus Clodius Hermogenianus Olybrius, who succeeded Praetextatus as *praefectus urbi* in A.D. 368. It is more than a simple reminder of protocol for the new office holder. Olybrius had apparently neglected to inform the emperor of the urban disturbances that the partisans of both sides of the episcopal conflict continued to generate. Apparently, Olybrius was engaged in some sort of rivalry with Aginatus, the vicar of Rome, who reported the dereliction of duty by Olybrius to Valentinian. SÁghy provides two possible reasons why Olybrius did not report the ongoing crisis. The first is that Olybrius was ambitious and as a newly appointed official, wished to present himself to the emperor as an effective administrator who maintained the peace in Rome. The second was that Olybrius had some other ideological reason to cover up the violence. SÁghy points out that André Piganiol had argued that Olybrius was a Ursinian sympathizer and covered up the violence in order to maintain the clandestine nature of the Ursinian meetings. SÁghy herself, however, provides the more plausible alternative that if Olybrius had supported any side in the fight, it was that of Damasus. In this case, Olybrius would have maintained silence in order to hide the “brutal measures” of Damasus against his opponents.<sup>107</sup>

Either way, Valentinian ordered Olybrius to proceed against the Ursinians with all haste.<sup>108</sup> Whereas before Valentinian merely banished the Ursinians from Rome, he now ordered that the Ursinians not be allowed within twenty miles of the city and exiled Ursinus himself to

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<sup>105</sup> Latham, 310.

<sup>106</sup> CA II.xii

<sup>107</sup> SÁghy, “Schismatic,” 10.

<sup>108</sup> CA VIII, *Tu quidem*.

Gaul.<sup>109</sup> Shrewdly, he also sent a rescript to the Aginatus, who had first informed him of the Olybrian omission, in order to ensure that his orders were carried out.<sup>110</sup> Valentinian followed this same protocol again two years later in yet another rescript in which he once again prohibited Ursinus and eight of his companions from entering Rome.<sup>111</sup> As he had done before with Olybrius and Aginatus, Valentinian sent a rescript to both the urban prefect and the vicar of Rome, posts that were held by men named Ampelius and Maximinus respectively.<sup>112</sup>

With this final banishment, Damasus was able to finally secure his position as bishop of Rome but such security was only made possible by imperial intervention and support. Although all serious opposition against him was effectively curtailed, Damasus would be haunted by Ursinian intrigue until the last day of his pontificate. Neil McLynn pointed out that “Ursinus continued to enjoy enough popular support at Rome to encourage a prefect of the city in 381 to make a renewed appeal on his behalf.”<sup>113</sup> The final attempt of the partisans of Ursinus to dislodge Damasus was to bring charges of a serious nature against the pope.<sup>114</sup> The vicar of Rome, named Aquilinus, heard the charges. The devoutly Nicene emperor Gratian wrote a rescript to Aquilinus which urged the prefect to disregard the charges and once again eject the Ursinians from Rome, once and for all.<sup>115</sup> In doing so, it also set the precedent for the pope to be immune from prosecution by a secular court.

Ursinus outlived Damasus. An imperial rescript from Valentinian II, Theodosius I and Arcadius congratulates Pinianus, urban prefect of Rome, on the successful election of Siricius,

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<sup>109</sup> CA VIII *Tu quidem*.

<sup>110</sup> CA IX *Omnem his*

<sup>111</sup> CA XI *Iure mansuetudinis* Interestingly, Lupus and Amantius, the two deacons mentioned by name in the *Gesta* as demanding the election of Ursinus as bishop, are not mentioned among the eight in this rescript.

<sup>112</sup> CA XII *Est istud*

<sup>113</sup> McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan: Church and Court in a Christian Capital*, The Transformation of the Classical Heritage, vol. 22 (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1994), 58.

<sup>114</sup> The spurious *Liber Pontificalis* lists these charges as adultery, but Loomis argues that is unlikely.

<sup>115</sup> CA XIII *Ordinarium*

successor of Damasus, without Ursinian interference.<sup>116</sup> That the emperors felt this was an accomplishment worth of imperial commendation indicates the threat that the Ursinians still posed.

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<sup>116</sup> *CA IV Populum Urbis aeternae*



### Possible Ursinian Alliance with the Luciferians

When Constantius died, his successor Julian, eager to sow dissension in the Christian ranks, recalled all the bishops whom his predecessor had exiled. In 363, the returned Athanasius presided over a council at Alexandria that ruled that Arians who repented of their heresy should be welcomed back into communion with the Church. Another returning bishop was Lucifer of Cagliari, whom Sozomen, Theodoret and the author of the *Gesta* record as suffering exile for his outspoken support of Liberius against Constantius. Having suffered much in defense of orthodoxy, Lucifer no doubt felt that the Church had capitulated too much to the Arian heretics, with the acceptance of Felix serving as a prime example. Refusing to accept former Arians into communion, Lucifer and his followers also broke away from both Athanasius and the bishop of Rome, who at that time was still Liberius.<sup>117</sup> The schism continued under Damasus. Thus, the invective which the author of the *Gesta* heaps on Damasus would have fit well with a Luciferian narrative.

The hostility of the Luciferians toward Damasus is evident from the title of their manifesto, the *Libellus precum ad imperatores adversus Damasum*. In it, Marcellinus and Faustinus describe violent measures taken by Damasus against the Luciferians in Rome. These are quite similar to the attacks on the Ursinians described in the *Gesta*.<sup>118</sup> It would appear that the Luciferians had picked up the torch of opposition to Damasus left by the exiled Ursinians. Damasus would have certainly been eager to root out this opposition to his episcopal authority. In Migne's *Patrologia Latina*, the *Gesta* is listed as the *Praefatio*, or preface, to the *Libellus* and thus the work of Marcellinus and Faustinus.<sup>119</sup> It would certainly serve as evidence of prior bad acts on the part of Damasus, and thus add validity to the claims of the Luciferian appeal to the

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<sup>117</sup> Socrates III.ix.

<sup>118</sup> Saghy, "Schismatic," 10.

<sup>119</sup> J.P. Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, Vol. 13 (Paris: 1848), 81-84.

emperors. McLynn wrote of Ursinus that “his papal candidacy has plausibly been associated with those extreme champions of Nicaea at Rome, the Luciferians.”<sup>120</sup>

While the association itself is plausible, there are problems with the identification of Marcellinus and Faustinus as authors of the *Gesta*. The chief of these is the depiction of Liberius. The author of the *Gesta* presents Liberius as steadfast against Constantius. His return to Rome is not presented as a result of his capitulation but of the fervent petitions of the Roman people to Constantius. In fact, no explicit mention of the fall of Liberius is made at all. The vaguely ominous words of Constantius, “You shall have Liberius, who will return to you better than when he was when he departed,” only make sense in the context of the Liberian lapse, making it conspicuous by its absence in the narrative.<sup>121</sup> This omission makes sense because the clear message throughout the *Gesta* is that Ursinus is the rightful successor of Liberius, instead of Damasus. The credibility of the entire Ursinian episcopal claim lays on the orthodoxy of Liberius.

The Luciferian schism, however, began during the reign of Liberius, approximately three years prior to the election of Damasus. Furthermore, in *Adversus Valentem et Ursacium* Lucifer’s one-time ally Hilarius of Poitiers demonstrated that *Studens Paci*, a letter in which Liberius allegedly repudiated his earlier support of Athanasius, was in fact a forgery. John Chapman argued that the forger was a Luciferian, and that schismatics used the forged letter to further justify their claims against Liberius and the whole Church with him.<sup>122</sup> Even if the charge of slander itself is false, its plausibility indicates a rift between Liberius and Lucifer, no doubt occasioned by the report of the former’s fall. Such enmity makes it unlikely that a Luciferian

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<sup>120</sup> McLynn, *Ambrose*, 58.

<sup>121</sup> CA II.iii *Habetis Liberium, qui qaulis a vobis profectus est, melior revertetur*

<sup>122</sup> “Pope Liberius,” *Catholic Encyclopedia*, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09217a.htm>

would be the author of the arguably pro-Liberian *Gesta*. Chapman presented a possible solution to the problem when he surmised that the author of the *Gesta* was not a Luciferian, but a Ursinian posing as one.<sup>123</sup> The reason for this charade would have been an effort to share in the tolerance extended to the Luciferians as a result of the *Libellus precum*.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> "Pope Liberius," *Catholic Encyclopedia*, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09217a.htm>

<sup>124</sup> Such toleration was the result of the imperial rescript issued by Valentinian II, Theodosius I and Arcadius to Cynegius, Praetorian Prefect of the Orient, in A.D. 384. The rescript acknowledges the Luciferians as orthodox Catholics, and thus saves them from persecution as heretics. It is included with the *Libellus Precum* in the Ursinian dossier of the *Collectio Avellana*

### Accounts and Interpretations

A cursory examination of the sources for the Ursinian schism reveals contradictory accounts. Closer analysis reveals that much of the apparent contradiction is rather simply omission and allows reconciliation of these accounts into one consistent narrative. Nevertheless, contradictions remain that cannot be reconciled. Study of these divergences reveal the existence of two relatively parallel yet ultimately opposed narrative traditions that can be clearly assigned to the two different sides of the conflict.

The largest point of contention is the origin of the schism itself. The pagan historian Ammianus Marcellinus blamed the violence on the “passionate ambition” of both Ursinus and Damasus “to seize the episcopal throne” which “passed all bounds.”<sup>125</sup> The *Gesta* gives the same motive for the riots as Ammianus, but ascribes it to only Damasus.<sup>126</sup> On the other hand, Socrates and Sozomen both place the blame for the schism squarely on the shoulders of Ursinus. They take the explanation of Ammianus and ascribe it to Ursinus alone, giving his wounded pride as the only reason for the schism.<sup>127</sup> In order for these motivations to make sense, the election of one bishop must have occurred before that of the other. In the *Gesta*, Damasus reacts to the prior election of Ursinus instead of Ursinus reacting to Damasus, as presented in the accounts of Socrates and Sozomen.

Ultimately, Sozomen borrowed heavily from his primary source of Socrates. Socrates himself appears to have relied on Jerome’s *Chronicon*. Jerome wrote of the year 366 that,

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<sup>125</sup> Ammianus Marcellinus, XXVII.iii.4

<sup>126</sup> *CA II.v Semper episcopatum ambierat*. “He always strived to be bishop”

<sup>127</sup> Sozomen reported, “A deacon named Ursicius, who had obtained some votes in his favor, but could not endure the defeat, therefore caused himself to be ordained by some bishops of little note, and endeavored to create a division of the faith among the people and to hold a separate church. (VI.xxiii.) Compare to Socrates: “A certain Ursicinus, a deacon of that church, had been nominated among others when the election of a bishop took place; as Damasus was preferred, this Ursicinus, unable to bear the disappointment of his hopes, held schismatic assemblies apart from the church, and even induced several bishops of little distinction to ordain him in secret.” (VI.xxix)

“Damasus is ordained 35<sup>th</sup> bishop of the Roman church, and after a not very long interval Ursinus was appointed bishop by some people, and with his partisans invaded (the church of) Sicininum, in which, coming together with some people from the supporters of Damasus, very cruel slaughters were committed.”<sup>128</sup> Jerome directly blamed Ursinus for the instigation but was apparently reluctant to impute direct guilt for the violence itself to either party. Socrates and Sozomen follow after him in this as well as in barely mentioning the violence. This is especially noticeable in the report of each on the riots following the disputed election. Both are brief and vague, following Jerome’s characterization of the violence as an untenable situation beyond all control.<sup>129</sup>

The *Chronicon* is one of the earliest documents recounting the violence and one of two that are contemporary with Damasus.<sup>130</sup> Not only was Damasus still alive at the time of composition but Jerome was very much in the camp of Damasus. The pope had corresponded with Jerome and patronized his scholarly endeavors, and Jerome had served as his personal secretary for a brief time.<sup>131</sup> Thus, Jerome would have been very highly motivated to paint Damasus in the best possible light. In following Jerome so closely, Socrates and Sozomen carry on a decidedly pro-Damasus historiographical tradition. It is possible, moreover, that neither Socrates nor Sozomen were aware of the existence of either the *Libellus* or the *Gesta*. They

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<sup>128</sup> Jerome, *Chronicon*, 326e

<sup>129</sup> Socrates writes, “Hence frequent conflicts arose, insomuch that many lives were sacrificed in this contention; and many of the clergy as well as laity were punished on that account by Maximin, the prefect of the city.” Sozomen recorded, “This gave rise to much contention and revolt among the people, which at length proceeded to the evil of wounds and murder. The prefect of Rome was obliged to interfere, and to punish many of the people and the clergy; and he put an end to the attempt of Ursicius.”

<sup>130</sup> J.N.D. Kelly dates the *Chronicon* to 380 A.D., the fourteenth year of the pontificate of Damasus. (*Jerome*, 33) The *Libellus Precum* is dated sometime between 383 and 384 A.D., either in the final or penultimate year of the pontificate of Damasus. If Migne is correct in identifying the *Gesta* as a Praefatio to the *Libellus*, than the *Chronicon* is the earliest document. However, it is more likely that Sághy’s dating of A.D. 368 is correct, and this would make the *Gesta* the earliest document.

<sup>131</sup> Jerome’s correspondence with Damasus consists of his *Epistulae* XV, XVI, XVIII, XIX, XX, XXI, XXXV, and XXXVI. *Epistula* XLV mentions his service as secretary to Damasus.

wrote their histories in the fifth century while the most probable date for the compilation of the *Collectio Avellana* is mid-sixth century.<sup>132</sup>

Both Jerome and Ammianus Marcellinus identify the *basilica Sicinnius* as the location of the bloody riot following the election of Damasus. It is not possible to determine an exact date for the work of Ammianus. It is likely, though, that he was completing his work and preparing it for publication in the decade following the publication of Jerome's *Chronicon*. It is possible, although unlikely, that Ammianus was familiar with the *Chronicon* and used it as the source for his record of the Ursinian schism. Although they probably never meet, both Ammianus and Jerome were well-educated natives of Antioch who migrated to Rome at some point in their respective lives. Unlike Ammianus, who composed his historical work in Rome, Jerome composed his *Chronicon* in his native Antioch, no more than two years before leaving for Rome. Neither of them were witnesses to the conflict that they report

The precise attitude of the pagan Ammianus toward Christianity is a matter of some debate among scholars. Alan Cameron devotes a significant portion of the *Last Pagans of Rome* dealing with the issue. He writes of Ammianus, "Unusually for a pagan, he refers quite openly to Christians and Christianity, sometimes favorably, more often not. He is usually seen as a moderate, tolerant pagan. Barnes argues against this view."<sup>133</sup> Interestingly, in the study of Ammianus that Cameron cites, Barnes only refers to his subject's mention of the conflict between Damasus and Ursinus once and very briefly at that.<sup>134</sup> The incident receives an even barer, passing mention in Barnes' more substantial work on the Church under the sons of

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<sup>132</sup> Sághy, "Schismatic," 1.

<sup>133</sup> Cameron, *The Last Pagans of Rome*, 220-1.

<sup>134</sup> Barnes, *Ammianus Marcellinus and the Representation of Historical Reality*, 220.

