

# *Misdated Popes: a Mistake in the Chronology of Seventh-Century Bishops of Rome*

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*The letter sent by Kyros of Alexandria to Sergios of Constantinople in 638 appears to contain a chronological contradiction: it implies that Sergios was aware before his death of the election of Severinus as the new bishop of Rome two months earlier. Given the travelling times in the seventh century, this is impossible. The problem originates in a mistake made by Louis Duchesne when calculating the chronology of the popes for his edition of the Liber pontificalis: for the period 619–49, all his dates are one year too late. This change of the chronological framework affects the interpretation of a number of documents.*

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The letter written in 638 by Kyros, patriarch of Alexandria (633–7, 641–2), to Sergios, patriarch of Constantinople (610–38), is a short and seemingly straightforward text.<sup>1</sup> Having thanked Sergios for his earlier message, Kyros comments on the doctrinal edict that has just been issued by the emperor Heraclius (610–41). The edict, known as the *Ekthesis*, was meant to avert a conflict between the Churches of Constantinople and Rome on the subject of the wills and operations of Christ. It achieved the exact opposite: it precipitated a schism between the two Churches known as the ‘monothelete controversy’, the healing of which took the rest of the seventh century. In the weeks after its publication, however, Kyros accepted Heraclius’ edict with enthusiasm and expressed the hope that God would grant the emperor victory over ‘Saracen wilfulness’, an allusion to the on-going Muslim conquest of the

*LP* = *Liber pontificalis*; *MGH* = *Monumenta Germaniae historica*; *PL* = *Patrologia Latina*; *Regesta* = *Regesta pontificum Romanorum ab condita ecclesia ad annum post Christum natum MCXCVIII*, 3rd edn, II: *Ab a. DCIV ad a. DCCCXLIV*, ed. W. Königshaus and T. Schlauwitz, Gottingen 2017

<sup>1</sup> *Concilium Lateranense a. 649 celebratum*, ed. R. Riedinger, Berlin 1984, 172; trans. in R. Price, *The acts of the Lateran Synod of 649*, Liverpool 2014, 235–6.

eastern provinces of the Roman empire. In 638, when the letter was written, Syria and Palestine had already been lost, and the fate of Egypt looked uncertain. Kyros's letter to Sergios is a rare contemporary reaction to these events. But its significance also lies elsewhere. Its references to the bishops of Rome and Constantinople cannot be reconciled with their currently accepted chronology. Either the text is corrupt or something is wrong with our chronological framework for the seventh century.

The first possibility can be discarded. It is true that documents included in such dossiers related to the monothelite controversy as the Lateran acts – which preserved the letter of Kyros to Sergios – were manipulated in various ways. Taking extracts out of context was the most common technique. But they were not, as a rule, textually altered, the entire point of their use being to confound the 'heretics' (such as Kyros) with their own words.<sup>2</sup>

This article argues therefore for the latter possibility, namely that the chronology of the popes of Rome is flawed by a systematic error that affects most of the first half of the seventh century. I will first establish that the chronological contradiction contained in the letter of Sergios to Kyros is inescapable. I will then retrace the procedure by which Louis Duchesne, in the later nineteenth century, calculated the dates of the bishops of Rome, and will propose a correction to his chronology. Finally, I will review the implications. On the one hand, the now rehabilitated letter of Kyros to Sergios opens up a new perspective on the career of Kyros, a key political operator in the last years of Heraclius' reign, and in particular on the vexed question of his exile on the eve of the Arab conquest of Egypt. This, in turn, leads to a reappraisal of narrative sources on this event and, consequently, of its course. I have investigated these questions elsewhere.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, the proposed change in papal chronology – treated as a secure framework by historians of the British Isles, Merovingian Gaul, Italy and Byzantium – affects the interpretation of several sources pertaining to the Western Church. It also significantly simplifies the narrative of the beginnings of the monothelite controversy, the main theological and political controversy of the Christian world in the seventh century.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The authenticity of Kyros's letter is discussed in M. Jankowiak, 'P.Lond. I 113.10, the exile of patriarch Kyros of Alexandria and the Arab conquest of Egypt', *Travaux et mémoires* xxvi (2022), 287–314 at pp. 288–90. My earlier doubts in 'Essai d'histoire politique du monothélisme', unpubl. PhD diss. Paris–Warsaw 2009, 159, echoed in recent scholarship, were unfounded.

<sup>3</sup> Idem, 'The exile of Kyros'.

<sup>4</sup> Idem, 'The date of the *Ekthesis* and the beginnings of the monothelite controversy', forthcoming.

*Travelling in the seventh century*

The circumstances in which Kyros wrote his letter to Sergios can be established with much precision. It was elicited by a message from Sergios accompanied by an attachment described by Kyros in the following terms:

the most glorious general Eustathios ... brought to me the all-honoured words of the God-honoured beatitude of my distinguished master [Sergios], enclosing a copy, [addressed] to Isaac the most exalted patrician and exarch of Italy, of the exposition (ἐκθέσεως) of our all-venerable faith composed in a manner timely, far-sighted and pleasing to God by our most pious and God-protected master and great emperor, which now needs to be ratified by our common brother the most holy Severinus, who, with the help of God, is to be consecrated in Rome.<sup>5</sup>

This situates Kyros's letter in the context of the lengthy vacancy of the see of Rome that followed the death of Pope Honorius, traditionally dated to 12 October 638. According to the Roman *Liber pontificalis*, the *interregnum* lasted for one year, seven months and seventeen days, and was the longest in the seventh century.<sup>6</sup> This can only mean that the usual confirmation of the pope-elect by the emperor was for some time withheld, a supposition confirmed not only by Kyros's reference to 'the help of God' needed for the consecration of Severinus, but also by an independent source: the account of the negotiations of Roman legates in Constantinople, luckily preserved in an excerpt from a letter from Maximos, known as the Confessor, to Abbot Thalassios.<sup>7</sup>

In this short fragment, Maximos reports a 'great and lengthy commotion' that took place in Constantinople because of 'the dogmas of His [i.e. God's] catholic, holy and apostolic Church' after the arrival of the envoys of a new pope seeking the approval of his candidature.<sup>8</sup> The 'holy churchmen' of Constantinople made their assent conditional on

<sup>5</sup> 'Ευστάθιος ὁ ἐνδοξότατος στρατηλάτης ... ἀπεκόμισέ μοι παντίμους συλλαβάς τῆς τοῦ ἐξαίρετου μου δεσπότης θεοτιμήτου μακαριότητος, ἔνδον ἐχούσας καὶ ἴσον τῆς εὐκαιρῶς προνοητικῶς τε ἅμα καὶ θεοφιλῶς γενομένης Ἐκθέσεως τῆς πανσέπτου ἡμῶν πίστεως παρὰ τοῦ εὐσεβεστάτου καὶ θεοστηρίκτου ἡμῶν δεσπότης καὶ μεγάλου βασιλέως πρὸς Ἰσαάκιον τὸν ὑπερφύεστατον πατρικίον καὶ ἔξαρχον τῆς Ἰταλίας, τῆς καὶ ὀφειλουσῆς προσομολογηθῆναι παρὰ τοῦ κοινουῦ ἀδελφοῦ Σεβηρίνου τοῦ ἀγιωτάτου σὺν θεῷ χειροτονουμένου ἐν Ῥώμῃ': *Concilium Lateranense*, 172, lines 9–16; trans. Price, *Lateran Synod*, 235, slightly modified.

<sup>6</sup> 'et cessavit episcopatus ann. I mens. VII dies XVII': *LP* 324, line 13.

<sup>7</sup> *PL* cxxix 583D–586B, with M. Jankowiak and P. Booth, 'A new date-list of the works of Maximus the Confessor', in P. Allen and B. Neil (eds), *Oxford handbook to Maximus the Confessor*, Oxford 2015, 19–83 at pp. 59–60, no. 58 (in view of the argument below, the date should be corrected from '640' to 'late 638 or 639'). The fragment was excerpted and translated into Latin in the ninth century by Anastasius the Librarian.

