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PRACTICE AND FUNCTION OF ECCLESIASTICAL RECOMMENDATION IN LATE ANTIQUITY (FOURTH – FIFTH CENTURIES AD)

Abstract

In the ancient world, recommendation was an important expression of patronage, effecting introduction, mediation, problem-solving. Christianity took over and adapted Roman models to suit new realities of Christian travel and hospitality, pastoral care, recruitment, career advancement (clerical as well as ascetic), the articulation of communion and orthodoxy, among others. This paper explores the functions of late antique Christian recommendation practices, its complex and often ambiguous typology, with particular emphasis on the correspondence – or discrepancy – between evidence collected from extant papyri, canonical prescriptions, and examples from epistolary corpora of known authors.

Keywords: *commendatio*, epistolography, letter-carriers, early canons, Basil of Caesarea, Ambrose of Milan, Augustine of Hippo, Jerome, Zosimus, Leo I, letters in papyri

Introduction: Recommendation in the Late Roman and Early Christian World

In contemporary use, a letter of recommendation ascertains that a candidate meets certain expectations in terms of character, qualifications and skills; it is based on the personal experience of its author with the recommended candidate; and it has a determined addressee (whether a person, institution, board or committee). In ancient times, however, recommendation was practiced on a much larger scale, being an inherent mechanism of social interaction.

Roman imperial society was polarised based on gender and age, and dimensioned by vertical connections. The master – slave and patron – client relationships system sanctioned structures of hierarchical dependence, with

the landed elite, and imperial bureaucrats in centre-place. Setting aside the legal dependence of women and children, these structures of dependence and interconnectivity meant that the socially inferior – whether private persons or entire communities – had to defer to their masters, respectively, patrons, for a wide array of actions: personal advancement (e.g., securing a position), legal representation, financial support, obtaining an exemption or a privilege, often of existential importance.

In this context, recommendation (*commendatio*) played a pivotal role. It could refer to a person, much like contemporary practices of recommendation; entrust a person or object for safekeeping; or delegate a legal matter to be settled by someone else (usually a client's patron).¹

By the same token, travel and relocation also often relied on *commendatio*. For instance, students who wished to study in cities outside their native province were required to present recommendation letters from the municipal and / or provincial authorities. As C. Grey noted, qualified labourers travelled also by recommendation.² At a more basic level, a letter of recommendation secured means of transportation and hospitality on the road to the person who wished to avoid the financial burden and inconveniences of putting up at inns or hostels in the course of a journey.³

The advent of Christianity brought but little disruption in this system. Instead, Christians extended the practice of *commendatio*, adding several other uses to the already existing ones. An immediately apparent domain is ecclesiastical communication and hospitality.

As Christian communities sprang across the empire, some at considerable distances from one another, but still looked for guidance at their founders or at prestigious teachers of the faith, an intense epistolary activity developed. The letters of the apostle Paul illustrate the importance of this ministry. With few notable exceptions, Christians generally preferred to use private communication channels instead of the official imperial travel and post service. Letters were usually conveyed via close collaborators who acted as trusted messengers.⁴ It should be mentioned that these messengers were also usually recruited from socially exposed categories. In this sense, it was imperative to ensure that the letter-bearer found sufficient resources during his travel to reach destination safe and sound, and was well-received by the addressees. Many letters from this initial period contain a few sentences which recommend the messenger, entrusting him to the care of the addressees. Foundational Christian documents such as the letters of Paul offer ample material not just for recommending the bearer of the respective letter, but also other

collaborators, travellers that the recipients were to expect.⁵ Likewise, in a letter to the community in Philippi, Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna (ca 69 – ca 155 AD) extended his recommendation to the messenger, Crescens, and his sister, who was to visit at a later date.⁶

This type of recommendation served two main purposes. It ascertained the identity of the letter-bearer and it procured him / her hospitality on the road and at destination. To the modern eye, used to clearly determined, easily recognised identification documents and stately regulation of mobility, this might seem strange. But to ancient people, deprived of such commodities, these recommendations were the only confirmation that otherwise unknown messengers were indeed who they claimed to be, not to mention that the letter they delivered was indeed authentic. Polycarp's letter to the Philippians shows also a growing concern to ascertain that travellers were pious Christians, worthy of the care and hospitality of Christian communities elsewhere.

Soon enough, issuing letters of recommendation proper to Christian travellers with limited resources became a regular ecclesial practice. These recommendations functioned as travel documents akin to a Christian *passe-partout*, used to obtain food and lodging not only at one's destination, but also in various communities one travelled through.

Constantine's edict of toleration (313 AD) brought unprecedented freedom to Christianity, but also a set of concerns that went hand in hand with organising the Church as an institution. In particular, Christian hierarchy devoted considerable effort to bring about unity amongst the disparate Christian communities and confer a degree of stability to this new organism.⁷ No longer persecuted by a polytheistic majority, the Church now had to face internal crises in its quest for self-definition as orthodox and universal Church.⁸ Factionalism, competing theological schools, competing hierarchy were no stranger to the Early Church either. Disagreements arose in terms of doctrine, constitution, rite, bringing into focus the question of authority: Who were the keepers and teachers of the truth? To whom ought one look for guidance in living out their faith, and whose guidance ought to be rejected?

In response to these afflictions, the Church sought to appoint a clearly defined hierarchy and impose territorial and jurisdictional limits emulating imperial administrative structures. This process of delimitation corresponded with the definition of ecclesial communion and of patterns of inclusion / exclusion from the Christian communion. Recommendation became an integral part of documents attesting communion,⁹ the ultimate

aim of which was to keep “heresies” and the authority / undue influence of competing bishops at bay.

The imperial acceptance and progressive support of Christianity procured a set of privileges for the clergy (including privileges of economic and judicial kind). The clerical career became a coveted way to gain prestige and personal advancement. The Church attempted to curb personal ambitions by limiting the number of appointments to the strictly necessary; clergy were ordained for life and tied to the community they served (*stabilitas loci*).¹⁰ This guaranteed a measure of stability in the life of the community and pre-empted clergy to wander off to better-situated places. Clerical mobility was subject to episcopal authorisation and the law of communion.

But the Church was more than just a religious institution: it also had a social function – what would be denoted in modern terms “pastoral care”. To mention but a few aspects, the Church ministered to the sick and the socially vulnerable; it supported orphans and women who had no social, economic, and judicial protection;¹¹ it engaged in freeing captives, interceded on behalf of prisoners, and gave asylum to slaves and exiles; it offered relief aid in case of catastrophe. Bishops, now belonging to the local elites, were entrusted with significant Church properties: they became patrons for the workers and tenants on these domains, as well as for the members of their communities. As leaders, they engaged in extensive networking and patronage. These represented as many areas that implied some sort of recommendation letters.

Freedom of worship also gave impetus to Christian devotion. The sacralisation of space complemented the sacralisation of the apostolic and martyrial past, giving birth to pilgrimage centres scattered across the empire. Devoting one’s life to God replaced dying for the name of God in a sort of living martyrdom: this stood at the core of ascetic practices, withdrawal to the desert or in monastic communities. On a more mundane level, monasteries or urban ascetic communities ensured their members’ basic needs of food, lodging, clothing. The socially vulnerable sought more and more often entrance to these communities because it lifted existential insecurity. In this sense, the presentation of a character reference attesting the piety and zeal of the applicant became one of the many requirements of the entrance procedure to a monastery.¹²

A final aspect of interest for this paper is, again, travel. Although bishops on occasion were allowed to use the imperial post for a speedy arrival, a great deal of communication happened via private channels. Christianity transformed the Roman empire into a hub of communication and

hospitality: bishops visited neighbouring communities, went to councils or travelled to ordain other bishops; pilgrims visited the holy places or sought the guidance of inspirational teachers;¹³ the needy travelled for relief, the sick were visited (sometimes at considerable distance), news, books, relics of saints and martyrs were exchanged. The Church intervened on behalf of travellers by offering them lodging, food, and covering minimal expenses – provided they presented a recommendation that attested who they were, and what their status was within the communion.

