

2010

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Kinney, Dale. 2010. "Ecclesiastical Architecture in Rome and Central Italy, ca. 350-650." In S. De Blaauw (ed.), *Storia dell'architettura italiana da Costantino a Carlo Magno*, Milan, Mondadori Electa: 54-97.

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THIS IS THE ENGLISH ORIGINAL OF THE ESSAY PUBLISHED IN ITALIAN IN *STORIA DELL'ARCHITETTURA ITALIANA DA COSTANTINO A CARLO MAGNO*, ed. SIBILE DE BLAAUW (MILAN: MONDADORI ELECTA, 2010), vol. 1, 54-97

Capitolo 3

ECCLESIASTICAL ARCHITECTURE IN ROME AND CENTRAL ITALY, ca. 350-650

Dale Kinney

The character of Roman church building was established once and for all in the second half of the fourth century, as the architectural legacy of Constantine was embraced by his imperial successors, and at the same time reduced to a type that was easily reproducible by patrons of lesser means. The emergence and persistence of this type suggest that the papal administration actively participated in church building even before the pope became the leading sponsor of new ecclesiastical construction in the fifth century. As patrons, popes inherited the duty of secular rulers to embellish their capital with opulent, showy buildings, but initially they were without the technical, material, and creative resources that had migrated to the chief sites of imperial activity: Milan – succeeded in 402 by Ravenna – and Constantinople. Thus the colonnaded thin-walled construction introduced by Constantinian architects became an invariable norm, as it was conducive to relatively simple designs that could be realized with either new or reused materials and made to look splendid by surface coatings of marble and mosaic. In the fourth century papal patronage favored consistency over variety and invention, as a means of asserting institutional identity and a connection with authoritative models of the past. Like Greek temples, therefore, church basilicas of this period tend to be fundamentally the same; yet they are also all individually different, as deliberate or accidental variations in site, size, proportions, and ornament precluded identical repetition.

1. St. Paul's: The Three Emperors' Basilica

The one great building of the later fourth century was the colossal basilica erected over the tomb of St. Paul between 386 and 403 in the names of the three emperors ruling in 386, Valentinian II, Theodosius I, and Arcadius (Figs. 1, 2). St. Paul's was the largest Christian building ever erected in the city and remained so for 1100 years, until the reconstruction of St. Peter's in the sixteenth century.¹ By the time it was completed, both Valentinian II and Theodosius had died, and an inscription on the triumphal arch credited Theodosius' son Honorius I (395-423) with bringing the project to closure. Not long afterward a "divine fire" caused a disastrous collapse, and the basilica was extensively repaired. In that form it survived until 1823, when it irreparably burned. After much debate about what to do with the remains, the early Christian basilica was demolished and St. Paul's was rebuilt as a neo-Classical simulacrum of its fourth-century form.

The project must have had an architect, very possibly the Cyriades, *comes et mechanicae professor*, who with another architect, Auxentius, was investigated for fraud in the construction of a "basilica and a bridge" in 384.² A *mechanicus* was qualified by law to supervise all aspects of public construction, including design, execution, and financing. In the case of this imperial commission he was responsible to the urban prefect, who in turn reported to the emperor.³ In 386 a (new?) plan for St. Paul's was presented to the emperors by the urban prefect Sallustius, and construction was in progress in 391, when on "the birthday of the basilica" a column went up bearing congratulatory inscriptions of Pope Siricius (384-399), the urban prefect Flavius Philippus, and the "curator" Senator Flavius Anastasius.⁴

¹ See the comparative plans in *Materiali e tecniche* 2001, p. 102. On St. Paul's see Camerlenghi 2007; Docci 2006; Brandenburg 2004, pp. 114-130; Filippi 2004; Kessler 2004; Brandenburg 2002; Barclay Lloyd 2002; Pensabene 2001; Filippi e De Blaauw 2000; *Pietro e Paolo* 2000; Krautheimer et al. 1980, pp. 97-169.

² For details Vera 1981, pp. 183-198, who follows Martínez-Fazio 1972, pp. 299-312 that the "basilica" was not St. Paul's. On the architects: Jones et al. 1971, voce Cyriades, p. 237; voce Auxentius 5, p. 142.

³ On the *mechanicus*: Papaconstantinou 2007, pp. 43-45; on building trades in general: Frézouls 1995.

⁴ Filippi 2000, pp. 228-229, cat. 101: "Columna Paul(i) a[postol(i)]; natale X[IIII kal(endas) dec(embres) ...] administrante Fl(avio) Filippo vir[ro clarissimo ... curato]re Fl(avio) Anastasio [v(iro) c(larissimo), t]rib(un)o praetoria[no]"; p. 229, cat. 102. On the date: Jones et al. 1971, voce Flavius Philippus 8, p. 697. For the letter to Sallustius: *Epistulae imperatorum* 1895, pp. 46-47, n. 3; on its date: Vera 1978, pp. 54, 94.

One purpose of the new basilica was to impress. To make it as large as possible, the plan of 386 reversed the orientation of the Constantinian church, which was razed, and turned the facade westward toward the Tiber, where there was room to expand. The basilica that rose on this site was a larger, better version of St. Peter's, extending more than 128 m from the depth of the apse to the entrance and preceded by an atrium over 59 m long and nearly 67 m wide. The new basilica served the same function as St. Peter's, to provide space for burial and commemoration in proximity to the apostle's tomb; yet it was also in some ways a critique of its model, with innovations in nearly every aspect: layout, elevation, and ornament.

The design was symmetrical in the Vitruvian sense of having harmonious proportional relationships among its parts. According to a recent analysis, the diameter of the apse, the depth of the transept, and the width of the nave all had the same dimension (80 Roman feet), and this module also determined the width of the transept, the length of the nave, the total width of the nave and four aisles, and the vertical placement of the window sills in the walls above the nave colonnades.⁵ The aisles were slightly taller than St. Peter's, so the transverse elevation stepped down more smoothly, and similarly the transept was higher, so its roof height was closer to the nave's.

The long rows of columns in the nave carried arches rather than architraves, which changed the visual impression from one of horizontal "flight" to that of a rhythmic procession. Column arcades had already been used in peripheral zones of the Constantinian basilicas and also with great effect in S. Costanza, but in their size and focalizing function the arcades of the Three Emperors' Basilica were more like monumental precedents outside Rome, such as the forecourt of Diocletian's palace at Split.⁶ Since arches add height to the elevation and permit a wider spacing of the columns than architraves, St. Paul's design was more vertical, lighter, and more economical than St. Peter's (20 columns per side rather than

⁵ Docci 2006, pp. 42-43. Krautheimer et al. 1980, p. 160 proposed a 40-ft. modulus; Barresi et al. 2002 propose 15 feet, equal to the interaxial intercolumniation, but note the error in the number of columns on p. 812.

⁶ Pensabene 2001, p. 110; Gros 1996, p. 111. On the combination of the arcade with a wall: Guidobaldi 2004, esp. pp. 246-253.

22); yet it still gave the impression of a “forest” of enormous shafts, which thrilled visitors into modern times.⁷

Rather than the kaleidoscope of multicolored *spolia* seen at St. Peter’s, the colonnades of St. Paul’s were composed of newly made, uniformly light-colored components, including shafts of Proconnesian marble and Corinthian capitals with “soft-toothed” acanthus leaves. These capitals must have been commissioned by Emperor Theodosius in Constantinople, because they are very like the capitals made for the Forum Tauri in that city, which was inaugurated in 393.⁸ In the aisle arcades, by contrast, the capitals were of the “schematic” type, in which the acanthus leaves are left unfinished, remaining solid “tongues” without the articulation of lobes or “teeth” (Fig. 3).⁹ The brightness of the interior was enhanced by multiplying the windows: there were twice as many windows in the nave as at St. Peter’s (one over every intercolumniation), and a variety of arched and ocular windows in the long and short walls of the transept.