<sup>8</sup> 'multa huius rei gratia et proluxa quaedam in ea facta sit motio, id est in regia urbe, a sacratibus illius ecclesiasticis viris: et prius quidem, sed praecipue per idem tempus,

the acceptance by the pope-elect of ‘the dogmatic document (*charta*) that they have now published’.<sup>9</sup> The legates refused to commit themselves but promised to ask the new pope to subscribe to it, and, after long debates, obtained the imperial *iussio* allowing the consecration of Severinus. Maximos, who saw a copy of the *charta*, reports that it banned discussions on the operations of Christ. Even if he does not refer to the matter of Christ’s will, there is little doubt that this was the *Ekthesis*: the statement on one will came to be considered its main point only later, and Maximos may have mentioned it in the lost section of the letter (even though this is unlikely given the specific interest of the excerptor, Anastasius the Librarian, in the history of the monothelete controversy).

Kyros’s reference to Severinus fits well the scenario described by Maximos. The copy of the *Ekthesis* that he enthusiastically accepted was, in fact, addressed not to him but to the exarch of Italy Isaac, who was in turn supposed to present it to Severinus. The dispatch of the *Ekthesis* to the highest imperial official in Italy was certainly meant to put additional pressure on the pope-elect to accept it, and only makes sense after the refusal of his legates to subscribe to it in his name. It follows that Kyros wrote his letter to Sergios around the time when the Roman embassy was about to leave Constantinople.

Herein lies the problem. Kyros’s letter implies that many months had elapsed since the death of Pope Honorius, usually dated to 12 October 638. At the same time, it was written in response to a communication from Sergios who is thought to have died fifty-eight days later, on 9 December 638. Sergios must have been aware of the death of Honorius, because he appended to his letter a copy of the *Ekthesis* destined for his successor. The problem is that fifty-eight days is not enough for the news of Honorius’ death in Rome to reach Constantinople,<sup>10</sup> not to speak of the lengthy negotiations supposedly conducted by the legates of Severinus within this time. There is a chronological contradiction here, and this is irrespective of where Kyros wrote his letter: in Alexandria or, as I argued elsewhere, in the vicinity of Constantinople.<sup>11</sup>

quando illic missos in causa promotionis papae cum delatis decretis apocrisarios susceperunt’: *PL* cxxix.583D–584D.

<sup>9</sup> ‘tunc enim, tunc post plurimos sermones, quos ad eos causa consecrationis moverunt, novissime ad effectum eius, atque ad ipsius desiderii completionem, protulerunt eis dogmaticam chartam nunc ab eis expositam, asserentes: Non aliter vobis in capitulo, pro quo tantum transigentes navigium hunc venistis, favorem praestabimus, nisi prius vos suasuros ei qui sacrandus est profiteamini, huic chartae subscribere et dogmatibus quae in ea continentur exceptis dilationibus consentire’: *PL* cxxix.584D–585A.

<sup>10</sup> Pace H. Ohme, ‘Die Konstantinopler Synoden von 638/9 (?) und die *Ekthesis* des Kaisers Herakleios (610–641)’, *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* cxxix (2018), 289–315 at p. 308 n. 129.

<sup>11</sup> On Kyros’s location see Jankowiak, ‘The exile of Kyros’, 293. For the traditional position placing the exile of Kyros only in 640 see, most recently, P. Booth, ‘The last

It is certain that travel between Rome and Constantinople took more than fifty-eight days thanks to the relatively abundant information about the circulation of letters and envoys between the two cities in the seventh century. In the case of several embassies, we know the dates of both their departure and arrival. The apocrisaries (legates) of Pope Vitalian, for example, left Rome soon after his ordination on 30 July 657, and reached Constantinople a little before 18 April 658.<sup>12</sup> Their journey, interrupted by the winter, took around eight months. The legates dispatched by Pope Agatho to represent him at the Sixth Ecumenical Council carried the letter of 125 bishops who met in Rome in late March 680, and arrived to Constantinople a little before or on 10 September of the same year, when Emperor Constantine IV, having consulted them, convoked the ecumenical council.<sup>13</sup> Even though they used imperial ships, they needed four months to make the journey in the summer, and seven months to return, partly in the winter: they carried a document issued in Constantinople on 23 December 681, and arrived to Rome in July 682.<sup>14</sup> Several decades later, Pope Constantine left the harbour of Rome on 5 October 710 and returned to his city on 24 October 711: his biographer does not tell us how long he spent in Constantinople and Nicomedia, where he met the Emperor Justinian II, but it is clear that each leg of his journey took several months.<sup>15</sup> The fastest known journey between Rome and Constantinople in the seventh century was that of another pope, Martin, who, immediately after his arrest in Rome, was put on a ship at Portus on 19 June 653 and delivered to Constantinople three months later, on 17 September; but this was a case of a high-ranking political prisoner whom the imperial government was anxious to remove from Italy as fast as possible, and who travelled, if we believe his own account, in very uncomfortable conditions (even if he was apparently accompanied by six or seven servants): he

years of Cyrus, patriarch of Alexandria († 642)', *Travaux et mémoires* xx/1 (2016), 509–58 at pp. 511–20.

<sup>12</sup> *LP*, 343, lines 1–3; Maximus, *Letter to Anastasius*, in P. Allen and B. Neil, *Scripta saeculi VII vitam Maximi Confessoris illustrantia*, Corpus Christianorum Series Graeca xxxix, Turnhout 1999, pp. xvi, 161, lines 3–4; trans. P. Allen and B. Neil in *Maximus the Confessor and his companions: documents from exile*, Oxford 2002, 121; Jankowiak, 'Essai', 329–30.

<sup>13</sup> Eddius Stephanus, *The life of Bishop Wilfrid*, ed. B. Colgrave, Cambridge 1927, 112; *Concilium universale Constantinopolitanum tertium*, ed. R. Riedinger, Berlin 1990–2, 8, line 29–10, line 4. On the council of 680–1 in general see R. Price and M. Jankowiak (eds), *The acts of the Third Council of Constantinople (680–1)*, forthcoming.

<sup>14</sup> *Concilium Constantinopolitanum tertium*, 867, lines 10–12; 871, lines 8–10. For imperial ships see p. 10, lines 2–4.

<sup>15</sup> *LP*, 389–91. See also K.-P. Todt, 'Die letzte Papstreise nach Byzanz: der Besuch Papst Konstantins I. in Konstantinopel im Jahre 711. Zugleich ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Papstreisen', *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* cxiii (2002), 24–50.

was allowed to wash only two or three times on his way.<sup>16</sup> His journey was faster than, for instance, the spread of the news of the death of Pope Donus on 11 April 678 that had not reached Constantinople four months later, on 12 August 678, when Constantine IV still addressed a letter to him.<sup>17</sup>

We are here a far cry from the travel time of 21.3 days optimistically predicted by the ORBIS model or journeys of one month recorded in the sixth-century *Collectio Avellana*, when both the Via Appia and the Via Egnatia were still practicable.<sup>18</sup> None of them could be used in the seventh century, the former being blocked by the Lombards, and the latter by the Slavs and Avars. The difficulty of travelling overland is illustrated by the land journey of Justinian II from Constantinople to Thessaloniki in 688, recorded as a feat in the chronicle of Theophanes; an army sent on the same route by Constantine IV in about 678 did not get that far.<sup>19</sup> Travel by land from Constantinople to the second city of the empire, let alone across the Balkans, was thus impossible in the seventh century. The itineraries of the two popes who travelled to Constantinople suggest that the Gulf of Corinth was also closed for navigation: Martin journeyed *via* Messina, Calabria, ‘many islands’, Naxos and Abydos, whereas

<sup>16</sup> *PL* cxxix.590A–C, 592A–C (servants are mentioned at 590B; cf. B. Neil, *Seventh-century popes and martyrs: the political hagiography of Anastasius Bibliothecarius*, Turnhout 2006, 181 n. 57). For the date of the departure from Rome see M. McCormick, *Origins of the European economy*, Cambridge 2001, 483–8, esp. p. 485 n. 65. Another instance of an exceptionally fast transmission of information is the disputation of Maximos with Pyrrhos in Carthage in July 645 that seems to react to the letter of Paul of Constantinople to Pope Theodore dispatched in May of the same year.

