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GEORGE T. BEECH

BIOGRAPHY AND THE STUDY OF 11<sup>th</sup> CENTURY SOCIETY  
BISHOP PETER II OF POITIERS 1087-1115<sup>1</sup>

One of the most serious obstacles to the understanding of virtually every period and society in medieval Europe is the obscurity of the leading figures of the day. Men who came to hold the highest offices in church, monastery, and government were regularly unidentified as to family, class, or place of origin, and rarely does the modern historian know the previous careers of such people or how they rose to positions of power. Nor does the situation improve when it comes to assessing the accomplishments of this or that individual of importance. Lack of clear, chronologically organized information about the policies, decisions, actions, itinerary, circle of acquaintances, etc., of most prominent people prevents the modern historian from determining their historical importance, whether they must be judged influential, of little account, or something in between. In large part this situation is due to the lack of contemporary biographies or biographical information. But to a considerable degree our ignorance on these questions stems from the failure of modern historians to take a biographical approach to the study of medieval Europe. Very few medieval Europeans have been the objects of modern biographies aside from the obvious cases of kings, popes, theologians, or leaders such as Thomas Beckett or Francis of Assisi, and surprisingly enough even many a king has yet to find his biographer. This modern neglect may be attributed to various factors but certainly most important among these is the conviction that medieval biography is impossible quite simply because of the lack of contemporary sources. In one sense this judgment is certainly correct. Full scale biographies such as one would write of 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, or 20<sup>th</sup> century personalities exposing in detail the psychological, intellectual, and religious development of the individual, his childhood, adolescence, education, career, marriage, etc., are clearly impossible for all save perhaps a handful of medieval Europeans. Yet in another sense this negative conclusion is premature and unfortunate. For fragmentary and incomplete but nonetheless significant biographical information can

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is a modified version of a talk delivered at a meeting of the German Historical Institute in Paris, June 15, 1978.



be assembled for a larger number of prominent people than might appear possible at first glance. Sources containing such information do in fact exist and for the period after the 10<sup>th</sup> century often in considerable abundance. I am referring first to the documentary record of charters, writs, letters, and the like and, second, to the data contained in monastic necrologies and martyrologies. The cumulative value of these two categories of sources for biographical information far exceeds that of narrative sources for the same periods. This information is not, however, immediately accessible to modern historians because it lies scattered in many different, unrelated documents in isolated bits and pieces most of which are unintelligible when seen by themselves alone. Only when someone assembles all the fragments available or known can the whole yield more than the separate parts.

An illustration of how the lack of biographical data on leading people limits or restricts the historical understanding of a medieval society is furnished by the region which is the subject of the following paper – Poitiers and the province of Poitou in west-central France at the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Since late antiquity Poitiers had been a religious center of the first order, the capital of a huge diocese comprising the modern departments of the Vendée, the Deux-Sèvres, and the Vienne. Several famous monastic houses such as Saint-Hilaire-le-Grand, Saint-Cyprien, Sainte-Croix, and Sainte-Radegonde flourished in or just outside the city. It had also long been a political center in western France. In the 10<sup>th</sup> century its counts had acquired the title to the duchy of Aquitaine and thus transformed the town into the capital of an enormous territorial principality extending from the Loire to the Pyrenees. The 11<sup>th</sup> century counts ranked among the most powerful princes in all France at the time. Whatever its greatness in earlier times, it is doubtful whether any period matched the extraordinary age of the later 11<sup>th</sup> and early 12<sup>th</sup> centuries. As in other parts of France at the time, growth of population and expansion in commerce and industrial production made this a period of unprecedented prosperity. Then beginning with the pontificate of Gregory VII the town became a center for the ecclesiastical reform movement as witnessed by the several great councils meeting there between the 1070's and the early 12<sup>th</sup> century with the most famous reformers of the age – bishops, archbishops, legates, and once the Pope – in attendance. Appeals for the new crusading movement were launched here and the city served as the starting point for what some historians now call the expedition of 1101. The local schools of Saint-Hilaire and of the cathedral of Saint-Pierre appear to have expanded at this time and to have gained renown especially in canon law. Simultaneously the new orders of reformed canons began to flourish in the diocese which also welcomed the settle-



ment of new eremitic and monastic orders founded by the itinerant preachers Robert d'Arbrissel and Giraud de Sales. At precisely the same time the romanesque style of architecture reached the highest point of its development with the construction of many new churches including those for which the city of Poitiers is famous. Finally, mere mention of the name of the count of Poitou and Duke of Aquitaine at this time, William the Troubadour (1086–1126), suffices to indicate that the city was becoming a literary center of great importance around 1100.

These generalizations have been gleaned from the works of a number of modern historians and have become commonplaces scarcely open to challenge.<sup>2</sup> But when one probes more closely in search for a more detailed knowledge of people and events, he is disappointed to find that such does not exist. Only one individual, William the Troubadour, has been studied in depth and then mainly by literary historians. Not even for him can one find a satisfactory political biography. Other prominent people of the day remain either entirely unknown or are at best shadowy figures whose origins, careers, and accomplishments are obscure.

The following paper is the first part of a project to make up for these gaps or deficiencies by using the biographical approach to study the structure and history of Poitiers and its region in northern Aquitaine ca 1100. The collective biographical or prosopographical approach would be a more accurate description for this will involve a series of comparative biographies of a number of people who played important roles in the events of the time and not just of a single individual. The shortcomings of individual biography are well known and need no reiteration here: above all else there is the fact that no single person, no matter how brilliant, forceful, or influential lives and works in isolation from others. Even those who lead depend on others for advice, support, and the like, and can best be understood as members of groups of one kind or another. This inquiry rests upon the supposition that a few small groups of influential people largely determined the course of events in Poitou during this period and that knowing them holds the key to the understanding of the period. Its goal then is to identify (i. e., as to family,

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<sup>2</sup> Gaston DEZ, *Histoire de Poitiers*, in: *Mémoires de la Société des Antiquaires de l'Ouest*, 4<sup>e</sup> série 10 (1966) p. 39–58. Alfred RICHARD, *Histoire des Comtes de Poitou*, Paris 1903, I, p. 382–506. Edmond-René LABANDE, *Situation de l'Aquitaine en 1066*, in: *Bulletin de la Société des Antiquaires de l'Ouest*, 4<sup>e</sup> série 8 (1966) p. 339–63. Edmond-René LABANDE, *La civilisation de l'Aquitaine à la fin de la période ducal*, in: *Bulletin du Centre International d'Études Romanes*, 1–2 (1964) p. 15–30. Gabriel LE BRAS, *L'Activité canonique à Poitiers pendant la réforme grégorienne*, in: *Mélanges offerts à René Crozet à l'occasion de son 70<sup>e</sup> anniversaire*, edd. Pierre GALLAIS, Yves-Jean RIOU, Poitiers 1966, p. 237–39.



social, regional origins) the members of these groups and to reconstruct so far as possible their careers as officials or leaders of one kind or another.