In many respects the designers of the Three Emperors’ Basilica cleverly made virtue of necessity. The tradition of marble carving that once produced intricately cut cornices, exquisite friezes, and finely detailed acanthus capitals had expired, so they put stone arches over the columns and accepted locally produced schematic capitals in the aisles.¹⁰ The taste of the time preferred smooth shiny surfaces to sculptural *chiaroscuro* anyway, and the arches and flat-leaved capitals could be covered with contemporary forms of gleaming ornament: mosaic, gilding, and paint. These are the features praised by the Spanish poet Prudentius, who visited Rome in 403 and left a poem describing the basilica on the feast day of Sts. Peter and Paul: roof beams covered with gold, coffered ceilings over columns of Parian (i.e., white)

⁷ A. Uggeri, *Édifices de la decadence*, quoted by Nicolai 1815, p. 303.

⁸ Barsanti 2002, pp. 1451-1452, effectively refuting Brandenburg’s suggestion that the capitals were made in Rome: Brandenburg 2002, p. 92; Brandenburg 1996, p. 15. According to Brandenburg some of the nave capitals were Composite: Brandenburg 2002, p. 89 versus Krautheimer et al. 1980, p. 161.

⁹ Herrmann 1973, p. 1.

¹⁰ Herrmann 1973, pp. 98-99, 182-183, 202-203.

marble, arcades with glass mosaic, “like meadows bright with spring-time flowers.” The effect of the whole was brilliant, “like the blaze of the sun at dawn.”¹¹

From a liturgical perspective the most important difference between the Three Emperors’ Basilica and St. Peter’s was the treatment of the Apostle’s tomb, which was not preserved as in St. Peter’s but recreated on a higher level, perhaps because of swampy conditions below. The saint’s remains were transferred to a sarcophagus that was set on the raised pavement of the transept (+ .54 m over the nave) under the frame of the triumphal arch, that is, as close as possible to the nave and visible to anyone within it (Fig. 4). The sarcophagus was reveted with marble slabs, in one of which was a funnel-like hole that allowed for libations or the insertion of objects to create contact relics; such practices must have been clerical prerogatives, as there was no access to the tomb from the nave and the approach from the aisles was probably restricted by railings. The design of St. Paul’s basilica fostered unprecedented visual contact with the site of the holy remains but limited physical proximity. A significant innovation was the marriage of the martyr cult focused on the tomb with the eucharistic ritual at the altar. In the latest consideration of this question, Brandenburg argued that the altar was directly behind the sarcophagus in the transept, while Filippi maintained that the sarcophagus itself was used as the altar.¹² The first reconstruction has the disadvantage of placing the celebrant with his back to the shrine, facing the apse; the second permits him to stand looking westward at the worshippers in the nave.

Prudentius’ poem on the feast day evokes the hectic atmosphere of pope and worshippers hurrying from one Apostle’s basilica to the other in order to observe celebrations in both. Krautheimer’s idea that the bridge involved in the inquest of 384 was complementary to the basilica raises an interesting possibility, that there was a plan to make a shorter route.¹³ The bridge must have been the *pons Theodosii*, which linked the western bank of the river

¹¹ Prudentius, *Peristephanon* XII, 45-54; Roberts 1993, p. 178; cf. Brandenburg 2005.

¹² Brandenburg 2005-2006; Filippi 2005-2006.

¹³ Krautheimer’s idea is reported by Barclay Lloyd 2002, p. 19.

almost directly to the Porta Ostiensis, the gate of the road to St. Paul's.¹⁴ The plan may have been to connect St. Peter's with St. Paul's via Trastevere. If so, this potentially direct path was never realized, and in later centuries the standard way from one basilica to the other went through the city, over the Bridge of Hadrian (*pons Aelius*), through part of the Campus Martius and around the Aventine.¹⁵

2. Tituli

While the emperors were constructing their showplace outside the walls, the Christian community was establishing an architectural presence in the city. The *Liber Pontificalis* attributes urban basilicas to Popes Liberius (352-366), Damasus (366-384), and Anastasius (399-401). The *basilica Liberii iuxta macellum Libiae* is an enigma, but the basilicas of Damasus and Anastasius – S. Lorenzo in Damaso and S. Sisto Vecchio – are known, and both were to become *tituli*.¹⁶ A peculiarly Roman phenomenon, *tituli* were semi-autonomous religious and administrative centers with their own clergy and staff, which served particular congregations (*ecclesiae*, as in the inscription on Christ's book in the apse mosaic of the *titulus Pudentis* [Fig. 5]). Their juridical standing is still not fully understood, but *tituli* generally were donations of wealthy laymen or priests, who acquired or signed over property, often large single-family residences, for the purpose.¹⁷ The distribution of *tituli* was not, therefore, determined by the location of pre-Constantinian "house-churches", nor did it necessarily reflect a coordinated papal strategy to establish liturgical centers in the main residential areas.

¹⁴ X. Dupré Raventós, voce Pons Probi, in *Lexicon topographicum* 1999, p. 111.

¹⁵ Kinney 2007.

¹⁶ For the *basilica Liberii*: LP 37 c. 8, Duchesne 1886 1, p. 208; Geertman 1986/1987; Brandenburg 2004, p. 113; De Blaauw 1994, 1, pp. 335-337; De Spirito 1994; De Spirito, voce Basilica Liberii, in *Lexicon topographicum* 1993 1, p. 181.

¹⁷ Guidobaldi 2002; Guidobaldi 2001-2002; Fiocchi Nicolai 2001, pp. 95-105; Guidobaldi 1989; but see the revisionist new studies of Hillner 2007 and Hillner 2006.

Tituli were in some sense papal, as it was the pope who authorized and consecrated them, but the initiative in founding them would also have come from the donor. *Tituli* evidenced Christian generosity – “evergetism” – on the part of new converts who were accustomed to making grand public benefactions as part of their civic responsibilities. Unlike traditional Roman displays of munificence, however, expenditures on churches took wealth out of the secular economy, including the system of inheritance that maintained the vast resources of the oligarchic senatorial class. The foundation of *tituli* was thus an opening wedge in the massive – if gradual and initially conditional – transfer of wealth from the secular aristocracy to the church, which began with the Christianization of the aristocracy after Constantine and was completed centuries later, when the last vestiges of this class had disappeared.¹⁸

Each *titulus* had a dedicated space for eucharistic and other liturgical services. In some cases the grand reception hall (*aula*) of a senatorial mansion was simply taken over without architectural alteration for this purpose.¹⁹ By the end of the fourth century, however, new titular churches routinely exhibited the same design: a basilican layout with nave and two aisles divided by longitudinal column arcades, a single apse, and often an atrium accompanied by the domestic feature of an arcade of three or five intercolumniations (*trifora* or *pentafora*) giving entrance to the basilica rather than doors.

Until recently, the earliest certainly dated example of a titular church of this format was S. Sisto Vecchio – if, as seems likely, it is the *basilica quae dicitur Crescentiana* – around 400.²⁰ The partial excavation of S. Lorenzo in Damaso between 1988 and 1993

¹⁸ The transfer of wealth was not uncontested; see Prudentius, *Peristephanon* II, 73-92; Cooper 2007; Curran 2000, pp. 260-320; Ward-Perkins 1984, pp. 65-71, 239-240; Matthews 1975, pp. 365-369. For evergetism see Fiocchi Nicolai 2007, p. 107; Hillner 2007, pp. 227-230; Hillner 2006, p. 60.

¹⁹ Examples include S. Balbina: Brandenburg 2004, pp. 216-218; and possibly SS. Quattro Coronati (*titulus Aemilianae*): Brandenburg 2004, pp. 195-196; Belardini 2003; Spera argues that this hall was not Christianized until the seventh century: L. M. Spera, voce Aemiliana, Titulus, in *Lexicon topographicum* 1993 1, p. 20; voce SS. Quattuor Coronati, Titulus, in *Lexicon topographicum* 1999 4, pp. 177-178.