<sup>17</sup> *LP*, 348, line 13; *Concilium Constantinopolitanum tertium*, 2, lines 7–9. The delay in the spread of this information cannot be laid on the blockade of Constantinople by the Arabs, traditionally dated to 674–8, but which in fact took place in 667–9; M. Jankowiak, ‘The first Arab siege of Constantinople’, *Travaux et mémoires xvii* (2013), 237–320. Nor can it be explained by the supposed habit of the imperial chancellery to address letters to the defunct pope until the announcement of the ordination of his successor, as proposed by L. Duchesne: ‘Le Liber diurnus et les élections pontificales au VII<sup>e</sup> siècle’, *Bibliothèque de l’École des chartes* lvi (1891), 5–30 at pp. 18–20. The only possible instance, that of letters sent to Pope Agatho by the Third Council of Constantinople nine months after his death, is justified by the necessity to conceal his death in order to prevent the loss of the credentials of his legates: Price and Jankowiak, *The Third Council of Constantinople*.

<sup>18</sup> <<http://orbis.stanford.edu>>; O. Günther, ‘Beiträge zur Chronologie der Briefe des Papstes Hormisda’, *Sitzungsberichte der Philosophisch-Historischen Classe der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften* cxxvi (1892), xi, esp. pp. 45–50. See also *Collectio Avellana*, ed. O. Guenther, *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* xxxv, Vienna 1895–8, §199, a letter sent from Constantinople on 31 August 520 and already received in Rome on 1 October. But §232, sent nine days later, did not arrive in Rome until 30 November, and most journeys took more than two months, including in the summer.

<sup>19</sup> Theophanes, *Chronicle*, trans. C. Mango and R. Scott, Oxford 1997, AM 6180; Jankowiak, ‘The first Arab siege’, 287–9 (with reference to the *Miracles of St Demetrios*).

Constantine stopped on his way in Naples, Sicily, Reggio, Crotona, Gallipoli, Otranto (where he wintered) and Keos. The only connection between Rome and Constantinople was by the sea, around the Italian boot and the infamous Cape Malea at the tip of the Peloponnesus.<sup>20</sup>

These lengthy travel times are further confirmed by notices on the *interregna* between successive pontificates in the *Liber pontificalis*. The biography of each pope records the interval between his death (or rather burial) and the ordination of his successor (see Table 1 below). This time was necessary for the election and ordination of a new pope, and, above all, for the approval of his candidature by the emperor who, however, could delegate this prerogative to the exarch of Italy.<sup>21</sup> The length of the period of *sede vacante* thus corresponds to that of the return journey of papal legates to and from Constantinople or Ravenna. This not only gives an idea of the travel times, but also allows us to guess where a given pope was confirmed, information only exceptionally provided explicitly by the sources.

It appears that from the Justinianic conquest of Italy until the early seventh century bishops of Rome sought the assent of the emperor in Constantinople.<sup>22</sup> The *interregna* between their pontificates ranged between four and twelve months, depending on whether the legates were able to return to Rome before the closure of the sea in winter.<sup>23</sup> Their sudden reduction to less than two months in 618 and 624 is a sign that

<sup>20</sup> PL cxxix.590B–C, 592A–B; LP, 390. On the difficulty of navigating around Cape Malea see D. Henning, ‘Die antiken Seehandelsroute um Kap Malea’, *Münstersche Beiträge zur antiken Handelsgeschichte* xx (2001), 23–37, and the proud epitaph of T. Flavius Zeuxis from Hierapolis (c. 100 AD) who ‘sailed around Cape Malea towards Italy on seventy-two sailings’ (Corpus Inscriptionum Graecarum, 3920; see also *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum* li [2001], no. 502).

<sup>21</sup> Documents relative to the election and approval of a new pope are extant in the *Liber diurnus Romanorum pontificum*, ed. T. E. von Sickel, Vienna 1889, §57–63, 82–5. See also J.-M. Sansterre, ‘La Date des formules 60–63 du “Liber diurnus”’, *Byzantion* xlviii (1978), 226–43. The doubts on this procedure of R. McKitterick, ‘The papacy and Byzantium in the seventh- and early eighth-century sections of the *Liber pontificalis*’, *Papers of the British School at Rome* lxxxiv (2016), 241–73 at pp. 263–4, are unfounded. The new bishop was elected on the third day after the burial of his predecessor: ‘hic [Boniface III] fecit constitutum ... ut nullus pontificem viventem aut episcopum civitatis suae praesumat loqui aut partes sibi facere, nisi tertio die depositionis eius, adunato clero et filiis ecclesiae, tunc electio fiat’: LP, 316, lines 3–6.

<sup>22</sup> This is explicitly attested for Gregory I in 590: *Gregorii episcopi Turonensis libri historiarum* X, ed. B. Krusch and W. Levison, MGH, *Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum* 1, 2nd edn, Hannover 1951, x. 1. It is also implied for Boniface III in 607: LP, 316. The LP specifies that Pelagius II (579–90) ‘ordinatur absque iussione principis eo quod Langobardi obsederent civitatem Romanam et multa vastatio ab eis in Italia fieret’ (p. 309, lines 1–2) which shows that this was an exception. See also, on what follows, H. Leclercq, ‘Liber diurnus’, in *Dictionnaire d’archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie*, ix, Paris 1929, 243–344 at cols 256–63 (to be read bearing in mind the recent change of perspective on the monothelete controversy).

<sup>23</sup> The *mare clausum* is traditionally dated 11 November–10 March.



Table 1. *Chronological data on the popes contained in the Liber pontificalis as established by Louis Duchesne*

Pope	Tenure	<i>Depositio</i>	Dates according to Duchesne	Following vacancy	Likely confirmation place of the successor
Sabinianus	1y 5m 9d	[22 Feb.]	13 Sept. 604– 22 Feb. 606	11m 26d	Constantinople
Boniface III	8m 22d	[12 Nov.]	19 Feb. 607– 12 Nov. 607	10m 6d	Constantinople
Boniface IV	6y 8m 13d	[25 May]	25 Aug. 608– 8 May 615	6m 25d	Constantinople
Deusdedit	3y 23d	[8 Nov.]	19 Oct. 615– 8 Nov. 618	1m 16d	Ravenna
Boniface V	5y [10m?]	[25 Oct.]	23 Dec. 619– 25 Oct. 625	13d	Rome?
Honorius	12y 11m 17d	12 Oct.	27 Oct. 625– 12 Oct. 638	1y 7m 17d	Constantinople
Severinus	2m 4d	2 Aug.	28 May 640– 2 Aug. 640	4d 24d	Ravenna
John IV	1y 9m 19d	12 Oct.	24 Dec. 640– 12 Oct. 642	1m 13d	Ravenna
Theodore	6y 5m 18d	14 May	24 Nov. 642– 14 May 649	52d	Ravenna?
Martin	6y 1m 26d	17 Sept.	22 July 649– 17 June 653	not given	Constantinople
Eugenius	2y 9m 24d	2 June	10 Aug. 654– 2 June 657	1m 28d	Ravenna
Vitalian	13y 6m	27 Jan.	30 July 657– 27 Jan. 672	2m 13d	Ravenna
Adeodatus	4y 2m 5d	26 June	11 Apr. 672– 17 June 676	4m 15d	Ravenna
Donus	1y 5m 10d	11 Apr.	2 Nov. 676– 11 Apr. 678	2m 15d	Ravenna
Agatho	2y 6m 14d	10 Jan.	27 June 678– 10 Jan. 681	1y 7m 5d	Constantinople
Leo II	10m 17d	3 July	17 Aug. 682– 3 July 683	11m 22d	Constantinople
Benedict II	10m 12d	8 May	26 June 684– 8 May 685	2m 15d	Ravenna
John V	1y 9d	2 Aug.	23 July 685– 2 Aug. 686	2m 18d	Ravenna