The biographies of these individuals will conform to a more or less fixed pattern. First the assembling of all known references to the person in question in contemporary sources, then their arrangement in chronological order. Such a list will normally furnish answers to at least some of the following questions which are vital to this type of inquiry. Where did the person come from, who were his parents, what was their social status, and what offices if any had they held; where, if at all, was he educated, in what, and by whom; what succession of offices or positions did he obtain, and how; finally what did he accomplish, and what was his attitude with regard to the greater and lesser movements and events of the day? Did he encourage them, oppose them, and what role, if any, did he play in influencing their outcome?

The contemporary bishop of Poitiers, a man who by virtue of his position alone must have been someone of consequence, is the subject of the first of these biographies.<sup>3</sup> A single man, Peter II, held the episcopal office for more than 29 years from 1087–1115, yet remains practically unknown even to local historians. No biography exists for him aside from a brief notice of some 30 lines in the *Vies des Saints* of the Benedictins of Paris and a bit longer one in a history of regional saints by a 19<sup>th</sup> century ecclesiastical historian.<sup>4</sup> But both are works of piety and neither makes any attempt to describe the historical bishop. The 17<sup>th</sup> century Poitevin scholar, Jean Besly, and the editors of the *Gallia Christiana* made more serious efforts to collect contemporary references to the highlights in his life but they only found fragments and in any case neither had any intention of writing a coherent biography of the man.<sup>5</sup>

Does the lack of a modern biography stem from the insignificance of the man, or simply from the lack of contemporary information on him? Neither hypothesis is correct. As will be demonstrated in the following, contemporaries considered him a bishop of exceptional stature and indeed a cult celebrating his sanctity took shape in the years following his death.

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<sup>3</sup> Due to the mass of material involved this paper will forego a full presentation of the facts concerning the contemporary bishop of Poitiers. Instead, leaving presentation of the detailed arguments for another occasion, it will summarize his role in several of the more decisive movements of the time and in the process show how even a individual biography can, despite its shortcomings, illuminate general history.

<sup>4</sup> *Vies des Saints et des Bienheureux*, edd. by the Benedictins of Paris, vol. 4 (April), Paris 1946, p. 97–98. Charles AUBER, *Vies des saints de l'église de Poitiers*, Poitiers 1858, p. 75.

<sup>5</sup> Jean BESLY, *Évesques de Poitiers*, Paris 1647, p. 66–86. *Gallia Christiana*, II, p. 1167–70.



At the same time a wealth of written evidence sheds more light on his life than on that of any other Poitevin bishop of the 11<sup>th</sup> and probably also of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Almost certainly the main reason why modern historians have failed to notice this bishop is the absence of a contemporary biography of the man such as do exist for a number of other French prelates of this time. With no narrative to serve as a framework for his life and with biographical data on him widely scattered in many different sources, it was easy for later historians to overlook him.

Since the episcopal archives from this period have not survived, charters from monasteries in the diocese of Poitiers constitute the major element in the documentation on bishop Peter II, although a not insignificant number come from outside the province. More than 40 of the bishop's own charters found their way into monastic archives as a result of a variety of transactions. In over 160 other instances monastic scribes drew up their own charters describing matters in which the bishop appeared as an arbitrator, judge, convener of synods, witness, and so forth. Most of these documents (perhaps two-thirds) have already been published, but a substantial number exists only in originals, or in contemporary or later copies. Few chroniclers were active in Poitiers during this period, hence their references to the bishop amount to little altogether and are of strictly secondary importance compared to the charter evidence. Citations in monastic obituaries are also few in number although of considerable value, as are also epitaphs, entries in rolls of the dead and references in lives of other saints. Finally a number of papal and episcopal letters addressed to Peter are extant; on the other hand the bishop's own correspondence has been lost.

As in the case with so many medieval dignitaries, Peter II begins to appear in the historical record only after rising to prominence as a mature man. Of his early life almost nothing is known. He reigned as bishop for over 29 years and held the office of archdeacon for several years before that. If it is assumed that he was at least in his 20's before being named to the latter office, he must have been in his 60's and possibly more when he died in 1115. His birthdate might thus fall around 1050.

It is striking that Peter himself in his own charters, as well as other scribes who mentioned him in theirs, kept silent on the subject of his parents and family. In all of the 200 or more documents available only one names his father and only one other identifies two of his brothers. Never a mention of his mother, grandparents, uncles, aunts, nephews, etc. In contrast to this the families of his four predecessors back for over a century were and are well known. Is this proof of the low social status of his family? Possibly. His name, Geoffrey de Chauvigny, identifies Peter's father as coming from a major Poitevin castle 15 miles east of the



city of Poitiers.<sup>6</sup> Until Geoffrey himself has been identified more clearly it can only be speculated that he was one of the vassals of the lords of that castle, thus one of the *milites castri* or knightly class, a class just then gaining recognition as the lowest stratum in the regional aristocracy. Both in his aristocratic descent and in being native to his diocese, Peter II conforms to the model of the typical bishop of this time as recently sketched by B. Guillemain.<sup>7</sup>

Either by choice or parental decision Peter turned to a career in the church and he presumably prepared himself for this by studies at one of the many episcopal or monastic schools then flourishing in urban centers in France. It is not known when, where, or what he studied, but an eulogy by Hildebert of Lavardin praises his learning in general terms and leaves no doubt that he was an educated man.<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless Peter left no written works nor did any contemporary attribute any books or treatises to him, so it is clear that he does not fall into the small category of intellectual-writer bishops of his time.<sup>9</sup> Any aspiring young student from Poitou in the 1060's and 70's would have had to look no further than the schools of Saint-Hilaire or of the cathedral of Saint-Pierre for an education. One 13<sup>th</sup> century biographer writes that the fame of abbot Renaud of Saint-Cyprien of Poitiers (1069–1100) reached far beyond the city and attracted among others Bernard of Abbeville, future founder of the order of Tiron, to Poitiers all the way from northern France.<sup>10</sup> Peter II's close association with Renaud after his elevation to the episcopacy in 1087 can only strengthen the conjecture that he received his intellectual upbringing under that abbot in the 1070's. This was a time when new reform ideas were first penetrating into the city with the famous councils of 1075 and 1078 and it is quite conceivable that Peter, at a formative stage in his youth, could have been won over to the reform party with the determination to help improve local conditions in the future.

<sup>6</sup> *Gaufredus de Calviniano . . . et filius ejus, Petrus, archidiaconus*, Cartulaire de Saint-Jean d'Angély, ed. Georges MUSSET, in: Archives Historiques de la Saintonge et de l'Aunis 30 (1901) p. 315.

<sup>7</sup> Bernard GUILLEMAIN, Les origines des évêques de France aux 11<sup>e</sup> et 12<sup>e</sup> siècles, in: Le istituzioni ecclesiastiche della Società Christiana dei secoli XI–XII. Papato, cardinalato ed episcopato. Atti della quinta Settimana internazionale di Studio Mendola 26–31 Agosto 1971, Milano 1974, p. 374–402.

<sup>8</sup> *Sed quoniam virtus in praesule plaris habetur, De virtute sua pauca referre libet. Corpus, opes, studium, mores, cibus asper, egenus, Lectio, probra, domat, carpit, alit, fugiunt*, Patrologia Latina, t. 171, col. 1434.