²⁰ LP 41 c. 1, Duchesne 1886 I, p. 218; Brandenburg 2004, pp. 152-153; Geertman e Annis 2001; Geertman 1968-1969.

confirmed that the design was already in use in the 370s or 380s.²¹ On the other hand, S. Anastasia, which dates from Damasus' time or earlier, was different in plan.²² In its current state S. Anastasia is an aisled transept basilica, but the aisles are generally considered to be additions of the early middle ages. If so, the original basilica was cruciform with a single nave, in principle like the Apostles' Church (S. Nazaro) in Milan, or if the aisles were original, it was a reduced form of the type of St. Peter's. Either way, S. Anastasia did not conform to the pattern of later *tituli*, perhaps for programmatic reasons or simply because the standard pattern was not yet established at mid-century.

Titular churches were not like basilicas built by emperors. With an average overall size about 46 m long and 28.5 m wide, two of them could have stood end-to-end inside the Three Emperors' Basilica with room to spare.²³ They were not *ex novo* creations on clean or cleared sites. Many were not free-standing, but remained partially embedded in building complexes that had been given to them by their founders. S. Anastasia was constructed on the upper level of a tenement at the foot of the Palatine hill, which had shops on the street level below and rental apartments in its upper stories. The church was inserted over the shops, which remained accessible and may have contributed to its income. S. Lorenzo in Damaso was established in a private building, often identified as the pope's own family home, in the Campus Martius.²⁴ The most familiar of the early titular basilicas, S. Clemente, was built into two different buildings aligned with the ancient via Tuscolana, a rectangular brick structure of

²¹ M. Pentiricci 2001; R. Krautheimer e M. Pentiricci, voce S. Laurentius in Damaso, in *Lexicon topographicum* 1996 3, pp. 179-182; Krautheimer 1995, pp. 958-963; Krautheimer et al. 1962, pp. 147-153. A full report on the excavations edited by C. Frommel (*Scavi nella Basilica di San Lorenzo in Damaso*, De Luca, Roma 2008), was not yet available at the time of this writing.

²² I am grateful to Judson Emerick for sharing the preliminary findings of his ongoing study of S. Anastasia. For now see Brandenburg 2004, pp. 134-135; A. Milella, voce Sant'Anastasia, in *Il Cristianesimo a Roma* 2003, pp. 84-85; Mazzoleni 2002, pp. 278-279; Guidobaldi 2001-2002, p. 64; Astolfi 2000; Augenti 1996, pp. 37-40; M. Cecchelli, voce S. Anastasia, Titulus, in *Lexicon topographicum* 1993 1, pp. 37-38; Matthews 1992, pp. 281, 299-304; Krautheimer 1937, 43-63.

²³ The average is based on dimensions provided by Brandenburg 2004 and Barresi et al. 2002: S. Clemente 42.3m X 29.8m; SS. Giovanni e Paolo 44 m X 30 m; S. Sisto Vecchio 47m X 25 m; S. Vitale 51m x 29 m.

²⁴ Hillner 2006, p. 65; Blair-Dixon 2002, pp. 334-336.

the third century and an older residence with an underground mithraeum.²⁵ Subdivided by column arcades, the brick building became the nave of the Christian basilica, while the apse was built over the mithraeum.(Fig. 6).

S. Clemente was built before 417, when Pope Zosimus used it to hear a case of suspected heresy, but how much before and by whom are not known.²⁶ There is no record of an aristocratic benefactor, and it seems possible that the church was the collective commission of a Christian community that had occupied the site in the second half of the fourth century. In any case, S. Clemente is a good illustration of the challenges posed by the construction of a basilica to patrons without imperial or senatorial resources. Reusing the walls of the brick building gave the church unusually wide proportions (42.3 m, including the apse, x 29.8 m). The builders seem to have put as few columns as possible in the nave (eight per side), but even so they were able to assemble only a motley collection of shafts that varied dramatically in height, with some nearly half again as tall as others.²⁷ The taller shafts were sunk beneath the floor and had no capitals; when capitals were employed, they were of different types. The entrance *pentafora*, however, was rather fine, and perhaps shows what the builders would have done throughout the basilica, had their resources sufficed. Two pairs of similarly sized, fine marble shafts are disposed in a pattern of color, with *cipollino nero* on the outside and reddish *portasanta* in the center.²⁸

Although S. Clemente may be an extreme case, the titular basilicas of this period were all built by assemblage and adaptation, taking over pre-existing walls, foundations, colonnades, and whatever else might be usable on the site. Characteristic of private secular building for centuries, this opportunistic approach was easily carried over for the conversion of domestic and other secular structures into *tituli*. Adaptive building could be accomplished with a lesser expenditure of time, labor and materials, and it did not require an architect. The

²⁵ Brandenburg 2004, pp. 142-152, pl. XIX.3; Guidobaldi 1992.

²⁶ Guidobaldi 1992, pp. 280-281, 304-306.

²⁷ Barresi et al. 2002, p. 837.

²⁸ Only one *portasanta* column survives: Guidobaldi 1992, p. 131.

design was a compromise, or marriage, of an abstract conception (the “basilica”) and the concrete givens of location, scale, materials, and prior layout.

It has been suggested that builders working in these conditions imposed order by creating modular designs based on the length of the interaxial intercolumniations of the nave colonnade. A grid with cells of this dimension determined, albeit roughly in some cases, the length and width of the basilica, the proportional widths of nave and aisles, and some points in the vertical elevation.²⁹ In buildings like S. Clemente, however, it is more plausible that the procedure worked the other way around, that is, the given dimensions of the perimeter determined the length of the intercolumnar module.³⁰ In any event, unlike the grand basilicas laid out on level sites by skilled professionals, titular churches typically had many irregularities: aisles of different lengths or widths, crooked walls, bent axes and abnormally long intercolumniations.³¹

3. Ornament and illumination

The modern word for reused elements like the column shafts in S. Clemente is *spolia*, but the term should not be taken literally. Columns, capitals, revetments, and other materials were not obtained by “stripping” older buildings unless it was a structure on the same site that was being replaced, in which case all valuable components would be recycled. Otherwise, private patrons and builders acquired their materials through a market in used or “reclaimed” pieces that probably was not unlike today’s traffic in “recyclables”; or from dealers who might commission custom-made pieces from a quarry; or from stocks of remainders: custom-made elements for projects that did not materialize and elements produced in quantity in standard sizes that were warehoused for future sale.³²

²⁹ Barresi et al. 2002.

³⁰ Cf. Barresi et al. 2002, table on p. 840.

³¹ Cf. Brandenburg 2004, pl. XX-1.

³² For such a depot at Ostia: Pavolini 2006, pp. 148-149, Brenk e Pensabene 1998-1999, pp. 293-299.

In the eyes of the congregation, the irregularities of *ad hoc* buildings constructed from reused walls and *spolia* were probably less significant than the overall effect of the completed interior. Gleaming white or colored surfaces created by marble columns of whatever size, marble-paved floors, and real or simulated marble on the walls emulated the splendor of the great imperial basilicas and distracted from the palimpsest nature of the underlying construction. Ingenious craftsmanship could disguise the prevalence of second-hand materials and transform them into sumptuous decorations, as evidenced by the historiated panels in *opus sectile* from the domestic basilica of Junius Bassus (consul in 331), which was converted into a church in the fifth century (Fig. 8).³³ The Bassi were one of the great families of Rome, yet at close range one can see that these panels are composed of debris: bits of broken glass vessels, marble fragments with moldings, and mismatched pieces of serpentine. At even a slight distance, however, the state of the components dissolves into a bravura display of draftsmanship in brilliant colors and materials.