Notes: y = years; m = months; d = days

Data derived from *LP*, pp. cclv–cclvii (Duchesne's calculations) and 315–67 (edited text)



the Persian and Avaro-Slavic invasions made travel to Constantinople too dangerous, and that the approval of the elect had been delegated to the exarch of Ravenna.<sup>24</sup> The interpretation of the later *interregna* is complicated by the monothelite controversy that caused the two patriarchates to break communion in *c.* 647–54 and *c.* 670–81. But in the four cases where we can be sure that Roman legates travelled to Constantinople, the *vacatio sedis* lasted between eleven and twenty months, implying one-way journeys of several months.<sup>25</sup> The *interregna* were reduced again to between forty and ninety days as soon as Constantine IV had delegated the right to approve the pope-elect to the exarch of Ravenna in 684.<sup>26</sup>

Thus, in an era when land and sea communications were disrupted by the Lombards, Slavs, Persians and soon the Arabs, no known journey between Rome and Constantinople took less than three months, and this only in the summer.<sup>27</sup> Shorter journeys may have been possible, as is suggested by a late seventh-century exarch of Ravenna who reportedly observed that ‘no-one can go to Constantinople and return in three months’, implying a one-way journey of at least forty-five days.<sup>28</sup> But they are not attested; and it should be borne in mind that, firstly, sailing to Rome, as opposed to from Ravenna, involved the laborious circumnavigation of the Italian peninsula and, secondly, that the embassies discussed here were composed of senior, no doubt often elderly, clerics.

It is manifest that the legates of Severinus—who were dispatched after the death of Honorius on 12 October 638, travelled in late autumn, and must have wintered on their way—could not have arrived in

<sup>24</sup> See below for these dates. The fact that the most extensive ninth-century Byzantine catalogue of bishops of Rome ends with Boniface IV (608–15) points in the same direction: Nikephoros, *Chronographikon syntomon*, ed. C. de Boor, *Nicephori archiepiscopi Constantinopolitani Opuscula historica*, Lipsiae 1880, 79–135 at p. 123, with C. Mango and R. Scott, *The chronicle of Theophanes Confessor*, Oxford 1997, p. lxxi.

<sup>25</sup> These were the legates of Severinus, Eugenius, Leo II and Benedict II. For all the other vacancies it can be assumed that the pope-elect asked the exarch of Ravenna for approval. Only Martin is known to have dispensed with this formality: S. Brock, ‘An early Syriac life of Maximus the Confessor’, *Analecta Bollandiana* xci (1973), 299–346 at p. 318, §21.

<sup>26</sup> *LP*, 363, lines 12–14, speaks of the imperial concession to ordain the elected pope ‘e vestigio absque tarditate’, but p. 368, lines 15–16, makes it clear that the popes were still confirmed by the exarchs of Ravenna, ‘ut mos est’.

<sup>27</sup> My original assessment of about seventy days in Jankowiak, ‘Essai’, 159, although judged too pessimistic by Ohme, ‘Die Konstantinopler Synoden’, 308 n. 129, was in fact too optimistic.

<sup>28</sup> ‘nullus est, qui in tribus mensibus Constantinopolim ire et reuertere possit’: *Agnelli Ravennatis Liber pontificalis ecclesiae Ravennatis*, ed. D. M. Deliyannis, *Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis* cxcix, Turnhout 2006, §132, p. 309; trans. by D. M. Deliyannis in *The book of pontiffs of the Church of Ravenna*, Washington, DC 2004, 256. On travel duration in late antiquity see D. Claude, *Der Handel im westlichen Mittelmeer während des Frühmittelalters*, Göttingen 1985, 62–6. McCormick argues for faster journeys after about 800, perhaps thanks to night-sailing: *Origins*, 491–9.

Constantinople before the spring of 639. Their negotiations probably took the bulk of the warm season, so that they had to winter again on their way back to Rome, judging from the date of the ordination of Severinus, traditionally dated at 28 May 640. And yet, Kyros and Sergios appear to have discussed the outcome of their talks in Constantinople before the death of the latter on 9 December 638. The conclusion is inescapable: the date of the death of either Honorius or Sergios is wrong.

Which of them? That of Sergios is confirmed by several independent sources. The date of 9 December 638 results from the addition of the length of his tenure given by patriarchal catalogues – twenty-eight years, seven months and twenty-one days – to the date of his ordination known from the *Chronicon Paschale*, 18 April 610. This date concords with that of his funeral on Sunday 13 December 638, and the mention of a second indiction (September 638–August 639) as the date of his death in a chronicle that may have been composed by his successor.<sup>29</sup> This leaves little room for doubt that Sergios did die in early December 638. No such external confirmation is forthcoming for the date of the death of Honorius, which is derived solely from the data contained in the *Liber pontificalis*. Is it possible that it has been miscalculated?

#### *Abbé Duchesne and the chronology of the Liber pontificalis*

The biographies of seventh-century popes in the *Liber pontificalis* contain, with almost no exception, three chronological indications: the length of the pontificate; that of the vacancy following the death of a pope, both given in years, months and days; and the day and month (but not the year) of his burial (*depositio*).<sup>30</sup> The first two belong to the original recension of the biographies and display relatively little variation between the main families of manuscripts; as for the burial dates, they are probably later interpolations in the biographies of the popes from Pelagius I to Boniface v, but are original from Honorius on.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Sources: *Chronicon Paschale*, ed. L. Dindorf, Bonn 1832, 699, trans. Mary Whitby and Michael Whitby in *Chronicon Paschale 284–628 AD*, Liverpool 1989, 149 and n. 419; Nikephoros, *Chronographikon syntomon*, 118; Constantin VII Porphyrogénète, *Le Livre des cérémonies*, ed. G. Dagron and B. Flusin, Paris 2020, ii. 30 (iii. 209), with commentary at iv/2, 731–2; Nikephoros, *Short history*, ed. and trans. C. Mango, Washington, DC 1990, §26 (on the author of its source see Jankowiak, ‘The exile of Kyros’, 291). For modern calculations see E. W. Brooks, ‘On the lists of the patriarchs of Constantinople from 638 to 715’, *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* vi (1897), 33–54 at p. 45; and J. L. van Dieten, *Geschichte der Patriarchen von Sergios I. bis Johannes VI. (610–715)*, Amsterdam 1972, 51, 56.

<sup>30</sup> The precise dates of death of the popes are unknown, but for the sake of convenience they are usually equated with those of their burials.

<sup>31</sup> *LP*, pp. ccxviii–ccxix. The interpolated dates are likely to have been mostly copied from the epitaphs of the popes in Old St Peter’s, but this is not the case at least for Boniface iv: see below.