<sup>9</sup> GUILLEMAIN, Les origines. According to Guillemain they accounted for only a small minority among the episcopacy of the time.

<sup>10</sup> *Est ab hac civitate (Poitiers) non longe positum Sancti Cypriani monasterium, quod eo tempore regebat abbas Raynaudus, vir apprime litteris eruditus, tanta sapientia praeditus, ut in conciliis publicis causarum perorator esset elegantissimus*, Goffridus Grossus, Life of Bernard of Tiron, Acta Sanctorum, Aprilis t. II, p. 225.



By the early 1080's at the latest, and probably earlier, Peter had gained appointment as a canon in the cathedral chapter of Saint-Pierre in Poitiers and thus took a decisive step towards an ecclesiastical career. In fact when he first appears clearly identifiable in contemporary charters (ca 1083) he had already advanced to the office of archdeacon, one of the foremost officials in diocesan government.<sup>11</sup> A recent survey of the ecclesiastical backgrounds of 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> century French bishops found that nearly all of those who were not monks and whose careers can be known prior to their nomination, came from cathedral chapters, and most frequently from the archdeaconate.<sup>12</sup> Once again Peter's case was no exception to the rule. Whether he owed his nomination and advancement to family connections, sponsorship by abbot Renaud, himself also a chapter member, acquaintance with the count, or with the incumbent bishop Isembert II (1047–86), or to some other circumstance, is uncertain. Not to be overlooked is the fact that bishop Isembert headed a family which controlled Chauvigny castle as vassals of the Count of Poitiers.<sup>13</sup> In all probability Geoffrey of Chauvigny, Peter's father, was himself a vassal of the bishop's family, and it is far from inconceivable that the two were related by marriage. These ties may have played a decisive role in Peter's advancement.

The circumstances surrounding Peter's elevation to the episcopacy in 1087 are somewhat clearer than those attendant on his accession to the cathedral chapter. At the time of the death of his predecessor Isembert in 1086, the condition of the church in Poitiers resembled closely that of many other dioceses in France at the time. Isembert represented the 4<sup>th</sup> generation of a single family which had held the bishopric for 120 years without interruption by passing the office from uncle to nephew.<sup>14</sup> Since they were vassals of the Count of Poitou, the latter must certainly have approved if not controlled this hereditary transmission of the office. Thus in the eyes of the Gregorian reformers of the 1070's, the suspicion of simony must have cast doubt on the legitimacy of Isembert's tenure.

<sup>11</sup> Cartulaire de l'abbaye de Talmond, ed. Louis de LA BOUTETIÈRE, in: *Mémoires de la Société des Antiquaires de l'Ouest* 36 (1872) p. 137. Cartulaires du Bas-Poitou, ed. Paul MARCHEGAY, Les Roches Baritaud 1872, p. 63–4. Documents pour servir à l'histoire de l'église de Saint-Hilaire de Poitiers, ed. Louis REDET, in: *Mémoires de la Société des Antiquaires de l'Ouest* 1847, p. 91. — The name Peter appears several times among canons of the cathedral in the 1070's and once as early as 1068 but until I have finished a systematic study of the canons during those years it will not be possible to confirm the identification of the individual(s) bearing that name.

<sup>12</sup> GUILLEMAIN, *Les origines* (n. 7).

<sup>13</sup> Jacques DUGUET, *La famille des Isembert, évêques de Poitiers et ses relations (X<sup>e</sup>–XI<sup>e</sup> siècles)*, in: *Bulletin de la Société des Antiquaires de l'Ouest*, 4<sup>e</sup> série 11 (1971) p. 163–87.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*



Nearly as serious a matter from the papal viewpoint, Isembert had recently supported the heretic Berengar of Tours and had complied with the orthodox position only after threat of excommunication. Then Gregory VII did in fact excommunicate Isembert in 1075 as a result of a dispute with the canons of Saint-Hilaire of Poitiers which the bishop attempted to settle in his favor by dispersing the participants in a regional church council with a troop of armed knights on horseback.<sup>15</sup> Scarcely the type of bishop preferred by Gregory VII! Furthermore Isembert had no intention of abandoning his family's hold on the bishopric and had prepared for his succession by naming a nephew of the same name archdeacon and heir-apparent shortly before his death.<sup>16</sup>

A charter from the abbey of Saint-Cyprien reveals that this nephew attempted to secure the nomination after his uncle's death in 1086 but that abbot Renaud had refused his consent to one who was married and had a family like ordinary laymen.<sup>17</sup> In so doing Renaud invoked another basic principle of the reformers, namely rejection of a married priesthood. Another charter relates that the *clerus*, the cathedral chapter, then proceeded to elect the archdeacon Peter to the office.<sup>18</sup> The succession did not take place without incident, for the disappointed Isembert vented his wrath on abbot Renaud by pillaging the abbey of Saint-Cyprien of some of its landed estates.<sup>19</sup> He did not succeed, however, in reversing the election.

Renaud, with the aid of the cathedral chapter, thus managed to take an important first step in reforming the episcopal office in Poitiers and in the process identified himself as a principle proponent, if not the leader, of the papal reform party in Poitou. For his role in this event alone Renaud merits closer attention, and will indeed be the subject of a separate biography in this series, but for the moment his anonymity renders impossible an accurate assessment of his place in local affairs. If Renaud and his fellow canons had anticipated difficulties in securing the approval of the Count of Poitiers for breaking the century old grasp of the

<sup>15</sup> RICHARD, *Histoire des Comtes* (n. 2) I, p. 315–23.

<sup>16</sup> *Hic Isembertus fuit archidiaconus tempore I(semberti) episcopi, avunculi sui, habens uxorem et familiam suam sicut alius laicus. Post mortem episcopi estimavit se fore episcopus, set multum laboravit, et quia R(ainaldus) abbas non consensit, ideo irati ipse et frater suus tulerunt masum de Vic*, Cartulaire de l'abbaye de Saint-Cyprien de Poitiers, ed. Louis REDET, in: *Archives Historiques du Poitou* 3 (1874), p. 131.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Quod iudicium Petrus archidiaconus, episcopo defuncto, jam a clero in episcopum preelectus et tunc collaudavit et post factus episcopus, ratum fore canonica auctoritate firmavit*, Recueil des documents relatifs à l'abbaye de Montierneuf de Poitiers (1076–1319), publiés par François VILLARD, in: *Archives Historiques de Poitou* 59 (1973) p. 35.

<sup>19</sup> For the Latin text see footnote 16 above.



Isembert family on the bishopric, they could not have chosen a better moment for their action. For the episcopal vacancy in 1086–87 coincided almost exactly with the death of the reigning Count Guy-Geoffrey-Guillaume and the succession of his son, the future William the Troubadour.<sup>20</sup> As a 15 year old at the time and new to his responsibilities, the latter was quite possibly unable to take an active part in the new bishop's election. His later hostility to Peter II tends to confirm the view that Peter was not his chosen candidate, although the young William must at least have approved the choice. In any case it is evident that the abbot Renaud exercised a decisive influence of Peter's advancement for reasons which may emerge with greater knowledge of his own life and career. As suggested above, Peter may have been his student, or he may have displayed unusual talents for administration as a canon and archdeacon, or enthusiasm for reform, or in fact family ties may have created a bond between them.