It goes without saying that the “brilliance” of interior surfaces was not the same as that created for today’s viewers by the bright even light of modern illumination. The windows of fourth- and fifth-century churches were proportionately quite large, making for luminous interiors in the daytime, but direct sunlight was obstructed by relatively bulky marble or stucco grilles, and when the grilles were filled with panes of selenite (gypsum) or (less likely) glass, the light was dampened and diffused (Fig. 11). Both gypsum and Roman window glass were translucent rather than transparent. At eye level the light also would have been indirect, since windows were usually confined to the high walls of the nave and the façade, with none in the aisles.³⁴ It may be that the shiny revetments, pavements, and accoutrements enhanced the light from the windows as much or more than vice versa.

³³ M. Sapelli, in *Aurea Roma* 2000, pp. 534-536, Nrs. 174-178.

³⁴ On the fenestration: Ladi 2002; on Roman window glass: Whitehouse 2001, pp. 35-36; on the evidence for glass in Rome: Del Nunzio 2001, erroneously citing Prudentius as evidence for window glass at St. Paul’s.

Brilliance was dependent on artificial illumination, oil lamps and wax candles.³⁵ No donation list for the Three Emperors' Basilica is preserved, but it would have been lit by the same dazzling density of gold and silver hanging lamps and standing brass candelabra that is recorded for St. Peter's. The titular churches, even accounting for size, were not as brilliant. Pope Damasus gave his *titulus* five silver "crowns" (*coronas*) – circular hanging lamps that typically lit the altar – weighing only eight pounds each and sixteen brass candlesticks (*cantara cereostata*).³⁶ *Coronae* burned olive oil, which gave more light than wax or tallow and was more expensive, and donors had to provide endowments to keep these chandeliers burning. At the end of the century, with the help of a wealthy benefactress Pope Innocent I (401-417) was able to put more than twice as much light in the *titulus Vestinae*: one 22-lb. hanging oil lamp, a dozen silver 15-lb. *coronas*, and four 25-lb. silver candelabra in addition to bronze lights "in the body of the basilica".³⁷

4. Alternative spaces

The *titulus* of the lady Vestina, which was established with the proceeds from the sale of her jewels and pearls according to instructions in her will, survives today as S. Vitale on the modern Via Nazionale.³⁸ With the *titulus Pammachii* (SS. Giovanni e Paolo) on the Celian hill, it shows the flowering and refinement of the standard basilica design at the turn of the fifth century. They were large structures with long arcades (12-14 columns) made with reasonably uniform shafts (although the granite shafts in SS. Giovanni e Paolo were too short) and new capitals or decent *spolia*.³⁹ An elegant innovation at SS. Giovanni e Paolo was the doubling of the entrance *pentafora* in the upper wall of the façade, which created an

³⁵ On interior lighting: Pavolini 2001-2002; Geertman 1988.

³⁶ LP 39 c. 4, Duchesne 1886 1, p. 212; cf. Geertman 1988, p. 72. For the definition of *coronae* and *canthara cereostata*: Pavolini 2001-2002, p. 115.

³⁷ LP 42 cc. 4-5, Duchesne 1886 1, pp. 220-221; on the endowment: Hillner 2007, p. 231; Hillner 2006, p. 62; Marazzi 1997, p. 413; Matthews 1975, pp. 367-368.

³⁸ Brandenburg 2004, pp. 153-155, pl. XXI-1; Krautheimer et al. 1976, pp. 299-316.

³⁹ On the capitals in S. Vitale: Herrmann 1973, pp. 108-109. On SS. Giovanni e Paolo: Leyser 2007; Brandenburg 2004, pp. 155-162, pl. XXII-3; Bartolozzi Casti 2002; Brenk 1995; Krautheimer 1937, p. 295 on the column shafts.

uninterrupted suite of windows 13 m long. The builders also inserted *oculi* over the normal arched windows in the nave walls and four round-headed windows in the apse.

The standardization of these basilicas must reflect the close collaboration of their lay aristocratic patrons with the pope and his representatives, even, perhaps, some centralized system of planning. The architecture of *tituli* identified them with papally-approved centers of worship in an urban landscape that was thick with heterodox and nonconformist communities.

⁴⁰ There were still many independent congregations in Rome in the later fourth century: Arians, Manichaeans, Pelagians, Cataphrygians, Valentinians, Marcionites, Montanists, Sabellians, Novatianists.⁴¹ Some of these dissident groups explicitly rejected the new basilicas, like the followers of Lucifer of Cagliari who authored the *Libellus precum* in 384:

Let them have their basilicas glittering with gold and ornamented with the ostentation of expensive marble, held up by the splendor of columns... As for us, the true salt, it is enough piously to worship and adore Christ our God in the meanest and most abject hovels, of a kind where once the same Christ ... found it worthy to lie in as an infant.⁴²

Rather than abject hovels, most non- or anti-establishment congregations probably met in spaces like the so-called Oratory of Monte di Giustizia near the Porta Viminale, or in the homes of noble families.⁴³ Domestic spaces constituted a widespread alternative to public churches as sites of prayer, teaching, and liturgical observance. Even aristocrats in communion with the pope took the eucharist at home rather than going out to church. They had oratories in their mansions, as documented in the well-known case of Melania the Younger, and private churches on their estates. Women, especially, were inclined to turn their homes into monastic retreats, where they received monks, clerics, and traveling holy men, some of whom spread unauthorized beliefs.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ The identification of *tituli* with the papacy was also expressed liturgically by the *fermentum*; Hillner 2007, pp. 233-234; Hillner 2006, p. 61; Carmassi 2001, p. 146.

⁴¹ LP 37 cc. 1-5, Duchesne 1886 1, p. 207; LP 40 cc. 2-3, Duchesne 1886 1, p. 216; LP 42 c. 2, Duchesne 1886, p. 220; Maier 1995.

⁴² Maier 1995, p. 242.

⁴³ Cerrito 2002.

⁴⁴ Cooper 2007, p. 173; Curran 2000, pp. 264-290; Clark 1984, pp. 29, 93-94..

An example of a domestic oratory is preserved under the *titulus Pammachii*, which was erected on the upper level of a luxurious house that had once been connected to a series of shops, the outlines of which can still be seen in the aisle wall of the later basilica. The shops had been closed by a previous owner and incorporated into an elaborately decorated suite of spaces for reception and entertaining; later, a Christian resident inserted the oratory on the landing of a stairway that connected these semi-public spaces with the living quarters above (Figs. 9-10).⁴⁵ The oratory was a low rectangular space, 4.6 m deep, with a niche in the end wall that may have contained relics. Painted on the wall under the niche is an orant male figure in contemporary dress with two people in proskynesis at his feet. Since the painting is at floor level, worshipers were evidently meant to kneel on the ground under the niche in imitation of the people in the painting. More paintings on the side walls depict scenes of martyrdom and aristocratic people offering gifts.

The construction of the titular basilica of Pammachius buried the oratory in an unmarked point under the nave. Its erasure prompts the speculation that the oratory may have belonged to a heterodox community; if so the founder of the *titulus*, Pammachius, a prominent Christian who died in the sack of Rome in 410, would have acquired the property in order to convert it into an orthodox place of worship; or it could have been bought in his name, like the *titulus Vestinae*, after his death from his bequest.⁴⁶

5. Baptisteries

Due to the system of *tituli*, Rome is unique in its proliferation of baptisteries.⁴⁷ The presence of baptisteries at *tituli* reflects their status as auxiliaries of the papal pastoral system, whose

⁴⁵ Brenk 1995.

⁴⁶ On Pammachius see Leyser 2007, pp. 143, 146-147; Curran 2000, pp. 295-296, 311-312; voce Pammachius, in *Prosopographie chrétienne* 2000, pp. 1576-1581. For the theory that the basilica was built after 410 by a different Pammachius, see Hillner 2006, pp. 62-63; Bartolozzi Casti 2002; Brenk 2002, pp. 1013-1014.