Constantine.<sup>135</sup> E.D. Hunt characterizes the kind of view of Ammianus expressed by Barnes and Cameron, among others, as “an attempt, despite appearances to the contrary, to see beneath the surface of Ammianus’ narrative a submerged hostility to Christianity.”<sup>136</sup> Hunt takes issue with this interpretation, arguing instead that Ammianus saw “the essential merit of Christianity” which was at times “perverted.” In this he appeals to W. Ensslin and J.J. O’Donnell, concurring with them that Ammianus displayed “a breadth of religious tolerance... associated with the monotheistic tendency of late antique Neoplatonism” as well as a “tradition of pagan tolerance and acquiescence in a multiplicity of faiths.”<sup>137</sup> Hunt examines Ammianus’ record of the conflicts between Damasus and Ursinus in light of the historian’s similar critiques of the lavish lifestyles of the pagan Roman aristocracy. He concludes that the motives for both critiques are the same, and that Ammianus did not intend to single out Christianity in general.<sup>138</sup> Thus, Ammianus is not, as some might conclude, arguing that Christianity itself leads to such murderous conflict. Instead, he blames the ensuing violence on an inordinate desire to gain the power available as a leader of the faith, a motive that he assigns to both belligerents. To this end, Hunt cites Ammianus’ self-admitted digression on the entire debacle. Here, Ammainus contrasts certain “provincial bishops, whose extreme frugality in food and drink, simple attire, and downcast eyes demonstrate to the supreme god and his true worshippers the purity and modesty of their lives” favorably with the bishops of Rome, arguing that “they might be truly happy” if they followed the example of the provincial bishops.<sup>139</sup> Ammianus, who has no dog in the fight, marvels at the pugnaciousness of the Christians.

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<sup>135</sup> Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*, 118.

<sup>136</sup> Hunt, “Christians and Christianity in Ammianus Marcellinus,” 187.

<sup>137</sup> Hunt, 187.

<sup>138</sup> Hunt, 191.

<sup>139</sup> Ammianus, XXVII.iii.14-15.

This “studied neutrality” and apparent tolerance for Christians makes Ammianus the most reliable source on this particular episode. For this reason most scholars uncritically accept his version of events. Thus, Neil McLynn describes the majority consensus: “The slaughter of 137 (or 160) people inside, ‘within a single day’, has therefore been presented as the ‘climax’ to ‘bitter and prolonged rioting’, the dreadful but unsurprising result of the election fever to which the city had succumbed.”<sup>140</sup> McLynn takes issue with this, pointing out that the assault occurred in the second hour of the morning (around 7 a.m.). He argues that this time would have been too early for a crowd to have gathered, much less to be whipped into a frenzy and become a murderous mob.<sup>141</sup> In ascertaining a motive for the attack on the basilica, McLynn focuses on the seven banished Ursinian presbyters who were rescued by supporters as they were leaving the city for exile. The rescuers took the presbyters to the relative safety of the “basilica of Liberius” and secured them there. McLynn speculates that Damasus saw the presbyters as possible loci around which Ursinian opposition could form. Therefore, McLynn argues, Damasus sent an “early morning ‘commando raid’” to retrieve the presbyters and ensure they entered exile. It was too late. Opposition had already begun to coalesce around the presbyters. McLynn argues that the men sent by Damasus did not expect such a large group of people and faced with the prospect of failing their mission, massacred the unarmed crowd.<sup>142</sup>

McLynn’s conclusions, however, rest on the use of the *Gesta*. Indeed, much of the use of Ammianus on this particular historical question is based on the uncritical acceptance of this

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<sup>140</sup> McLynn, “Christian Controversy and Violence in the Fourth Century,” 15. McLynn specifically cites J.F. Matthews, *The Roman World of Ammianus*, 444 and W.H.C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity*, 626 as examples.

<sup>141</sup> McLynn, “Christian Controversy,” 15.

<sup>142</sup> McLynn, “Christian Controversy.” 17



source as an authoritative source and its corroboration with Ammianus.<sup>143</sup> Like T.D.Barnes, who refers to it simply as a “contemporary document,”<sup>144</sup> McLynn unquestioningly accepts the *Gesta* as corroboration for the version of events presented by Ammianus. He accepts the assertion that the Ursinians alone suffered a massive amount of casualties, solely on account of the similar number mentioned by Ammianus. Additionally, he considers the description of the perpetrators of the attack as “‘professionals’ working for Damasus” to be “perfectly plausible.”<sup>145</sup> If the account in the *Gesta* is accurate, its condemnation of Damasus as an “author of crime” and “a murderer” is more than deserved.<sup>146</sup> McLynn’s theory concerning the nature of the attack only paints an even more villainous picture of Damasus. As he writes, “[T]he massacre at the *basilica Sicinini* does not naturally fit into its surrounding context: it was not the climax to a wave of riots, but an escalation to an entirely new scale of violence.”<sup>147</sup> However, one must read the *Gesta* with a critical eye.

Thomas Sizgorich is one of the few historians to approach the *Gesta* critically. In *Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity*, Sizgorich writes that the *Gesta* begins with the same formula that was used to begin various *acta martyrum*. He argues that the author saw the edict of Constantius as parallel to the edicts of earlier emperors, most recently the Tetrarchs, mandating sacrifice to pagan gods.<sup>148</sup> Sizgorich further argues that Damasus, because he abandoned Liberius in exile and accepted Felix, is cast as a traitor, “one who failed the test of the martyrs” in the narrative. As the narrative progresses, and the followers of Ursinus come into open, armed

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<sup>143</sup> While he would have been remiss to not include the incident, Bertrand Lançon goes into further detail than is necessary in describing the violence. In doing so, he cites both Ammianus and “an anti-Damasus text from the *Collectio Avellana*.” Bertrand Lançon, *Rome in Late Antiquity: AD 312-609* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 101.

<sup>144</sup> Barnes, *Ammianus Marcellinus*, 220.

<sup>145</sup> McLynn, “Christian Controversy.” 16.

<sup>146</sup> *CA II.xii Auctorem scelerum et homicidam*

<sup>147</sup> McLynn, “Christian Controversy.” 17

<sup>148</sup> Thomas Sizgorich, *Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity: Militant Devotion in Christianity and Islam*, 73

conflict with those of Damasus, the role of Damasus changes from traitor to persecutor. Here, Damasus is mentioned in the same breath as the persecuting emperors and judges “before whom so many martyrs spoke their communal truths and suffered in their defense.” Additionally, the location of the third and final attack on the Ursinians is critical to Sizgorich’s argument. “It is, moreover, profoundly significant that this act of violence takes place during the annual commemoration of the martyrdom of one of Rome’s founding saints.” According to Sizgorich, early Christian commemoration of a martyr’s death spiritually brought the faithful through space and time to the actual moment in which the martyrdom occurred. Thus, the attacks by Damasus on the Ursinians are not only reminiscent but, in a very real way, part of the earlier persecutions of Christians.

This point is especially interesting given the probable time of the *Gesta*’s composition. Sizgorich mentions that “[t]he implications of this enactment are simply an inversion of the implication of Damasus’s much grander campaign to associate his own community with the legacy of the martyrs.”<sup>149</sup> If Sághy’s dating is correct and the *Gesta* was composed circa 368, then Damasus was still in the process of consolidating his power and solidifying his position. His program to establish the cults of the martyrs, if it had even begun, was certainly not in full swing. In this case, the program could be seen as part of that consolidation, with Damasus appropriating a Ursinian theme both for legitimacy and as a sign of his supremacy. It is possible, however, that this was simply a common current in mid-fourth century Christian thought, one which both sides aimed to use to their respective advantages. Sizgorich concludes,

[A]s the members of the community gathered around the figure of Ursinus recalled certain formative events of their communal past—and particularly their schism with the Damasian community—they did so within a narrative of Christian history whose plot

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<sup>149</sup> Sizgorich, 74-75.

determined the specific ways in which the vents and contingencies of the split with Damasus were interpreted and remembered by members of the community. The conflict with Damasus and his followers was yet another episode of persecution, and Damasus was subsumed into roles which were both necessary and native to that narrative.<sup>150</sup>

Sizgorich never explicitly questions the veracity of the *Gesta*'s account. Nevertheless, his interpretation of the *Gesta* as a carefully crafted narrative meant to make a point, plausibly presents the possibility that its version of events may not be entirely factual.

In a similar vein, Kate Blair-Dixon has helpfully pointed out that, “scholars have tended not to consider closely how the *Collectio*'s perspective may color the evidence it offers.” She argues that “[t]he *Praefatio* presents the reader with a number of anachronisms that lead one to question its date and reliability.”<sup>151</sup> The first of these is the statement that Damasus was elected by his supporters *in lucinis*.<sup>152</sup> “[S]cholars have argued that *in lucinis* must be the *titulus Lucinae* mentioned in the synod list of 499, which in turn must be the basilica of S. Lorenzo in Lucina.”<sup>153</sup> This is problematic because the *Liber Pontificalis* reports that Xystus III built a basilica dedicated to St. Lawrence in the reign of Valentinian III. Xystus III reigned as pope from 432 until 440 A.D., long after the *Gesta* was allegedly written. Additionally, the *Gesta* is the only literary reference to the basilica of S. Lorenzo in Lucina that is not dated to the late fifth or sixth centuries. Even more damning are the recent archaeological excavations that confirm that the church in question did not exist until the fifth century, nor is there evidence for an earlier Christian community at the site.<sup>154</sup> Similarly, Blair-Dixon argues that the reference to the *basilica Liberii* is the only ostensibly fourth-century reference to the building by that name. The

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<sup>150</sup> Sizgorich, 75.

<sup>151</sup> Blair-Dixon, “Memory and Authority in sixth-century Rome: the *Liber Pontificalis* and the *Collectio Avellana*,” in *Religion, Dynasty and Patronage in Early Christian Rome, 300-900*, ed. Kate Cooper and Julie Hillner. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 71.

<sup>152</sup> CA II.v

<sup>153</sup> Blair-Dixon, 71.

<sup>154</sup> Blair-Dixon, 72.

only reference at all, besides the *Gesta*, to the *basilica Liberii* is in the *Liber Pontificalis*, which is consistently dated to the sixth century.<sup>155</sup> The attack on the *basilica Liberii* by the partisans of Damasus is the keystone of the *Gesta*'s narrative. Questioning the identification of such an important location casts doubt on the veracity of the entire narrative.

Kate Blair-Dixon has effectively brought into question the reliability of the *Gesta* as a source for the schism between Damasus and Ursinus. Later in her article, Blair-Dixon succinctly concludes that “*LP* and *CA* cannot be used as a reliable source for the history of the papacy in the early centuries of the church, because of their persistent tendency to retroject their own visions of the Roman church into earlier periods.”<sup>156</sup> Her hypothesis of a sixth-century date for the writing, or at the very least an editing, of the *Gesta* significantly diminishes its credibility. If it is correct, the likes of Barnes, McLynn, and Lançon may need to reconsider their unwavering allegiance to the *Gesta* as a “corroborating document.” There certainly was violence but accepting the extent of the violence as presented in the *Gesta* at face value may no longer be possible.

While Ammianus may not have been criticizing Christians as a whole, the situation that he describes was unquestionably embarrassing to the leaders of the Church. Although he passes over it quickly, the mere mention of the crisis by Jerome indicates that it was impossible to deny. Jerome's version of events became the official narrative, repeated by Socrates, Sozomen and Theodoret. In opposition to this pro-Damasus narrative is the Ursinian tradition represented by the *Gesta*. Even if the *Gesta* was composed in the sixth century instead of the fourth, as Kate Blair-Dixon argued, it stands opposed to an official church narrative.

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<sup>155</sup> Blair-Dixon, 72

<sup>156</sup> Blair-Dixon, 76

It was not until the sixth-century that the Church was able to change the narrative and completely omit any mention of the violence. The *Liber Pontificalis* states simply that Ursinus was ordained “in the same place...under strain” with no mention of the reasons for the schism.<sup>157</sup> Indeed, there is no mention of the schism at all; it is almost as if Ursinus was ordained by accident. In the *Liber*, the situation is resolved, without bloodshed, by Ursinus being made the bishop of Naples with Damasus remaining “in the city of Rome...on the throne of the Apostles.”<sup>158</sup> Louis Duschene argued that the author of the *Liber* added this detail to the narrative in order to create a precedent for the situation in his own time. In A.D. 498, the Laurentian schism was resolved by awarding Laurentius, who contested the election of Pope Symmachus an alternative see in the same way as Ursinus in the fictive narrative of the *Liber*.<sup>159</sup> The *Liber Pontificalis* is just as unreliable in its record of Damasus as that of his predecessor Liberius and the antipope Felix II who opposed him. If the *Gesta* was composed in the sixth century it is possible that the *Liber Pontificalis* was written in opposition to it or vice versa in ignorance, perhaps deliberate, of the earlier sources. The accounts in the *Liber* are inversions of the *Gesta* with a heretical Liberius persecuting the faithful and a saintly Felix suffering martyrdom for opposing him. Blair-Dixon states, however, that “It would be going too far to claim that the *Collectio* represents a polemical response to the *Liber Pontificalis*. We know too little about the composition and audience of both texts to be able to make claims about direct contact between the two.”<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> *LP XXXVIX.i eodem ordinatur sub intentione Vrsinius* “Ursinius had been ordained in the same place under strain”

<sup>158</sup> *LP XXXVIX.i mansit Damasus in urbe Rome...in sedem apostolicam*. “Damasus remained in the city of Rome...on the apostolic throne.”

<sup>159</sup> Louis Duschene, *Liber Pontificalis*, Vol. 1, 213. nn. 3-5.

<sup>160</sup> Blair-Dixon, 64.

Most historiography has favored the anti-Damasus narrative represented by the *Gesta*. This favor is based primarily on the lack of other sources to contradict the information that the *Gesta* presents and the belief that more detail allows for a more accurate account. Indeed, Jerome and those following after him do seem to be attempting to brush off, as quickly as possible, the embarrassing events of the schism. Proponents of the anti-Damasus view usually claim corroboration with the independent account of Ammianus but Ammianus is not wed as closely to this narrative as initial appearances suggest. The identification of the location of the riot as *basilica Sicinini* by both Jerome and Ammianus, places Ammianus more with the Hieronymian pro-Damasus tradition than with that of the *Gesta*. Ultimately, the anti-Damasus tradition is based solely on the *Gesta*. The work of Kate Blair-Dixon and Thomas Sizgorich has lowered the credibility of the *Gesta* as a source. The problems with this source make the pro-Damasus tradition, despite the sparseness of information therein, likely the more accurate tradition.

## CHAPTER III

## THE EPIGRAPHIC PROGRAM OF DAMASUS

## Overview

Much of the recent scholarly work on Damasus has focused on the epigrams that he composed, primarily for the tombs of Roman martyrs. Maximilian Ihm produced a scholarly catalogue of the epigrams in 1895. He was followed by the Jesuit archaeologist Antonio Ferrua, who published a new edition of the epigrams in 1942. Ferrua has remained the authority on the epigrams until very recently. In late 2015, Dennis Trout will release the newest scholarly edition, which is the first in English.<sup>161</sup>

Study of the epigrams of Damasus requires the combined use of two complementary but nevertheless distinct types of historical sources: epigraphic and literary. Of the fifty-nine epigrams currently ascribed to Damasus, fifteen remain at or reasonably close to the location of their initial discovery.<sup>162</sup> Of these, ten were found in the proximity of their probable original location. The *Elogium Felicissimi et Agapitius* and *Elogium Eutychii* are exceptional cases. The former was found in a location different from that where it was originally placed, but has since been returned to its original location. A copy of the latter can be found at the location where it was initially discovered, while the original is located in the basement of the Vatican Museums.<sup>163</sup> The others are in various degrees of fragmentation. The most intact of these are located,

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<sup>161</sup> As of this writing, Trout's *Damasus of Rome: The Epigraphic Poetry* has not yet been released. It's projected release date by the Oxford University Press is November 3, 2015. Trout's article in the Fall 2003 edition of the *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, "Damasus and the Invention of Early Christian Rome" is swiftly becoming an indispensable source for interpretation of the epigraphic program of Damasus.

<sup>162</sup> Ferrua gives this number. Ihm has sixty-two in his edition of the epigrams.

<sup>163</sup> Littlechields, Rebecca. "The epitaphs of Damasus and the transferrable value of persecution for the Christian community at Rome in the fourth-century AD," (2008) 114-19.

unsurprisingly, in the catacombs, specifically those of Calixtus and Domatilla. The other five are so fragmentary that scholars can only identify them by their locations.<sup>164</sup>

Even some of the inscriptions that can be securely identified with a particular martyr are fragmentary. Identification of the subjects of these epigrams would be exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, without textual corroboration. With the notable exception of the *Elogium Agnetis*, which is almost completely intact, and *Faustino et Viatrici*, the only securely identifiable inscriptions are that those can be matched to textual records.<sup>165</sup> Indeed, a significant number of the epigrams are known only through the textual record. The inscriptions themselves have been lost.