As this brief overview suggests, the importance of recommendation in the context of hospitality, mobility and clerical networking entitles this category of documents to be studied in their own right. Given their special use in the broader game of orthodoxy and heterodoxy, ecclesiastical career, as well as late antique asceticism, their role in creating or defying patterns of identity, in recruitment practices and personal advancement deserves to be spelled out.

This contribution seeks to explore late antique Christian recommendation practices and types on the basis of information retrieved from early Christian synodal documents, select literary sources and papyri. Its chronological limits range from the early fourth century to the council of Chalcedon (451 AD). The period coincides with a major formative-normative stage in the life of the Church, which I sought to outline above. The councils held in the fourth and the fifth centuries mention several types of recommendation as prerequisites for mobility and clerical advancement. Given the prolific epistolography of the period, an exhaustive analysis would by far exceed the scope of this paper. For this reason, the corpus of analysed letters focuses on the epistolary collections of Basil of Caesarea (330 – 379 AD), Ambrose of Milan (ca 339 – 397 AD), Jerome (ca 342/7 – 420 AD), John Chrysostom (ca 347 – 407), and Augustine of Hippo (354 – 430 AD). These personalities were not only influential leaders who participated in doctrinal controversies and in organising ascetic practices, but were also intense networkers caring for large communities. It must be stated, however, that even within this limited selection, the material is of unequal proportions. The surviving ancient letter collections have been subject to various processes of editing, either by the authors themselves, or subsequent generations, processes that entailed the omission of material considered unimportant for the agenda of the editor. It is not by chance that the authors who furnish the majority of recommendations cited below are Basil of Caesarea and Augustine, both of whom kept quite extensive archives. Ambrose and Jerome both organised their letter collections

attempting to highlight certain aspects of their legacy, whether as exegete, ascetic teacher or controversialist, whereas John Chrysostom initiated the extant letter collection in his final years, when he was in exile, perhaps as an attempt to make up for the archives he had lost.¹⁴

Documentary papyri, in turn, offer complementary examples and information, immersing the scholar into everyday challenges faced by ordinary Christians, aspects less visible in the high-profile correspondence of famous Christian authors.

Recommendation Letters or Practices of Recommendation?

The *Typoi epistolikoi* of Pseudo-Demetrius, an ancient handbook of letter-writing, defines the recommendation letter – ἐπιστολή συστατική or *littera commendatoria*, *commendaticia* in its Latin equivalent – as a letter written “to a person for the sake of another, inserting (words of) praise, and speaking of those previously unacquainted as if they were acquainted.”¹⁵ Pseudo-Libanius, another epistolary theorist, this time writing closer to the period which interests us (later fourth / early fifth century), gives approximately the same definition: “The recommendation [letter] is the one through which we recommend [συνίστωμεν] someone to somebody; it is also called introductory [παραθετική].”¹⁶

These definitions, cryptic at best, fail to convey the volatility and the scope of the concept of “recommendation” in ancient and Early Christian times. While both authors stress the fact that the beneficiary must be considered worthy of the introduction / recommendation, they tell us nothing of the finality of such letters. Recommendation was seldom gratuitous, and many surviving letters can be construed ultimately as (unofficial) requests or petitions. Oftentimes the συστατική and the πρεσβευτική – the petition – conflate into “letters of mediation”.¹⁷ Several extant letters also show that the recommended persons were previously known to the recipient. Basil of Caesarea’s *ep.* 305 was written on behalf of such a person.¹⁸ Basil does not name either the addressee or the beneficiary of this letter. Yet, evidently, in spite of his assurances, the carrier sought to obtain something from the addressee, perhaps a closer acquaintance, which the letter from Basil naturally provided.

Likewise, as mentioned before, recommendation could also refer to goods (e.g., a property) or legal matters.¹⁹ Requests for tax exemption that regularly pop up for instance in the correspondence of the Cappadocian

Fathers are at the same time recommendations.²⁰ The pen of Basil of Caesarea again left us excellent examples. *Ep.* 313, for instance, requests that the tax burden on the property of a magistrate, Ulpicios, be eased. More interesting is that Basil commends this property as if it were his own. Augustine, in turn, writes *ep.* 96 to Olympius on behalf of Boniface, a neighbouring bishop. Boniface had previously sought a solution to the financial troubles he inherited from his predecessor,²¹ and Augustine makes it clear that he had recommended Boniface to Olympius on that occasion too. In *ep.* 96 he took advantage of Olympius' promotion to a higher imperial office to raise the issue of the petition (not necessarily the person!) again: "I again commend to your kind consideration the petition of my brother and colleague Boniface, in the hope that what could not be done before may be in your power now. (...) I beg you to condescend to give your support to this petition, because he has resolved not to bring forward the decision in his favour which was formerly obtained, lest it should preclude him from the liberty of making a second application; for the answer then given fell short of what he desired."²²

Another complicating factor is that recommendation need not be the main subject of the letter. More often than not in surviving correspondence, recommendations amounted to a few sentences written into letters with an altogether different subject.²³ Personal relationships and social status, but also the urgency of the request and its nature, or whether the addressee was solicited in an official capacity or for private assistance determined the tone and the content of the recommendation. Educated correspondents, established friends or contacts wrote in different registers; the introductory paragraph of praise, as well as the mandatory assurances of repayment (in terms of loyalty, honour, or prayer)²⁴ could be shortened, eschewed altogether or expanded as the case required. Seen against the broader system of patronage, recommendation served a variety of purposes, from problem-solving to personal advancement, benefitting not just the recommended person, but also the sender and the addressee. Senders had the opportunity to discharge their obligations as patrons, to create new contacts or intensify existing links in their network; the addressees, in turn, also broadened their network of clients, thereby augmenting their social prestige and influence.

Taking into account this diffuse spectrum, this contribution refers to "recommendation" as a set of practices and a cultural phenomenon,²⁵ in so far as "practice(s) of recommending" represents a more inclusive term than the reductive "letter of recommendation". Of course, the ancient

letter remains the standard medium, at least the one we can access, for recommendation practices. However, even in relation to this standard medium, recommendation exceeded by far the scope of the *συστατική* and the *παραθετική* defined in epistolary handbooks. Of course, Christians had other examples to guide their use and understanding of recommendation. The paradigmatic text here is Paul's Letter to the Romans, cited above:²⁶ It recommends Phoebe as a collaborator of Paul, a messenger entrusted not only with delivering Paul's letter, but also expanding *viva voce* his message;²⁷ it specifies Phoebe's status as deaconess; it requests she be granted hospitality in the Roman community and that they sponsor her return journey. The stylistic register and terminology is also symptomatic for later Christian recommendations.