A greater abundance of information for the period after Peter's elevation to the bishopric dispels the uncertainty attendant on his early life and career, and brings out with clarity the main developments of his long rule of 29 years. In order to measure the historical importance of a bishop like Peter II at least two central questions need to be addressed. First how did the bishop conceive of the episcopal office, what goals did he set for himself in his government of his diocese, and what was his attitude to the larger international issues of the day? These included notably the papal calls for the abolition of lay investiture of priests, simony, and marriage of priests, and, generally speaking, the greater independence of clergy from lay control. Secondly, did he, in actual practice, manage to achieve any of his goals? What was the nature of his relationship to the secular powers of his region, or to what degree did he dispose of independent authority of his own and to what degree was he subservient to them?

In view of the formal character of 11<sup>th</sup> century charters, it is not surprising that Peter did not explicitly state his goals or his attitudes on these points in texts of this kind. Thus they can only be inferred from his actions and accomplishments and some uncertainty will consequently always linger on the question. Nevertheless the cumulative weight of the charter evidence strongly supports the conclusion that the bishop took a broad, activist view of the episcopal office and sought to impose his authority forcefully in a number of different ways in his government of the diocese. The lack of studies of Peter's predecessors rules out any precise comparisons and forces one to rely instead on impressions. Still it is

<sup>20</sup> RICHARD, *Histoire des Comtes* (n. 2) I, p. 382.



difficult to avoid the conclusion that Peter took a more active role in the affairs of the diocese than Isembert II (1047–86). For one thing a great many more charters, both his own and those of others referring to him, survive for Peter II than for Isembert. Mere chance of loss and survival may account for some of the imbalance but more likely most of it results from the greater frequency of the bishop's interventions in monastic affairs which culminated in the issuance of a charter. These show the bishop involving himself regularly and vigorously in the life of the Poitevin monasteries in many different ways. Without attempting to enter into detail here, his activities can be summarized as including the installation of new abbots, the consecration of new abbeys and altars, the confirmation of monastic properties, and, above all else, the settlement of disputes between different houses.<sup>21</sup> Some of these instances reveal the bishop acting on his own initiative, others show abbots appealing to him for his intervention and assistance. In their totality these cases leave the unmistakable impression of a man of considerable personal authority who inspired awe and respect among all concerned. As an example, on one occasion a monastic scribe refers to the bishop's anger and severity (which some call harshness, he added parenthetically, and perhaps disapprovingly) when an abbot failed to keep an appointment with him.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore the Poitevin charters bring to light no cases of abbots or monks defying or resisting the bishop.

The introduction of a new clause in the dating formulas of charters from the regional monasteries during Peter's episcopacy may be relevant to this point. After giving the year, the name of the Count, and sometimes that of the incumbent Pope, scribes regularly added the name of Peter as the reigning bishop.<sup>23</sup> Rarely had that happened during the episcopacy of Isembert II. This addition may well testify to the greater prestige of the episcopal office under Peter and to the fact that the bishop was a new force to be reckoned with in the affairs of the province.

The same monastic charters also shed light indirectly on the structure and operation of episcopal government in Poitou at this time. A small group of officials from the cathedral chapter followed Peter faithfully in his travels and visitations around the diocese, drew up and witnessed his charters, and served as judges in the hearings which he conducted to

<sup>21</sup> See above footnote 3.

<sup>22</sup> *Propter eiusdem episcopi asperitatem (alii duritiam dictum est) . . .*, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Fonds français, ms. 20258, fol. 62 verso.

<sup>23</sup> An example of this is: . . . *Facta sunt haec anno Incarnationis Domini millesimo centesimo primo Philippo rege Francorum, Petro episcopo Pictavorum, Guillelmo duce Aquitanorum*, Recueil Montierneuf, p. 54.



settle disputes. Two men, Aimeri the dean and Rainier his chaplain, stood out among these both in the regularity of their appearances with him and in their longevity of service.<sup>24</sup> The master of scholars in the cathedral school and the three Poitevin archdeacons were only somewhat less consistent in their attendance on the bishop. These men doubtless constituted the nucleus of his administration both in advising him and in carrying out his policies. The stability of this group seems remarkable; few changes in personnel occurred during Peter's nearly 30 years as bishop. His two closest subordinates, the dean, and the chaplain, stayed with him throughout his entire episcopate whereas his archdeacons averaged about 15 years each. Such stability cannot have failed to lend continuity to Peter's administration.

His own charters bring out nicely one aspect of Peter's concern for efficient government. In many of them, before proceeding to the specific business at hand, he repeats a phrase to the effect that matters of moment should be recorded in writing so that they will not be forgotten in the future.<sup>25</sup> Such statements cannot be dismissed as merely casual repetition of stereotyped, hence meaningless, phrases, but should be taken to reflect his belief that he and his successors must have records of the important actions and decisions of his reign. And this no doubt in the interest of more efficient government. His advocacy of increased reliance on the written document, probably a result of his schooling, puts him in the ranks of that small vanguard of Europeans who were seeking to rationalize and render more efficient government at all levels in the later 11<sup>th</sup> century. Such statements also doubtless help account for the existence of a much greater body of documentation from Peter's episcopacy than those of his predecessors. More documents survive because more were drawn up to begin with. That the earliest reference to the existence of episcopal archives dates from only two years after Peter's death is probably not accidental.<sup>26</sup> If not the first Poitevin bishop to maintain archives, he may well have laid greater stress than his predecessors on the orderly storage of copies of episcopal documents. In view of his attitude toward the written document it can hardly come as a surprise that he is

<sup>24</sup> These generalizations on the chapter officials summarize data taken from a great many charters and for reasons of space cannot be documented here. These data will be presented in detail elsewhere in articles on each of the men in question.

<sup>25</sup> An exemple is the opening line of a charter of 1090: *Antiquorum sancitum est patrum industria modernorumque comprobatur sollercia, ne aliqua in eorum factis in posterum subsequeretur versutia, res in firmo statu permansuras scripto commendare, ne amplius ullis infestationibus possent titubare*, Cartulaires du Bas-Poitou, p. 11.

