CHAPTER THREE

THE PANNONIAN-MORAVIAN DIOCESE IN THE LETTERS OF POPE JOHN VIII (872–882): PAPAL STRATEGIES AND LANGUAGES

Around the year 870, Pope Hadrian II consecrated Methodius as archbishop of Pannonia, as is confirmed in a letter from his successor Pope John VIII (873). However, from that year onward there was no further communication between Hadrian II and Methodius. This absence is perhaps the result of the inadequacy of the sources; on the other hand, it could be a sign of a reduction in the diplomatic competence of the Apostolic See in the last years of Hadrian II’s pontificate. The pontificate of John VIII is recognized for the richness of the letters which survive, and which provide evidence for an important expansion of papal diplomatic horizons. It is true that a life of John VIII is not included in the Liber Pontificalis, but the collection of John VIII’s surviving letters is much richer than those of both Nicholas I and Hadrian II. Furthermore, the letters of John VIII have been preserved quite differently from those of Nicholas I and Hadrian II.

Nicholas I’s letters (one hundred and seventy missives, comprising complete letters, fragments of letters, and dubious letters) were copied from the letters of the recipients and were widely used in eleventh- and twelfth-century canonical collections. Hadrian II’s letters (forty-four texts, also including dubious letters) have been preserved in several dossiers (again compiled from the recipients’ copies), but hardly left a trace in the canonical literature. In contrast, the monks of Montecassino copied three hundred fourteen letters of John VIII, probably from the original register of the pope; furthermore, excerpts from sixty-two letters of John VIII were transmitted exclusively through canonical collections. John VIII’s letters—operative tools of papal action—allow us to understand how Roman diplomatic practice worked in different contexts, and to follow the evolution of papal policy over time, in the light of changed circumstances. The quality and significant number of the surviving letters thus allow us to follow the difficult genesis of the Sancta Ecclesia Marabensis against a broad and complex geo-political background. In analyzing the role of John VIII in establishing the new ecclesiastical province, we must take into account the political and ecclesiastical developments concerning central and southeastern Europe which the letters describe. The analysis
of the large geo-political context on which papal interest clearly converges could cast new light on the different stages of the *Sancta Ecclesia Marabensis*, an ecclesiastical project which the Apostolic See used all means to pursue. This research allows us to understand fully how establishing the new ecclesiastical province was the key to the exercise of jurisdictional control over the whole of Illyricum and Dalmatia.

Another important focus of this chapter concerns the way in which the ninth-century Lateran *scrinium* reworked and actualized the legacy of the past by re-reading the story of Methodius and the establishment of the new ecclesiastical province in the light of precedents: the Apostolic See had previously intervened in missionary processes, claiming a leading role in the creation of new ecclesiastical provinces. This research focused on the basic model, the foundation of the *ecclesia Anglorum* by Pope Gregory the Great and his missionary Augustine. It also considered, however, the fruitful cooperation between the popes and Wynfrith-Boniface in the eighth century, as well as papal conduct of the issue of the emerging Bulgarian church during the pontificates of Nicholas I and Hadrian II. The aim of this chapter will be to bring out an encoded *modus operandi*, which could further help to reconstruct the different phases of papal policy in the case of the Methodian archdiocese.

Finally, the chapter focuses on the rhetorical strategies developed by the papal *scrinium* to communicate with the barbarians in the last three decades of the ninth century. An analysis of the political vocabulary of John VIII allows us not only to trace out the models which inspired the papal letters to the ninth-century barbarians, but also to point out subsequent changes in those models. These changes aimed to develop linguistic strategies which could work in the present within an institutional situation changed from the past. This linguistic analysis provides an opportunity to appreciate the flexibility of the Apostolic See’s policy; in substance, changes in terminology are indicators of the various turning-points in a papal policy which was sensitive to different historical contingencies in its attempt to establish the new ecclesiastical province.

The chapter begins with a broad contextualization of the policy of John VIII. Previous papal interventions in missionary processes are presented to assist in the evaluation of the jurisdictional role that the Apostolic See tried to play in the territories of the former Avar qaganate in the second half of the ninth century. Second, it examines the letters of John VIII to analyze the creation of the extensive diplomatic network with those local Slavic rulers who were well disposed towards an ecclesiastical province under Roman jurisdiction. The chapter then considers the question of the