With its ambitions to universality and unity, post-Constantinian Christianity transformed the Mediterranean into a "networked world".²⁸ On the one hand, Christian letter-writing was deeply rooted in Graeco-Roman epistolography. Christians continued to write letters, recommendations, petitions, etc., much as their "pagan" contemporaries. But specifically Christian, and within this domain, specifically ecclesiastical patterns of communication began to emerge, in which the Christian letter played a pivotal role. For one thing, the sending and receiving of letters became an expression of communion, of the unity of faith and doctrine within a particular community as well as between various local communities and hierarchs. This implied the shaping of inclusion – exclusion patterns that accompanied, among others, the development of penitence, the discernment of orthodoxy vs. heresy, or the liturgical practice of reciting the names of bishops in the diptychs. In the context of enhanced Christian travel and communication, knowing who the bishop of a given community was and whether he was part of the ecclesial communion was paramount. As was the need to know if a traveller could participate in the Eucharist or, for that matter, if they could participate at all in the liturgy, as various stages of the penitential practice implied various degrees of exclusion. In other words, ecclesiastical recommendation became an instrument of communion.²⁹

Moreover, the development of Christian pilgrimage and pastoral care (especially of vulnerable social categories, such as widows, orphans, the destitute) rendered hospitality an integral part of the organisational structure of the Church. Bishops and monastic leaders promoted the creation of "trans-regional structural spaces".³⁰ The reciprocation of hospitality was extended to the entire social spectrum, meaning that hospitality was granted at community level. Gradually, hospitality practices

were differentiated according to the nature of membership in the Christian church and the position the traveller held in ecclesiastical hierarchy. Chapter II.58 of the *Apostolic Constitutions* (fourth century AD) prescribes that each traveller be received in the category to which they belong:

When a brother or a sister arrive from abroad with letters of recommendation, the deacon shall examine their situation, and shall ascertain if they are believers, if they are part of the Church, if they have not been tainted by some heresy, and again, in the case of a woman, if she is married or a widow. Informed in this way about them, knowing that they are truly believers and in communion of thought as regards the Lord, the deacon shall lead each [of them] to their rightful place. If a presbyter arrives from another region, the presbyters shall receive him in their college; if he is a deacon, he shall be received by the deacons; and if he is a bishop, he shall sit with the bishop.³¹

The passage implies that recommendation letters are mandatory only for the laity, and their reception should be subject to an additional examination by the deacon. But the *Apostolic Canons* of the same collection show that both clergy and laity were required to present recommendations. *Can. 12* states that “[i]f a member of the clergy or a layperson, excluded or admitted [to communion] travels to another town and is there received without letters of recommendation, those who received him and he himself shall be excluded”.³² *Can. 13* advises that those who were subject to some degree of exclusion and lied about their membership in the Christian community should have their exclusion prolonged.³³

Indeed, early Christian canonical sources consistently demand that travelers and those who wish to relocate present recommendations upon arrival; otherwise, they ought not to be received.

Recommendation in Canonical Sources of the Fourth and the Fifth Centuries

In this section I offer a brief overview of the canonical regulations concerning the use of recommendation established by the synods of the fourth and the fifth centuries. Since the majority of synods, both local and inter-regional, dealt with this issue, I selected only the more relevant examples for the purposes of this paper.³⁴

Can. 7-8 of the Council of Arles (314 AD) rule on the participation of secular officers in the life of the Church. According to these canons, for the duration of their tenure imperial office-holders who were Christians were required to submit to the authority of the bishop where they served their tenure, and were obliged to present mandating letters – that is, recommendation letters – from their own bishop:

Concerning governors who pursue a term in office as Christians, we deemed good that upon their promotion they receive ecclesiastical communion letters (*litteras communicatorias*), but to the end that, regardless where they exercise their function, they submit to the supervision of the bishop of that place; and if they start committing acts against Church discipline, they should be excluded from communion. The same applies concerning those who wish to engage in public service.³⁵

In other words, they were subject to the rules that applied to any itinerant Christian.

Can. 7 of the council of Antioch (341 AD) forbids the reception of foreigners who fail to submit *pacífic letters* (εἰρηνικά).³⁶ This type of recommendation letter has ample illustration amongst surviving papyri, as shall be discussed later. A similar provision, this time referring both to laity and clergy, was advanced at the council of Carthage (348 AD). *Can.* 7 states that foreigners (laypersons and clergy alike) may participate in the Eucharist on condition that they present letters from their bishop: “... no clergy or layperson should partake of communion in another place without letters from their bishop. (...) For when they are received with letters, concord between bishops is maintained”.³⁷ The concern here is that persons on whom one bishop imposed some penalty should evade punishment by secretly taking refuge in another community. This is in line with *can.* 42 of the Council of Laodicea (end of fourth century),³⁸ or *can.* 33 of the *Apostolic Canons*, which states:

Do not receive any foreign bishop, priest, or deacon without recommendation letters (συστατικά γράμματα); if they bring such [letters], they shall be examined, and if they are preachers of the faith, they shall be received; otherwise, give them what they need, but do not receive them in communion.³⁹

Synodal documents dealt not only with the necessity of presenting recommendation letters, but also who was authorised to issue them. This is

the case of *can.* 8 of the council of Antioch (341 AD), which rules implicitly on extra-provincial travel: “Priests who serve in the country ought not to give canonical letters, let them address letters only to neighbouring bishops. But let unblemished country bishops issue pacific letters at will”.⁴⁰ The canon denies country priests the authority to issue any type of communion letter (ἐπιστολάς κανονικάς), including recommendation letters – except to bishops in the immediate vicinity, probably the closest chorepiscopus or town bishop. This offered some degree of protection to those forced to travel until they could appeal to a bishop. However, the council did recognise the authority and jurisdiction of country bishops,⁴¹ albeit limiting it to a specific type of recommendation (the *pacific letter*). At any rate, canonical sources consider recommendation of whatever type the province of bishops alone.⁴² *Can.* 7 of the Council of Carthage, cited above, includes also bishops amongst the personnel required to present recommendation letters. Presumably such letters were authored by the metropolitan or primate, as *can.* 27 of the Council of Hippo (393 AD) confirms: “Similarly, let no bishop travel overseas unless they consulted the primate of each province, so that they can obtain from him in advance a recommendation [letter] (*formatam uel commendationem*)”.⁴³ This seems to be a characteristic practice of Western provinces. From *ep.* 1 of pope Zosimus (417 – 418 AD) we learn that reception of clergy from Gaul depended on the successful presentation of a recommendation (*littera formata*) issued by the bishop of Arles.⁴⁴

A number of canons refer to clerical relocation, i.e., the permanent change of parish or ordination to a higher clerical office in a different place. Invariably, these relocations had to be authorised before by the bishop under whose jurisdiction the respective clergy originally belonged. Likewise invariably, the approval had to be granted in written form, by way of letter. *Can.* 16 of the council of Nicaea (325 AD) states:

Any presbyter, or deacon, or any other [person] enrolled among the clergy, who, not having the fear of God before their eyes, nor taking into account the ecclesiastical canon, recklessly and inconsiderately separate from their own church, must by no means be received by another church; but they should be constrained by every means to return to their own parishes; and, if they persist [in staying away], they must be excommunicated. And if anyone shall dare surreptitiously to carry off and in his own Church ordain a man belonging to another, without the consent of his own proper bishop, from whom he has separated although enrolled [there] in the clergy, let the ordination be void.⁴⁵