⁴⁷ Cosentino 2002; Coates-Stephens 2001-2002; Cantino Wataghin et al. 2001; Falla Castelfranchi 2001; Ristow 1998, pp. 189-192, 318-319; Bartolozzi Casti 1995-1996, pp 353-354.

clergy were authorized to exercise certain episcopal functions in the pope's stead.⁴⁸ Dedicated spaces for baptism may have appeared in the fourth century and certainly existed by the turn of the fifth, when the urban prefect Longinianus (400-402) built a place (*sedem*) for a font at S. Anastasia and the *titulus* of Vestina received a special silver service for baptismal rites.⁴⁹ These baptisteries have been characterized as “piccoli, non spettacolari, spesso in pessime condizioni e difficili da datare con precisione”.⁵⁰ They were rooms rather than buildings, and the designers' attention seems to have been focused less on the enclosing space than on the shape and decoration of the font. The fonts were often elaborate, large and deep enough for immersion, as can be seen from the fine sixth-century example recently discovered at S. Clemente (Fig. 6).⁵¹

Baptisteries were also installed at cemetery churches, in catacombs, and in parochial churches in the suburbs. According to the *Liber Pontificalis*, the first cemetery baptistery was made by Constantine at S. Agnese, “where his sister Constantina was baptized”.⁵² The notice is probably apocryphal, but baptism may have been performed at S. Agnese in the fourth century. Contested papacies and the tendency of schismatic groups to occupy cemetery sites, discussed below, must have been factors in the creation of the earliest baptisteries *extra muros*.⁵³ Pope Damasus, who wrested his office from a rival, made a baptistery in the north transept of St. Peter's. Prudentius described it as beautifully decorated with colored marble, mosaic and gold, their colors all reflected in the flowing water of the font, and he remarked that the pope himself baptized there.⁵⁴ Very different were cemetery baptisteries like that in the Catacomb of Ponziano (sixth century?), which was eked out of the underground area housing the tombs. This was not a space that displayed the beneficence of its founder; rather,

⁴⁸ Cosentino 2002, pp. 141-142.

⁴⁹ S. Anastasia: Martindale 1980, voce Fl. Macrobius Longinianus, pp. 686-687; Krautheimer 1937, p. 44; *titulus Vestinae*: LP 42 c. 5, Duchesne 1886 1, pp. 220-221.

⁵⁰ Brandt 2003, p. 137.

⁵¹ See the plans in Brandenburg 2004, pl. XXVIII-1 (S. Cecilia); Episcopo 1995, p. 737 (S. Marcello).

⁵² LP 34 c. 23, Duchesne 1886 1, p. 180.

⁵³ LP 37 c. 4, Duchesne 1886 1, p. 207; LP 44 c. 2, Duchesne 1886 1, p.227; Cosentino 2002, pp. 135-136.

⁵⁴ Prudentius, *Peristephanon* XII, 37-44. Cf. De Blaauw 1994, 2, pp. 487-488.

it intensified the experience of ritual death for the baptizand by its proximity to sites of real death in the surrounding galleries.⁵⁵

6. Shrines of the saints

From a Christian perspective, the cemeteries in the suburbs outside the Aurelian wall were an extension of the mission of the *tituli*, for the living were in frequent communication with the dead. The Three Emperors' Basilica, like its Constantinian model, was a highly visible marker of the Christian presence in this busy zone of farms, industries, villas, imperial estates, and temples.⁵⁶ It is not clear to what extent the popes sought to make such visual statements of their own. The *Liber Pontificalis* attributes cemeterial structures to Popes Felix II (355-358), Damasus, and Anastasius (399-401), but they could have been familial *basilichette* rather than large buildings for communal use.⁵⁷ Far more influential, in any case, were the interventions made by Pope Damasus underground.

As St. Jerome recalled it many years later, visiting the catacombs in the mid-fourth century was frightening and dangerous:

When I was a boy at Rome [probably in the 360s] ... on Sundays I used to tour the tombs of the apostles and martyrs with others of the same age ... and frequently to enter the crypts... Everything was so dark ... we ... were reminded by the darkness of night that surrounded us of that saying of Virgil: "Everywhere dread grips the mind, while even the silences terrify".⁵⁸

Basilicas like St. Paul's sacrificed the terrifying intimacy of such encounters by surrounding the holy tomb with light and space. Pope Damasus took a different approach, increasing access to the martyrs' tombs while preserving the powerful effect of the uncanny underground

⁵⁵ Cosentino 2002, pp. 137-138; Bisconti 2001, p. 424 and figs. 13, 15; Ricciardi 2001; Spera *Ad limina* 1998, pp. 47-48 .

⁵⁶ De Francesco 2003, pp. 541-542; Marazzi 2000, pp. 30-31.

⁵⁷ LP 38 cc. 2-3, Duchesne 1886 1, p. 211; LP 39 cc. 1, 5, Duchesne 1886 1, pp. 212-213; LP 41 c. 3, Duchesne 1886 1, p. 218; Prudentius, *Peristephanon*, XI. For the basilica of Felix: G. N. Verrando, voce Felices duo, basilica, in *Lexicon topographicum Suburbium* 2004 ***, pp. 240-243; on the basilica of Damasus: L. Spera, voce Damasi basilica, ecclesia, in *Lexicon topographicum Suburbium* 2004 ***, pp. 185-188; on the cemetery of Anastasius, Ricciardi 2002; P. M. Barbini, voce S. Anastasii, coemeterium, in *Lexicon topographicum Suburbium* 2001 1, p. 52. In general Janssens 2002, pp. 235-243.

⁵⁸ St. Jerome, *In Hiezechielem* 12, 40, 5-13; trans. Roberts 1993, pp. 158-159; the allusion is to *Aeneid* 2. 755.

setting. According to the *Liber Pontificalis*, “He sought and found the bodies of many saints, and he proclaimed about them in verses”.⁵⁹ In fact, after Damasus’ pontificate the number of saints in the Roman calendar had more than tripled, and fragments of dozens of his poems, incised by the brilliant epigrapher Philocalus, are known from cemeteries on all of the main roads to Rome.⁶⁰ Typically, the tomb “found” by the pope was given an architectural frame of columns or pilasters. A plaque inscribed with the poem, naming the martyr and giving a cursory account of his virtues or the (sometimes gruesome) means of death, was placed before or above the grave, and a masonry table (*mensa*) was added for candles or gifts. New stairways were built leading down to the chosen tombs, as well as more and bigger light wells, and spaces in front of the tombs were enlarged.⁶¹ The resulting shrine was similar in scale and format to the oratory under SS. Giovanni e Paolo, and similarly allowed the worshipper to pray prostrate in intimate proximity to the locus or object of veneration.

Prudentius wrote a poem about one of the sites improved by Damasus, the shrine of St. Hippolytus on the via Tiburtina. He found it easy to reach (*progressu facili*) via a winding stair and a corridor with ample light wells. The approach was lined with marble and a “rich hand” had covered the tomb with silver. Aucharistic altar stood in front of the tomb, and on the wall above it a painting of the saint’s martyrdom enabled the poet to imagine his death in hideous detail. The “narrow cave” (*angustum specus*) in front of the tomb, a space lit by lamps reflected off the marble and silver amid the still-dark neighboring corridors filled with other graves, announced the presence of the “very special dead”.⁶² The poet found it “a place of wondrous grace” (*mira loci pietas*), where in prostration (*stratus*) before the tomb, he always attained relief. Excavations of this crypt have confirmed the access stair, light wells,

⁵⁹ LP 39 c. 1, Duchesne 1886 1, p. 212.

⁶⁰ *Epigrammata Damasiana* 1942, pp. XII-XIV. Cf. Spera, *Ad limina* 1998, map on p. 22, and Guyon 1986, map on p. 250.

⁶¹ Fiocchi Nicolai 2001, pp. 79-92; Sághy 2000; Fiocchi Nicolai in Fiocchi Nicolai et al. 1998, pp. 48-58; Spera, *Ad limina* 1998, pp. 36-43; Spera, *Interventi* 1998; Guyon 1986.