<sup>26</sup> . . . tres monachi Novi Monasterii jurarent quam cartam illam quam pretendebant, de archivis B(eati) Petri habuissent (i. e. the cathedral church of St. Peter of Poitiers), Recueil Montierneuf, p. 81.



the first bishop of Poitiers to use an episcopal seal for authentication of his charters.<sup>27</sup>

All in all Peter leaves the impression of having been a bishop who set out to transform the episcopacy from an office based on informal procedures and largely dependant on the person of the incumbent into a more rational, more efficient institution with a far greater range of action and influence. Peter's relations with the contemporary count of Poitou, William the Troubador, lend further credence to this view. If the counts of Poitou and other regional aristocracy controlled and manipulated the earlier 11<sup>th</sup> century bishops of Poitiers as elsewhere in France at that time, then Peter's episcopate marks a clear turning point in the history of the institution. He did not owe his election to Count William, as observed above, even though the latter probably had to approve the choice. And his subsequent actions do not show a man closely subservient to the Count. On the contrary the bishop frequented the count's assemblies only occasionally during the first 15 years of his rule, i. e., up until 1100, and then almost never in the last 15 years. Conversely lay aristocracy and particularly the Count, rarely attended the episcopal-monastic assemblies of which there is record. But nothing illustrates Peter's independent tendencies so well as his dramatic dispute with Count William in 1114 when he had the temerity to excommunicate the Count in a public assembly after repeated warnings had failed to persuade the latter to abandon an adulterous relationship.<sup>28</sup> William's initial reaction was one of incredulity and rage, as if it had never occurred to him that a bishop of Poitiers would even contemplate such a measure. He barely restrained himself from doing physical violence to Peter before then forcing him to flee the city. Peter never returned to Poitiers, dying shortly thereafter in exile in Chauvigny, but it is noteworthy that he did not relent in his excommunication. A brief perusal of existing literature shows no previous case of a bishop of Poitiers openly resisting the Count and tempts one to see this struggle as the result of an ambitious bishop attempting to impose episcopal authority in matters and in ways unprecedented in the past.

At the same time that he was taking his distance as bishop from the Count, Peter of Poitiers was establishing closer ties than his predecessor with the papacy and papal legates in France. He knew personally both Popes of his time not only through the letters which they exchanged but

<sup>27</sup> François EYGUN, *Sigillographie du Poitou jusqu'en 1515. Étude d'histoire provinciale sur les institutions, les arts et la civilisation d'après les sceaux*, Poitiers 1938, p. 92-3; 359.

<sup>28</sup> *Willelmi Malmesburiensis Monachi de Gestis Regum Anglorum*, ed. William STUBBS, London 1887-89, Vol. 2, p. 510-11.



as a result of his attendance at church councils held when they travelled in France. Peter led a Poitevin contingent of five to the great council of Clermont in November of 1095, then accompanied Urban II as the latter made his way west through the Limousin to Poitou and the Loire region in early 1096.<sup>29</sup> On two separate occasions during that long trip Urban II stopped in Poitiers to hold ecclesiastical assemblies bringing together many of the great French prelates of the day.<sup>30</sup> Then at least once, Rome, April 1099, Peter journeyed to a papal council in Italy.<sup>31</sup>

Likewise he established direct personal contacts with Pascal II, five of whose letters to Peter still survive.<sup>32</sup> In 1105 he travelled to Rome in order to plead personally for papal recognition and approval of Robert d'Arbrissel's new order of Fontevraud, then in 1107 he attended Pascal's council at Troyes.<sup>33</sup> On two other occasions Pascal chose Peter's episcopal city as the meeting place of French councils aimed at recruiting crusaders. First in 1100 two papal legates launched an appeal there for an expedition which left in 1101. One text of this time pictures Peter distributing crusaders cloaks to men who had taken the vow at an open air meeting in the city.<sup>34</sup> Again in 1106 Pascal authorized the legate Bruno of Segni and Bohemond of Antioch, newly returned from the Holy Land, to convoke another crusading assembly.<sup>35</sup>

Amat of Oloron, archbishop of Bordeaux, Hugh of Die, archbishop of Lyons, and Gerard, bishop of Angoulême, headed the group of papal legates active in southern France at this time in behalf of Urban II and Pascal II. Due to the vagueness of the documents available, and especially to the lack of witness lists, it is often difficult to determine who participated in the regional church councils which the legates held for the pur-

<sup>29</sup> Jean BESLY, *Histoire des comtes de Poictou et ducs de Guyenne*, Paris 1647, p. 409. J. BESLY, *Évesques*, p. 67, P. CHIFFLET, *Histoire de l'abbaye royale et de la ville de Tournus*, Dijon 1664, p. 334. Chartes et Documents pour servir à l'histoire de l'abbaye de Charroux, ed. P. DE MONSABERT, in: *Archives Historiques du Poitou* 29 (1919) p. 25–27. Recueil Montierneuf, p. 40–42; 437; 439.

<sup>30</sup> Cartulaire de Talmond, p. 192. Cartulaire de Cormery précédé de l'histoire de l'abbaye et de la ville de Cormery, ed. J. BOURASSÉ, in: *Mémoires de la Société Archéologique de Touraine*, 1861, p. 88–90.

<sup>31</sup> Cartulaires du Bas-Poitou, p. 71.

<sup>32</sup> *Patrologia Latina*, t. 163, col. 81. Recueil Montierneuf, p. 59–60; 71–72. Chartes et documents pour servir à l'histoire de l'abbaye de Saint-Maixent, ed. Alfred RICHARD, in: *Archives Historiques du Poitou* 16 (1886) p. 260; 260–61.

<sup>33</sup> *Patrologia Latina*, t. 162, col. 1089–90. Anonymous author, *Histoire de l'Ordre Militaire des Chevaliers du Saint-Sepulchre et de la Maison-Dieu de Montmorillon*, 1766, *Archives de la Vienne, Poitiers, Série H Supplément* 101, p. 17.

<sup>34</sup> *Anno incarnatione Domini MCI . . . Deinde Pictavis cum habitum peregrinationis a domno Petro episcopo vellet accipere*, Cartulaires du Bas-Poitou, p. 6.

<sup>35</sup> *Chronicon Sancti Maxentii Pictavensis*, in: *Chroniques des églises d'Anjou*, edd. Paul MARCHEGAY and Emile MABILLE, Paris 1869, p. 423.



pose of promulgating papal programs. Despite this obstacle Peter II can be identified often enough among the dignitaries present that there can be no hesitation in counting him among those most faithful in attendance. The texts tell nothing about the bishop's attitude toward, nor his part in, these meetings but his presence alone strongly suggests that he actively supported the legates and their proposals.

Any doubts about the bishop's commitment to the contemporary reform movement fade away when one examines his much better documented policies within his own diocese. The goals of the papal reformers had included the abolition of simony, marriage of priests, and lay investiture of clergy. The Poitevin charters contain only one explicit reference to simony but the text in question is detailed and clear, and shows that *simonia* was a condemned practice. Merely the suspicion of it led Peter II to summon three suspects (in this case monks) to the bi-annual diocesan synod in Poitiers and order them to repeat their previous denials under oath in public.<sup>36</sup> On priestly marriage the sources are even less informative. Still, one charter from the first years of Peter's episcopate shows the bishop successfully forcing a reluctant chaplain, who was the son of a priest, to recognize publicly that he held his chaplaincy from the abbot of the monastery to which the chapel belonged.<sup>37</sup> This text is too laconic to permit a satisfactory reconstruction and understanding of the situation yet it appears that the bishop accepted the fact of clerical marriage and heredity of churches while at the same time seeking to limit the independence of the incumbent priest by compelling him to admit that inheritance alone did not entitle him to exercise his priestly functions. Investiture by the abbot who was patron of the church had to take place first. While this did not constitute a direct attack on *n i c o l a i s m* it may be seen as a first step in that direction.