Undoubtedly, there was substantial mobility amongst late antique clergy. As E. Wipszycka noted, ordination did not entail giving up one's previous occupation; depending on the category from which clergy were recruited, this often implied regular travel.⁴⁶ However, such enhanced mobility clashed with the Church's concern for stability, episcopal jurisdiction and authority. Councils sought to discourage prolonged absence from one's diocese, for pastoral as well as disciplinary reasons. Keeping accurate track of who was a member of the clergy and where had a practical side, too, considering that clergy were exempt from certain taxes, but that often they were recruited from dependent social categories. This is especially visible in the case of rural churches (situated in villages or on aristocratic domains). Their inhabitants were often tied tenants, included in the tax lists under the name of their landowners. Were they to wander off to other places, the landowner would incur tax losses. *Codex Theodosianus* 16.2.33 (July 27, 398 AD) orders that rural clergy should be recruited from among the inhabitants of the same village or domain, in order to pre-empt unnecessary fiscal burden on the landowners and clerical ordination for the sake of being exempted from tax.⁴⁷

In this sense, *CPR* V 11 is revealing.⁴⁸ This papyrus, dated to the early fourth century, preserves a contract between Aurelios Basis, newly ordained deacon, and his bishop, Ammonotheon. Without particular juridical value, it is nonetheless a written engagement on the part of the deacon that he shall remain in Ammonotheon's service. As per the terms of the agreement, Aurelios Basis was allowed to travel – or to relocate – if he could persuade Ammonotheon and obtain his consent; or, in case he received a letter:

I agree by this document not to forsake you, nor to transfer to the service of another bishop or presbyter, unless you assent to it because these are the terms on which I made the agreement. If I want to leave without your consent or without even a letter, let me be unable to retain the diaconate under you but merely hold lay fellowship with dignity.⁴⁹

Although an atypical act, the contract echoes canonical efforts to tie clergy to their place of ordination. It also confirms that formal, written statements had to be obtained to enable clerical mobility (the "consent" and the "letter" that Ammonotheon was supposed to give). It should be noted that the document had no judicial value, but functioned more by way of a pledge on the part of the deacon and an extra precaution on the

part of the bishop.⁵⁰ In essence, it repeats what the canons cited above and others sought to achieve: that clerical expats should have the authorisation of their bishop if they wished to retain the clerical rank; otherwise, their ordination should be invalidated.

An interesting case is *can.* 1 of the Council of Nîmes (396 AD). The council addressed abusive situations when strangers forged recommendation letters to pass as clergy. While the requirement to examine incomers even after they submitted recommendations is expressed in previous synodal documents, the council of Nîmes is the first to confirm the frequent occurrence of forgery:

... because many [men] travelling from the farthest parts of the East pretend to be priests and deacons, thrusting upon unsuspecting people recommendations (*apostholia*) signed by unknown [persons], and because, hoping as they are to exact financial support for expenditures and alms (*sumptum*), they abuse the communion of the saints under the pretext of a feigned religion: we decided that if there is anybody of that sort, and the general interest of the Church is not endangered, they should not be admitted to the service of the altar.⁵¹

The text is corrupted in places, which makes it quite difficult to interpret. But the gist is that pretend presbyters and deacons used recommendations signed by obscure names to get access to resources allocated to the clergy (board and food as well as stipend). Interesting is also that the canon makes circumstantial allowances. Persons discovered with forged letters are apparently allowed to retain their position if there was penury of clergy that would have caused disruption in ministry.

Finally, *can.* 11 of the Council of Chalcedon (451 AD) states that “the poor and those needing assistance shall travel, after examination, merely with pacific letters from the church (ἐπιστολίοις εἰρηνικοῦς ἐκκλησιαστικοῦς), and not with commendatory letters (συστατικοῦς), inasmuch as commendatory letters ought to be given only to persons held in high esteem”.⁵²

A Contested Typology

From an overview of ancient canons several technical denominations emerge for recommendation letters: εἰρηνική, συστατική, or their Latin equivalents, *pacifica*, respectively *commendaticia*, *communicatoria*,

formata, epistolia or *apostholia*.⁵³ As a result, scholarship identified three main types of ecclesiastical recommendation – and again, this classification is based not so much on formal grounds as on the purpose which these documents fulfilled: the pacific letter (*littera pacifica*), the recommendation for the use of the clergy (*littera commendaticia*, or, with a more technical term, *littera formata*),⁵⁴ and the dimissorial letter, which authorized clergy to be ordained in another province.

I shall devote the remainder of my paper to a discussion of these types. But first, two observations are in order. Firstly, these three types do not exhaust the arsenal of ecclesiastical recommendation. In his 2017 monograph *Monasteries and the Care of Souls in Late Antique Christianity*, Paul Dilley repeatedly mentions that ascetic recruitment involved often the presentation of recommendation letters.⁵⁵ Dilley admittedly does not cite examples; however, *ep.* 297 of Basil of Caesarea is just such a recommendation on behalf of a woman who wished to lead an ascetic life. The letter is addressed to an unnamed widow, probably engaged in domestic asceticism. After an elaborate introduction, Basil states the two purposes of the letter: to offer greetings to the widow; and to introduce the bearer of the letter, that is, the aspiring ascetic:

I present to you the daughter of whom I just spoke, so that you may receive her as my daughter and your own sister. Consider as your own all that she confides to your noble and pure heart, and take her into your care with the certainty that you shall be rewarded by the Lord, and then that you grant us a favour.⁵⁶

Likewise, Jerome commends a widow named Theodora to the spiritual care of the presbyter Abigaus.⁵⁷

Of similar import, but referring to clerical ordination is ch. 7 of Augustine's letter 31 to Paulinus of Nola – a letter of considerable breath, covering many subjects. In ch. 7, Augustine recommends Vetustinus, the carrier of the letter, who had suffered some affliction in Africa, for which reason he was fleeing to Italy:

I recommend to your kindness and charity this boy Vetustinus, whose case might draw forth the sympathy even of those who are not religious: the causes of his affliction and of his leaving his country you will hear from his own lips. As to his pious resolution – his promise, namely, to devote himself to the service of God – it will be more decisively known after some time has elapsed, when he is of stronger age, and his present fear is removed.⁵⁸

It seems Vetustinus wished to be ordained into the clergy. Augustine thus asked Paulinus to delay the ordination for some time to ascertain that the youth did not have an ulterior motive (namely to escape affliction). This passage represents an embedded introduction on behalf of a person seeking clerical advancement, attesting at the same time the fact that recommendations were not always self-standing documents.

Another aspect of pastoral care was education. Again, Basil's letters to Libanius on behalf of students he sent for training with the Antiochene master are illustrative.⁵⁹ At the end of letter 41 to Aurelius of Carthage, again on a different subject, Augustine recommends a physician.⁶⁰ Paulinus of Nola commended one of his former slaves who wished to obtain a property;⁶¹ Gregory of Nazianzus sought Themistius' support in procuring a position in Constantinople for the Cappadocian rhetor Eudoxius,⁶² and the list goes on. Thus, recommendation remained a diffuse phenomenon, encompassing mobility, career advancement, problem-solving, recruitment, participation in the life of the Church, etc.

Secondly, as I stressed before, recommendations could be inserted into wider letters. At times, they amounted to a few words singling out the letter-bearer, without ulterior motive. At times, they could commend persons for further action on the part of the receivers.⁶³ *P Oxy XXXI 2603* is essentially a letter of greeting, of widespread attestation in literary epistolography. Yet, the author took the opportunity to commend the carriers of the letter, who, it should be mentioned, were known to the addressee (Sarapion):

Now concerning the acquaintances of ours who are bringing down the letter to you, there is no need for me to write, (knowing as I do) your friendship and affection to all, especially towards our brethren. Receive them therefore in love, as friends, for they are not catechumens but belong to the company of Ision and Nikolaos, and if you do anything for them, you have done it for me. All the brethren here salute you. Greet also the brethren with you, both elect and catechumens. I pray you may be strong.