None of these indications contains any absolute year dates.<sup>32</sup> These were calculated by Louis Duchesne in his magisterial edition of the *Liber pontificalis* published in 1886.<sup>33</sup> His general approach was to add the lengths of the pontificates and vacancies to the few exact dates of deaths of the popes that can be established from their letters and epitaphs, in the first place that of Gregory I, whose register of letters begins in September indiction 9 (590) and ends in March indiction 7 (604), very close to the date of the *depositio* noted in his epitaph, 12 March.<sup>34</sup> As for the epitaphs, even though the full series belonging to popes from Gregory I to Honorius had been copied before the demolition of the Old Saint Peter's in the early sixteenth century, only two contain the full date of the *depositio*: those of Boniface III (12 November 607) and Boniface IV (8 May 612, but the year needs to be corrected to 615).<sup>35</sup> Finally, the exact date of the death of Pope Martin in exile in Crimea is known: 16 September 655.<sup>36</sup>

On this basis and with the help of two additional assumptions – that the ordinations of the popes took place on Sundays, and that the lengths of pontificates were more significant and therefore more likely to be correctly remembered than those of the vacancies<sup>37</sup> – Duchesne was able to build a consistent, and for the most part uncontroversial, chronology of the bishops of Rome. His hesitations as to the precise day of the ordination or death of a pope rarely involved a margin of error greater than several days or weeks. But the dates of Boniface V turned out to be a hard nut to crack:

Après Deusdedit nous rencontrons une difficulté spéciale. La durée du pontificat de Boniface V, 5 ans et 10 mois, additionnée avec les deux vacances avant et après ce pape, donne juste six ans moins un jour et nous conduit au commencement de novembre 624. Or il est sûr, par les documents de la correspondance pontificale, que Boniface V siégeait encore en 625 et qu'Honorius lui succéda vers la fin de cette année. Il y a donc erreur d'un an, soit dans les chiffres de vacance entre Deusdedit et Boniface V, soit dans les chiffres de siège attribués à Boniface V. La

<sup>32</sup> The *LP* is in general very sparing with absolute dates: the only exception in the first half of the seventh century is an earthquake dated to August 618, shortly before the death of Deusdedit (p. 319, line 7). <sup>33</sup> *LP*, pp. cclv–cclvii.

<sup>34</sup> Gregory I, *Registrum epistularum*, ed. D. Norberg, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina cxi, Turnhout 1982; epitaph: *LP*, 314 n. 10 (the year is not noted).

<sup>35</sup> The epitaphs are reproduced in the notes to the biographies of the individual popes in the *LP*: see especially pp. 316 n. 3 (Boniface III) and 318 n. 4 (Boniface IV, read 'anno eius v' for 'anno eius ii').

<sup>36</sup> 'μηνὶ Σεπτεμβρίῳ 15 ἰνδικτιῶνος 18': Theodore Spoudaios, *Hypomnestikon*, in *Scripta saeculi VII*, 213 (trans. by Allen and Neil in *Maximus the Confessor*, 161); preferable to *LP*, 338, line 21 (17 Sept. 655).

<sup>37</sup> One could, however, argue the opposite: the vacancies are shorter and therefore easier to calculate, and are placed at the end of the biographies of the popes (rather than at the beginning of those of their successors) implying that they were recorded soon after their deaths, when at least some of the biographies were composed.

première hypothèse est la seule admissible, en raison d'abord de la différence d'autorité des deux groupes de chiffres, ensuite parce que la vie de Boniface v place, avant son ordination, la révolte de l'exarque Eleuthère, et nous fournit ainsi l'explication d'une vacance plus longue que de coutume. Nous admettrons donc 1 an, 1 mois et 15 jours de vacance après Deusdedit. Cette correction faite, l'ordination de Boniface v est fixée au dimanche 23 décembre 619, tant par les chiffres de vacance qui tombent juste, que par les chiffres du siège, qui conduisent au mardi 25.<sup>38</sup>

It is not necessary to engage with the detail of this calculation, which is based on more assumptions and emendations than it may at first appear. The length of the tenure of Boniface v, '5 years' in the best manuscripts of the *Liber pontificalis*, was reasonably corrected by Duchesne to '5 years 10 months' on the basis of other catalogues of popes.<sup>39</sup> It is indeed likely that the number of months and days fell out at an early stage of transmission. Duchesne then added the length of the pontificate of Boniface v (plus the preceding and following vacancies) to the date of the death of his predecessor Deusdedit (8 November 618) that he had calculated, in turn, from the date of the *depositio* of the previous pope, Boniface iv (known from his epitaph), and the length of the tenure of Deusdedit (given by the *Liber pontificalis*).<sup>40</sup> But the resulting date of the ordination of Honorius, November 624, is, according to Duchesne, impossible because there exist letters of Boniface v demonstrating that he was still in office in 625. There must be somewhere an error of a year, either in the length of the vacancy preceding Boniface v or in that of his pontificate. Without hesitation, Duchesne chose the first possibility: not only *per* his

<sup>38</sup> 'After Deusdedit, we encounter a special difficulty. The length of the pontificate of Boniface v, 5 years and 10 months, added to the two vacancies before and after that pope, gives only six years less one day, which leads us to the beginning of November 624. It is, however, certain from the documents of papal correspondence that Boniface v was still in office in 625 and that Honorius succeeded him towards the end of that year. There is thus an error of a year, either in the length of the vacancy between Deusdedit and Boniface v, or in the length of the tenure attributed to Boniface v. Only the first hypothesis can be accepted, first because of the difference in the authority of the two groups of data, and then because the life of Boniface v places the revolt of exarch Eleutherius before his ordination and thus provides the explanation for a longer vacancy than usual. We accept, then, 1 year, 1 month and 15 days of vacancy after Deusdedit. With this correction, the ordination of Boniface v is dated to Sunday 23 December 619 both by the length of the vacancy, which is exact, and by the length of the tenure that points towards Tuesday 25': *LP*, p. cclvi.

<sup>39</sup> *LP*, p. cclvi n. 4 and *app. crit. ad p.* 321, line 1. See also pp. 28–33 for the relevant catalogues.

<sup>40</sup> Duchesne struggled, in *LP*, p. cclvi, with the date of the ordination of Deusdedit. It can be calculated based on three items of information, each of which implies a different date: the death of Boniface iv as known from his epitaph; the same date as interpolated in his biography in the *LP*; or the death of Deusdedit. Duchesne decided for the third, but the first is also possible.

assumption that lengths of tenures are more likely to be correct than those of the vacancies, but also because political turmoil in Italy in 618 might explain why the vacancy lasted for over a year. He concluded that a year should be added to the vacancy between Deusdedit and Boniface v, and that the ordination of the latter should be fixed to 23 December 619, not 618.<sup>41</sup>

This is a complex and coherent argument. But its complexity disguises several arbitrary corrections, the questionable choice of the date of the death of Deusdedit, the brevity of the revolt of the exarch Eleutherius<sup>42</sup> and, above all, the insertion of a full year between popes Deusdedit and Boniface v—which was necessitated, according to Duchesne, by the existence of letters of Boniface v dated to the year 625.

Duchesne did not reference them, but he certainly had in mind three letters of Boniface v included by Bede in his *Ecclesiastical history of the English people*, and addressed to Justus archbishop of Canterbury, Edwin king of Northumbria, and his wife Æthelburh of Kent.<sup>43</sup> Bede did not copy their dates, but he situated them quite precisely within his chronology of English bishops: he inserted the letter to Justus right after the notice of the death of his predecessor Mellitus on 24 April 624, and those to Edwin and Æthelburh after the account of the journey of Paulinus, who had been ordained bishop by Justus on 21 July 625, to Northumbria in the train of Æthelburh, betrothed to the still pagan Edwin. More precisely, in his narrative Æthelburh and Edwin receive the letters soon after the birth of their daughter Eanfled on Easter of the following year (20 April 626).<sup>44</sup> According to this chronology, Boniface v must have written to them in late 625, and therefore could not have died a year earlier.

<sup>41</sup> The dates of ordination of Boniface v and Honorius have been also debated independently of the chronology of the *LP*, in the context of the date of the *Liber diurnus*, especially of the *decretum de electione pontificis* (formula 82 in the Vatican manuscript, *Liber diurnus Romanorum pontificum*, ed. H. Förster, Bern 1958, 221, lines 23–4): see Th. von Sickel, ‘Prolegomena zum Liber diurnus II.’, *Sitzungsberichte der philosophisch-historischen Classe der kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften* cxvii (1889), xiii, 35–8, 63–72, and the reaction of L. Duchesne, ‘Le Liber diurnus et les élections pontificales au viii siècle’, *Bibliothèque de l’École des chartes* lii (1891), 5–30 at pp. 22–3. This debate does not bear on my argument.