The texts in which so many of the epigrams of Damasus are preserved are from a genre of writing, popular during the Middle Ages, known as *syllogae*. *Sylogae*, from the Greek meaning “collection,” are simply compilations of documents. In this case, the *syllogae* are records of Latin inscriptions found in Rome. The *syllogae* that contain the epigrams of Damasus were composed between the seventh and tenth centuries, during the Lombard rule of Italy.<sup>166</sup> These *syllogae* were composed by pilgrims visiting Rome, such as the Anglo-Saxon abbot Adhelm, who visited Rome at the end of the seventh century. Michael Lapidge has argued that *syllogae* were often composed for the purpose of guiding travellers to the tombs of the martyrs, which were becoming ever more crowded with pilgrims.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Refer to figure 2 for an example of this situation. The inscription in the photograph is the *Fragmentum in S. Clementis*, so named because it was found at the entrance to the ancient basilica of Saint Clement, close to its current location.

<sup>165</sup> Maximilian Ihm, *Damasi Epigrammata: Accedunt Pseudo-Damasiana Aliaque ad Damasiana Inlustraina Idonea*, 10. The only reason this inscription can be identified is that the sole remaining fragments contain the names of Faustinus and Viatricius in the dative case. The rest of the epigram is not extant.

<sup>166</sup> Littlechild, 114-120.

<sup>167</sup> Michael Lapidge, “The Career of Adhelm,” in *Anglo-Saxon England* 36 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 56.



Lapidge also wrote of the inscriptions of the epigrams of Damasus, that “although only one or two survive in approximately their original position, many more would have been visible *in situ* in the later seventh century.”<sup>168</sup> The vast majority of the epigrams of Damasus would have been unintelligible or altogether lost but for the efforts of the medieval epigraphers who compiled these *syllogae*. For this alone, scholars owe them a debt of gratitude. Yet, it is important to remember that despite this, and the poetic nature of the epigraphs themselves, they are not meant to be literary works. To be fully and properly understood, the epigraphs of Damasus must be viewed as first and foremost inscriptions and analyzed in that context. It is only in that context that the purpose of these epigraphs, individually and collectively, and the motives behind their composition can be understood. Thus, the *Epigrammata Damasiana* is an exemplary case study for the necessity of collaboration between subfields within the discipline to paint the most accurate historical picture.

The clearest example of the necessity for collaboration between the textual and epigraphic traditions is the case of the epigrams for the family of Damasus. Maximilian Ihm only included the epigrams for Damasus himself and his sister and numbers them IX and X respectively.<sup>169</sup> In her edition of the *Liber Pontificalis*, Louise Loomis mentions the inscription Damasus wrote for his father, but states that the one for Laurentia “has been lost.”<sup>170</sup> This was clearly because there was no textual attestation. During the thirty year period from 1916-46, the epitaph was found in two pieces in the *cubiculum* of the 12 Apostles in the catacomb on the *Via Ardeatina*. Upon the discovery of the epitaph of Laurentia, the remaining fragment of the epitaph

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<sup>168</sup> Lapidge, 53.

<sup>169</sup> Ihm, 13-15.

<sup>170</sup> Louise Loomis, *The Book of the Popes Liber Pontificalis*, Records of Civilization: Sources and Studies, Vol.3 (New York: Octagon Books, 1965), 282-3.

of Irene was moved to join that of her mother in the *cubiculum*<sup>171</sup>. Ferrua included it in his edition and numbered it as *Epigrammata X*, while bumping Irene, the sister of Damasus to XI and Damasus himself to XII.

The epigrams of Damasus can be broadly categorized into two distinct groups that are nevertheless linked. The first group is five epigrams for private individuals including four dedicated to members of his family: his father Antonius, mother Laurentia, sister Irene and Damasus himself.<sup>172</sup> Damasus addressed the fifth inscription to a young woman named Proiecta, the daughter of an aristocratic Christian family. The second group is significantly larger and arguably much more significant. This group consists of saints or more specifically martyrs of the Roman church. It includes thirty-three epigrams, which can be broken down further into three sub-categories. The first of these subcategories are epigrams inscribed over the tombs of bishops of Rome. The second and significantly largest of the subcategories are martyrs of the Roman church. The martyrs span the entire history of the church at Rome from the persecution under Nero to the Edict of Milan, the majority of which suffered in the Diocletianic persecution. The third group is significantly smaller consisting of only two epigrams. These belong to martyrs who suffered in locations other than Rome, but whose relics were apparently transferred there.

The exact points in the pontificate of Damasus when he wrote certain epigraphs cannot be determined. However, a number of them can be connected to the events of his election. These epigraphs should be viewed as a public relations measure to mitigate the damage to his reputation caused by the schism and assert his authority over the Ursinian dissidents. Other, presumably later, epigraphs take this motive and expand it to the whole city with Damasus demonstrating control of key Christian sites by means of his name being inscribed for

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<sup>171</sup> Littlechilds, 114.

generations thereafter. Finally, what are likely the latest epigraphs seem to answer challenges to the burgeoning authority of Rome that were developing in the East at end of the pontificate of Damasus. Ultimately, all of the epigraphs of Damasus can be characterized as part of a sustained to increase the prestige of the Roman see and the power of its bishop.

## Epigraphs of the Popes

Six, possibly eight, of the extant epigrams of Damasus are dedicated to previous *episcopi* of the Roman see.<sup>173</sup> These epigrams span the length of the entire papacy up until the pontificate of Damasus. There are, of course, two epitaphs to Peter, the first pope, one to him individually and the other together with Paul. Damasus also composed an epigram that is located in the fourth century basilica dedicated to Saint Clement, the fourth bishop of Rome. Eusebius lists Clement as the fourth bishop of Rome, but others considered him to be the immediate successor of Peter<sup>174</sup>. Jerome seems to favor the numbering of Eusebius, but makes note of the controversy, writing that, “most of the Latins think that Clement was second after the apostle.”<sup>175</sup> He is without question the most prominent pope of the Apostolic Age besides Peter.

The inscription itself is far too fragmentary to discern whether it is in fact addressed to Clement. It is currently located in the ancient, now underground, basilica of Saint Clement, at the entrance of which it was found in 1869.<sup>176</sup> Jerome reported a church dedicated to Clement in Rome. Jerome left Rome in 385, a few months after the death of Damasus in December of 384.<sup>177</sup> Citing a different fragmentary inscription, Giovanni di Rossi dates the completion of the basilica of Saint Clement to the first year of the pontificate of Siricius, the successor of Damasus.<sup>178</sup> This identification is far from definite however, and provides a window of only ten months for the consecration. Furthermore, these ten months would have been very tumultuous for Jerome as he simultaneously mourned the death of his patron, came into conflict with his

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<sup>173</sup> Damasus' *Elogium Marci* may have been dedicated to Pope Marcus (336), but this is uncertain. The number also does not include the epitaph that Damasus wrote for himself, which served an entirely different function than those he wrote for his predecessors. See appendix A for a complete list.

<sup>174</sup> Eusebius III.xv.

<sup>175</sup> Jerome *De viris illustribus*, XV

<sup>176</sup> Littlechild, 119.

<sup>177</sup> Kelly, 116. More specifically Kelly states that Jerome had left Rome by August of 385,

<sup>178</sup> Joan E. Barclay Lloyd, “The Building History of the Medieval Church of S. Clemente in Rome,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 45, no. 3 (September 1986):199 n.9

successor and prepared to leave Rome. It is unlikely that he would have noted the consecration of a basilica, particularly by a bishop with whom he had a decidedly adversarial relationship. It is far more likely that Damasus consecrated the basilica of Saint Clement in the last years of his life. Even if Siricius was the ultimate consecrator, the ten-month window makes it likely that the majority of the basilica's construction was carried out during the pontificate of Damasus.

Damasus would have likely planned on being the one to consecrate the basilica, even if death took him before he could achieve his aim. In this case, it would have been out of character for Damasus to not have an epigram already prepared to commemorate the occasion. This is especially true because the pontificate of Clement I was so integral to the tradition of the primacy of the Roman See. Thus it is highly likely that the fragmentary inscription at San Clemente was originally intended by Damasus to honor the saint by commemorating the consecration of a basilica. An epigram that Damasus composed for the construction of a baptistery honors St. Peter, alluding to his role as keeper of the keys to the kingdom of heaven.<sup>179</sup> It is likely that any inscription that Damasus would have placed in the Clementine basilica would have mentioned Clement himself in a similar way.

Damasus employed Furius Dionysius Filocalus to do the actual engraving of the epigrams. Filocalus had distinguished himself early during the pontificate of Liberius with his completion of the *Chronography of 354*.<sup>180</sup> The *Chronography* is a series of smaller documents. One of these documents is the *Deposito Episcoporum*, which lists the reigns and burial places of

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<sup>179</sup> *Epigrammata* III.iii *praestante Petro, cui tradita ianua caeli* "Excelling Peter, to whom the door of heaven is confided." The allusion is to Matthew 16:19. Where Christ tells Peter, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." (RSV)

<sup>180</sup> Peter Brown, *Through the Eye of the Needle*, 259.

the popes from Lucius (c. 253-254) until Liberius, who was reigning at the time.<sup>181</sup> Although Damasus had knowledge of the burial sites of his predecessors going back one hundred and twelve years, he did not choose to honor every one of his predecessors. Damasus honored three popes who are buried in the Catacombs of Calixtus with individual inscriptions: Xystus (II), Cornelius and Eusebius. In so doing, he carefully selected those popes with some aspect of their pontificate with he could identify personally.

The overall aim of the epigraphic program of Damasus was to honor the martyrs of Rome, but Xystus is the only one honored by Damasus who is included in the *Depositio Martyrum*. The *Depositio* is another document within the *Chronography* that is essentially a church calendar and lists the burial places and *natales*, or dates of commemoration, for the martyrs.<sup>182</sup> The *Depositio* did not include popes who had suffered exile but were not martyrs in the strict sense.<sup>183</sup> With his epigrams, Damasus was the first to consider these exiled popes to be martyrs.

While he provides epigrams for popes who are not in the *Depositio Martyrum*, there is no extant epigram by Damasus for either Popes Pontian or Fabian, both of whom are included in the *Depositio*. It is possible that Damasus was simply eager to preserve the memory of his exiled predecessor by honoring earlier popes who had suffered exile for the faith. In this way, Damasus may have been indirectly arguing that simply because Liberius did not shed his blood, this did not mean that he did not suffer in defense of his faith. If that is the case, the omission of Pontian is rather glaring, considering that Pontian, like Cornelius, Marcellus and Eusebius, died in exile

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<sup>181</sup> Daniel O' Connor, *Peter in Rome: The Literary, Liturgical and Archeological Evidence*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 41. Because it thus ends with Liberius, the *Depositio Episcoporum* is often referred to as the *Liberian Catalogue*.

<sup>182</sup> O' Connor, 191.

<sup>183</sup> Masey H. Shepherd, "The Liturgical Reform of Damasus I," in *Kyriakon: Festschrift Johannes Quasten*, ed. Patrick Granfield and Josef A. Jungmann (Münster: Verlag Aschendorff, 1970), 853.

for his faith in Sardinia. Moreover, it does not seem that the memory of Liberius was in any serious need of rehabilitation, indeed, even the opponents of Damasus held his predecessor in esteem. Furthermore, such a motive makes the lack of an epigram by Damasus for Liberius himself inexplicable.<sup>184</sup>

.Arguments from silence are inherently flawed and this is not an attempt to make such an argument. Absence of extant epigraphs by Damasus for Pontian and Liberius is mentioned here in an attempt to account for such an absence. It is also meant to answer possible objections that might arise to the arguments presented here based on the absence. As such, the response must be congruent with the earlier presented argument. While the absence in question somewhat bolsters the original argument, it is not the lynchpin of such an argument. Without the absence, the argument can stand sufficiently on earlier evidence. Ultimately, the question of what motivated Damasus to honor certain popes and not others can only be answered with hypotheses

The exclusion of Pontian makes even less sense in the context of the inclusion by Damasus of a significant figure in Church history who is closely associated with Pontian. Hippolytus of Rome was one of the most prolific patristic writers. He also holds the distinction of being the only antipope who is also venerated as a saint. In his own writings, Hippolytus describes his feud with Pope Zephyrinus, on account of the latter's failure to deliver a judgment on the teachings of Modalism. Hippolytus considered these teachings to be heresy. He also stridently opposed the influence of the deacon Callistus on Zephyrinus. Upon the election of Callistus to succeed Zephyrinus, Hippolytus entered official schism and may have even allowed himself to be elected bishop in opposition to Callistus. He remained in schism and opposed to the successors of Callistus: Urban (I) and Pontian. Maximinus Thrax condemned both Pontian and

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<sup>184</sup> There is an extant epitaph which John Baptist de Rossi and Louis Duschene ascribed to Liberius, but Franz Xaver von Funk ascribed to Pope Martin I, the last pope to be considered a martyr. De Rossi insisted that it must be from the fourth, yet neither Maximilian Ihm nor Antonio Ferrua included it in their editions of the Epigrams of Damasus.

Hippolytus to the mines of Sardinia around A.D. 236 and there Pontian received Hippolytus back into communion before both died as a result of their exile.

In the epigram that Damasus wrote in honor of Hippolytus, he refers to him as a “presbyter in schism” but identifies the schism as that of Novatian. This is an anachronism, since the schism of Novatian took place during the reign of Cornelius. Damasus additionally states that when an unidentified persecution began, Hippolytus confessed the Catholic faith and died a martyr, although Damasus characteristically does not give details of the martyrdom.<sup>185</sup> H.P.V. Nunn argued, “Nothing better illustrates the confusion and obscurity which enveloped the history of the Roman Church owing to the destruction of the records in the persecution of Diocletian than the fact that Damasus had to depend on uncertain oral tradition in writing the epitaph of this celebrated person.”<sup>186</sup> However, the *Chronography of 354*, which Damasus most likely used as a source for his epigrams, mentions Hippolytus as a presbyter who shared the exile to Sardinia with Pontian. Damasus may have honestly been unaware of the discrepancy. At any rate, the epigram of Hippolytus can be seen as an indirect exhortation for current schismatics, with whom Damasus contended throughout his pontificate, to be rejoined in communion with the bishop of Rome.<sup>187</sup>

Incidentally, the epigraph that Damasus wrote for Cornelius makes no mention of Novatian, whose schism was the most significant aspect of the pontificate of Cornelius.<sup>188</sup> In the wake of the Decian persecution, Cornelius supported the re-admittance of *lapsi* to the Church, a practice opposed by a rigorist minority centered mostly in North Africa. Adherents of the

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<sup>185</sup> *Epigrammata* XXXV.ii-vii.

<sup>186</sup> H.P.V. Nunn, “The Epitaphs of Damasus.” In *Christian Inscriptions, Texts for Students*, Vol. 11, ed. by Caroline A.J. Skeel, H.J. White and J.P. Whitney (London: The Macmillan Company, 1920), 37. Shepherd argues a similar point.