The author also emphasised that they were not simply catechumens, but rather in the final stages before baptism. A note was also inserted in the left-hand margin requesting that Sarapion write further recommendations for them, so they may be received *κατὰ τόπον*, in every place they go: "And if you can write to the others about (them) don't hesitate, that they may receive them in each place".⁶⁴ The carriers' journey obviously continued beyond the place where Sarapion lived. Admittedly, this papyrus comes

from Manichean circles. Yet, it is illustrative for the category of pacific letters, to which I now turn.

Self-standing pacific letters are well attested by papyri. Their common denominator is the formulaic redaction (generally introductory greeting; request to receive the beneficiaries *ἐν εἰρήνῃ* or *κατὰ τὸ ἔθος*, according to custom), with specification on the status of these beneficiaries, and final greetings. A total of ten such papyri have been published.⁶⁵ C.-H. Kim, and in his wake K. Treu identified them as recommendations,⁶⁶ of the type mentioned by Sozomen, Gregory of Nazianzus and Basil of Caesarea – all of whom refer to tokens, *συμβολαῖοι*, with which Christians travelled the world and found brotherly love and support everywhere.⁶⁷ The chief difficulty in studying these letters is that papyri cannot be dated with precision. At best, one can approximate the period based on palaeographic criteria.⁶⁸

P Oxy LVI 3857, dated to the fourth century, is addressed, in modern terms, to “whomever it may concern” – laity as well as clergy, which suggests it was used as a travel document. It identifies Germania as a person in need and as a “daughter”, meaning that she was a baptized Christian: “To my beloved brothers and fellow ministers, wherever they may be. Receive in peace our daughter Germania, who needs help and goes to you. Through her I and those who are with me greet you and those who are with you. Immanuel”.⁶⁹ Interestingly, the writer of *P Oxy* LVI 3857 does not identify himself – perhaps because Germania was expected to volunteer the information when questioned.⁷⁰ The absence of authors’ credentials would become a problem in time, as we have seen with *can.* 1 of the council of Nîmes.

The materiality of this papyrus is also telling. It has been folded from bottom to top six times, into a tiny object measuring ca 2-3 cm in width,⁷¹ and was carried probably in a pouch around the neck or attached to the belt. This gives us an idea of how precious these documents were for their beneficiaries, people of limited resources who depended on the support of the communities they stopped at in the course of their journey.

In *P Oxy* VIII 1162, likewise from the fourth century, a presbyter named Leon commends Ammonius, styled as “brother” (meaning he is a baptized Christian) to the clergy of whichever community Ammonius passes through:

Leon, presbyter, to fellow servants presbyters and deacons, beloved brothers in the Lord God, fullness of joy. Our brother Ammonius, who is

coming to you, receive him in peace; through him I and those (who are) with me affectionately greet in the Lord you and those (who are) with you. I pray for your welfare in the Lord God. Emmanuel is my witness. Amen.⁷²

Here the sender does identify himself, and mentions his clerical position. The community from which Ammonius came was probably recognized from lists of clergy and addresses local Churches must have had at hand.

Scholarship interprets these and similar papyrus letters as a separate category of recommendation letters on the basis of their formal and structural homogeneity, similar use of vocabulary, the care to mention the status of the beneficiaries,⁷³ who are invariably lay Christians or catechumens, their need for assistance, and the fact that none of these letters implied the solving of other problems.⁷⁴ More recently, Timothy Teeter also argued for setting the pacific letter apart from the recommendation letter (*littera commendaticia*, respectively *formata*). Teeter weighed these papyri against canonical sources, and maintained that pacific letters were issued to the laity only. Any members of the higher clergy (deacons, presbyters, bishops) could author such letters – here Teeter refers to *can.* 8 of the Council of Antioch, discussed above. He also argued that such letters were only meant to secure hospitality, without particular bearing on communion in the Eucharist.⁷⁵ Yet the careful emphasis of the beneficiary's credentials suggests otherwise. The main purpose of the pacific letter depended on the type of endeavour carriers undertook: if the carrier was a traveller, the letter was meant to secure hospitality along the way and/or at destination; if a displaced person, it could function as a "certificate of transfer of church membership".⁷⁶ One can assume that local ecclesiastical chancelleries dealt with this type of documents, both in terms of writing and of reception.⁷⁷ They may have also been produced in bulk, and the name and credentials of the beneficiary inserted later.

Amongst literary sources that mention pacific letters, a useful point of comparison, overlooked so far in scholarship, is Basil of Caesarea's *ep.* 258, addressed to Epiphanius of Salamis. In the introductory chapter, Basil refers to εἰρηνικά γράμματα, with which Epiphanius supplied his envoys. Basil thanks Epiphanius for having sent "brothers to visit us, carriers in good standing of pacific letters".⁷⁸ In determining, however, whether "letters of peace" refers to recommendation or has other technical meanings, the context is very important. For example, Leo I (bishop of Rome 440 – 461 AD), denotes as "letter of peace" the document of communion

he refused to Anatolios of Constantinople.⁷⁹ A similar understanding appears in Basil's *ep.* 203, addressed to the "bishops on the sea coast". Basil reproaches these bishops their silence, tantamount in his view with their refusal to acknowledge him as metropolitan. He then asks these bishops to "console" him "of the past with pacific letters and loving words".⁸⁰

In contrast, the ecclesiastical *littera commendaticia* or *formata* in later councils, was granted to clergy alone. Its author could only be a bishop, in later times, a metropolitan or primate. Teeter relies here on the distinction *can.* 11 and 13 of the council of Chalcedon make between pacific letters given to the needy and recommendations given to "persons of distinction". He seems to imply that this designates clergy.⁸¹ But this was not always the case. *Can.* 12 of the Council of Carthage (407 AD) states that any person (irrespective of belonging to clergy) wishing to appeal to the imperial court must present first a *formata* to the Church of Rome, and ask for a new *formata* from there lest they be deprived of communion.⁸² This is not the only council that seeks to control appeal to the emperor. A similar prohibition was made, for instance, at the council of Antioch.⁸³ Through such canons the Church attempted to discourage dissenting parties (be they schismatics, heretics, excommunicated or unsatisfied parties) from seeking a secular resolution to ecclesiastical matters. *Can.* 12 here does not discriminate between clergy and laity: both are obliged to present recommendations. In light of this, the persons "held in esteem" from *can.* 11 of Chalcedon should be understood to include lay Christians of some consequence, since anyone who could access the court must have had considerable wealth and influence.

If theoretically any travelling clergy should carry a recommendation of the second type, in practice this was not always the case. At any rate, we do not know in what way the content differed from the pacific letter. To give another example from the correspondence of Basil, at the end of his letter to the Western bishops (*ep.* 243), he commends the carrier thus:

By God's grace instead of many we have sent one, our very pious and very beloved brother Dorotheos, the fellow priest. He is fully able to supply by his personal report whatever has been omitted in our letter, for he has carefully followed all that has occurred, and is a zealous defender of the right faith. Receive him in peace (Ὁν προσδεξάμενοι ἐν εἰρήνῃ), and speedily send him back to us, bringing us good news of your readiness to support the brotherhood.⁸⁴

It is unlikely that Dorotheos carried separate recommendation letters; in this case, Basil's recommendation passage was sufficient – all the more so since the letter was meant to be circulated, so it could be read by ecclesiastical authorities that fell in Dorotheos' path. Moreover, Basil's turn of phrase is very similar to the pacific letters just discussed. The only difference is that Dorotheos was mandated to give a full report of the happenings in the East (the persecution of Nicene Christians, rifts within the Nicene party).