<sup>42</sup> This is emphasised in the main source, the *Auctarii Hafniensis extrema*, ed. T. Mommsen, *Chronica minora saec. IV. V. VI. VII: Volumen I*, MGH, Auctores Antiquissimi ix, Berlin 1892, 339, §23: ‘sed temerae usurpationis audacia non diu potitus est.’ See also J. R. Martindale, *Prosopography of the later Roman Empire*, III: A.D. 527–641, Cambridge 1992, s.v. Eleutherius.

<sup>43</sup> Bede, *HE* ii. 8, 10–11. See also *Regesta* 3211, 3213–14. Another letter of Boniface v to Justus, inserted in the *Gesta pontificum Anglorum* of William of Malmesbury (*Regesta* 3215), is spurious. No other letter of Boniface v from 625 is known.

<sup>44</sup> Bede, *HE* ii. 7–11. There is a good commentary in D. P. Kirby, *The earliest English kings*, rev. edn, London 2000, 30–5, 63–5.

It is tempting to accept Bede's chronology as it stands: it is coherent and requires no conversion into our system given that he was one of the first chroniclers to count years *ab incarnatione Domini*. But Bede encountered the same problems as any historian when trying to reconcile dates from various sources. He placed, for instance, the death of Pope Gregory I in 605, one year too late, which suggests that his date of the beginning of the pontificate of Boniface V should also be moved one year earlier, from 619 to 618 (which, incidentally, contradicts Duchesne's intercalary year).<sup>45</sup> His dates of the death of Mellitus and the ordination of Paulinus are expressed in years from the incarnation, indicating that they resulted from his calculations, the logic of which cannot be recovered. They 'cannot be wildly inaccurate', but it would be rash to consider them indisputable.<sup>46</sup> There are also other difficulties: the news of the ordination of Paulinus must have reached Boniface V within only three months (before 25 October 625, Duchesne's date of his death), whereas Edwin and Æthelburh, if we follow Bede in placing their marriage after the ordination of Paulinus, must have taken immediate action for their daughter to be born less than nine months later. The former is impossible, and the latter unlikely.<sup>47</sup>

It rather appears that all three letters of Boniface V must have been written at the same time.<sup>48</sup> They may have reached Bede by different channels, but they all refer to the same immediate context, that of the recent conversion of an Anglo-Saxon king, 'Aduluald' or 'Audubald', that

<sup>45</sup> Bede, *HE* ii. 1, 7.

<sup>46</sup> Quotation from Kirby, *Earliest English kings*, 32, in reference to the date of Justus' succession to Mellitus. On Bede's chronology of Northumbria see also D. P. Kirby, 'Bede and Northumbrian chronology', *EHR* lxxviii (1963), 514–27, which dates the ordination of Paulinus to 20 July 626, and S. Wood, 'Bede's Northumbrian dates again', *EHR* xcvi (1983), 280–96, which disputes Kirby's chronology.

<sup>47</sup> See E. H. Blair, 'The letters of Pope Boniface V and the mission of Paulinus to Northumbria', in P. Clemoes and K. Hughes (eds), *England before the Conquest*, Cambridge 1971, 5–13 at p. 11, although Blair mistakenly dates Easter 626 to 31 March instead of 20 April; Bede, *Storia degli inglesi*, ed. M. Lapidge, trans. P. Chiesa, Rome–Milan 2008–10, i. 372, and C. Plummer, *Venerabilis Baedae opera historica*, Oxford 1896, ii. 96–7. The news of the baptism of the Angles by Augustine at Christmas 597, communicated by Pope Gregory I to Eulogios of Alexandria in July 598, gives an indication of the speed of travel between England and Rome: Gregory I, *Registrum epistularum*, viii. 29. See also the opinion of an obstetrician on the birth of Eanfled: R. Gardener, 'The departure of Paulinus from Northumbria: a reappraisal', *Archaeologia Aeliana* 5th ser. xxiv (1996), 73–7 at pp. 76–7 n. 13.

<sup>48</sup> 'There is no reason to suppose that the original letters to Eadwine and his queen were separated in their writing from that to Archbishop Justus by any appreciable interval of time': Kirby, *Earliest English kings*, 32. But there is equally no reason to follow Kirby in inverting Bede's chronology and placing the letter to Justus after those to the Northumbrian couple.



opened up prospects for further missionary success.<sup>49</sup> The letter to Justus alludes to his plans to Christianise the neighbours of the converted king, a probable reference to his projects in Northumbria, which are, in turn, the subject of the pope's letters to the Northumbrian couple.<sup>50</sup> The latter do not mention Paulinus and make it clear that Edwin and Æthelburh are already married, contrary to what Bede's sequence of events implies.<sup>51</sup> As a result, it is not necessary to place them after the ordination of Paulinus.<sup>52</sup> Given the rarity of written communications between Rome and England, it is more than likely that all the three letters travelled together and were written around the year 624.

Bede's chronology of the letters of Boniface v is not then sufficiently firm to justify the muscled emendation of the *Liber pontificalis* proposed by Duchesne. There is no reason to tamper with the length of the vacancy between Deusdedit and Boniface v as transmitted by its manuscripts, and to move the ordination of Boniface v from December 618 to December 619. His pontificate has been dated by Duchesne one year too late.

Consequently, the dates of Deusdedit's successors are also affected. But of how many of them? Ideally Duchesne should have encountered another chronological difficulty as he progressed with his reconstruction of the chronology of seventh-century popes. And indeed, only several paragraphs further he found himself faced with a superfluous year:

Entre le 14 mai 649, jour où mourut Théodore, et le 10 août 654, jour où fut ordonné Eugène, il n'y a pas place pour la durée que le *Liber pontificalis* assigne au pontificat de Martin, 6 ans 1 mois et 26 jours. Il n'en est pas de même si on descend jusqu'au 17 septembre 655, date que le biographe indique comme celle de la mort du pape. En remontant à partir de cette date, les chiffres de siège conduisent au mercredi 22 juillet 649.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>49</sup> This may be Eadbald of Kent (Kirby, *Earliest English kings*, 31–2), or an otherwise unknown Anglo-Saxon king (Blair, 'Letters of Boniface v', 7–8). Different transmission channels are suggested not only by different spellings of his name in the papal letters copied by Bede, but also by palaeography: P. Meyvaert, 'The Registrum of Gregory the Great and Bede', *Revue bénédictine* lxxx (1970), 162–6.

<sup>50</sup> 'non solum suppositarum ei gentium plenissimam salutem, immo quoque uicinorum, uestrae praedicationis ministerio credimus subsequendam': Bede, *HE* ii. 8.

<sup>51</sup> Thus Kirby, *Earliest English kings*, 32–4. Bede's account of the appointment of Theodore of Tarsus as bishop of Canterbury in *HE* iv. 1 raises similar interpretative difficulties: R. Shaw, 'Bede, Theodore and Wighard: why did Pope Vitalian need to appoint a new bishop for the English Church in the 660s?', *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* cxiii (2018), 521–43.

<sup>52</sup> This is also Blair's conclusion: 'Letters of Boniface v'.

<sup>53</sup> 'Between 14 May 649, the day Theodore died, and 10 August 654, the day Eugenius was ordained, there is no space for the length of the pontificate attributed by the *Liber pontificalis* to Martin i.e., 6 years, 1 month and 26 days. This is not the case if we move to 17 September 655, the date indicated by the biographer as that of the death of the pope. Counting back from that date, the length of the tenure results in Wednesday 22 July 649': *LP*, p. cclvi.