To judge from surviving charters nothing occupied Peter's attention more than the elimination of churches owned privately by laity. This was accomplished by the transfer of such churches from their lay patrons to one or another of the Benedictine monasteries of the diocese. In nearly a dozen examples the lay owner of a church explained in his charter that he was making his donation at the request of the bishop who witnessed

<sup>36</sup> *Sed, stimulante qui nunquam quiescere novit diabolo, rursus aliquando canonici falso cujusdam Garini testimonio adjuti ad eundem dominum Petrum (i. e. episcopum) recurrunt, monachos abbatis Alexandri de simonia illo testificante infamantes, Cartulaire de Talmond, p. 222.*

<sup>37</sup> *Capellaniam S. Marie de Perata per hereditatem Radulfus filius ejusdem loci presbyteri dominio tenuerat, et contra preceptum domni Petri Pictavorum episcopi agens eam nullatenus ab abbate S. Crucis accipere volebat. Sed . . . Radulfus, in meliorem mutatus spiritum, precepto episcopi sui acquiescens . . . ad eundem abbatem accessit et ab eo capellaniam S. Marie recepit, ibid., p. 176.*



and participated in the formalities of the transfer.<sup>38</sup> Even more frequently Peter issued his own charter confirming gifts of churches by laymen in what was clearly intended to demonstrate that to the bishop alone belonged the authority to validate such transfers.<sup>39</sup> Equally often it was Peter himself who awarded parish churches to their new monastic patrons without any reference to lay owners at all.<sup>40</sup> That, in these cases, Peter carefully obtained the approval of the canons of the cathedral chapter before completing the transaction suggests that these churches were already under the patronage not of laymen but of the bishop and the chapter and were being assigned to monks for nomination of the priest and performance of services. In the absence of the episcopal archives it is impossible to be certain but it is at least conceivable that the bishop made little or perhaps no attempt at all to administer parishes directly at this time. It is certain, however, that he relied heavily if not exclusively on the abbeys of the diocese for the performance of these functions.

The restitution of private lay churches to ecclesiastical patronage had begun during the episcopate of Isembert II, Peter's predecessor, but the latter was almost certainly much more active in promoting the change.<sup>41</sup> And, it must be added, in carrying it to a conclusion, as a text of the last years of Peter's episcopate brings out in a striking fashion. When recount-

<sup>38</sup> L'Abbé LACURIE, *Histoire de l'abbaye de Maillezais depuis sa fondation jusqu'à nos jours*, Fontenay-le-Comte 1852, p. 226–29; 229–31; *Recueil Montierneuf*, p. 66–69; *Cartulaire Saint-Cyprien*, p. 209–10; 235–36; 287–88; 295; 331; 333–34. *Chartes poitevines de l'abbaye de Saint-Florent près de Saumur*, ed. Paul MARCHEGAY, in: *Archives Historiques de Poitou* 2 (1872) p. 83.

<sup>39</sup> Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Collection Moreau, Vol. 35, fol. 61r–63r. *Cartulaires du Bas-Poitou*, 64–5; 203. *Cartulaire de Sainte-Maure*, in: *Archives d'Anjou*, ed. Paul MARCHEGAY, Vol. 2, p. 367–68. *Cartulaire de l'abbaye de Saint-Laon de Thouars*, ed. Hugues IMBERT, in: *Mémoires de la Société de statistique, sciences, lettres et arts des Deux-Sèvres*, 2<sup>e</sup> série 14 (1875) p. 4–5. *Chartes Saint-Maixent*, I, p. 270–71. *Cartulaire Saint-Cyprien*, p. 45; 135–36; 183; 230. *Cartulaire Saint-Jean d'Angély*, I, p. 276; LACURIE, *Histoire Maillezais*, p. 234–36. *Chartes de l'abbaye de Nouaillé de 678–1200*, ed. P. DE MONSABERT, in: *Archives Historiques du Poitou* 49 (1936) p. 262–63. *Cartulaire de l'abbaye de Noyers*, ed. C. CHEVALIER, in: *Mémoires de la Société Archéologique de Touraine* 22 (1872) p. 434–35. *Chartularium Sancti Jovini*, ed. A. GRANDMAISON, in: *Mémoires de la Société de statistique . . . des Deux-Sèvres* 17 (1854) p. 22–24.

<sup>40</sup> *Gallia Christiana*, II, col. 1387. *Chartes poitevines de Saint-Florent Saumur*, p. 128. *Archives de la Vienne, Chartes antérieures à 1200*, IH7, pièce 1. BESLY, *Évêques*, p. 74–76. *Chartes Saint-Maixent*, I, p. 208–9; 231–2. *Cartulaire de l'abbaye de Bourgueil*, manuscript copy of Dom François CHAMARD, *Abbaye de Ligugé (Vienne)*, p. 137; 196. *Cartulaire Saint-Cyprien*, p. 246–47. *Chartes de Nouaillé*, p. 260–61. Jacques de FONTRÉAUX, *Le Dorat. Ancienne Capitale de la Basse Marche*. T. 1. *Le Chapitre de Saint-Pierre du Dorat*, Limoges 1940, p. 19. *Chartes inédites concernant l'histoire du Velay*, in: *Tablettes Historiques du Velay* 8 (1877–78) p. 195–96. *Codex Diplomaticus Ordinis Sancti Rufi*, in: *Bulletin de la Société de la Drôme* 25 (1891) p. 43–45. Dom MARTÈNE and Dom DURAND, *Thesaurus Novus Anecdotorum*, Paris 1717, col. 249–50.

<sup>41</sup> *Cartulaires du Bas-Poitou*, p. 217–18.



ing the origins of the abbey of L'Absie-en-Gâtine west of Poitiers, one of the scribes of that abbey explained that the first monastic church had been built on the ruins of a privately owned parish church at the behest of the bishop Peter II. He then added parenthetically, *in illo tempore erant ecclesiae laicorum . . .*, »in those days there were lay churches«. <sup>42</sup> In other words private churches no longer existed when he was writing shortly after Peter's death in 1115, and indeed were such a thing of the past that he feared his readers might not understand what they had been without a special word of explanation. That Peter played an important, probably decisive, role in achieving this goal of the Gregorian reformers can scarcely be doubted.