Within this category, a group apart are letters of delegation, by which bishops identified and mandated legates to attend official ecclesiastical business. Here we can cite several examples. In a petition to emperor Theodosius, Ambrose detailed the embassy he was sending and its mission.⁸⁵ In a letter to Jerome, Theophilus of Alexandria expounded the embassy he sent to the Holy Land and its mission.⁸⁶ Leo I wrote to Theodosius II and Pulcheria informing them who were the legates he appointed to the council of Ephesus.⁸⁷ But even here, *ep.* 30 to Pulcheria is rather concerned with the Eutychian controversy and Pulcheria's role in it, the recommendation of the legates being of secondary character and appears only at the end.

The distinction between the *commendaticia* or *formata* and dimissorial letters is even more difficult to extract from the documents of the time. Canonical sources do not use specific terms for dimissorial letters. At best, we find vague references to the "consent" and / or "authorization" of the ruling bishop for relocation and ordination elsewhere. If the dimissorial became an established type in the Middle Ages, it seems that in Late Antiquity the *commendaticia* was an umbrella-term that encompassed also recommendations enabling clergy to change parish. Augustine, for instance, speaks in *ep.* 78 of a certain Spes, who was pressuring the bishop either to ordain him into the clergy, or to write him a letter of recommendation so that he could be ordained elsewhere:

But when he was labouring most earnestly to obtain promotion to the rank of the clergy, either on the spot from myself, or elsewhere through letter of mine (*litteras meas*), and I could on no account be induced either to lay hands in the act of ordination upon a man of whom I thought so ill, or to consent to introduce him through commendation of mine to any brother, he began to act more violently (...).⁸⁸

This Spes had some sort of quarrel with a presbyter, Boniface, a conflict Augustine was unable to sort out, and decided, therefore, to send both to Nola, to the sanctuary of Felix, in the hope that a miraculous event would reveal the culprit.⁸⁹ He also mentions in the same letter that Boniface “humbly agreed to forego his claim to a letter by the use of which on his journey he might have asked what was due to his rank, so that both should stand on a footing of equality in a place where both were alike unknown”.⁹⁰

CPR V 11 seems to distinguish between “consent” and the receiving of “letters” (γράμμάτων), the latter evidently less authoritative than the former. “Letters” may be used here in technical sense, akin to *epistolia* in conciliar documents. It perhaps refers to a letter enabling Aurelios Basis to travel, without implying relocation. In contrast, the bishop’s “consent” would imply a document that authorized the deacon to relocate.

Generally, however, boundaries remained blurred. The same letter could be used to more than one end. The recommendation with which Jerome dispatched his deacon, Praesidius, to Augustine, is worth citing at length:

Last year I sent by the hand of our brother, the sub-deacon Asterius, a letter conveying to your Excellency a salutation due to you, and readily rendered by me; and I think that my letter was delivered to you. I now write again, by my holy brother the deacon Praesidius, begging you in the first place not to forget me, and in the second place to receive the bearer of this letter, whom I commend to you with the request that you recognise him as one very near and dear to me, and that you encourage and help him in whatever way his circumstances may demand; not that he is in need of anything (for Christ has amply endowed him), but that he is most eagerly desiring the friendship of good men, and thinks that in securing this he obtains the most valuable blessing. His design in travelling to the West you may learn from his own lips.⁹¹

One or two years later, Augustine requested a Praesidius to forward a letter to Jerome. This Praesidius is styled “brother and partner in the priestly office” (*consacerdos*), a term with which Augustine usually designates fellow bishops.⁹² If the two persons are identical,⁹³ we may suppose that Praesidius travelled to Africa to further his clerical career – in which case letter 103 served by way of dimissorial letter. Yet, Jerome was merely a priest, whereas the *commendaticiae* of this type should have been issued by bishops alone. Even if we see *ep.* 103 as a plain ecclesiastical recommendation, or even a private recommendation with

no “official” value, chances are small that Praesidius had documents that respected canonical prescriptions (i.e., issued by the bishop of the place and mandating his ordination elsewhere). At the time, Jerome was in full conflict with John of Jerusalem, the incumbent bishop.⁹⁴ The Origenist controversy notwithstanding, what sparked John’s animosity was that Jerome’s brother Paulinianus had been ordained by Epiphanius of Salamis without his consent. John treated the ordination as uncanonical. It is unlikely that he would have issued recommendations of any type for Praesidius. In this case, Jerome’s authority seems to have been sufficient.

Concluding Observations

If conciliar sources enable a theoretical distinction into pacific, commendatory and dismissorial letters, in practice ecclesiastical recommendation remained a fluid phenomenon, subject to processes of evolution, specialisation. Rules could be overlooked if the situation demanded. Boundaries were conflated, and one and the same document could serve multiple purposes. Moreover, there is a pronounced difference in practices of recommendation at a regional level. Western provinces, more focused on the authority of the Roman see, would develop a hierarchy of recommendations different from Eastern practices. The pacific letters used in Egypt did not necessarily coincide in form and especially function with the “letters of peace” used in Cappadocia. In many cases, the context determines the meaning and function of the recommendation. Thus, we should beware of constructing a linear development, although development did exist.

Amongst literary sources, embedded recommendations occur more frequently than self-standing letters. Letter-bearers were recommended in the body of the letter often for practical reasons: firstly, to authenticate the letter and, reciprocally, to identify its bearer. Several other factors influence the making of such recommendations: whether the letter was meant to be circulated (which would have made another recommendation superfluous); the length of travel, the availability of trustworthy messengers and of transportation, the relationship between author and messenger; the purpose of travel on the carrier’s part.

As I hope to have shown, the separation between clergy and laity is not as clear-cut as one would think at first sight. In certain situations *formatae* could be issued to laity. Rather, one should set apart the elite

from the rest of the congregation. Christians with limited resources depended on ecclesiastical referral to obtain assistance, whereas the elite and the aristocracy had ample resources for travel, their own networks of hospitality and people to vouchsafe for them in situ. The Paulas and Melanias of the time had no need to be recommended by their bishop when travelling to the Holy Land. Their aristocratic pedigree was a recommendation in itself.

Ecclesiastical recommendation, understood as recommendation issued by Church authorities in their capacity as authorities has a much broader scope than the three categories outlined above. While we know of these because they were mandatory, pastoral care and ecclesial patronage provided many more occasions for exercising recommendation: asceticism, intercession on behalf of supplicants and protégés, education, among others. Moreover, the recommendation did not always guarantee the good conduct of the beneficiary. Vigilantius, a priest who made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land and whom Jerome received in his monastery at Bethlehem, had been recommended by Paulinus of Nola. Soon, however, Vigilantius left the monastery and turned against Jerome, prompting him to exclaim bitterly: "I believed the letter of holy Paulinus, and I did not think that his judgment on your name could be wrong".⁹⁵

This being said, there still remain unanswered questions. Our sources remain silent, for instance, on the validity of these documents, or on how (if) they were archived, particularly the letters with collective address. Like in so many other aspects, any consideration we may advance is conditioned by the sources we have access to. Recommendations, being functional documents, had a smaller chance of survival in the epistolary collections designed to present their author in a certain light.