<sup>187</sup> Sághy, “*Renovatio memoriae*,” 257

<sup>188</sup> *Epigrammata* XIX.



minority view elected a Roman presbyter named Novatian as a bishop in opposition to Cornelius. The Luciferians, who were in open schism during the pontificate of Damasus, opposed the receiving back into the Church of former Arian heretics. Damasus too had faced the opposition of an antipope, Ursinius, whose following could be described as rigorist, in a situation very similar to that faced by Cornelius. Like that of Hippolytus, the placement of this epigram by Damasus indicates that he wanted to remind the Roman people of these similarities. Furthermore, Damasus wished to vindicate himself by identifying with the martyred Cornelius. Shepherd reported that, in addition to writing the *elogium Cornelii*, “Damasus arranged more commodious space about his tomb and a more convenient stairway to it.”<sup>189</sup>

Like Cornelius, Pope Eusebius and his predecessor Marcellus I, faced a crisis in the Church regarding the attitude toward the *lapsi* following a serious persecution. The election of Marcellus took place after a considerable interregnum following the martyrdom of the similarly named Marcellinus in the persecution under Diocletian. According to the epigram that Damasus composed for him, Marcellus, in contrast to Cornelius, required the *lapsi* to perform serious penances in order to gain readmission.<sup>190</sup> Many of them rebelled violently in response and the ensuing unrest caused Maxentius to banish Marcellus. His successor Eusebius faced a situation more similar to that of Cornelius. The otherwise unknown Heraclius opposed the reception of *lapsi* back into the church, much as Novation had done. The resulting unrest caused Maxentius to banish Eusebius from Rome as well.<sup>191</sup>

The pontificates of Marcellus and Eusebius cover a period from A.D. 308 until 309 or 310, a few years after the birth of Damasus. It is highly likely that Antonius, the father of Damasus, would have served as a presbyter in Rome under one or both of them. In one of his

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<sup>189</sup> Shepherd, 853.

<sup>190</sup> *Epigrammata* XVIII

<sup>191</sup> Sághy, “*Renovatio Memoriae*,” 255.

other epigrams, Damasus recalled the story of the martyrdom of Marcellinus and Peter that he heard as a boy.<sup>192</sup> If he was able to remember such a story, he could have also remembered the popes who reigned when he was a young boy, whom he may have known personally. In this case, he once again chose to honor pontiffs with whom he had a personal connection or with whom he wished to connect himself.

One of the most enigmatic epigrams of Damasus is the *elogium Marci*. The exact saint whom Damasus honored with this epigram is not known with certainty. The information contained within the epigram is very general. Damasus states that “by love of God” Marcus “was able to despise the world” and “having scorn of grand things/...Courage held the innermost parts of his heart.”<sup>193</sup> These are all statements that could apply to any saint. Giovanni Battista di Rossi identified the Marcus to whom the epigram refers as none other than Pope Marcus, who reigned for almost nine months in A.D. 336.<sup>194</sup> There is nothing in the epigram to identify Marcus as a bishop or even a priest. This does not, however, rule out the possibility of Di Rossi’s identification because only one of the epigrams that Damasus addressed to a pope contained the identification of *episcopus*.<sup>195</sup> The epigram makes no mention of any significant event connected with the pontificate of Marcus, but this is unsurprising considering the brevity of his reign. All Damasus can really write about Marcus is that he was a model Christian. It initially seems unusual that Damasus chose to honor such a relatively insignificant pope. However, in 336 Damasus would have been approximately thirty-one years old and the canonical age for ordination was thirty. Antonius likely prepared his son for at least the possibility of ordination,

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<sup>192</sup> This Marcellinus and Peter are distinct from the popes of the same names, who were martyred centuries apart. Marcellinus was an exorcist and Peter was a presbyter. They suffered martyrdom together under Diocletian.

<sup>193</sup> *Epigrammata* L.ii, iv-v

<sup>194</sup> *Ihm*, 17.

<sup>195</sup> *Epigrammata* XVIII. Even this inscription was most likely a gloss by the inscriber Filocalus, who was likely trying to create a parallel with the inscription at the top DAMASVS EPISCOPVS FECIT: “Bishop Damasus made this”

and it would have made sense for the ordination of Damasus to occur sooner rather than later. Thus, if the *elogium* does indeed refer to Pope Marcus, it is most likely because Marcus was the bishop who ordained Damasus as a deacon. When Damasus himself became pope, he saw fit to dedicate an epitaph to Marcus, whom he may have felt would otherwise have faded into obscurity.

Damasus honored the whole institution of the papacy by reconstructing the Crypt of the Popes as a small church.<sup>196</sup> In this chapel, he included an epigram that is the most blatant instance of Damasus identifying himself with the popes or any other martyr. He addresses the epigram to the “crowd of the pious” buried close to Xystus in the catacombs of Callistus.<sup>197</sup> In the epigram he states, “Here, I confess Damasus wished to bury my body, but I feared to disturb the ashes of the pious saints.”<sup>198</sup> Whether Damasus actually intended to have his body interred in that crypt, the result is the same. The epigram presents the mental image of Damasus among the saints to future pilgrims and he will forever be associated with the saints interred there.

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<sup>196</sup> Sághy, “Martyr Cult,” 27.

<sup>197</sup> *Epigrammata XVI.i turba piorum*

<sup>198</sup> *Epigrammata XVI.x-xi.*

### Epigraphs of the Martyrs

In her extensive study of the epigrams of Damasus, Marianne Sághy concluded that “The promotion of the episcopal cult seems to have been a significant, but not the main concern. Damasus did honor his episcopal forerunners, but the majority of the *elogia* are dedicated to non-episcopal, yet mostly clerical martyrs.” Honoring his predecessor popes is an obvious way for Damasus to use epigraphs to increase the power and prestige of his office. Damasus also used epigraphs demonstrating devotion to the martyrs of Rome to achieve a similar end in a less blatant way. Not only did Damasus similarly pick and choose from the *Deposito Martyrum* as well, but he honored martyrs whom the *Deposito* did not include. “Damasus’ bishop list is shorter, his martyr list is longer than the despositones-lists: he added more martyrs to the existing catalogues, as if to bring more heroes to the attention of the Christian community. Damasus provided Rome with thirteen “new” martyrs.”<sup>199</sup>

It is not hard to believe that Damasus wished to be buried near the tomb of Xystus (II). Xystus is only pope honored by Damasus, other than Peter, who actually shed his blood for the faith.<sup>200</sup> The epigraph by Damasus commemorates Xystus and his six companions who were arrested and summarily beheaded, a death that Damasus references by saying that “they gave their necks to the soldiers.”<sup>201</sup> It can be argued that martyrs associated with Xystus make up a subgroup within the group of martyrs whom Damasus honored. In addition to the *elogium Xysti*, Damasus composed a separate epigram for Felicissimus and Agapitus, two deacons of Xystus

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<sup>199</sup> Sághy, “Martyr Cult,” 22

<sup>200</sup> Neither Eusebius nor Jerome mentions Clement’s martyrdom but Rufinus does (*Epilogue to Pamphilus*, 422). It is unknown whether Damasus would have considered Clement to be a martyr. At any rate, while the inscription in the basilica San Clemente is probably dedicated to Clement, that identification is by no means certain.

<sup>201</sup> *Epigrammata* XVII.iv *Militibus missis populi tunc colla dedere.*

who were also martyred.<sup>202</sup> Most importantly, Damasus composed three inscriptions which were in some way connected to the martyr Lawrence, to whom Damasus had significant devotion.

Only one of these inscriptions is extant. The second is fragmentary but was found in the porch of the church of San Lorenzo *in Lucina*.<sup>203</sup> The third is located in the same church but is not itself dedicated to Lawrence. However, it gives a number of plausible reasons for the great devotion that Damasus held for Lawrence. Unlike the epigrams for his other family members, the one for his father actually marks the construction of a new archival building by Damasus. In the epigram, Damasus states that his father Antonius served as the archivist for the church at Rome.<sup>204</sup> He adds that Antonius was later ordained and progressed through the orders of lector, deacon and finally priest.<sup>205</sup> Damasus further wrote that it was in this same church, where his father served as a priest, that he was elected as pope.<sup>206</sup> This agrees with the account in the *Gesta*, which states that the election of Damasus took place *in Lucinis*.<sup>207</sup>

It is possible that the devotion of Damasus to Lawrence stemmed from a sentimentality based on his election in the church of the martyr. It is more likely, however, that his father's service made the church the natural choice for the headquarters of Damasus during the conflict

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<sup>202</sup> *Epigrammata XV*.

<sup>203</sup> Littlechild, 119.

<sup>204</sup> The inscription does not provide his father's name but there is no reason to doubt the identification of his father as Antonius by the *Liber Pontificalis*. The Latin word generally translated as "keeper of records" is *exceptor*, which literally means something akin to "one who takes up" or receives.

<sup>205</sup> The actual word translated as "deacon" is *Levitas*, literally meaning "Levite." In the Old Testament, Levites were non-priests who served the priests of the Temple. The term has been used to describe the ministry of deacons from the early days of the Church. Many have identified Antonius as a bishop but the word used in the inscription is *sacerdos*, indicating that the highest order to which Antonius was ordained was priest. Furthermore, throughout his epigrams Damasus used the word *episcopus* for bishop and a bishop in Rome who is not pope makes no sense whatsoever.

<sup>206</sup> The actual Latin word is *provecto*, which is literally translated as "having been carried forward." The full text in Latin is *Hinc mihi provecto Christus, cui summa potestas, sedis apostolicae volvit concedere honorem*, translated as "With me having been carried forward hence, Christ, who holds the highest power, wished to bestow on me the honor of the apostolic Throne."

<sup>207</sup> Although Kate Blair-Dixon has effectively argued for a sixth-century composition of the *Gesta*, her argument is based on the lack of references to San Lorenzo in Lucina *by that name* until the sixth century. Damasus is the only attestation that corroborates this location, albeit it was likely under a different name.

that ensued upon his election. Damasus later dedicated a church to Lawrence in what had been his family's house and in which he placed the epigram he wrote in honor of the martyr.<sup>208</sup> The location for the new church that Damasus founded and dedicated to Lawrence bears out the connection between the election of Damasus and his devotion to Lawrence. The new church was constructed near the Theater of Pompey and the stables of the Green chariot faction.<sup>209</sup> The author of the *Gesta* states that charioteers were among the armed rabble that Damasus employed against the supporters of Ursinus.<sup>210</sup> It is possible that the new church was meant to indirectly commemorate this action by connecting Lawrence and the charioteers.<sup>211</sup> Antonius was also a Spaniard, which makes a church dedicated to Lawrence a remarkably appropriate assignment for him, because Lawrence is generally considered to have been of Spanish origin. Lawrence was also the archdeacon of Rome as Damasus had been prior to his election. Although it is likely a coincidence, the name of the mother of Damasus was Laurentia.

Lawrence is one of the best known martyrs of the church at Rome. He is mentioned by name in the Canon of the Mass, now known as the First Eucharistic Prayer. Another martyr of Rome mentioned in the Canon is Agnes, for whom Damasus also composed an epigram. Like that of Lawrence, the composition of the *elogium Agnetis* was connected to the turbulent circumstances of the election of Damasus. The partisans of Ursinus had gathered in the cemetery of Agnes on the Via Nomentata, a site associated with Liberius, in order to associate themselves with late bishop. Damasus had dispersed the congregation with bloody force which likely caused the location to become a rallying point for the continued Ursinian opposition that dogged Damasus for the first decade of his pontificate. As Damasus established his power more firmly,

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<sup>208</sup> *Epigrammata* XXXIII.

<sup>209</sup> Matthews, 422.

<sup>210</sup> CA II.iii

<sup>211</sup> Matthews on the other hand argues that Damasus intended to unite the supporters of the competing factions in the Church.

he found it necessary to remove the Ursinian association and appropriate the Liberian association to himself. He accomplished both these aims ably with his epigram in honor of Agnes.

The epigram has a supplicant tone unusual for Damasus that is especially noticeable in the closing verse. “I pray that you may favor the prayers of Damasus, glorious martyr.”<sup>212</sup> Damasus is projecting an image of atonement but he has a broader aim as well. By placing this inscription, he is reclaiming the memory, both of Agnes and Liberius, in support of his own episcopal legitimacy. Damasus succeeded in erasing any memory of his opponents who once congregated there and only his name remains. As fate or, as Damasus surely would have preferred to believe, the will of God would have it, the *elogium Agnetis* is the most intact of his epigrammatic inscriptions and is one of the few that remains exactly where it was placed 1700 years ago.<sup>213</sup>

Taken as a whole, the epigrams of Damasus served the same basic purpose as the *elogium Agnetis*. As the Ursinian crisis had demonstrated, the cult of the martyrs was a potential locus for opposition to the established church. It allowed direct access to the martyrs and bypassed official locations that were controlled by the church, such as basilicas. With the epigrams, Damasus brought these cult sites under the aegis of the bishop of Rome. Most of the epigrams of Damasus contain his name in some form or another. While this was common practice in writing epigrams, Damasus is making his mark and leaving his name etched in stone for generations of Christian pilgrims who come to these sites. “By putting his name on the tombs, Damasus appropriated the martyrs of for *his* Catholic Church.”<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> *Epigrammata* XXXVII.x *Ut Damasi precibus faveas precor inclyta martyr*

<sup>213</sup> See figure 3.

<sup>214</sup> Sághy, “Martyr Cult,” 35.

## The Romanization of Christianity and the Christianization of Rome

The epigraphic program of Damasus increased papal power by extending papal control over important sites and connecting the memory of key figures to Damasus himself. Damasus extended this effect to the city as a whole and, more subtly, the entire Roman world.

The epigraphic program affected the layout of the city itself. The location of the inscriptions “formed a sort of diadem around the city.”<sup>215</sup> Sághy writes that “Damasus rewrote the topography of the *Urbs* and created Christian Rome, the holy city of the apostles and martyrs.”<sup>216</sup> A number of the epigrams of Damasus reinforce this theme of the new foundation of Rome as a Christian city. The chief of these epigrams is undoubtedly that which Damasus composes to honor the Apostles Peter and Paul. Sághy finds it to be significant that Damasus, who aimed to exalt the Roman see through his episcopal epigrams, did not hail Peter as the first bishop of Rome. This is especially interesting because it is yet another deliberate departure on the part of Damasus from his source, the *Deposito Episcoporum*. Despite this omission, the epigram nevertheless became a support for papal primacy because it was seen as evidence that Peter had in fact been in Rome.<sup>217</sup>

Damasus, who knew all too well the calamitous effects of disunity, celebrated Peter together with Paul as twin founders of the church at Rome. Together, Peter and Paul represented the *concordia apostolorum*, a harmony that Damasus undoubtedly hoped that feuding factions within the Church would look to and emulate.<sup>218</sup> “Charles Pietri has argued that the increased pairing of Peter and Paul that occurred in the mid-fourth century was, in some circumstances,

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<sup>215</sup> Lançon, 100. Sághy uses the word “belt” to describe the same effect, but diadem seems more appropriate in this case.

<sup>216</sup> Sághy, “Pope Damasus and the Beginnings of Roman Hagiography,” 14.

<sup>217</sup> Daniel O’ Connor devotes 7 pages (103-110) to the “Damasus Inscription” in his work *Peter in Rome: The Literary, Liturgical and Archeological Evidence*.

<sup>218</sup> Sághy, “Hagiography,” 10-11.



funded by Roman bishops (especially Damasus) who wished to smooth over factional infighting.”<sup>219</sup> However, Timothy Gray has pointed out that Peter and Paul were depicted together in Christian art as early as the second century. He argues that for a very long time, the Church at Rome saw Peter and Paul and as the new Romulus and Remus.<sup>220</sup> There are echoes of the idea of Peter and Paul as the twin founders of a new Rome in the epigram of Damasus. More explicitly, the text of the epigram evokes the image of the *Dioscuri*, Castor and Pollux, especially in the last stanza, which refers to Peter and Paul as “new stars.”<sup>221</sup>

The epigram dedicated to Peter and Paul states, “The East sent the disciples, which we willingly admit. On account of the merit of their blood...Rome deserves to call them her own citizens.”<sup>222</sup> Maura Lafferty explains that “although Damasus allows that both Peter and Paul were born elsewhere, he nevertheless asserts that their new birth in martyrdom turned them into citizens of Rome herself.”<sup>223</sup> Damasus uses similar language for the Greek martyr Hermes. “Greece sent you, by blood you changed nations.”<sup>224</sup> Damasus did not limit his Romanization to martyrs who had suffered at Rome. Damasus also wrote an epigram for Saturinus, who had suffered martyrdom along with Perpetua and Felicity at Carthage in the first decade of the third century. Damasus wrote, “Now an inhabitant of Christ, he was of Carthage before...by blood, he changed his nation, name and family; the birth of saints made a Roman citizen.”<sup>225</sup> Ultimately,

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<sup>219</sup> George E. Demacopoulos, *The Invention of Peter: Apostolic Discourse and Papal Authority in Late Antiquity*, Divinations: Rereading Late Ancient Religion (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 37.