Peter II was instrumental in the success of another great religious movement of the later 11<sup>th</sup> and early 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, that begun by a handful of hermits and wandering preachers who advocated, both by example and teaching, a return to a simple life of solitude, austerity, and prayer. Confined to a few individual leaders at the outset, the influx of enthusiastic followers resulted in the institutionalization of the movement through the foundation of hermitages, then monasteries and communities of regular canons endowed with lands and committed to one or another of several fixed rules of religious life. This movement prospered widely in western France but especially in the diocese of Poitiers through the monastic foundations of two of the earliest and best known of the wandering preachers, Robert d'Arbrissel and Giraud de Sales, one of his disciples. <sup>43</sup> Robert founded the great monastery at Fontevraud in the northern part of the diocese shortly after 1100 and Giraud established 6 of his 14 houses there at approximately the same time. <sup>44</sup> Contemporary writers take pains to emphasize the importance of Peter of Poitiers in the establishment and success of both these new foundations. Giraud's biographer writes that Peter was the first French bishop to recognize Giraud's qualities as a holy man and preacher and urged him to settle in his diocese while at the same time offering special privileges and exemptions from episcopal authority. <sup>45</sup> Similarly the Poitevin bishop invited Robert d'Arbrissel to his diocese, solicited landed donations from local aristocracy

<sup>42</sup> Cartulaires et chartes de l'abbaye de l'Absie, ed. Bélisaire LEDAIN, in: Archives Historiques du Poitou 25 (1895) p. 7.

<sup>43</sup> Augustin FLICHE, Histoire de l'église depuis les origines jusqu'à nos jours, vol. 8: La réforme grégorienne et la reconquête chrétienne 1057-1125, Paris 1946, p. 445.

<sup>44</sup> Cartulaire de l'abbaye royale de Notre-Dame des Châtelliers, ed. Louis DUVAL, Mémoires de la Société de statistique, sciences, lettres et arts des Deux-Sèvres, 2<sup>e</sup> série 7 (1867), introduction, p. VI-XIX. Patrologia Latina, t. 162, cols. 1089-92.

<sup>45</sup> *Audita sunt Giraudi praeconia longe lateque, et celebri sermone vulgata, in episcoporum et praelatorum audientia. Primus, dominus Petrus, Pictaviensis episcopus, vir vita et scientia praeclarus, dextram dedit ei interminabilis caritatis, committens ei vices suas et ordinariae auctoritas*, cited in Cartulaire des Châtelliers, Introduction, p. XV.



for the new order, and went to Rome in 1106 to persuade Pascal II to confirm it.<sup>46</sup> In the last 10 years of his episcopate Peter involved himself in the affairs of that abbey more fully than in those of any other Poitevin house, and was a close companion of Robert d'Arbrissel. At his death the nuns of Fontevraud succeeded in obtaining part of his remains for burial in an ornate tomb now lost, and a later inscription celebrated him as the co-founder of the order second only to Robert himself.<sup>47</sup>

No less than four other men who began as hermits and itinerant preachers, and who later gained fame as founders of monastic houses, had close associations with the diocese of Poitiers during Peter's time. Bernard of Abbeville spent many years as a monk and abbot at Saint-Cyprien of Poitiers before founding the order of Tiron in the Perche.<sup>48</sup> His fellow hermit, Peter de l'Etoile, founded the abbey of Fontgombault just outside the diocese around 1100, and Peter's younger brother Isembaud established the Poitevin abbey of l'Étoile in 1124.<sup>49</sup> Raoul de la Futaye, a companion of Robert d'Arbrissel, and founder of the double monastery of Saint-Sulpice in Rennes in Brittany, came from the Poitevin monastery of Saint-Jouin-de-Marnes during Peter's episcopate.<sup>50</sup> In addition to these men, a hermit of only regional reputation, Peter de Bunt, founded the Poitevin monastery of l'Absie at Peter's insistence shortly before the latter's death.<sup>51</sup> Other than this last named Peter only Bernard of Tiron can be demonstrated by charters of the time to have had a personal relationship with Peter of Poitiers, but the bishop can hardly have been indifferent to the presence of the others in his diocese. On the contrary his known sympathies for the eremitic movement must have contributed materially either to attracting them from other regions or to retaining them in his own diocese.

The history of the penetration of communities of regular canons into Poitou in the later 11<sup>th</sup> and early 12<sup>th</sup> centuries has yet to be written, but even a superficial assessment brings out that the movement made substantial progress under Peter's administration.<sup>52</sup> In 1095 he reformed the

<sup>46</sup> *Patrologia Latina*, t. 162, col. 1089–90.

<sup>47</sup> *Sciunt posteri hic jamdudum quiescere ossa piosque cineres admodum reverendi prae-sulis Petri Pictavorum antistitis, qui venerabili Roberto istius ordinis parenti contemporaneus fuit, eique apprime carus. Hujus enim auspiciis et munificentia exaedificatum est hoc templum*, *Gallia Christiana*, II, col. 1170.

<sup>48</sup> *Cartulaire Saint-Cyprien*, Introduction, p. XXVIII.

<sup>49</sup> *Gallia Christiana*, II, 1352. *Acta Sanctorum*, Aprilis II, p. 227, col. 1.

<sup>50</sup> D. PIOLIN, Le moine Raoul architecte de l'église abbatiale de Saint-Jouin-de-Marnes et le bienheureux Raoul de la Futaye, in: *Revue des Questions Historiques* 42 (1887) p. 497–509.

<sup>51</sup> *Cartulaires de l'Absie*, p. 7.

<sup>52</sup> Georges PON, L'apparition des chanoines réguliers en Poitou. Saint-Nicolas de Poitiers, in: *Bulletin de la Société des Antiquaires de l'Ouest*, 4<sup>e</sup> série 13 (1975) p. 55–71.



church of Saint-Pierre of Airvault by imposing the rule of St. Augustine on the secular canons who had fallen away from the communal life, and by installing a new abbot from the famous house of Augustinian canons of Lesterps in the neighboring Limousin.<sup>53</sup> He appears to have created a priory of Augustinian canons at Celles-sur-Belles in 1100, subject to the same Limousin house, and he also called upon the equally renowned canons of Saint-Ruf of Valence to take charge of a number of parishes in the northern part of the diocese.<sup>54</sup> Finally it was at Peter's initiative that the canons of Saint-Laon of Thouars adopted the Augustinian rule between 1107 and 1110.<sup>55</sup>

Peter of Poitiers died in Chauvigny on April 4, 1115, never having resumed his episcopal functions after his exile by the Count late in 1114.<sup>56</sup> News of his dramatic banishment and death in exile spread quickly and brought an exceptional response not only in his own diocese but from far beyond as well. Two local chronicles recorded the event but much more noteworthy is William of Malmesbury's account in his *Gesta Regum*.<sup>57</sup> Whereas the first two briefly noted the death, this Anglo-Norman monk writing in southwest England gives the most detailed surviving description of the quarrel, the exile, and Peter's demise and adds to this two poems lauding the bishop's virtues. Although there is no proof of it, it is quite conceivable that William learned of this affair from French monks or nuns coming to England bearing a mortuary roll started for Peter after his death and requesting prayers for him. Many years later in the 1150's monks from Saint-Cyprien of Poitiers and nuns from Fontevraud wrote in Peter's name and solicited prayers for him when making entries in the mortuary rolls of Vital of Savigny and Ebles of Turenne.<sup>58</sup> According to entries in their obituaries monks in at least five different French abbeys, including one in Chartres and another in the Dauphiné, annually commemorated Peter's memory and prayed for him on the anniversary of his death.<sup>59</sup> But it was Hildebert of Lavardin, bishop of Le Mans and archbishop of Tours, and famous Latin poet, who paid the

<sup>53</sup> Gallia Christiana, II, 1386-87.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 1337. Codex Diplomaticus Ordinis Sancti Rufi, p. 43-45.