⁶² Prudentius, *Peristephanon* XI, trans. Thomson 1953; Bertonière 1985, pp. 33-38, 41-43; Brown 1981, pp. 69-85.

and a roughly square space about 4.6 m wide in front of the saint's *loculus*, as well as the addition of narrow corridors that created a space "behind the saints" (*retro sanctos*), which quickly filled with new tombs.⁶³

The goal of Pope Damasus' program was evidently to establish an official, orthodox presence in the *suburbium*, as the *tituli* were meant to do within the walls. The problems encountered in the cemeteries were the same, or possibly even worse than in the city: privatization and a proliferation of heterodox and dissident communities, including Damasus' rival for the papacy Ursinus, whose supporters met and celebrated "stations" in the *coemeteria martyrum*.⁶⁴ Opposing sects claimed certain martyrs as their own, and innocent worshippers might mistake a schismatic for a catholic saint. St. Hippolytus himself had opposed the orthodox pope Callixtus (217-222) in his lifetime; Damasus' inscription associates him with a more contemporary schism and stresses his repentance and reconciliation.⁶⁵ The strategy for imposing papal influence was the same as that used in the *tituli*: the creation of multiple sites of standardized, easily recognizable appearance, realized with the help of wealthy allies, which laid claim to the surrounding area and made it easy for worshippers to identify authorized sites and to avoid those of suspect competitors.

One effect of Damasus' underground improvements was increased traffic to the cult sites. Prudentius' poem on St. Hippolytus describes an above-ground basilica that was large enough to hold the huge crowds that came once a year to celebrate the martyr's anniversary. It was an imposing building with lofty walls, opulent decoration, twin rows of columns, a coffered ceiling and gilded beams, and a stepped silhouette that carried the nave high above the aisles. Opposite the entrance was a *tribunal* raised on steps, from which the priest

⁶³ Bertonière 1985, pp. 134-144; *Epigrammata Damasiana* 1942, pp. 169-171.

⁶⁴ Maier 1995, pp. 245-249; the citation is from *Quae gesta sunt inter Liberium et Felicem*. Cf. Hillner 2007; p. 239; Blair-Dixon 2002, pp. 341-345, Sághy 2000.

⁶⁵ Blair-Dixon 2002, pp. 345-351.

“preached God” (*praedicat Deum*).⁶⁶ Although the *Liber Pontificalis* does not mention any such building by Damasus, it could have been the work of his “entourage”.⁶⁷ Another large cemetery basilica at the catacomb of S. Generosa, at the sixth mile of the via Campana (modern Magliana), has been attributed to Damasus by Philippe Pergola. Much farther away than the other known cemetery basilicas, this one is said to have been 30 m long, divided into nave and aisles.⁶⁸

More problematic is the basilica of SS. Nereo e Achilleo in the catacomb of Domitilla on the via Ardeatina, which directly contradicts the general picture of Damasus’ interventions as “modestes”.⁶⁹ It is a *basilica ad corpus*, about 31 m long and ca. 19.5 m wide, that intruded into the space of the catacomb, destroying its upper level so that the apse could stand on the site of the cubiculum that had contained the martyrs’ tombs. The basilica’s perimeter walls rose above ground level, and the nave arcades (four columns per side) probably supported galleries at the level of the outside terrain. This type of building is well known from sixth- and seventh-century examples in Rome, and a date in the time of Pope John (523-526), who “remade (*refecit*) the cemetery of the blessed martyrs Nereo e Achilleo”, seems preferable to the fourth-century date maintained by Pergola and some others.⁷⁰

7. Elite tombs and mausolea

Pope Damasus’ transformation of the cemeteries insured their long-term vitality as places of worship and pilgrimage, and consequently also of commerce and settlement. The high point of pilgrimage occurred after the sixth century, when there was a spate of brilliant new

⁶⁶ Prudentius, *Peristephanon* XI, 215-226; Bertonière 1985, pp. 39-43. On the basilica of St. Hippolytus: Serra 2002; Bertonière 1985, pp. 40-41; *Epigrammata Damasiana* 1942, pp. 173-174, Nr. 35¹.

⁶⁷ Fiocchi Nicolai 2001, pp. 84-85.

⁶⁸ Pergola 1995; cf. the map in Fiocchi Nicolai et al. 1998.

⁶⁹ Guyon 1986, p. 255.

⁷⁰ LP 55 c. 7, Duchesne 1886 1, p. 276; Brandenburg 2004, pp. 131-132 (end of the fourth century); Fiocchi Nicolai in Fiocchi Nicolai et al. 1998, p. 56 (Siricius); Pergola 1995, 1986 (Damasus). Favoring a sixth-century date: Spera, *Interventi* 1998, p. 309 n. 39; Krautheimer et al. 1971, pp. 129-135. Damasus certainly did some work in this cemetery: *Epigrammata Damasiana* 1942, pp. 101-104, Nr. 8; Bisconti in Fiocchi Nicolai et al. 1998, pp. 103, 106 fig. 120.

construction and decoration that continued until the Carolingian era. In the short term, Damasus' shrines generated new opportunities for burial *retro sanctos*, leading to a dense proliferation of new graves. These privileged sites were often occupied by members of the senatorial élite, who could afford to dig out elaborately shaped chambers that presumably reproduced domestic and sepulchral typologies, constituting an "architettura in negativo" under the earth.⁷¹ This class also reused existing mausolea above ground, or built new ones. An impressive example of new construction is the hexaconch – the only one known from this period in Italy – that still stands on the north side of via Appia Pignatelli near the cemetery of Praetextatus. It is dated to the late fourth or fifth century by its masonry.⁷² A rotunda with an internal diameter of 9.42 m and six projecting apses, this mausoleum had a concrete dome with six brick ribs rising over exterior buttresses.⁷³ The interior was dimly lit by pairs of deeply splayed windows, mere slits on the exterior, cut into the apses and into the wall above them.

If papal activity fostered burial in the cemeteries along the consular roads, the court preferred St. Peter's. Attached directly to the apse of the Constantinian basilica was the mausoleum of Sextus Petronius Probus (d. ca. 388), four times praetorian prefect and thus the emperor's closest advisor, built by his wife Anicia Faltonia Proba.⁷⁴ This partly underground structure was a small basilica, with marble colonnades and architraves inscribed with two metric epitaphs of Probus. The tombs were sealed under the floor. Around the same time, Emperor Honorius must have arranged for his own burial in the nearby rotunda attached to the south wing of the transept, where the sarcophagus of his wife Maria (d. ca. 407) was unearthed in 1544. Written sources indicate that in addition to Maria and Honorius (d. 423),

⁷¹ Spera 1999, p. 407.

⁷² Windfeld-Hansen 2003; Spera 1999, p. 191 Nr. UT 323.

⁷³ On the use of ribs: Rasch 1991, pp. 370-379.

⁷⁴ Jones et al. 1971, voce Anicia Faltonia Proba 3, pp. 732-733; voce Sex. Claudius Petronius Probus, pp. 736-740; Krautheimer 1964.

the mausoleum eventually contained the remains of the infant son of Galla Placidia, Theodosius (d. ca. 414).⁷⁵

According to Jürgen Rasch, the funerary rotunda – called “the Mausoleum” until it was dedicated to S. Petronilla in the eighth century – and the adjoining, slightly larger rotunda to the east of it were pre-existing buildings that were raised one story in the fourth century, in order to bring their pavements up to the level of St. Peter’s. It is not certain whether this restructuring was done at the beginning of the century when the basilica was built or by Honorius; either way the renovated mausolea were the last known examples in the West of the type called *Obergadenrundbau* (clerestory rotunda).⁷⁶ These imposing, thick-walled structures both had eight niches in the wall at ground level large windows in the wall over each niche, and a dome. As in the mausoleum of Probus, the imperial tombs in the western rotunda were under the floor, leaving a bright open space – a “festival hall”, as von Hesberg called it – for other uses.⁷⁷

It seems surprising that the emperor made his dynastic tomb at St. Peter’s and not at St. Paul’s, where he was celebrated as a founder; and if Rasch’s theory is correct, he made two new mausolea but used only one.⁷⁸ A possible explanation is suggested by the poet Claudian’s description of Honorius’ triumphal procession from Ravenna to Rome to inaugurate his sixth consulship, with Stilicho, the emperor’s father-in-law and head of the armies, riding beside him in the triumphal chariot.⁷⁹ This ambitious Goth, the power behind the throne until he fell from favor and was executed in 408, may have persuaded the emperor to cede him the second rotunda for his own family. In any case, the imperial choice of St. Peter’s confirmed the relative status of the apostles’ tombs. St. Paul’s may have been a better building, but St. Peter’s was the more powerful shrine.