Duchesne thus accepted the length of the pontificate of Pope Martin given by the *Liber pontificalis*, but struggled to find enough room for it. He first tried the most obvious solution, namely subtracting it from the day of the ordination of his successor Eugenius. The resulting date of the beginning of Martin's tenure, 15 June 648, contradicted that of the death of Martin's predecessor Theodore, placed by him on 14 May 649. But Pope Martin, the only pope forcibly deposed in the seventh century, is a special case. The end of his pontificate can in theory be placed on three different dates: his arrest on 17 June 653, the ordination of Eugenius on 10 August 654, or his death in exile in Crimea on 16 September 655.<sup>54</sup> Duchesne decided on this last date and calculated that Martin was ordained on 22 July 649, suitably close to his date of Theodore's death and to the length of *interregnum* indicated by the *Liber pontificalis* (fifty-two days, extended to sixty-nine days).

Duchesne's solution is again ingenious and unnecessary. If Martin's biographer in the *Liber pontificalis* had really counted the period between the ordination of Martin's successor and the death of Martin as part of his pontificate, this would imply that he considered Eugenius to be illegitimate. There is, however, not a shadow of doubt as to the canonical status of Eugenius as the bishop of Rome in the *Liber pontificalis*; he was even acknowledged as such (even if somewhat grudgingly) by Martin himself in a letter from his exile in Crimea.<sup>55</sup> Duchesne's initial instinct was, in fact, correct: the slightly more than six years of Martin's pontificate ought to be counted back from the ordination of Eugenius, as indicated also by the exceptional omission of the length of the vacancy between these two popes in the biography of Martin. It results in the conclusion that Martin was ordained bishop of Rome in June or July 648.<sup>56</sup>

The consequence of this double mistake – the insertion of a year between the pontificates of Deusdedit and Boniface v in 618–19, and the removal of the first year of Martin in 648–9 – is that all the dates of the popes between 619 and 649 have been advanced by one year, and should consequently be moved one year back (see [Table 2](#) below).<sup>57</sup>

<sup>54</sup> See n. 36 above.

<sup>55</sup> '[Deus] confirmet contra omnem haereticum et adversariam ecclesiae nostrae personam, et immobiles custodiat, praecipue pastorem qui eis nunc praeesse monstratur': *PL* cxxix.602A.

<sup>56</sup> The precise date depends on whether we start from the length of the pontificate of Martin (15 June, a Sunday) or of the vacancy after Theodore (5 July, a Saturday). The former is preferable by Duchesne's criteria, the latter by mine.

<sup>57</sup> My attempt to establish exact dates of pontificates is only tentative. It is based on the assumptions that the dates of death of Boniface iv and from Honorius onwards are secure; that, contrary to Duchesne, the lengths of vacancies are more trustworthy than those of the pontificates; that time spans are not counted inclusively; and that ordinations do not need to take place on Sundays: in the proposed reconstruction, only those of John iv, Theodore and Eugenius fall on Sundays; all the others are Saturdays, with the exception of the ordination of Deusdedit which took place on a Tuesday.

Table 2. *Proposed chronology of seventh-century popes*

Pope	Dates according to Duchesne	Proposed dates	Notes on the exact dates
Deusdedit	19 Oct. 615– 8 Nov. 618	2 Dec. 615– 25 Dec. 618	based on the death of Boniface iv
Boniface v	23 Dec. 619– 25 Oct. 625	10 Feb. 619– 14 Oct. 624	starting date based on the death of Boniface iv; ending date calculated backwards from the death of Honorius
Honorius	27 Oct. 625– 12 Oct. 638	27 Oct. 624– 12 Oct. 637	calculated backwards from the death of Honorius
Severinus	28 May 640– 2 Aug. 640	29 May 639– 2 Aug. 639	all indications concur
John iv	24 Dec. 640– 12 Oct. 642	26 Dec. 639– 12 Oct. 641	all indications concur
Theodore	24 Nov. 642– 14 May 649	25 Nov. 641– 14 May 648	all indications concur
Martin	22 July 649– 17 June 653	5 July 648– 10 Aug. 654	starting date based on the death of Theodore; ending date on that of Eugenius
Eugenius	10 Aug 654– 2 June 657	10 Aug 654– 2 June 657	based on the death of Eugenius

### *Documents from the first and last years of the pontificates*

Is it possible to bring the surviving documents issued by the six concerned popes, or addressed to them, in line with the proposed correction of their dates? Despite the significant number of documents from the years 619 to 649 included in the *regesta* of the popes, very few kept their original dates, and not a single one of them comes from the last year of any of the six popes. But several documents known indirectly from references in other sources have been attributed to the years that have now changed pope.<sup>58</sup> In what follows, I will try to show that they can all be assigned to a different pope or date.

We have already seen the case of the letters of Boniface v to Edwin and Æthelburh of Northumbria. As for his successor Honorius, the most recent edition of papal *regesta* places three documents in his last year (637/8): a letter to Spanish bishops, their irritated answer dated 9 January 638, and a

<sup>58</sup> In addition to the *Regesta*, other useful *regesta* are V. Grumel, *Les Regestes des actes du Patriarcat de Constantinople*, Constantinople 1932; P. Conte, *Chiesa e primato nelle lettere dei papi del secolo VII*, Milan 1971; F. Dölger, *Regesten der Kaiserurkunden des oströmischen Reiches von 565–1453*, 2nd edn, 1. Teil, 1. Halbband: *Regesten 565–867*, ed. A. E. Müller, München 2009; F. Winkelmann, *Der monenergetisch-monotheletische Streit*, Frankfurt am Main 2001. They all accept Duchesne's chronological framework.

letter from Sophronios of Jerusalem.<sup>59</sup> The first is only known from a mention in the second: there is no difficulty in placing it before Honorius' death on 12 October 637, and in assuming that the Spaniards had signed their response before the news of his death reached them.<sup>60</sup> As for the letter from Sophronios, all we know is that shortly before his death he sent to Rome an envoy, Stephen of Dor.<sup>61</sup> The identity of the pope whom Stephen met is not specified and the episode is difficult to date, given the uncertainty as to the precise date of Sophronios's death, variously placed between 638 and 640.<sup>62</sup> No document issued by, or addressed to, the next pope, Severinus, can be independently dated, but his exchanges with Constantinople strongly support the chronology proposed in this article. Finally, a letter sent by the pope-elect John IV and other Roman clerics during the vacancy preceding his ordination to bishops and clerics from Ireland, known from Bede's *Ecclesiastical history* and traditionally dated to August–December 640, belongs more logically to the previous year. If it answers, as has been proposed, an Irish enquiry about the correct date of Easter in 641, it would make more sense to provide such information well in advance of the beginning of Lent in early February 641, rather than risk throwing the liturgical calendar into confusion. Such an answer should therefore have been dispatched from Rome in autumn 639 for it safely to reach Ireland in time.<sup>63</sup>

More interesting is the privilege that a pope John issued at the request of a king Chlodwig for a Merovingian monastery, perhaps Luxeuil. Such a combination of names is only possible for Pope John IV and Clovis (Chlodwig) II, king of Neustria since January 639 (until 657). The original is lost, but was 'recycled' in five spurious privileges for Frankish

<sup>59</sup> *Regesta* 3250–2.

<sup>60</sup> The letters of Pope Leo II to several Spanish correspondents in 683 give an idea of the travel times. Written shortly before his death on 3 July 683 and dispatched soon after it, they did not arrive in time for the Thirteenth Council of Toledo in November of the same year: *La Colección canónica hispana*, ed. G. Martínez Díez and F. Rodríguez, Madrid 1966–2002, iii. 190–204 (the Roman letters) and vi. 275–90 (the Spanish answer). What is more, one of the letters is addressed to Quiricus, bishop of Toledo, who died in January 680 and whose death was apparently not known in Rome three and a half years later: Jankowiak, 'Essai', 502.