<sup>220</sup> Timothy Gray, “The Holy Twins: Sts. Peter and Paul and the Founding of the Roman Catholic Church” (lecture, Fellowship of Catholic University Students SEEK conference, Nashville, January 3, 2015)

<sup>221</sup> *Epigrammata XX, nova sidera*. Marianne Sághy (“Historiography,” 10) and Dennis Trout (“Damasus I and the Invention of Christian Rome,” 524) concur. In myth, Castor and Pollux became the constellation Gemini.

<sup>222</sup> *Epigrammata XX.iii-iv,vi*. Discipulos oriens misit, quod sponte fatemur, sanquinis ob meritum...Roma suos potius meruit defendit cives.

<sup>223</sup> Maura K. Lafferty, “Translating Faith from Greek to Latin: *Romanitas* and *Christianitas* in Late-Fourth Century Rome and Milan,” 42.

<sup>224</sup> *Epigrammata XLVIII.i-ii*. Te Graecia misit; sanguine mutasti patriam.

<sup>225</sup> *Epigrammata XLVI.i,iii-iv*. Incola nunc Christi, fuerat Carthaginis ante...sanguine mutavit patriam nomenque genusque; Romanum civem sanctorum fecit origio.

Damasus is making the claim that to be Christian is to be Roman. He clearly believes that just as Rome was once the center of the Roman Empire, it should now be the beating heart of the Christian world.

In order for Rome to be legitimately considered to be the center of Christianity, the city needed to be Christianized. This was also an aim of Damasus in composing his epigrams which are riddled with allusions to and lines taken from classical authors, most notably Virgil.<sup>226</sup> In some cases, Damasus appropriated classical themes for Christ and the martyrs, as he did by comparing Peter and Paul to Romulus and Remus or Castor and Pollux. In others, he uses classical allusions to subtly subvert Roman cultural values and replace them with Christian ideals. Nereus and Achilleus were soldiers, most likely Praetorian Guards, in the reign of either Nero or Domitian.<sup>227</sup> Damasus describes their military service as a “savage office” and stated that they were “looking equally to the commands of the tyrant.”<sup>228</sup> Damasus often refers to persecutions as the “commands of tyrants.” It is a direct challenge to Romans who embraced traditional republican values which were often defined as opposition to tyranny. Once they convert, they flee the camp and cast down their arms. Traditional Roman values would see these actions as cowardice in battle but the pair is allowed “to bear the triumphs of Christ,” signifying that they have won victory in battle.<sup>229</sup> Damasus states that in doing so, they demonstrate that faith has the ability “to put aside furor.”<sup>230</sup> Lafferty points out that in the *Aeneid*, Virgil uses the word *furor* to describe “the forces that resist the efforts of both Aeneas and the foundation of Rome.”<sup>231</sup> Thus, Damasus argued that in casting down their arms, Nereus and Achilleus actually

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<sup>226</sup> For a detailed summary and analysis of these allusions, see Lafferty or Trout.

<sup>227</sup> Making them the earliest non-Apostle martyrs to be commemorated by Damasus.

<sup>228</sup> *Epigrammata* VIII.ii-iii. *Saevumque gerebant officium, partier spectantes iussa tyrani*

<sup>229</sup> *Epigrammata* VIII vi-ix.

<sup>230</sup> *Epigrammata* VIII.v.

<sup>231</sup> Lafferty, 44.

cast aside what prevented them from becoming truly Christian. The epigrams of Damasus reveal his belief not only that to be Christian is to be Roman but that to be genuinely Roman is to be Christian.

Damasus was bishop of Rome in the time of Quintus Aurelius Symmachus and Vettius Agorius Praetextatus. Symmachus and Praetextatus were in part of highest echelons of Roman society and were ardent pagans. Though Julian's reign (361-363) was brief, his apostasy gave a jolt of life to the pagan cause. Julian had briefly banned the teaching of classical literature and philosophy by Christians in an effort to establish a pagan monopoly on classical culture.<sup>232</sup> Pagan aristocrats, however, carried on the idea that classical learning was solely in the purview of pagans. Symmachus especially believed that true Romans are those who followed the ancient religion of the Romans and served the old gods. By his epigrams, Damasus worked to dispel this belief, claim the heritage of Rome for Christianity. In so doing, he endeavored to demonstrate that Christians could not only be true but perhaps better Romans than their pagan counterparts.<sup>233</sup>

Peter Brown argued that, "Damasus did not nurse the illusion (dear to modern scholars of classical inclination) that by writing Vergilian verse he might somehow swing the mighty Senate to the Christian cause. His aims were more clearly focused"<sup>234</sup> Brown also seems to reject the idea, put forward by Lafferty, that part of the goal of Damasus was to "take his place among the Roman aristocracy and establish Christianity as a cultured religion, fit for aristocratic consumption."<sup>235</sup> For Brown, Damasus had no interest in joining the aristocracy but in establishing the Roman clergy as a separate class, what he terms a "Third Estate."<sup>236</sup>

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<sup>232</sup> Cameron, *Last Pagans*, 7.

<sup>233</sup> Lafferty, 39.

<sup>234</sup> Brown, 253.

<sup>235</sup> Lafferty, 39.

<sup>236</sup> Brown, 251.

Nevertheless, not all Christians could be clergy and some were undoubtedly members of the aristocratic class. The more aristocrats converted to Christianity, the more influence the new faith could have on Rome. Brown concedes that Damasus “knew how to reach out to accommodate the new rich” and cites as evidence the epigram that Damasus wrote for Proiecta.<sup>237</sup>

Proiecta was the daughter of a prominent aristocratic family that had apparently converted to Christianity. At the time of her death, she had recently married into an equally prominent family.<sup>238</sup> An important practice of the old aristocracy was the erection of funerary monuments and epigrams for family members. With this *elogium*, Damasus took part in this custom as a function of his office as bishop of Rome, once again demonstrating his knowledge and appreciation of classical Roman traditions in a Christian context. Most epigrams were written for aristocratic tombs by family members. Damasus followed this tradition by writing epigrams for his sister, mother and father. Like the old pagan Roman epigrams that listed out the offices and honors held by the deceased, Damasus listed the ecclesiastical offices in which his father Antonius served.<sup>239</sup> Although Damasus may not have seen himself as an aristocrat, he ably demonstrated that he could associate with the members of that segment of the population which were part of his flock. More importantly, he worked to ensure that new aristocratic converts did not see their new faith as a violent rupture from their previous way of life but a seamless transition. In this way, the small amount of epigraphs that Damasus wrote for private individuals served the same aim as his other epigraphs: establishing his personal prestige and with it that of his office and the see it governed.

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<sup>237</sup> *Epigrammata* LI

<sup>238</sup> Cameron, “The Date and Owners of the Esquiline Treasure,” *American Journal of Archaeology* 89, no. 1 (January 1985): 136-139, Accessed August 19, 2014. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/504776>

<sup>239</sup> *Epigrammata* LVII

CHAPTER IV  
ALLIES AND FELLOW WORKERS

Ambrose of Milan

With his position within the city of Rome itself finally firmly secure, Damasus needed to further establish himself by extending his power beyond the confines of the city. This entailed dealing with the aftermath of the Arian crisis which had so dramatically affected his predecessor Liberius. Liberius had allegedly agreed to the problematic creed formulated at the Council of Arminum under Constantius II.<sup>240</sup> Once Liberius had safely returned to Rome, he repudiated the creed in a letter that Socrates preserved in the text of his historical work.<sup>241</sup> One of the few bishops who still supported the Arian creed was Auxentius, the bishop of the imperial city of Milan. Eusebius of Vercelli and Hilarius of Potiers, who like Liberius had suffered exile under Constantius, worked hard to remove Auxentius. Their efforts to do so were thwarted in 364 by the emperor Valentinian I who, while personally Nicene, advocated a policy of harmony and toleration among the Christian factions.<sup>242</sup> In 371, Damasus called a synod of Western bishops in Rome that repudiated all the decrees passed at Ariminum. No doubt this was at least partially motivated by the controversy which still surrounded the memory of Liberius that the followers of Lucifer of Cagliari were using to their advantage. In an *epistula* addressed to the bishops of Illyria, Damasus wrote that “Those who devise strange doctrines ought not to be followed...Auxentius, bishop of Milan, has been publically declared to be condemned pre-eminently in this matter.”<sup>243</sup> Nevertheless, even the full weight of the authority of the Roman see was not enough to dislodge Auxentius from his own, until his death in 374.

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<sup>240</sup> Socrates, II. xxx.

<sup>241</sup> Socrates IV. xii.

<sup>242</sup> McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan*, 23-25.

<sup>243</sup> Sozomen VI. xxiii. McLynn states that the synod was “probably” in 371. (*Ambrose*, 40)

Ambrosius Aurelius was the *consularis* of the province of Aemelia-Liguria, of which Milan was the capital. He came from a Christian family but was still a catechumen. Foreseeing a heated dispute over the episcopal succession that would likely generate significant unrest, Ambrose went to the church where the election was occurring, ostensibly to maintain order. Neil McLynn has argued that Ambrose's intervention had a pro-Nicene slant and that he took over the proceedings to ensure that the Nicenes at least had a voice in the proceedings. The Nicenes viewed this action as support for their cause and acclaimed Ambrose as bishop. He initially dramatically refused and went to extraordinary lengths to avoid being consecrated, but reluctantly took up the episcopal office when Valentinian ordered him to do so.<sup>244</sup>

For the decade between his consecration as bishop and the death of Damasus, Ambrose proved himself to be the foremost ally of Damasus in the West. Theodoret invariably pairs Ambrose with Damasus in his writings, both historical and epistolary.<sup>245</sup> Ambrose himself stressed his allegiance and adherence to Rome, to the point that one of his opponents even referred to him as the "servant" or mouthpiece of Damasus.<sup>246</sup> Ambrose also shared the conviction of Damasus that to be truly Christian was to be Roman. It was at some point during the time when Damasus ruled over Rome and Ambrose ruled over Milan, that the church in both cities began to formulate a standard liturgical text. Whereas the liturgy had originally been in Greek, the new prayers were written in Latin.<sup>247</sup> Lafferty argued that, "An examination of Ambrose's anti-Arian writings reveals that Ambrose repeatedly figures the Arians in Milan as uncivilized, non-Latinate barbarians, despite the reality that both Latin-speakers and Greek

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<sup>244</sup> McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan*, 43-47.

<sup>245</sup> Theodoret *Historia Ecclesiastica* IV.xxvii; *Epistulae* CXLV, CLI, CLXX .

<sup>246</sup> Lafferty, 52.

<sup>247</sup> Lafferty, 22-23.

speakers...also belonged to the Arian community there.”<sup>248</sup> In order for the arguments of both Ambrose and Damasus in this case to hold, the identity of Rome as a Christian city had to be maintained

A significant threat to such a maintenance came in the last year of the pontificate of Damasus. Augustus had installed the Altar of Victory in the Curia in 27 B.C. to commemorate his victory at Actium. It remained there until Constantius II removed it in 357. His successor Julian subsequently restored it. In 382, Gratian removed the Altar for a second time and when a group of pagan senators rebuked him for thus neglecting his duties as *pontifex maximus*, the emperor rejected the title.<sup>249</sup> After the assassination of Gratian the next year, a group of senators presented a *relatio* to the new emperor Valentinian II, in which they protested the removal of the Altar and requested its reinstallation. The *relatio*, authored by Symmachus, argued that the disasters which had befallen the Empire in the later part of the fourth century, particularly the defeat at Adrianople, were the result of neglecting the ancestral rites of the Romans.<sup>250</sup>

In response to this petition by Symmachus, Ambrose wrote a letter to Valentinian, in which called him “most Christian emperor,” to argue against putting the Altar back.<sup>251</sup> Ambrose mentioned to the emperor that Damasus had sent him a memorandum from the Christian senators protesting that they did not support “the request of the heathen.” The senators also threatened to boycott Senate meetings if Valentinian restored the Altar.<sup>252</sup> Convinced that the Senate was not unanimous in its request, Gratian rejected the restoration request.

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<sup>248</sup> Lafferty, 56.

<sup>249</sup> Alan Cameron, “Gratian’s Repudiation of the Pontifical Robe,” *The Journal of Roman Studies* 58, nos. 1 and 2. (1968): 99. Accessed October 23, 2014. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/299698>.

<sup>250</sup> Alan Cameron, *Last Pagans*, 339.

<sup>251</sup> Ambrose, *Epistula* XVII.iii.

<sup>252</sup> Ambrose, *Epistula* XVII.x.

This passing mention is the solitary reference to Damasus in the *Epistulae* of Ambrose. Nevertheless, it depicts Damasus and Ambrose closely collaborating in the context of a significant event with both political and religious implications. Such close collaboration was clearly the norm and was not exceptional. Ambrose was a staunch and invaluable ally of Damasus in increasing the power of the papacy, in no small part because the proximity of Milan to Rome meant that an increase in Rome's prestige helped increase that of Milan as well.



## Aurelius Prudentius Clemens

Marianne Sághy has argued that the epigraphic program of Damasus was the beginning of Roman hagiography.<sup>253</sup> However, the epigrams of Damasus often offer little more than rudimentary information. Damasus himself complained that there was not a wealth of information available on the martyrs. “Antiquity was able to retain neither their names nor numbers.”<sup>254</sup> Therefore, he made use of what information was available to him. However, he limited himself to what was historically verifiable, often by oral accounts from witnesses.<sup>255</sup> For this reason, many scholars consider the epigrams of Damasus to be the sole reliable source for information on particular martyrs.<sup>256</sup> Two martyrs for whom Damasus composed epigrams were Daria and Chrysanthus. Candida Moss has demonstrated that the *Acta* of these martyrs makes no historical sense.<sup>257</sup> However, recent archaeological evidence supports at least the existence of Daria and Chrysanthus and their martyrdom by being buried alive.<sup>258</sup> The historically spurious details of the *Acta* were no doubt added at a later date, embellishing the simple, factual account on which Damasus based his epigram.

Ambrose slightly modified the account that Damasus presented of the martyrdom of Agnes. Damasus mentions death by immolation.<sup>259</sup> Ambrose states that the judge originally ordered Agnes to be burned alive but when the flames failed to consume her, she was

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<sup>253</sup> Sághy, “Hagiography,” 14.

<sup>254</sup> *Epigrammata* LII.ii *Nomina nec numerum potuit retinere vetustas*

<sup>255</sup> Shepherd, 848. The most notable oral accounts on which Damasus relies are from the parents of Agnes (XXXVII.i) and the executioner of Marcellus and Peter (XXVIII.ii).

<sup>256</sup> Nunn, 34. Nunn directly mentions the martyrs Nereus and Achilleus, but this is the case for a number of the epigrams of Damasus.

<sup>257</sup> Candida Moss, *The Myth of Persecution: How Early Christians Invented a Story of Martyrdom* (New York: Harper Collins, 2014), 83-87.