⁷⁵ De Rossi 1863, p. 141, but with the erroneous identification of Theodosius as the emperor who died in 450 and was buried in Constantinople. Cf. Martindale 1980, voce Maria 1, p. 720; voce Theodosius 5, p. 1100.

⁷⁶ Rasch 1990 (Honorius); Tolotti 1988 (Constantine); Biering and v. Hesberg 1987.

⁷⁷ Von Hesberg 1992, p. 54.

⁷⁸ This is also an issue if the rebuildings are attributed to Constantine: Tolotti 1988, p. 305.

⁷⁹ Claudius Claudianus, *Panegyricus de sexto consulatu Honorii Augusti*, 578-580.

8. After 410

It is generally agreed that the material effect of the Gothic invasion of Rome in 410 was not nearly as great as its psychological and intellectual impact, and it is difficult to find material traces even of that.⁸⁰ The apse mosaic of the *titulus Pudentis* (Fig. 5) must have been made either just before or directly after the invasion. The beatific vision of the Lord as “preserver” (*conservator*) of the congregation conveys a message of institutional stability and the universal mission of Rome that persisted regardless of military and political realities.⁸¹

Some aspects of fifth-century church building do seem to reflect significant physical and social changes, however. The *spolia* employed in the first half of the fifth century imply the sudden availability of fine pieces from public buildings and villas, which may have been abandoned or damaged beyond repair by the marauders. By mid-century the pope surpassed the lay aristocracy and rivaled the imperial court as the source of the most ambitious and creative church architecture, and this reversal may have been facilitated by an accelerated flow of senatorial fortunes to the church that was stimulated by sack-related donations and bequests.

S. Sabina – starkly pure following an early twentieth-century restoration, but still one of the most beautiful early Christian buildings known today – was built by the priest Peter of Illyrium in the papacy of Celestine I (422-432), according to the dedicatory inscription.⁸² It is similar in size to the basilica of Vestina (53 m long, 12 columns per side) but far more elegant, largely because of the perfectly matched components of its nave arcades (Fig. 11).

This fine set of second-century fluted column shafts of Proconnesian marble with their

⁸⁰ Brandenburg 2004, p. 163; Brenk 2002; Krautheimer 1980, pp. 45-46; but cf. Ermini Pani 2007, pp. 27-30.

⁸¹ On the building of S. Pudenziana: Brandenburg 2004, pp. 137-142; Guidobaldi 2002; Krautheimer et al. 1971, pp. 280-305. On the mosaic: Goffredo 2002 (with an apparent misreading of Mathews, p. 1960); Steen 2002; Hellemo 1989 *passim*.

⁸² Brandenburg 2004, pp. 167-176; Bellanca 1999; S. Episcopo, voce S. Sabina, Basilica, titulus, in *Lexicon topographicum* 1999, pp. 221-223; Krautheimer et al. 1976, pp. 69-94. The basilica may have been completed under Pope Sixtus III: LP 46 c. 9, Duchesne 1886 1, p. 235.

Corinthian capitals must have come from a recently demolished building.⁸³ The *spolia* create a classical tone that mitigates or dissimulates the non-classical nature of the arcaded elevation as a whole, and they produce an aura of refinement that could not have been achieved with architectural components carved by contemporary craftsmen. The fifth-century *opus sectile* patterns in the spandrels above the capitals, which playfully imitate bare stone masonry and what appear to be military insignia, are competent but not as refined as the columns.⁸⁴

In overall design S. Sabina resembled SS. Giovanni e Paolo, with large windows in the apse and a quintuple arcaded window in the façade, but it was much more ornate. In a possible concession to the recent incursion, three solid doors replaced the matching arcade at ground level. The wooden leaves of the central door, unique in Rome, are carved with relief representations of events from the Old and New Testaments as well as more abstract theological subjects (Fig. 12). Inside, the nave wall above the door is covered by the monumental donor's inscription in mosaic, with gold letters on blue ground. A figural mosaic decorated the conch of the apse and painting presumably covered the nave walls above the *opus sectile* in the spandrels. If S. Sabina arose from the ashes of the burned and looted villas of the Aventine, its opulence defied the thought that Rome had fallen.

Another post-invasion church with matched *spolia* is S. Pietro in Vincoli (Fig. 13), the *titulus Apostolorum* built by the presbyter Philip who represented Pope Celestine at the Council of Ephesus in 431. Philip must have sponsored the *titulus* on his return from the Council. The history of the building is difficult to disentangle, since there seem to have been two churches erected on the site in quick succession: a basilica of the standard "ca. 400" design that collapsed due to inadequate foundations, and the present transept basilica.⁸⁵

⁸³ Pensabene 2003, p. 419; Pensabene 1995, pp. 1080-1081 proposes an origin in the destroyed temple of Juno Gabina (*sic*), on the basis, however, of an inaccurate citation of Deichmann 1975, p. 16. Brandenburg 2004, p. 169 and elsewhere emphasizes that there were warehouses of such salvaged elements.

⁸⁴ Cf. Berger 1981, pp. 41-79, figs. 3-13. Rickert 1998 argued that some of the patterns represent imperial orbs on stands.

⁸⁵ The first church, dubbed "Basilica A" by Krautheimer, has been reconstructed in more detail by Bartolozzi Casti, but its existence is not universally accepted: Bartolozzi Casti 2002; A. Milella, voce S. Petrus in Vinculis,

Inscriptions recorded in the middle ages mentioned – in addition to the work (*labor et cura*) of Presbyter Philip – a prior dedication (*prius nomen*) and a vow of Emperor Theodosius II (d. 450) and his wife Eudocia, which was fulfilled by their daughter Eudoxia (d. 462).⁸⁶ The prevailing opinion is that the second, extant basilica is the one constructed by Philip in the papacy of Sixtus III (432-440), and that Eudoxia had something to do with it.

The second basilica was unusual in several respects, including the presence of relics (the chains of St. Peter's imprisonment, mentioned in one of the inscriptions); the "tripartite transept" divided by two transverse arches on the lines of the nave colonnades; and the Doric colonnades themselves, which represent the only instance of this order in an early Roman church interior.⁸⁷ The source of the columns is unknown, but given the rarity of the Doric order in Roman architecture, it was probably a public building of the very early Empire.⁸⁸

S. Pietro in Vincoli is one of the buildings said to represent a "classical renaissance" in church architecture in the decades following the Gothic attack.⁸⁹ The validity of this concept is disputed, and it must be said that the combination of Doric columns with arches (as well as Attic bases) appears profoundly unclassical. Nevertheless, the very willingness to experiment with Doric as an element in the Christian basilican arcade betrays a degree of architectural creativity not seen since the Three Emperors' Basilica. Rather than a specific aspiration to classicism, architecture in the time of Sixtus III seems to show an innovative approach to inherited Christian designs that drew upon elements of the Roman imperial repertoire for inspiration. The invention and intelligence exhibited in these buildings suggest the participation of architects and skilled craftsmen, which in turn reflects the active assistance of the imperial court during Sixtus' pontificate.

Titulus; T. Eudoxiae; T. Apostolorum; T. S. Petri ad Vincula, in *Lexicon topographicum* 1999, pp. 82-83; Krautheimer et al. 1971, pp. 179-234.