<sup>55</sup> Cartulaire Saint-Laon de Thouars, p. 4-5; 6-8.

<sup>56</sup> Chroniques des églises d'Anjou, p. 426.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid. Richard le Poitevin, Chronicon, Recueil des Historiens de la Gaule et de la France, vol. 12, p. 412. Willelmi Malmesbiriensis de Gestis Regum, II, 510-511.

<sup>58</sup> Leopold DELISLE, Rouleaux des morts du 9<sup>e</sup> au 15<sup>e</sup> siècle, Paris 1866, p. 324; 361.

<sup>59</sup> Bibliothèque Municipale de Poitiers, Collection Dom Fonteneau, t. 60, p. 95; t. 78, pp. 589-90. Auguste MOLINIER, Obituaires de la province de Sens. t. 2: Diocese de Chartres, Paris 1906, p. 184. U. CHEVALIER, Necrologium prioratus Sancti Roberti Cornilionis Gratianopolitaniae Diocesis, Grenoble 1868, April II Nones. B. PAVILLON, La vie du bienheureux Robert d'Arbrissel, Patriarche des solitaires de la France et Instituteur de l'Ordre de Fontevraud, Paris 1666, p. 578.



most detailed and complimentary tribute to the bishop whom he had known from at least as early as the meetings held in Poitiers in 1096 by Pope Urban II.<sup>60</sup> Some years earlier Hildebert had written a panegyric on the city of Poitiers and its bishop.<sup>61</sup> Now he composed verses for Peter's epitaph at Fontevraud and entered still another poem on the bishop in the latter's mortuary roll.<sup>62</sup> Finally, to complete the list of contemporary references to Peter's death, a copy of his tombstone inscription in the abbey of Saint-Cyprien of Poitiers has survived even though the stone itself is lost.<sup>63</sup>

All the texts which entered into any detail stressed the courage of the bishop in the face of death and his patience in enduring the privations of exile.<sup>64</sup> Several emphasized the saintly character of the dead prelate and two told of the performance of miracles at his tomb in later years.<sup>65</sup> These latter indicate that a cult of sanctity had grown up around Peter shortly, and possibly immediately, after his death. Many charters issued by poitevin abbeys in the decades after 1115 testify to this point by referring to the dead bishop as Peter »of pious memory«, »of blessed memory«, and one of 1120 calls him . . . *venerabilis Petri magne sanctitatis antistitis* . . .<sup>66</sup> Similar language in a letter of Pope Calixtus II of 1123 . . . *felicis memorie* shows that these views of Peter were not confined just to his own diocese.<sup>67</sup>

The popular canonization of Peter after his death inevitably leads to the question of a modern assessment of the bishop's historical importance. It was Peter's courage and persistence in his final trials which won the admiration of his contemporaries, and it is tempting to attribute his reputation for sainthood in large part to the spectacular circumstances

<sup>60</sup> J. D. MANSI, *Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova et Amplissima Collectio*, t. 20, 1902, p. 931.

<sup>61</sup> The best text is in J. DESCROIX, *Poitiers et les lettres latines dans l'Ouest au début du XII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, in: *Bulletin de la Société des Antiquaires de l'Ouest* 13 (1942–45) p. 658–60.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.* p. 648–49; 649–51.

<sup>63</sup> *Gallia Christiana*, II, 1170.

<sup>64</sup> *Captio vincla minae census domuumve ruinae  
nunquam pastorem flexere summve rigorem  
imo magis fortis instanti tempore mortis,  
nulla relaxit quae jure liganda ligavit  
qui sedit in episcopatu xxix annis et unum mensem.* *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *In illo tempore, illud famisissimum coenobium foeminarum quod dicitur Fons-Ebraudi, construitur in pago Pictavensi a Roberto de Bruxello, juvante eum Petro Pictavorum Episcopo cuius sanctitatem crebra miracula tumuli ejus loco loquuntur et praedicant,* Richard le Poitevin, *Chronicon*, in: *Recueil des Historiens de la Gaule*, t. 12, p. 412. *Acta Sanctorum*, Aprilis II, p. 232, col. 2.

<sup>66</sup> *Cartulaire Saint-Jean d'Angély*, vol. 2, p. 182. *Recueil Montierneuf*, p. 79–80; 83–84.

<sup>67</sup> *Recueil Montierneuf*, p. 106.



surrounding his banishment. On the other hand it would be a mistake to dismiss him as an insignificant figure made famous at the end of his life by a single fortuitous event. In nearly three decades as a bishop he travelled widely, met many distinguished men in the ecclesiastical as well as lay worlds, and participated in several of the great, decisive councils of his age. His acquaintances included both Popes of his episcopate, the papal legates Hugh of Die, Amat of Bordeaux, and Gerard of Angoulême, all of his fellow French bishops of western France (he knew and corresponded with Yves of Chartres for example), the prominent writers Hildebert of Lavardin, Baudri of Bourgueil, and Geoffrey of Vendôme, and the itinerant hermit-preachers Robert d'Abrissel, Giraud de Sales, and Bernard of Tiron.<sup>68</sup>

Nonetheless in the final analysis he must be judged not on the basis of a single act of great courage, nor by the famous people he knew in the larger world outside Poitou, but by what he accomplished within his own diocese. Here the evidence pictures him as a man committed to establishing the episcopal office on a firmer basis than it had had in the past by making it less dependent on the local aristocracy, by increasing its efficiency through more frequent recourse to written records and archives, and by extending the range of its activities and of its jurisdiction further than in the past. It pictures him as a man committed to the papal reform movement who, through determination, strong character, and administrative ability made substantial progress in containing simony and eliminating private churches and lay investiture. Further as one attached to the new orders of regular canons which he sought to promote in his diocese. In all of these Peter of Poitiers took his inspiration from and followed the lead of others from the larger world outside his diocese. But in one respect he should probably be given credit for having recognized, before any other prelate in his part of France, the great importance and appeal of itinerant preachers like Robert d'Arbrissel to women, the poor, and generally the less fortunate in his world. His success in helping to establish and institutionalize these movements in his diocese marks him as an innovator and a man of vision.

This paper began as part of a search for the people who were the leaders in the great expansion of Poitevin society at the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> century. It should now be clear that the contemporary bishop of Poitiers, hitherto unknown to modern historians, must be counted in that group of people. It is equally obvious that a number of others brought to light by

<sup>68</sup> Yves de Chartres, *Correspondance* (Les classiques de l'histoire de France au Moyen Age) Paris 1949, t. 1, p. 146-53. *Patrologia Latina*, t. 157, letters of Geoffroi de Vendôme, Book I, letter 21.



this inquiry such as the abbot Renaud of Saint-Cyprien of Poitiers took leading roles in the events of the day and contributed basically to Peter's success. As long as the origins, careers, and accomplishments of these men are unknown, a comprehensive view of Poitevin society at this time will be impossible. Their biographies are the next step in this project.