<sup>258</sup> <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2011/04/110415-saints-murdered-chrysanthus-daria-science-rome-roman-christians/>

<sup>259</sup> *Epigrammata* XXXVII.v.

decapitated.<sup>260</sup> The hagiographic tradition initiated by Damasus was carried on much more effectively, however, by his fellow Spaniard, Aurelius Prudentius Clemens. Prudentius wrote the *Peristephanon Liber*, a collection of poetic hymns about the martyrs, particularly those of Spanish origin, that he finished by 405.<sup>261</sup> At some point at the end of the fourth century, Prudentius visited Rome. It is possible that he arrived during the last years of the pontificate of Damasus. His mention of a liturgy at the basilica of Saint Paul outside the Walls indicates that the majority of his stay was in the last decade of the fourth, after the death of Damasus.<sup>262</sup>

Prudentius based his hymns on the accounts preserved by Damasus in his epigrams. Like Ambrose, Prudentius composed hymns in honor of Agnes, Lawrence and the Apostles Peter and Paul, all of whom had been eulogized by Damasus.<sup>263</sup> Prudentius greatly embellished the accounts of all of these martyrs in his hymns. In one case he completely disregarded what Damasus had written. Damasus included a slight anachronism by presenting Hippolytus as a presbyter of the Novatian schism, when Hippolytus had actually led a schism of his own a few decades earlier. Prudentius made Hippolytus into a Roman soldier whom Lawrence converted and who suffered martyrdom. The manner of martyrdom, being pulled apart by horses, is evocative, perhaps deliberately, of the death of Hippolytus, son of Theseus, in classical myth.<sup>264</sup>

Ursula Reutter argues that the epigrams of Damasus were the first of their kind and that some of his formulations influenced those of Prudentius.<sup>265</sup> Daniel O' Connor makes a connection between the poetry of Damasus and that of Prudentius by pointing out the use of the

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<sup>260</sup> Ambrose, *Hymn VIII*.

<sup>261</sup> The *Praefatio* that Prudentius wrote for the *Liber* offers this date.

<sup>262</sup> Prudentius, *Peristephanon XII*. The imperial rescript *Disederantibus nobis* (CA III), dated to 386, mentions the construction of the basilica. Sághy argued that the project was begun during the pontificate of Damasus, but he died before its completion. ("Hagiography," 12).

<sup>263</sup> Prudentius: *Peristephanon XVI*, II and XII respectively. Damasus: *Epigrammata XXXVII*, XXXIII, and XX.

<sup>264</sup> Prudentius, XI.

<sup>265</sup> Reutter, 60

word *tropaeum* by both. *Tropaeum* is the Latin word for “trophy” or “memorial of victory.” For Prudentius the memorial of victory is the martyr’s tomb, while Damasus considers the relics in the tomb or the location of the martyrdom itself to be the trophies.<sup>266</sup> Similarly, in his *Passio Agnetis*, Prudentius uses the epitaph *martyris inclytae*<sup>267</sup> for the virgin martyr Agnes.<sup>268</sup> Damasus uses the vocative form of the same phrase in his invocation at the end of his own epitaph for Agnes.<sup>269</sup> Peter Kuhlman argued, “The choice of the expressions *Romulea domus* for Rome, *inclyta* for St. Agnes, and *Quirites* for the Roman citizens gives this passage a Roman-pagan and at the same time heroic-aristocratic ring.”<sup>270</sup> In this case, the hymns of Prudentius served a similar function to the epigrams of Damasus, which endeavored to recast Christian saints as Roman heroes of a newly Christian Rome.

Most of the information available on Eulalia, the famous martyr of Mérida, comes from a hymn Prudentius wrote in her honor.<sup>271</sup> Mérida, then known as Augusta Emerita, was originally a *colonia* established by veterans of the legions that had served under Augustus.<sup>272</sup> It also served as the administrative capital of the province of Lusitania.<sup>273</sup> Egítania, (now Idanha-a-Velha, Portugal) widely considered to be the birthplace of Damasus, is only one hundred and fourteen miles from Mérida. Eulalia’s martyrdom is sometimes dated to the persecution under Decius (250-51) but is more often considered to have occurred during the Great Persecution, around 304. The place of her burial outside the city walls had become a locus of veneration and center of

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<sup>266</sup> O’Connor, 112

<sup>267</sup> “glorious martyr”

<sup>268</sup> Prudentius, XIV.ii

<sup>269</sup> XXXVIII.10

<sup>270</sup> Peter Kuhlman, “Cultural Memory and Roman Identity in the Hymns of Prudentius,” in *Memory and Urban Religion in the Ancient World*, 248.

<sup>271</sup> Prudentius, III.

<sup>272</sup> Cassius Dio, LIII.xxvi.1

<sup>273</sup> Ellington, 1

her cult by the fourth century, possibly shortly after her death.<sup>274</sup> It is possible, although admittedly unlikely, that Damasus could have still resided in Lusitania while the cult of Eulalia was in its infancy.<sup>275</sup> Even if he was already residing in Rome, his parents would surely have nurtured the veneration of a Christian martyr from their own province. The experience could have been part of what motivated Damasus, as pope, to enact a campaign that established the tombs of the martyrs as cultic sites in Rome. While Damasus the poems of Prudentius did not directly increase power of Damasus in his lifetime, the influence of his epigraphs on Prudentius demonstrates the lasting power of his legacy.

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<sup>274</sup> Roger Collins, *Spain: An Oxford Archaeological Guide*, 199. Prudentius' hymn in her honor portrays her denouncing the emperor Maximian who ruled the territory including Spain until his abdication in 305 A.D.

<sup>275</sup> Other than his birth, the only (somewhat) certain date in the life of Damasus prior to his election as bishop is his ordination as a deacon sometime before 355 A.D. Based on his own epigrams for his father, it is likely that Damasus was in Rome long before this. It is not; however, altogether implausible to conclude that Damasus and his family, if he was actually born in Hispania, resided in his home province of Lusitania at least reasonably close to date of Eulalia's martyrdom and possibly for sometime afterward.

## Eusebius Sophronius Hieronymus

Although Jerome did not enter the orbit of Damasus until the last five years of his pontificate, he played a substantial role in the elderly pope's expansion of power. In his extensive study of the relationship between late antique Christianity and monetary wealth, Peter Brown argued that Damasus consciously presented himself as a patron of the finest arts. To this end, Damasus had scholars and other experts work on projects that he patronized. One such artist was Furius Dionysius Filocalus, who had designed and carved the script for the epigrams of Damasus.<sup>276</sup> Jerome was another scholar/expert whom Damasus patronized.

Following the close of the Council of Constantinople, Jerome travelled to Rome with Paulinus, whose claim to the bishopric of Antioch had been rejected by the Council.<sup>277</sup> In Rome, Jerome met Damasus, who recognized the presbyter's skills and employed him in a secretarial capacity. Jerome himself wrote of "helping Damasus bishop of Rome with his ecclesiastical correspondence, and writing his answers to the questions referred to him by the councils of east and west."<sup>278</sup> In his letter to Asella, Jerome writes that "Damasus, of blessed memory, spoke no words but mine." This simple, albeit no doubt exaggerated, comment reflects the level of influence Jerome exerted, or thought he exerted, on the aging pontiff. In that way, it would fit well with Jerome's earlier statement, in the same letter, that "almost everyone" judged him as a viable candidate to succeed Damasus as bishop of Rome.<sup>279</sup>

Brown argued that Jerome saw an opportunity and played on the need of Damasus for scholars. "Jerome knew that Damasus needed experts. He was quick to present himself as

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<sup>276</sup> Brown, *Eye of a Needle*, 258.

<sup>277</sup> Jerome, *Epistula* CXXVII.vii. Andrew Cain theorized that Jerome's purpose was to serve as interpreter for the Greek speaking delegation to the Latin speaking Damasus. (*The Letters of Jerome*, 44)

<sup>278</sup> Jerome, *Epistula* CXXIII.x.

<sup>279</sup> Jerome, *Epistula* XLV.iii.

indispensable as a translator and a critic of the texts.”<sup>280</sup> Damasus had a great deal to gain from patronizing Jerome. In the preface to his translation of Origen’s commentary on the Song of Songs, Jerome states that his work “would require almost boundless leisure and labor and money.”<sup>281</sup> These were the very thing which an aristocrat possessed that allowed them to patronize artists and scholars. By patronizing the work of Jerome, Damasus was able to further the image of himself that he wished to project.

The basis of Jerome’s career had been the patronage of Damasus: therefore, the reputation of Jerome rested on that of his patron. As such, Jerome was eager to present a favorable image of Damasus. In *De viris illustribus*, Jerome writes that Damasus, “had a fine talent in making verses and published many works in heroic meter.”<sup>282</sup> If Damasus had indeed been talented in composing poetry, then he could certainly be trusted as a connoisseur who would only patronize work of the highest quality. Modern critics have not been as kind as Jerome to Damasus. J.N.D. Kelly found the epigrams of Damasus to be “sonorous-sounding, if rather vacuous.”<sup>283</sup> Even less kindly, Alan Cameron characterized Damasus as a “poor stylist” and described one particular epitaph as “typically frigid... a tissue of tags and clichés shakily strung together and barely squeezed into the meter.”<sup>284</sup>

Kelly argued that Jerome’s secretarial position was initially only supposed to last for the duration of the synod, but that Jerome proved his worth and stayed on in the same position after the synod.<sup>285</sup> The document known as the *Decretum Gelasianum* takes its name from Pope Gelasius I (492-496) during whose pontificate the document likely took its final form. However,

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<sup>280</sup> Brown, *Eye of a Needle*, 261.

<sup>281</sup> Jerome, “Preface to the Translation of Origen’s Two Homilies on the Song of Songs”

<sup>282</sup> *De viris illustribus*, CIII

<sup>283</sup> Kelly, 83

<sup>284</sup> Cameron, “Esquiline” 137

<sup>285</sup> Kelly, 83

the beginning part of the *Decretum* is likely based on earlier documents dating from the synod convened by Damasus at Rome in 392, in which Jerome took part. In these earlier parts, the *Decretum* contains the canon or list of approved Scriptural texts.<sup>286</sup> It is clear that in the closing years of his pontificate, Damasus began to take an interest in Scripture. To this end, it was at this time that Damasus commissioned Jerome to revise the Old Latin translations of the Gospels from the Greek. This was the beginning of the project for which Jerome is best known: the Latin Vulgate.

Jerome addressed the preface of his revised translation to Damasus. He wrote, “You urge me to revise the old Latin version, and, as it were, to sit in judgment on the copies of the Scriptures...and, inasmuch as they differ from one another, you would have me decide which of them agree with the Greek original. The labour is one of love, but at the same time both perilous and presumptuous; for in judging others I must be content to be judged by all.”<sup>287</sup> Andrew Cain has argued that Jerome was fully aware that this new translation would generate significant controversy. For this reason, he carefully crafted the preface to “insulate himself pre-emptively from criticism” and emphasize “Damasus’ ultimate accountability for the project.”<sup>288</sup>

Jerome often defended himself and his work by appealing to the authority and, after his death, the memory of Damasus. In one instance, he pointed out that Damasus, whom he called an “excellent man—versed in Scriptures as he was,” found nothing objectionable in Jerome’s discourse on the perpetual virginity of the Virgin Mary.<sup>289</sup> Cain argued that Jerome intentionally circulated the correspondence between himself and Damasus in order to validate his exegetical

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<sup>286</sup> *Decretum Gelasianum*.II [http://www.tertullian.org/decretum\\_eng.htm](http://www.tertullian.org/decretum_eng.htm)

<sup>287</sup> Jerome, “Preface to the Four Gospels” Translated by Ernest Cushing Richardson. In *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Second Series, Vol. 3, edited by Phillip Schaff and Henry Wace, 360-384. Grand Rapids, MI: WM. B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989

<sup>288</sup> Cain, 52.

<sup>289</sup> Jerome, *Epistula XLVIII*.xxviii.

expertise with the aura of papal approval and “to announce to Christians there that he was the personal Scriptural advisor to a renowned pope.”<sup>290</sup> Cain also mentions a theme of *Hebraica veritas* running through the letters Jerome writes in response to Damasus. Jerome strongly advocates going back to the original Hebrew when there are conflicts between the Latin and Greek translations of the Scriptural texts.<sup>291</sup> This idea will figure prominently in the work that Jerome will do on the translation of the Old Testament following the death of Damasus.

In the last letter that Damasus wrote to Jerome, he presents five exegetical questions for Jerome to answer.<sup>292</sup> Another exegete at Rome named Ambrosiaster had already posed and answered these questions. Damasus is apparently asking Jerome for a second opinion.<sup>293</sup> Annelise Volgers argued that Damasus was merely interested to know what Jerome thought on some exegetical matters he had heard being discussed recently.<sup>294</sup> Jerome on the other hand, according to Cain, carefully crafted his response in order to subtly demonstrate the superiority of his own method of exegesis over that of Ambrosiaster. Cain offered the possibility that the criticism of Ambrosiaster was deliberately indirect because “Jerome knew or suspected that Damasus was partial to Ambrosiaster’s work or the man himself.”<sup>295</sup> Brown identified Ambrosiaster as a member of the Roman clergy of Damasus.<sup>296</sup> While this hardly indicates partiality, it does demonstrate that Damasus had a certain degree of familiarity with Ambrosiaster and familiarity can be leveraged into influence. Jerome certainly would have

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<sup>290</sup> Cain, 64.

<sup>291</sup> Cain, 53-59.

<sup>292</sup> Jerome, *Epistula XXXV*

<sup>293</sup> Cain, 59.

<sup>294</sup> Annelise Volgers, “Damasus’ Request: Why Jerome Needed to (Re-)Answer Ambrosiaster’s *Questions*,” in *Studia Patristica: Papers presented to the International Conference on the Patristic Studies* 43(2006), 536.

<sup>295</sup> Cain, 61-62.

<sup>296</sup> Brown, *Eye of a Needle*, 255.



needed to walk a fine line between assuring that Ambrosiaster did not supplant him and offending Damasus by criticizing one of his presbyters too strongly.

Ambrosiaster and Jerome would have agreed on one thing. Ambrosiaster had argued that a congregation praying in a language that it could not understand offered no gain for the people involved because they could not understand what they said.<sup>297</sup> Thus it is likely that Ambrosiaster would have been in favor of changing the liturgical language to Latin, a process that began under Damasus. However, unlike Ambrosiaster, Jerome was someone who could actually assist in the implementation of the Latinizing initiative through his revision of the old translations of Scripture. Damasus understood that Jerome was someone with whom he could work in advancing his aims. Ambrosiaster was not. Thus, Jerome had little to fear while Damasus lived.

Ultimately, Ambrosiaster was a member of the Roman clergy, the “low-profile but tenacious body of men” who had “rallied behind” Damasus.<sup>298</sup> The clergy had always seen the monastic Jerome as an outsider and interloper. After Damasus died on December 11, 384; the clergy elected the deacon Siricius to succeed him as pope. With Damasus gone to his eternal reward, Jerome no longer had anyone with either the ability or desire to support him in Rome. By August of the next year, Jerome had left Rome at the express orders of the new pope, never to return. He returned to the East, where he would spend the next twenty-two years of his life completing the great work his friend Damasus had given to him.

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<sup>297</sup> Lafferty, 32-33.

<sup>298</sup> Brown, *Eye of a Needle*, 254.

CHAPTER V  
DAMASUS ASCENDANT

The Situation in the East

Until this point, Damasus had been preoccupied with problems close to home in the West. Having finally firmly established himself there, he could now turn his attention to the East. His initial goal does not seem to have been to exert his power over the Eastern bishops. However, as he was inexorably drawn more into the doctrinal and political conflicts in that half of the Empire, he began to assert his authority more audaciously. By the resolution of the crisis, Damasus and the papacy had reached a level of unprecedented power and influence.

Jerome had written a letter to Damasus between 376 and 377, asking Damasus to intervene in a crisis that was currently embroiling Jerome's home see of Antioch. In 330, a synod at Antioch, instigated by Eusebius of Nicomedia, deposed and subsequently exiled Eustathius on the grounds that he held to the doctrine of Sabellianism. The see of Antioch was held by a succession of Arian and Semi-Arian bishops, culminating with Eudoxius in 358.<sup>299</sup> Meanwhile, the Nicæan resistance in Antioch, led by a presbyter named Paulinus, continued to consider Eustathius to be the rightful bishop of Antioch until his death in 337. When Eudoxius became the bishop of Constantinople, Meletius was elected to succeed him. Socrates wrote that Meletius "at first avoided all doctrinal questions...but subsequently he expounded to his auditors the Nicene creed, and asserted the doctrine of the *homoousion*. The emperor being informed of this, ordered that he should be sent into exile and caused Euzoius, who had before been deposed together with Arius, to be installed bishop of Antioch in his stead."<sup>300</sup>

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<sup>299</sup> Socrates II.xxiv. Sabellianism was a common charge leveled by Arians against the adherents of Nicæa. In Chapter XXXVII, Socrates argues that Eudoxius obtained the see fraudulently, upon the death of fellow Arian Leontius.