<sup>61</sup> The information comes from the report of Stephen of Dor presented at the Lateran synod of 649: *Concilium Lateranense*, 40–2; Price, *Lateran Synod*, 145–6.

<sup>62</sup> See P. Booth, *Crisis of empire: doctrine and dissent at the end of late antiquity*, Berkeley, CA 2013, 243–4.

<sup>63</sup> Bede, *HE* ii. 19 (*Regesta* 3296). I follow the interpretation of D. Ó Cróinín, "'New heresy for old': Pelagianism in Ireland and the papal letter of 640", *Speculum* lx (1985), 505–16. On the eleven addressees see Plummer, *Venerabilis Baedae opera historica*, ii 112–13, and Bede, *Storia degli inglesi*, i. 396–7. One of them, Lasrén abbot of Leighlin, is thought to have died in 638 or 639, which also hints at the earlier date of the letter of John IV proposed here.

monasteries.<sup>64</sup> The complex relations between these documents need not occupy us here; what is relevant is that one of the charters, for the monastery of St Cross in Meaux, contains a dating formula of such complexity that, as observed by Eugen Ewig, it must derive from an authentic letter of John IV:

Datum R. Id. Maii impp. DD.NN. piissimis sed Constantino anno xxvi P.C. eius anno viii et Heraclio anno viii DD. et Martino CC sed DD. quidem anno secundo et Martino anno primo indictione xii.<sup>65</sup>

Ewig proposed to date it to the reign of Constantine III and Heraklonas, the sons of Heraclius, and read it as follows:

Datum R(omae) Id. Maii imperantibus dominis nostris piissimis [Constantino et Heraclio] sed Constantino anno xxvi et Heraclio anno viii [post consulatum eius (eorum?)] anno viii, David et Martina c(aesaribus?) sed David quidem anno secundo Martina anno primo indictione xii.<sup>66</sup>

Ewig correctly recognised David, the son of Heraclius who became Caesar on 4 July 638, in the abbreviation *DD*, but incorrectly interpreted the name of his brother Martin as that of his mother and the second wife of Heraclius, Martina (who never appears in the imperial dating formulae). He observed, also correctly, that ‘sed’ after ‘dominis nostris piissimis’ and ‘Constantino’ in the first line was explicative but his addition cannot be retained, as he did not realise that all the chronological indications point towards the period before the death of Heraclius. It is his years of reign and post-consulate that one needs to supply in the *lacuna*:

Datum R(omae) Id. Maii imperantibus dominis nostris piissimis sed [Heraclio anno xxx post consulatum eius xxix,<sup>67</sup> et] Constantino anno xxvi post consulatum eius anno viii, et Heraclio anno viii, David et Martino caesaribus sed David quidem anno secundo et Martino anno primo, indictione xii.

Such formulae are well known from papyri dating from the very last years of the Roman rule in Egypt and have been recently much discussed.<sup>68</sup> The difficulty, in this case, is that its elements are not consistent:

<sup>64</sup> See E. Ewig, ‘Bemerkungen zu zwei merowingischen Bischofsprivilegien und einem Papstprivileg des 7. Jahrhunderts für merowingische Klöster’, in A. Borst (ed.), *Mönchtum, Episkopat und Adel zur Gründungszeit des Klosters Reichenau*, Sigmaringen 1974, 215–49. The charters were issued for St Cross of Meaux, Rebais, a monastery of Mary, Columba and Agatha, Luxeuil, and Remiremont: *Regesta* 3304–5, 3311–13, edited in J. M. Pardessus, *Diplomata, chartae, epistolae, leges aliaque instrumenta ad res Gallo-Francicas spectantia*, Paris 1843–9, ii. 65–9, 71–80, nos 298–9, 301–4.

<sup>65</sup> *Diplomata*, 73; Ewig, ‘Bemerkungen’, 215–20.

<sup>66</sup> Ewig, ‘Bemerkungen’, 218 (brackets modified to reflect actual emendations).

<sup>67</sup> See below for the proposed date of the formula.

<sup>68</sup> See C. Zuckerman, ‘On the title and office of the Byzantine *basileus*’, *Travaux et mémoires* xvi (2010), 865–90 at pp. 867–9, where earlier bibliography.

the 26th year of Constantine III corresponds to	22 January 638–21 January 639,
his 8th post-consulate to	1 January–31 December 639,
the 8th year of Heraklonas also to	1 January–31 December 639,
the second year of David as Caesar to	4 July 639–3 July 640,
the exact date of the elevation of Martin as Caesar is not known, but it took place between January and November 639, <sup>69</sup>	
and the 12th indiction to	1 September 638–31 August 639.

Despite its incoherence, the formula has all the hallmarks of authenticity: beyond its complexity, it includes the names of the two little-known Caesars, and counts the regnal years of Heraklonas from his appointment as Caesar on 1 January 632, not from his coronation as Augustus on 4 July 638, while correctly classifying him as a full emperor.<sup>70</sup> In conjunction with the day given at the beginning of the formula, the indiction suggests the date of 15 May 639. But a date one year later, 15 May 640, is a better fit, even if it only satisfies two indications contained in the formula: the years of Caesar David and perhaps of Caesar Martin. These two dates, however, are the least likely to have undergone corruption: both numerals are spelled out in full, differently from all the others that could have easily lost their ‘i’s in manuscript transmission.<sup>71</sup> While perhaps not a smoking gun, the original of the Meaux formula comes with much likelihood from a document issued by Pope John IV in May 640, that is, several months before the date of his ordination proposed by Duchesne (24 December 640), and thus supports the chronology proposed in this paper.<sup>72</sup> Incidentally, it also allows us to narrow down the date of the elevation of Martin to the dignity of Caesar to the period between 16 May and 8 November 639.<sup>73</sup> It also perhaps throws some light on the early days of the monothelete controversy: the intriguing omission of the regnal years of Heraclius may reflect the estrangement between Rome and the court of Constantinople resulting from Heraclius’ attempts to impose the *Ekthesis* on the Roman Church.<sup>74</sup>

Finally, no document of Pope Theodore is dated to his last year in the chronology of Duchesne (648/9). In general, very few of his documents

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. 875.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid. for a parallel in *Corpus Papyrorum Raineri* xxiii. 35.

<sup>71</sup> The necessary emendations are: the regnal year of Constantine III from xxvi to xxviii, his post-consulate and the year of Heraklonas from viii to viiii, and the indiction from xii to xiii.

<sup>72</sup> Even assuming that the original day and month were altered by the author of the Meaux forgery, the second year of Caesar David provides a secure *terminus ante quem* of 3 July 640.

<sup>73</sup> Another document attributed to John IV and dated to October indiction 13 (AD 639), published in J. von Pflugk-Hartung, *Acta pontificum Romanorum inedita*, Tübingen 1880–8, 2, 15, no. 42, was in reality issued by Pope John XVIII in October 1004: *Regesta* 3295 (with the erroneous date 640).

<sup>74</sup> For more detail see Jankowiak, ‘The date of the *Ekthesis*’.

are known from originals, incidental mentions or later forgeries, suggesting that the Palestinian pope was more interested in the great politics of the monothelete controversy than in the affairs of the Western Churches.

This survey shows that there is no obstacle to the modification of the dates of several seventh-century bishops of Rome proposed in this article. Even if this change does not have cataclysmic consequences, it provides a more secure point of reference for historians of the early medieval Christian world and allows a better contextualisation of documents pertaining to Italy, Gaul, Britain and Ireland. It also results in significant modifications to the chronology of the beginnings of the monothelete controversy and thus throws a new light on the seventh-century schism between the Churches of Constantinople and Rome.<sup>75</sup> For now, it is fitting to end with a homage to Louis Duchesne and his edition of the *Liber pontificalis*, as irreplaceable today as it was at the time of its publication 135 years ago. This little gloss to his chronological framework is a proof of this.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.