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Pope Hadrian I is widely regarded as one of the most important of the early medieval popes, largely because of his special relationship with Charlemagne and the huge interest generated among modern historians of the papacy and papal territories by the alleged confirmation by Charlemagne of the Donation of Quierzy (attributed to Pippin III). It was Hadrian who incited Charlemagne to invade the Lombard kingdom of Italy that led to its conquest in 774. But Rome itself flourished during Hadrian’s pontificate and became a major centre for the veneration of saints and pilgrimage. All this can be learnt from the surviving evidence, primarily of Roman origin, for Hadrian’s reign. Hartmann’s book in consequence offers a specifically Roman perspective on Hadrian’s career. Not only is there the physical evidence still visible among Rome’s buildings, but much of Hadrian’s correspondence with the Frankish ruler appears to have been preserved in the Codex Carolinus. Hartmann rightly stresses the tensions inherent in the relationship between the pope and the Frankish ruler, and evident behind the diplomatic cordiality of the letters’ texts. There is besides the problematic Life of Hadrian included in the Liber Pontificalis (Life 97). This essentially offers a full account for the years 772–774 but thereafter (c. 45 onwards) simply offers a description of Hadrian’s various gifts to and restorations of the churches and other buildings, aqueducts and walls of Rome. Only a brief allusion is made to the papal reception of the Second Council of Nicaea in 787 (c. 88) and the pope’s death (c. 97). The biography is thus frustratingly meagre in terms of its coverage of political events.

It is important to note, however, that this is the form in which Hadrian’s career was presented to the world at large. Life 97 is the final Life in some of the earliest manuscripts of the Liber Pontificalis in both the so-called »Lombard« and »Frankish« recensions, though many others of these two versions, as well as of Duchesne’s Groups C and D texts, only include the papal biographies up to Life 94 (Stephen II). The wonderful epitaph for Hadrian, inscribed on the large black stone from the Ardennes and sent from Francia after his death, is still to be seen above the door in the left hand portico of St Peter’s basilica in Rome, whence it was transferred after the destruction of Old St Peter’s in the sixteenth century. The section on this inscription, would have benefited from the important work of Joanna Story and others published in the »Papers of the British School at Rome« in 2005.

As the subtitle of this book suggests, Hartmann is particularly concerned, first of all to place Hadrian in his Roman context, not least within the social networks of the Roman aristocratic families and the immediate hinterland of Rome itself. Secondly he discusses the relations between Hadrian and both the Franks and Byzantium, which inevitably involved issues of papal authority and theology. Hartmann sees Hadrian’s pontificate as having a greater claim than most to be a major turning point in the
history of the papacy. He introduces his readers first of all to the written evidence offered in the Life in the *Liber Pontificalis* and in the *Codex Carolinus*. For the latter he was able to use the then not-published study of the *Codex Carolinus* by Achim Thomas Hack, subsequently published as the next volume (vol. 35) after Hartmann’s in the series »Päpste und Papsttum« in 2006. Hartmann then explores what can be reconstructed concerning the aristocratic character of Hadrian’s milieu and activities, manifested above all in his election and his policies. Hartmann argues that a recognition of this aristocratic emphasis is crucial for a proper understanding of Hadrian’s career. The intentions behind, as well as the content of, the various texts associated with Hadrian, such as the »Hadrianum Sacramentary« and the »Dionysio-Hadriana« collection of canon law, accord, on Hartmann’s showing, with this emphasis. Hartmann has also been able to take full advantage of recent developments in historical analysis, not least ideas of *Inszenierung* and symbol. The chapter on papal liturgy and liturgical processions as well as the splendid gifts and embellishments of the buildings are persuasively interpreted by Hartmann as aspects of the establishment of papal control of Rome and one means for the legitimization of his secular rule of the city. How the pope attempted to exert his authority outside Rome is explored in well-crafted sections dealing with the pope’s relations with Gausfred of Pisa, the duchy of Spoleto, San Vincenzo al Volturno, and Ravenna.

It is astonishing that no-one since David Sefton’s Michigan PhD of 1975 has attempted a major book-length re-examination of the career and historical role of Pope Hadrian. This thorough and interesting analysis of Hadrian’s political activity in its various manifestations by Florian Hartmann, first presented for PhD in 2005 in Bonn, is therefore all the more welcome. This useful and lucidly presented book should be an essential point of reference from henceforth.