<sup>300</sup> Socrates II.xliv.

Despite this demonstration, at cost, of adherence to the doctrine of Nicaea, the followers of Eustathius still refused to recognize Meletius as rightful bishop due to his prior connections with the Arian party.<sup>301</sup> In 361, Constantius died and was succeeded by Julian, who annulled all his predecessor's decrees of expulsion in an effort to weaken the Christians with division. In this, he succeeded. Along with Meletius, returned the rigorist Lucifer of Cagliari. Soon to start a schism of his own, Lucifer exacerbated the one at Antioch by beating Meletius to the city and consecrating Paulinus as bishop.<sup>302</sup> The adherents of Nicaea were thus divided and unable to present a united front against the Arians.

In his letter, Jerome explained that members of the Meletian party were harassing him in an effort to ascertain which candidate he supported and determine his orthodoxy.<sup>303</sup> Eastern Christians tended the use of the formula of “three *hypostases* in one *ousias*” to describe the Trinity. In so doing, they hoped to avoid the charge of Sabellianism that the followers of Arius so often hurled at the adherents of Nicaea. For rigorists adherents of Nicaea, including the followers of Eustathius, this was a dangerous innovation on the Nicene Creed that bordered on Arianism.<sup>304</sup> Although he claims to be neutral, Jerome shows himself to at least a sympathizer of Paulinus by referring to the three *hypostases* as an “unheard of formula” and calling the Meletians “Arians.”<sup>305</sup>

In the letter, Jerome urges Damasus to use his position as bishop of Rome to do something about the schism. Ever the student of rhetoric, Jerome uses grandiose and hyperbolic language to describe his allegiance to the bishop of Rome. He goes as far as to state that he will

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<sup>301</sup> Socrates II.xliv.

<sup>302</sup> Socrates III.vi.

<sup>303</sup> Jerome, *Epistula* XV.2 He refers to them as Campenses, (the field party) because, with the churches under Arian control, they were forced to assemble outdoors.

<sup>304</sup> Kelly, 38.

<sup>305</sup> Jerome, *Epistula* XV.iii

abide by whatever ruling Damasus might give, even if it were to go against the doctrine established at Nicaea.<sup>306</sup> Jerome indicates that he has such great trust in Damasus because as bishop of Rome, he is the successor of Peter. “My words are spoken to the successor of the fisherman, to the disciple of the cross. As I follow no leader save Christ, so I communicate with none but your blessedness, that is with the chair of Peter. For this, I know, is the rock on which the church was built!”<sup>307</sup>

Surprisingly, Damasus does not take this opportunity to assert the authority Jerome strongly believes him to possess. Less than a year later, Jerome once again wrote to Damasus to renew his plea. He opens the letter with allusions to a number of New Testament parables where a supplicant receives that for which he asks through unrelenting persistence. Jerome reiterates his submission to the authority of the pope by stating “He who clings to the chair of Peter is accepted by me.”<sup>308</sup> His additional statement that all three claimants to the see of Antioch claim to do so as well, indicates the prestige that the see of Rome held at this time. There is no recorded response of Damasus to this letter.

Even before this, other notables had been attempting to enlist the aid of the bishop of Rome to resolve this crisis. Since his consecration in 370, Basil, bishop of Caesarea, had been trying to bring in Western support for Meletius and thus end the schism.<sup>309</sup> He communicated this plan with Meletius himself who cooperated with Basil in carrying it out by loaning his deacon Dorotheus to serve as Basil’s envoy to Rome.<sup>310</sup> Basil also wrote a number of letters to

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<sup>306</sup> Jerome, *Epistula* XV.iii

<sup>307</sup> Jerome, *Epistula* XV.ii. This is a direct reference to the Gospel of Matthew, where Christ says to Peter, “Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church.” (Matthew 16:18) This has long been the foundational text for the doctrine of papal supremacy.

<sup>308</sup> Jerome, *Epistula* XVI.

<sup>309</sup> Justin Taylor, “St. Basil the Great and Pope St. Damasus I,” in *Downside Review* 91 (1973), 187.

<sup>310</sup> Basil, *Epistula* LXVIII.

Athanasius of Alexandria, in an attempt to gain his aid as well, but Athanasius supported Paulinus.<sup>311</sup> Among the *Epistulae* of Basil is a letter with no addressee, which is nonetheless grouped with Basil's other letters from this period. The text of the letter indicates that it was originally addressed to Damasus. The most compelling evidence for this is Basil's mention of "the blessed bishop Dionysius, conspicuous of your see as well for soundness of faith as for all other virtues."<sup>312</sup> Dionysius succeeded the martyred Xystus II as bishop of Rome, where he reigned for a year and half.<sup>313</sup> Basil apparently never sent this letter. Justin Taylor theorized that "Basil may have had a presentiment...that Damasus may not be as sympathetic as he had hoped, and so refrained from making the sort of personal appeal to him that he had earlier planned."<sup>314</sup>

Eamon Duffy sums up well the mindset of Damasus at this time. "With no intention of embroiling himself in the nightmare complexities of the Eastern theological debates, he thought the right procedure was for the bishops of the East to establish their orthodoxy by signing Roman formulas."<sup>315</sup> Meanwhile, the situation went from bad to worse. In 373, Athanasius died. In the same year Evagrius, a presbyter who had been serving as another of Basil's envoys to the West, refused to receive communion with Dorotheus, indicating his rejection of Meletius as bishop.<sup>316</sup> When Damasus finally entered the fracas, he came in decidedly on the side of Paulinus. Damasus sent a letter to Paulinus, in which the pope addressed Paulinus as the bishop of Antioch and explained the terms for communion with Vitalis.<sup>317</sup> Vitalis had been a follower of Meletius and was well respected by adherents of Nicaea, but Apollinaris of Laodicea had consecrated him as

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<sup>311</sup> Taylor, 192. Basil's communication with Athanasius on this subject consists of his *Epistulae* LXVI, LXVII and LXIX.

<sup>312</sup> Basil, *Epistula* LXX.

<sup>313</sup> *LP* XXVI

<sup>314</sup> Taylor, 195.

<sup>315</sup> Duffy, *Saints and Sinners*, 34.

<sup>316</sup> Basil, *Epistula* CLVI.

<sup>317</sup> Damasus, *Epistula* III *Per filium*.in *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 13, ed. J.P. Migne.

bishop. Apollinaris taught that Christ had no human soul, essentially, the divine *Logos* had simply taken up residency in Christ's human body. Adherence to this belief made Vitalis, despite his adherence to Nicaea, anathema to both the Meletians and Paulinians.<sup>318</sup> On account of the letter, Evagrius officially joined with Paulinus, and would succeed him as bishop upon his death in 388. Jerome took this letter as the decision for which he had beseeched Damasus and returned to his home see to be ordained as a presbyter by Paulinus.<sup>319</sup> Theodoret also records a profession of faith that Damasus sent to Paulinus, demonstrating their communion.<sup>320</sup>

In 378, Valens, the Augustus of the East and an Arian, died in battle with the Goths at Adrianople.<sup>321</sup> The crushing defeat was an unmitigated disaster for the Empire but providential for the champions of Nicaea. Upon the death of Valens, his imperial colleague Gratian elevated the Spanish general Flavius Theodosius as Augustus of the East. Theodosius and Gratian were both strong adherents of Nicaea. Gratian recalled all the bishops whom Valens had exiled, while Theodosius exiled Demophilus, bishop of Constantinople, for refusing assent to the Nicene Creed.<sup>322</sup>

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<sup>318</sup> Sozomen VI.xxv.1

<sup>319</sup> Kelly, 58.

<sup>320</sup> Theodoret V.xi

<sup>321</sup> Ammianus XXXI.xiii.

<sup>322</sup> Socrates V.ii (Gratian) and vii (Theodosius).

## The Edict of Thessalonica and the Council of Constantinople

Damasus exerted a subdued, but nonetheless significant influence on Theodosius. Damasus was at the very least of Spanish extraction and Theodosius certainly was born in Hispania, in what is now the city of Coca. Prudentius, another Spaniard, served in the court of Theodosius until about 392. There was thus a Spanish affinity here that Damasus could work to his advantage. Furthermore, Alan Cameron has identified Aemelius Florus Paternus, the Praetorian Prefect *Orientis* under Theodosius from 381-383, as the father of Proiecta, the only non-martyr and non-family member for whom Damasus composed an epigram.<sup>323</sup> This level of intimacy with the family of second-highest ranking man in the East certainly would have translated to influence in the court of Theodosius.

However, the most significant influence exerted on Theodosius by Damasus was in the person of Acholius, the bishop of Thessalonica. Acholius baptized Theodosius following a serious illness that left the emperor near death in 380.<sup>324</sup> Thus, it is no accident that in that same year, Theodosius issued the famous edict *Cunctos Populos* from Thessalonica, for which reason it is also known as the edict of Thessalonica. The Edict established orthodox Christianity, defined as “that religion which was delivered to the Romans by the divine Apostle Peter...and which is now professed by the Pontiff Damasus and by Peter, bishop of Alexandria” as the state religion of the empire.<sup>325</sup> It is likely that this definition on the part of Theodosius was a result of the influence of Acholius, who was in regular communication with Damasus.

It is no surprise that Theodosius mentions Peter of Alexandria alongside Damasus of Rome. Rome and Alexandria had long enjoyed a close relationship and alliance. “One writer

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<sup>323</sup> Cameron, “Esquiline,” 143

<sup>324</sup> Socrates V.vi.

<sup>325</sup> *Codex Theodosianus* XVI.i.2.

even called it an ‘axis.’”<sup>326</sup> Tradition held that Mark, who had founded the church at Alexandria and served as its first bishop, had been a close companion of Peter.<sup>327</sup> As previously mentioned, Julius I had sheltered and given support to Athanasius during one of his periods of exile. Athanasius had personally chosen Peter to succeed him, but immediately after Peter’s consecration he was threatened with arrest and forced to flee Alexandria. Peter followed his predecessor’s example and fled to Rome, where Damasus warmly received him. As Julius had, Damasus also wrote letters in support of Peter but the deacon whom he sent to deliver them was arrested and condemned to the mines.<sup>328</sup> While in Rome, Peter played his part in drawing Damasus into the Meletian controversy on the side of Paulinus by accusing Meletius of Arianism in the presence of Damasus.<sup>329</sup>

Peter and Damasus did not agree in all things, however. When Theodosius exiled Demophilus, the Arian bishop of Constantinople, in 380, Peter saw an opportunity to exert control on an upstart see that threatened the power of his own, which had been established far longer. To this end, Peter sponsored the clandestine consecration of an Egyptian named Maximus the Cynic, with the aim of gaining *de facto* control of Constantinople for Alexandria. Theodosius had originally nominated Gregory, formerly bishop of Nazianzus as bishop of Constantinople. At night, while Gregory was confined to bed with illness, Maximus entered the cathedral at Constantinople to be consecrated as bishop. When the people of Constantinople, who largely supported Gregory, learned that Maximus was attempting to set himself up as bishop, they interrupted his consecration and he was forced to flee. Maximus travelled to the court of Theodosius to plead his case but the emperor instead sought the advice of Damasus,

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<sup>326</sup> Taylor, 197.

<sup>327</sup> Eusebius, II.xvi.

<sup>328</sup> Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*, 180-1.

<sup>329</sup> Basil, *Epistula* CCLXVI.ii



using Acholius as an intermediary.<sup>330</sup> When Damasus learned of the clandestine consecration, far from supporting such a maneuver, he was outraged. He dispatched a letter to Acholius, in which he denounced the consecration of Maximus. He further suggested that Theodosius call a council to find a suitable alternative to Maximus and otherwise set the affairs of the Eastern church in order.<sup>331</sup> Thus, *Cunctos Populos* and the Council of Constantinople of 381, two significant events in the reign of Theodosius, came about as the result of the influence of Damasus, exercised through Acholius. Ultimately, the edict had a more beneficial effect on the papal power of Damasus than the council did.

In 382, Damasus called a synod of Western bishops, none of whom had been present at Constantinople, in Rome as a follow up to the Council of Constantinople. There were two main issues that needed to be resolved. Meletius of Antioch, whom Damasus had opposed in favor of Paulinus, was elected to preside over the Council, effectively recognizing him as the legitimate bishop of Antioch. Meletius died in the midst of the proceedings and despite promises to join with Paulinus and end the schism, the followers of Meletius elected Flavian to as his successor. The ensuing confusion prompted the follow up synod of Western bishops, who had not been present in Constantinople, in Rome the following year. The Western bishops sent a tome to the Eastern bishops requesting clarification on the situation of the succession in Antioch. In response, the Eastern bishops adopted a supplementary canon that declared, “We receive those in Antioch also who confess the unity of the Godhead of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.”<sup>332</sup> This formula effectively sidestepped the question of the three *hypostases*, rendering the arguments of the Paulinians moot. They also addressed a synodical letter to “Damasus,

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<sup>330</sup> Christopher Wordsworth, *A Church History*, (New York: James Pott and Co., 1887), 312-313

<sup>331</sup> Damasus, *Epistula V*.

<sup>332</sup> In most editions of the Canons of the Council, despite the canon being a supplemental canon added after the Council, it is usually listed as canon 5

Ambrosius...and the rest of the holy bishops assembled in the great city of Rome” that recognized “the most religious Flavian” as rightful bishop of Antioch.<sup>333</sup>

The most troubling result of the Council of Constantinople was not its fifth canon but its third. It stated, “The Bishop of Constantinople, however, shall have the prerogative of honour after the Bishop of Rome, because Constantinople is New Rome.”<sup>334</sup> This canon was problematic for Damasus on a number of levels. It demoted Alexandria and Antioch, which had long enjoyed status just behind Rome. Moreover, despite maintaining the primacy of Rome, Damasus worried that it ultimately threatened the foundation of that primacy.

The authority of bishops had been said to derive ultimately from the mission of the apostles....In contrast, by elevating to a position above Alexandria and Antioch a city that was only recently founded and did not claim for its church an apostolic origin in the same way that those cities did, I Constantinople’s third canon seemed to base primatial authority upon the mere secular circumstance that Constantinople happened to be the new capital of the Roman Empire.<sup>335</sup>

The response of the Roman synod, under the leadership of Damasus, indicates that he well knew the possible implications of the canon. Damasus made the argument that the rank of each should be based on the founding of those churches by apostles rather than the founding of the cities by emperors.

Therefore first is the seat at the Roman church of the apostle Peter 'having no spot or wrinkle or any other [defect]'. However the second place was given in the name of blessed Peter to Mark his disciple and gospel-writer at Alexandria, and who himself wrote down the word of truth directed by Peter the apostle in Egypt and gloriously consummated [his life] in martyrdom. Indeed, the third place is held at Antioch of the most blessed and honourable apostle Peter, who lived there before he came to Roma and where first the name of the new race of the Christians was heard.<sup>336</sup>

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<sup>333</sup> Theodoret, V.ix

<sup>334</sup> Canon III

<sup>335</sup> William Henn, “The Honor of My Brothers: A Brief History of the Relationship Between the Pope and the Bishops,” (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 200), 59-60.

<sup>336</sup> *Decretum Gelasianum* III.iii.

Damasus could have gone either way with his ordering. Since Rome's primacy is based on Peter, it would seem more logical to have Rome first, Antioch second and Alexandria third. However, the Council of Constantinople had recognized Flavian as bishop of Antioch while Damasus continued to recognize Paulinus. This would have prevented Damasus from recognizing the primacy of Antioch over the see of Alexandria, which was overseen by his close ally Peter. The irony of Damasus, who was initially able to secure his position only through imperial intervention, protesting the elevation of a city based on its imperial status was probably lost on him.