Abbreviations

ANF – Ante-Nicene Fathers

CChr.SL – Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina

CSEL – Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum Latinorum

NPNF – Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers

PCBE – Prosopographie chrétienne du Bas-Empire

PL – Patrologia Latina

SC – Sources chrétiennes

NOTES

- 1 Cf. GIZEWSKI.
- 2 GREY 2004, 25-40.
- 3 An excellent illustration of how expensive, time-consuming, and cumbersome was travel in the ancient world is given by CASSON 1994, 115-218.
- 4 As CASSON 1994, 220, notes, since there was no institution that could approximate modern postal services, ancient letter-writers, Christian or not, struggled constantly to find suitable carriers of their missives. They often had to appeal to third parties, travellers or strangers going in the right direction. Cf. also HEAD 2009, 283-284. All this meant that the delivery of a letter was an exercise of trust on the part of the sender, and generally an unpredictable affair. Hence the many undelivered letters and the time-lapse between sending and reception, which could amount to anything between days and several years. For the importance of this chronological gap in the study of ancient letters, see EBBELER 2017, 247.
- 5 E.g., Rom 16:1-2: "I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church at Cenchreae, so that you may welcome her in the Lord, as is fitting for the saints, and help her in whatever she may require from you, for she has been a benefactor of many and of myself as well"; 1 Cor 16:10-11: "If Timothy comes, see that he has nothing to fear among you, for he is doing the work of the Lord just as I am; therefore let no one despise him. Send him on his way in peace, so that he may come to me; for I am expecting him with the brothers."
- 6 POLYCARP, ep. ad Phil. 14: "These things I have written to you by Crescens, whom up to the present time I have recommended unto you, and do now recommend. For he has acted blamelessly among us, and I believe also among you. Moreover, y[ou] will hold his sister in esteem when she comes to you." (tr. ANF 1, 36).
- 7 SLOOTJES 2019, 295-300.
- 8 For an overview of the doctrinal debates of the fourth and the fifth centuries, see the still influential analysis of GRILLMEYER 1974.
- 9 Apart from recommendation letters, communion was attested by letters of salutation written by clergy to one another, pastoral letters, synodal and canonical letters, letters informing on the ordination to and "taking possession" of a see, letters authorizing clerical mobility, etc. See CARR 2009, 815-832.
- 10 See SLOOTJES 2019, 298.
- 11 Such as widows and virgins who rejected marriage and the social security it offered, to dedicate themselves to a religious life.
- 12 DILLEY 2017, *passim*.
- 13 See, e.g., HUNT 1982.

- ¹⁴ On these letter collections and issues of editing, agenda, survival, see the following studies in SOGNO, STORIN and WATTS 2017: RADDE-GALLWITZ, 146-160; WASHBURN, 190-204; CAIN, 221-238; and EBBELER, 239-253. See also CAIN 2009.
- ¹⁵ Ps-DEMETRIUS, *Τύποι ἐπιστολικοί* 2 (ed. WEICHERT, 3.16-18); English tr. in KEYES 1935, 38. Keyes (pp. 28-30) asserts that, although the manual has been written in the first century BC, it was subject to multiple revisions and remained in use up to the fourth century AD.
- ¹⁶ Ps-LIBANIUS, *Ἐπιστολιμαῖοι χαρακτηρισῆρες* 4 (ed. WEICHERT, 16.2-3); English tr. in KEYES 1935, 38.
- ¹⁷ The term of BRAUCH 2010, 130.
- ¹⁸ BASIL OF CAESAREA, *ep.* 305 (ed. COURTONNE, vol. 3, 182): “This man is already known to you, as his very words show (...) So this man, who now goes back to you, asked for a letter [from us], not to inveigle himself in your close circle through our mediation, but to be of service to me and offer me an occasion to greet my friends. The Lord shall reward him for his good intention; as for you, repay as far as you can the debt of gratitude you owe him through your prayers and the goodwill you show to all (...)”. Unless otherwise specified, the English translations are mine.
- ¹⁹ BASIL OF CAESAREA, *ep.* 313 (ed. COURTONNE, vol. 3, 187-188).
- ²⁰ In this sense, the law in *Codex Theodosianus* 16.2.15, exempting clergy from supplementary taxes, has been brought in relation to BASIL OF CAESAREA, *ep.* 83, 98, 213, 281, 284 and GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS, *ep.* 67-69. See SC 497, 151, n. 4.
- ²¹ Boniface’s case, as reconstructed from Augustine’s correspondence, is outlined in PCBE 1, Bonifatius 7, 148-149.
- ²² AUGUSTINE, *ep.* 96.2-3 (CSEL 34/2, 514.20-515.1, 516.1-4); English tr. in NPNF I/1, 405.
- ²³ In fact, the majority of the examples cited here from amongst the letters of known authors are such “embedded” recommendations.
- ²⁴ Cf. GIZEWSKI.
- ²⁵ Cf. See LUIJENDIJK 2008, 103: “The duties of friendship entailed recommending friends to influential relations in order to help them to advance their lives”.
- ²⁶ See n. 5 above.
- ²⁷ For a discussion on the Pauline letter-bearers entrusted with such extended ministry, see HEAD 2009, 279-282. In the remainder of his paper (pp. 282-298), Head proceeds to corroborate this observation with documentary papyri which give the name of the respective letter-bearer.
- ²⁸ MRATSCHEK 2019, 155.
- ²⁹ See VIELLA MASANA 2009, 83-113, with a focus on communion letters in the context of travel.

- 30 MRATSCHEK 2019, 152.
- 31 *Apostolic Constitutions* II.58.1-2 (SC 320, 320-322).
- 32 *Apostolic Constitutions* VIII.47.12 (SC 336, 279).
- 33 *Apostolic Constitutions* VIII.47.13 (SC 336, 279).
- 34 A comprehensive treatment of canonical sources in relation to *stabilitas loci* can be found in DOCKTER 2013, 49-76, especially the section on recommendation letters and clerical mobility at 60-66.
- 35 COUNCIL OF ARLES, *can.* 7-8 (SC 241, 48-50).
- 36 COUNCIL OF ANTIOCH, *can.* 7 (ed. JOANNOU, 110.4-5, tr. NPNF II.14, 111): “No stranger shall be received without letters pacifical”. The term “received” is to be understood here in the sense of being granted hospitality as well as being accepted into communion.
- 37 COUNCIL OF CARTHAGE, *can.* 7 (CChr.SL 149, 6.118-7.128).
- 38 COUNCIL OF LAODICEA, *can.* 42 (ed. JOANNOU, 148.4-6): “A presbyter or a clergyman should not leave without permission from [their] bishop.”
- 39 *Apostolic Constitutions* VIII.47.33 (SC 336, 284). See also DOCKTER 2013, 60-61.
- 40 COUNCIL OF ANTIOCH, *can.* 8 (ed. JOANNOU, 110.9-14).
- 41 The term “unblemished” refers probably to the doctrinal stance of these bishops, since the council of Antioch was convened in the context of Christological controversies.
- 42 See, e.g., COUNCIL OF NÎMES (396 AD), *can.* 6 (SC 241, 128): “If any minister of the altar embarks on a trip for whatever reason, their letters should be signed by [their] bishops alone.”
- 43 COUNCIL OF HIPPO, *can.* 27 (CChr.SL 149, 41.155-159). This canon also prescribes that the primate should write to overseas bishops in the name of the local council – presumably the traveller was to carry this letter too, in an attempt to maximise the benefits of an otherwise expensive and time-consuming endeavour.
- 44 ZOSIMUS, *ep.* 1.1 (PL 20, 642-643). See DOCKTER 2013, 63-64; VIELLA MASANA 2009, 98-99.
- 45 COUNCIL OF NICAEA, *can.* 16 (ed. MANSI, vol. 2, 676; tr. NPNF II/14, 35, modified).
- 46 WIPSZYCKA 1996, 180-184. For a study on the often mundane factors that prompted Christian mobility in late antique Egypt, see BLUMELL 2011, 239-247.
- 47 *Codex Theodosianus* 16.2.33 (SC 497, 186-187), with n. 3 on p. 187.
- 48 WIPSZYCKA 1996, 177-194; WIPSZYCKA 2001, 1310.
- 49 Greek text in WIPSZYCKA 1996, 178. Tr. HORSLEY 1981, 121, modified according to the translation of E. Wipszycka.
- 50 WIPSZYCKA 1996, 191.
- 51 COUNCIL OF NÎMES, *can.* 1 (SC 241, 126).

- 52 COUNCIL OF CHALCEDON, *can.* 11 (Greek text in TEETER 1997, 959.)
- 53 VIELLA MASANA 2009, 108, n. 140, considers that *apostholia* is a variation
on *epistolia*. It may also translate into Christian usage a type of authorisation
for grain shipment attested, e.g., in Egypt, albeit much earlier than the fourth
century. See BALAMOSHEV 2019, 1-16.
- 54 GAWLIK 1991, 2024-2025, distinguishes *formata* as part of the general
category of recommendation letters (*commendaticiae*), but referring to
itinerant clergy alone. See also FABRICIUS 1926, 39-86.
- 55 See n. 12 above.
- 56 BASIL OF CAESAREA, *ep.* 297 (ed. COURTONNE, vol. 3, 172.10-15).
- 57 JEROME, *ep.* 76.3 (CSEL 55, 36.12-20).
- 58 AUGUSTINE, *ep.* 31.7 (CSEL 34/2, 6.22-7.2; tr. NPNF I/1, 259-260).
- 59 E.g., BASIL OF CAESAREA, *ep.* 335 (ed. COURTONNE, vol. 3, 203.1-14);
ep. 337 (ed. COURTONNE, vol. 3, 204.1-205.15).
- 60 AUGUSTINE, *ep.* 41.2 (CSEL 34/2, 83.19-84.2).
- 61 PAULINUS OF NOLA, *ep.* 12.12. See GREY 2004, 33-34.
- 62 GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS, *ep.* 38.
- 63 Several of Augustine's letters recommend more than one person, making
it clear that the beneficiaries need not be also the carriers of the letter. See
AUGUSTINE, *ep.* 31.7 (CSEL 34/2, 6.22-7.18), 139.4 (CSEL 44, 154.2-
11), 212 (CSEL 44, 371.6-372.10). The latter commends two ascetic
ladies, mother and daughter, who also served as letter-carriers. Similarly,
AMBROSE's *ep.* 2.27 (PL 16, 886-887) commends to the care of Constantius,
a fellow bishop, an entire community. Constantius should oversee it until
a bishop could be ordained.
- 64 Ed. and tr. in BARNES *et al.* 1966, 174-175; NALDINI 1968, 212-215 (no. 47).
- 65 WIPSYZCKA 2001, 1312-3, gives the following list: P. Alex. 29 (Naldini 19,
3rd c.); PSI XV 1560 (Naldini 20, 3rd-4th c.); PSI III 208 (Naldini 28, 3rd-4th c.);
PSI IX 1041 (Naldini 29, 3rd-4th c.); P. Oxy. XXXI 2603 (Naldini 47, 4th c.); P.
Oxy. VIII 1162 (Naldini 50, 4th c.); SB III 7269 (Naldini 94, 4th-5th c.); SB XVI
12304 (3rd-4th c.); P. Oxy. XXXVI 2785 (4th c.); P. Oxy. LVI 3857 (4th c.).
- 66 KIM 1972; TREU 1973, 629-636. A synoptic overview of nine, on the basis
of Kim and Treu, is given in SIRIVIANOU 1989, 112-114. See also BLUMELL
2011, 244-245.
- 67 SOZOMEN, *hist. eccl.* 5.16.3; GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS, *Oration IV*
against Julian 1.11; BASIL OF CAESAREA, *ep.* 191 (ed. Courtonne, vol. 2,
145.23-27): "Such, indeed, was once the glory of the Church, that brothers
from each particular church travelled from one end of the world to the other
having been provided for the road with little tokens of recognition, found
all men fathers and brothers". See also TREU 1973, 636.
- 68 WIPSYZCKA 2001, 1313.
- 69 Ed. and tr. in SIRIVIANOU 1989, 115.

- 70 As HEAD 2009, 298, noted, in such cases “the bearer invariably has a crucial
 role in explaining in person the generally fairly coded requests for help”.
- 71 SIRIVIANOU 1989, 114.
- 72 Ed. HUNT 1911, 266. NALDINI 1968, 223-224 (no. 50). Tr. of Hunt,
 modified.
- 73 This is especially visible in earlier papyri, from the third century, P. Oxy.
 XXXVI 2785 and *PSI* IX 1041, pacific letters from the dossier of Sotas. See
 LUIJENDIJK 2008, 102-124; BLUMELL 2011, 10.
- 74 KIM 1972, 101-118; LUIJENDIJK 2008, 109-110; WIPSYZCKA 2001, 1312.
- 75 TEETER 1997, 958.
- 76 KIM 1972, 118: “It is quite possible that when a member of the church moved
 from one place to another, the leader of the local church instructed him to
 join another Christian congregation in his prospective residence area, and
 gave him a letter of introduction and certification to take along”.
- 77 WIPSYZCKA 2001, 1314: “Il est probable que les lettres de ce genre étaient
 rédigées au niveau des collaborateurs d’un évêque et étaient destinées aux
 collaborateurs d’un autre évêque.”
- 78 BASIL OF CAESAREA, *ep.* 258 (ed. Courtonne, vol. 3, 100.7-9).
- 79 LEO I, *ep.* 111.1 (PL 54, 1021).
- 80 BASIL OF CAESAREA, *ep.* 203 (ed. Courtonne, vol. 3, 171.2-3).
- 81 TEETER 1997, 955-956.
- 82 COUNCIL OF CARTHAGE, *can.* 12 = COUNCIL OF CARTHAGE (419 AD),
can. 106 (ed. JOANNOU, 370.6-371.12).
- 83 COUNCIL OF ANTIOCH, *can.* 11 (ed. JOANNOU, 113.4-21): Clergy cannot
 appeal to the emperor without “the consent and letters of the bishops of
 the province, and particularly of the metropolitan bishops”. The penalty for
 breaching the canon amounted to public excommunication and exclusion
 from the clergy.
- 84 BASIL OF CAESAREA, *ep.* 243 (ed. COURTONNE, vol. 3, 73.7-15).
- 85 AMBROSE, *ep.* 62.3 (PL 16, 1188).
- 86 JEROME, *ep.* 87 (CSEL 55, 140).
- 87 LEO I, *ep.* 29-30 (PL 54, 782-790).
- 88 AUGUSTINE, *ep.* 78.3 (CSEL 34/2, 334.10-15); tr. NPNF I/1, 346, modified.
- 89 On this conflict, see PCBE 1, Bonifatius 5, 148.
- 90 AUGUSTINE, *ep.* 78.4 (CSEL 34/2, 337.9-12); tr. NPNF I/1, 346, modified.
- 91 JEROME, *ep.* 103.1 (CSEL 55, 237.5-15) = AUGUSTINE, *ep.* 39; tr. NPNF
 I/1, 272.
- 92 AUGUSTINE, *ep.* 74 (CSEL 34/2, 279).
- 93 Cf. PCBE 1, Praesidius 1, 1814.
- 94 See HUNT 1982, 182-191.
- 95 JEROME, *ep.* 61.3 (CSEL 54, 580.7-8).

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