### The First Pontiff

While the Council of Damaskos had suggested presented fresh challenges to his authority, Damaskos achieved a significant victory with *Cunctos Populos*. The use of Pontiff (*pontifex* in Latin) as a title for Damaskos in *Cunctos Populos* is of great interest. From the early second-century writings of Ignatius of Antioch, Christians had used the Greek word ἐπίσκοπος, *episkopos*, meaning “overseer,” to refer to their highest ranking leaders.<sup>337</sup> Although Pontiff is now a commonly used synonym for pope, it was initially a term for a pagan religious official. The *Collegium Pontificum* was still existence as an institution in the year during which the emperors promulgated *Cunctos Populos*.<sup>338</sup> This would imply that there were still pagan *pontifices*. Cameron argues that it is unlikely that, despite both being rather devout Christians, “either Gratian or Theodosius directly abolished the priestly colleges.” Rather, “they simply faded away as their older members died off, in the first decade of the fifth century.” Quintus Aurelius Symmachus, a staunch defender of paganism who died in 402 A.D. is the last man recorded to have held the office of *pontifex*.<sup>339</sup> Thus, there does not appear to be any concerted effort on the part of the emperors or any other Christians, to directly replace pagan *pontifices* with Christian bishops. Cameron further argues that, “The Christian man in the street was likely to see a *pontifex* as something like a pagan bishop.”<sup>340</sup> Conversely, one could infer that pagan men on the streets would see a bishop as a Christian *pontifex*.

In 378, a synod at Rome, headed by Damaskos sent a *relatio* to the *Augusti* of the West, Gratian and Valentinian in which the word *pontifex* appears. In this context, the word no doubt refers to the bishop of Rome. In that same year, the two emperors issued the rescript

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<sup>337</sup> Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Philadelphians* I

<sup>338</sup> Cameron, *Last Pagans*, 45

<sup>339</sup> Cameron, *Last Pagans* 166

<sup>340</sup> Cameron, *Last Pagans* 158.

*Ordinariorum Sententias*. *Ordinariorum* was very important to the development of papal primacy because it granted “ecclesiastical jurisdiction to the bishop of Rome, making him the court of first instance for Western metropolitans and a court of appeal for Western bishops.”<sup>341</sup> It did not use the pontifical title but instead the term *episcopus Romanus*, which is simply Latin for “bishop of Rome. Some form of *episcopus* appears seven times in the rescript, once referring directly to Damasus himself.<sup>342</sup> In none of the imperial documents of the *Collectio Avellana*, most of which predate *Cunctos Populos*, is the title *pontifex* used. Two years later, Gratian and Valentinian II joined Theodosius in issuing *Cunctos Populos* in which Damasus was clearly referred to as *pontifex*.

Theodosius was the driving force behind the edict, therefore he most likely influenced his colleagues to identify Damasus as *pontifex*. If this is the case, however, it remains unclear why Theodosius does not use the same term to describe Siricius, the successor of Damasus. A congratulatory rescript issued by Theodosius, Valentinian II and Gratian’s successor Arcadius at the time the election of Siricius, refers to the new pope as *episcopus*.<sup>343</sup>

The use of *pontifex* by the imperial authors of *Cunctos Populos* is thus extremely significant. It is important to remember that although the *Collegium Pontificum* was a religious body it was also an organ of the Roman state. Members of the *Collegium* were responsible for carrying out the various rituals of the established state cult and obtaining the favor of the gods for the undertakings of that state. Religion and politics were so closely intertwined that many politicians, including Julius Caesar, served as *pontifices* simultaneously with such high offices as consul. From Augustus onward, the emperor was also *Pontifex Maximus*. *Cunctos populos*

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<sup>341</sup> Sághy, “Schismatic,” 3

<sup>342</sup> *Synodus Romana, Relatio ad Gratianum et Valentinianum directa* (CPL 0160 7 (M)) II.xx)

<sup>343</sup> *CA VI Populum Urbis aeternae*

made orthodox Christianity the official state religion of the Roman Empire. Although it was effectively no longer the seat of government, Rome was still the capital of the empire, at least spiritually. Thus, as the head of the church of Rome, it made logical sense for Damasus to assume the role of *pontifex*. As such, Damasus received, at least in theory, newfound authority as the highest ranking member of the priesthood of the new state religion in the western empire.

Damasus never officially took the title of *Pontifex Maximus*. That office had long been only ostensibly a religious one, and much more of a political appointment. From Augustus onward, the title of *Pontifex Maximus* belonged to the Roman emperors, even Christian ones.<sup>344</sup> Gratian was, at first, no exception, but that changed shortly after the issuance of *Cunctos Populos*. Perhaps Gratian now felt that, after issuing a document that officially declared Christianity to be the faith of the empire, he had to take official actions to make that a reality. He did so in 382, when he ordered the removal of the Altar of Victory from the Roman Senate House. At the same time, he withdrew the subsidies that the government had been paying to the pagan cults and priestly colleges.<sup>345</sup> A group of pagan senators dispatched an embassy to protest Gratian's measures before the emperor himself at his court in Milan. Cameron argues that when the senators reminded Gratian of his duties as *Pontifex Maximus* to uphold the traditional Roman religion, Gratian repudiated the title.<sup>346</sup> There was now a void that Damasus was willing to fill, albeit unofficially. In 440, Pope Leo the Great claimed the title of *Pontifex Maximus* and the bishop of Rome had held it to this day. However, as in many things, Damasus paved the way for Leo.

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<sup>344</sup> Cameron, "Repudiation," 96

<sup>345</sup> Cameron, *Last Pagans*, 34

<sup>346</sup> Cameron, "Repudiation," 99.

CHAPTER VI  
CONCLUSION

Most historians have seen the pontificate of Leo I and his confident assertion of papal power to be the beginning of the monarchical style of power which would characterize the medieval papacy. However, the description of Damasus as *pontifex* in *Cuncto Populos* is but one example of Damasus setting the stage for Leo. Henry Chadwick put it best when he wrote, “The basis of Leo’s self-confidence is the conviction expressed by Damasus that Rome has a claim upon the apostles which is unique and unrivalled by any other community.”<sup>347</sup>

It is certainly arguable that the acknowledgment of the primacy of Rome was a generally increasing trend even from the pontificate of Clement I (c. A.D. 92-99). Kenneth Whitehead sees Clement’s *Epistle to the Corinthians* as an early example of the bishop of Rome authoritatively intervening in the affairs of a different see, as if he had jurisdiction. He writes, “It is clear from Clement’s Letter that he was conscious of occupying a place in the Church of Christ that allowed—even obliged—him to adopt the didactic and hortatory tone toward a sister Church.”<sup>348</sup> From that point, Whitehead provides an exhaustive list of examples going past Damasus and even Leo all the way to Pope Hormisdas in A.D. 519.<sup>349</sup>

However, the continued ascendance of the Roman see was by no means a matter of course. The influence and deference that had caused others to look to Rome made the apparent capitulation of Liberius, whether factual or not, all the more devastating. The aftermath of the crisis, with the turmoil that ensued upon the death of Liberius, brought into question not only the legitimacy of his successor but whether the ostensible bishop of Rome could even maintain his

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<sup>347</sup> Chadwick, 317

<sup>348</sup> Whitehead, 130.

<sup>349</sup> Whitehead devotes an entire chapter to “The Primacy of Rome in the Early Church.” It is by far the longest chapter of the book taking up 175 of the book’s 305 pages of text, it is over one half of the book.

position. Furthermore, by the time of Damasus, the status of the city of Rome had already begun to decline and the status of its bishop with it. Contrary to popular belief generated by forged medieval documents and exacerbated by Renaissance paintings, Pope Sylvester I did not baptize Constantine. In fact the pope probably did not ever meet the emperor.<sup>350</sup> Constantine's foundation of Constantinople and establishment of the city as a new capital further accelerated the loss of prestige that the city had endured during the Tetrarchy.

Arguably, when Damasus ascended to the throne of Peter in A.D. 366, the papacy was at its nadir. Damasus managed to turn the situation around and he did so rather quickly. Damasus did not have an exceptionally long papacy. It was just above average length: he reigned for eighteen years, in a period where the average length of a pontificate was about fourteen years.<sup>351</sup> By the end of those eighteen years, Damasus had reestablished the prestige of the Roman see and fired the first salvo in what would become an escalating struggle for primacy with Constantinople.

The events of the Liberian crisis clearly demonstrated to Damasus the unfortunate effects of being on the wrong side of imperial power. Damasus was fortunate to receive imperial support when faced with the Ursinian schism following his election. Whether Damasus bought this support with bribery, as alleged by the Ursinians, or not, he adroitly employed it to rid himself of his opposition. While the extent of the violence he allegedly inflicted on the Ursinians is surely exaggerated, Damasus clearly suffered no rivals and was resolutely determined to root out those who set themselves up as such.

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<sup>350</sup> The alleged close relationship between Sylvester and Constantine is found in two medieval documents the *Vita beati Silvestri*, which is part of the Symmachean forgeries and the famous *Donation of Constantine*, which was probably composed in the eighth century.

<sup>351</sup> Julius I reigned for fifteen years; Liberius reigned for fourteen years and Siricius, the successor of Damasus, reigned for just under fourteen years. Contrary to Andrew Cain's statement on page 41 of *The Letters of Jerome*, Damasus was not the longest reigning pope of the fourth century. The longest pontificate of the fourth century was that of Sylvester I, who reigned for almost twenty-two years. The shortest was that of Pope Marcus, the pope who ordained Damasus. Marcus reigned for less than eight months.



At the same time, Damasus shrewdly realized that it was not enough to remove his opposition but it was necessary to erase the memory of his enemies as well. This he accomplished by reclaiming locations associated with his opponents by means of strategically placed epigrams. These epigrams honored the classical heritage of Rome while appropriating it for the new Christian faith. In so doing, Damasus created a new material culture for Christian Rome, free from the taint of paganism. At the same time, by inserting his name into almost every epigram he forever associated himself with the martyrs. Damasus further this effect by singling out for special honoring those bishops and even martyrs with whom he could demonstrate personal connections.

The prestige of the see rose with the power of the bishop. His epigrams evidence his conviction that Rome was, and should remain, the center of the Christian world. With the backing of such notables as Ambrose and Jerome, Damasus set about to make Latin the language of the Church in liturgy as well as in Scripture. Even at the end of his life, Damasus rose to meet challenges to the preeminent status of Rome as Christian capital both from within and without the Church. Damasus was the first pope to be called *pontifex*. He did not possess all the pomp and prestige that would later be associated with that office. Yet, he had risen to new heights of power from which his successors would not descend for centuries. It is therefore most appropriate to refer to Damasus as the first pontiff of Christian Rome.

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## APPENDIX A: CLASSIFICATION OF THE IDENTIFIABLE EPIGRAMS OF DAMASUS

- Popes
  1. Peter: c. A.D. 33-67 (III, XX)<sup>352</sup>
  2. Clement: A.D. 92-99 (LV)<sup>353</sup>
  3. Cornelius: A.D. 251-253 (XIX)
  4. Xystus II: A.D. 257-258 (XVII)
  5. Marcellus I: A.D. 308-309 (XL)
  6. Eusebius: 309 A.D. (XVIII)
  7. Marcus: 336 A.D. (L)<sup>354</sup>
  
- Martyrs of Rome
  1. Paul: under Nero (I, XX)
  2. Nereus and Achilleus: under either Nero or Domitian (VIII)
  3. Hermes: perhaps under Hadrian
  4. Januarius, Felix, Phillip, Vitalis, Martialis and Alexander: perhaps under Marcus Aurelius (XXIV, XXXIX, XLI)
  5. Hippolytus: under Maximinus Thrax (XXXV)<sup>355</sup>
  6. Tarcisius: most likely under Valerian (XV)
  7. Laurence: under Valerian (XXXIII)
  8. Felicissimus and Agapitius: under Valerian (XXV)
  9. Protus and Hyacinthus: under Valerian (XLVII)
  10. Maurus: under Numerian (XLIV)
  11. Chrysanthus and Daria: under Numerian or Diocletian
  12. Faustinus and Viatricus: under Diocletian (VI)
  13. Felix and Adactus: under Diocletian (VII)
  14. Eutychius: under Diocletian (XXI)
  15. Marcellinus and Peter: under Diocletian (XXVIII)
  16. Tiburtius: under Diocletian (XXXI)
  17. Agnes: under Diocletian (XXXVII)

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<sup>352</sup> The numbers for the epigrams are taken from Ferrua.

<sup>353</sup> Inscription is too fragmentary to positively identify as being addressed to Clement. Inscription is located in the ancient Basilica of San Clemente.

<sup>354</sup> Uncertain identification

<sup>355</sup> His death actually took place in Sardinia, where he had been condemned to the mines along with Pontian, bishop of Rome. However, because Hippolytus was a Roman presbyter, he can right be considered a Roman martyr.

- Martyrs Elsewhere
  1. Saturninus: most likely under Septimius Severus at Carthage (XLIV)
  2. Gorgonius: under Diocletian at Nicomedia<sup>356</sup> (XXXII)
- Private Individuals
  1. Antonius-father of Damasus (LVII)
  2. Laurentia-mother of Damasus (X)
  3. Irene-sister of Damasus (XI)
  4. Damasus himself (XII)
  5. Proiecta-daughter of an aristocratic Christian family (LI)

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<sup>356</sup> There is some debate as to whether this Gorgonius is the same one that suffered martyrdom at Nicomedia. One theory is that there were two Gorgonii who suffered martyrdom, one at Nicomedia and the other at Rome. The epitaph by Damasus is frustratingly sparse on information, and is thus unhelpful.



## APPENDIX B: FIGURES



Figure 1. Portraits of, from left, Felix II, Damasus I and Siricius. Basilica of Saint Paul outside the Walls in Rome, Italy. Photo by Nancy-Leigh McIntyre.



Figure 2. *Fragmentum in San Clementis*. Basilica of Saint Clement in Rome, Italy. Photo by Nancy-Leigh McIntyre.

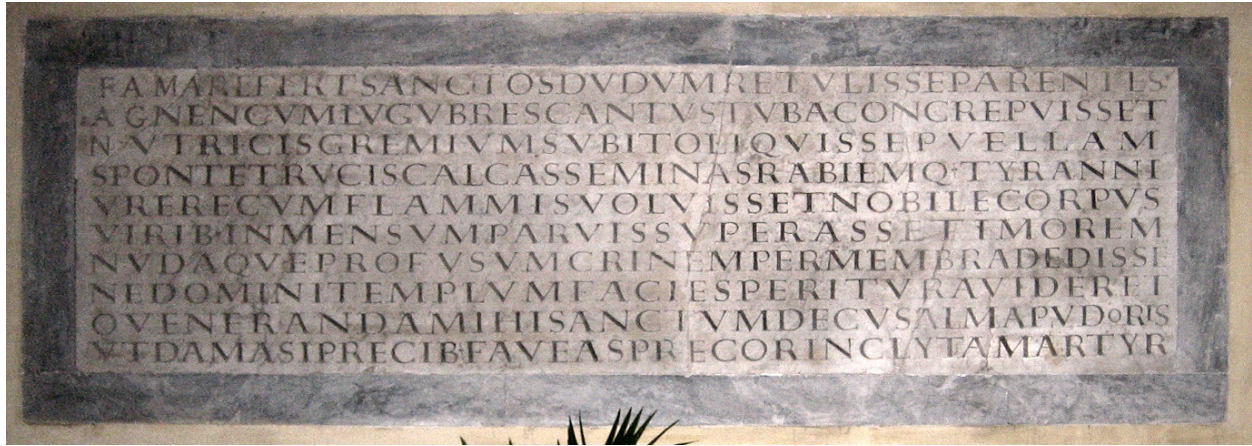


Figure 3. *Elogium Agnetis*. [http://bp2.blogger.com/\\_c6hls1MUNpg/R5TKxB7oLQI/AAAAAAAAAWA/vpD5y-MgKYs/s1600-h/Fama.jpg](http://bp2.blogger.com/_c6hls1MUNpg/R5TKxB7oLQI/AAAAAAAAAWA/vpD5y-MgKYs/s1600-h/Fama.jpg)