⁸⁶ Krautheimer et al. 1971, p. 182.

⁸⁷ Brandenburg 2004, pp. 189-192.

⁸⁸ Brandenburg 2004, p. 193; C. Panella, voce Porticus Liviae in *Lexicon Topographicum* 1999, pp. 127-129.

⁸⁹ Krautheimer 1980, pp. 43-53. Cf. Brandenburg 2004, p. 185; De Blaauw 2002, pp. 59-61.

9. The Imperial Papacy

Whatever the aesthetic intentions of his buildings, the dynamics of architectural patronage in Rome changed fundamentally with Pope Sixtus III. Wealthy lay aristocrats and the imperial court continued to provide essential financial assistance in the building and embellishment of churches, but the acknowledged author of all new major ecclesiastical construction was now the pope. This new relationship is immediately evident in the *Liber Pontificalis*, in which for the first time the pope appears as the chief patron of the old imperial foundations – St. Peter’s and the Lateran Cathedral – while the Emperor Valentinian III (425-455, husband of Eudoxia) makes gifts to them “at Pope Sixtus’ request”.⁹⁰ The pope’s new status was also announced in the buildings he founded himself, especially the basilica now known as S. Maria Maggiore, where “Bishop Sixtus for the People of God” (*Xystus episcopus plebi Dei*) is prominently written on the arch at the end of the nave.⁹¹

The authorship of S. Maria Maggiore is clouded by the fact that the *Liber Pontificalis* identifies it as the basilica “which is called ‘of Liberius’ by the ancients”.⁹² This has suggested to some that the basilica with the fifth-century inscription is actually the fourth-century *basilica Liberii*, appropriated and redecorated but not newly built by Sixtus III. Others have argued for different reasons that that the basilica credited to Pope Sixtus was actually planned and largely constructed by Sixtus’ predecessor Pope Celestine. Nothing in the written record points to any founder but Sixtus III, however, nor is there archaeological evidence of an earlier “basilica of Liberius” underneath or in the fabric of the present church. It is possible, as Geertman has argued, that the function of Pope Sixtus’ new foundation was anticipated by Liberius’ vanished basilica *iuxta macellum Libiae* as well as by the Pope Julius I’s *basilica Iuli iuxta forum*, which, according to Geertman, was the predecessor of the

⁹⁰ LP 46 c. 4, Duchesne 1886 1, p. 233: “ex rogatu Xysti episcopi”; cf. De Blaauw 1994, 1, p. 339.

⁹¹ On S. Maria Maggiore: Wolf e Pollack 2007; Brandenburg 2004, pp. 176-189; De Blaauw 2002; De Blaauw 2001, pp. 53-54; Saxer 2001, pp. 31-62; Sperduti 1996; De Blaauw 1994, 1, pp. 345-365; Krautheimer et al. 1971, pp. 1-60.

⁹² LP 46 c. 3, Duchesne 1886 1, p. 232.

basilica Apostolorum in via Lata (Ss. Apostoli) begun by Pope Pelagius I (556-561).⁹³ These were “patriarchal basilicas,” outposts of the Lateran Cathedral where the popes could stage representative events – councils, trials, elections, as well as the papal liturgy – in the heart of the city.

S. Maria Maggiore (Fig. 14) stands 53 m above sea level on the Cispius, a summit of the Esquiline Hill, so it was visible from all directions. Its facade looks southeast, roughly toward the Lateran.⁹⁴ The site was irregular and fell off sharply to the northwest, necessitating the construction of a terrace to support the apse end of the building. Although not on the scale of fourth-century imperial constructions, the project was still a massive undertaking, more like an emperor’s basilica than a *titulus*. The majestic proportions of the basilica that rose on top of the terrace (79 m long, 35 m wide, 18 m high in the nave), with its long colonnades (20 columns per side), advertise the honor due not only to the founder but to Mary, the dedicatee. This was the first church in Rome dedicated to the Virgin Mary, testimony to the papal endorsement of Mary’s venerable status as Mother of God.

Architecturally, the new basilica surpassed all previous efforts in its thoughtful reappraisal of both Roman and Christian architectural traditions. Although its classical effect has been exaggerated by an eighteenth-century restoration that eliminated the irregularities entailed by the use of *spolia*, including the presence of six shafts of *cipollino* in the predominantly Proconnesian colonnades, the original nave elevation was still markedly more classicizing than that of any previous Roman Christian basilica. The architect simulated the trabeated paradigms of St. Peter’s and the Lateran basilica by filling the arches over the columns with brick masonry and wooden lintels, and covering the in-fill with a horizontal mosaic frieze and stucco cornice to give the impression of a stone entablature. The colonnades recall St. Paul’s in their uniformly light-colored shafts, and – for the first time in a Roman

⁹³ LP 36 c. 2; LP 37 c. 8; LP 62 c. 3, Duchesne 1886 1, pp. 205, 208, 303; Geertman 1986-1987 (2004); cf. De Blaauw 1994, 1, p. 336.

⁹⁴ Saxer 2001, pp. 31-33.

Christian interior – the capitals are Ionic. Stucco pilasters over the false trabeation create the appearance of a second order of supports rising to the beams of the ceiling. Between the pilasters are the usual large windows and, underneath each window, a square field of narrative mosaic framed like an ancient *pinax* by a stucco aedicule. The vertical integration of the pictorial decoration with the real and simulated support structure of the nave produced a uniquely architectonic effect.

The basilica was preceded by an atrium and thus its entrance wall could have been open in a colonnade, but the evidence is ambiguous and some scholars believe that there were doors. At the opposite end was a single apse. A foundation wall further west, discovered in 1971, has been interpreted as marking the perimeter of an ambulatory around the apse, a space in which, at least in a later century, women stood to hear Mass and annoyed the pope with their proximity.⁹⁵ De Blaauw proposed that the apse opened into this space via a curved, trabeated colonnade like that in the nave, which directly supported the semi-dome under the arch with Pope Sixtus' dedicatory inscription (Fig. 14). This would have been a unique and structurally audacious solution; and if an ambulatory existed at all, it seems more likely that it communicated with the apse through windows, especially since five windows were described by an eleventh-century observer.⁹⁶

According to the *Liber Pontificalis*, Pope Sixtus III “made” a second basilica, dedicated to St. Lawrence, “quod Valentinianus Augustus concessit”.⁹⁷ The mention of an imperial concession has led to multiple identifications of this basilica, one being S. Lorenzo in Lucina, which stands close to the Ara Pacis in the Campus Martius.⁹⁸ Against this view Geertman has argued for the “basilica maior” near St. Lawrence’s tomb outside the walls, a

⁹⁵ LP 100 c. 30, Duchesne 1886 2, p. 60; see the plan in De Blaauw 1986-1987, opp. p. 96.

⁹⁶ On the windows: Saxer 2001, pp. 196-197; for the reconstruction: De Blaauw 2001, pp. 53-54; De Blaauw 1994, 1, pp. 350-355; De Blaauw 1986-1987, doubted by Brandenburg 2004, p. 179 and Krautheimer: De Blaauw 2002, p. 64 nota 25. Saxer 2001, p. 83 proposed it was added later.

⁹⁷ LP 46 c. 6, Duchesne 1886 1, p. 234.

⁹⁸ On S. Lorenzo in Lucina: Brandenburg 2004, pp. 166-167; Bertoldi 2003; Bertoldi 1994; Krautheimer et al. 1962, pp. 161-186 CK.

“circiform” basilica generally thought to be the “basilicam beato Laurentio martyri via Tiburtina in agrum Veranum” that is credited to Constantine in the *Liber Pontificalis*.⁹⁹ The grounds for Geertman’s identification include the quantity of liturgical implements and lights given by Pope Sixtus to the basilica, too large for a *titulus* but comparable to S. Maria Maggiore; and physical features that distinguish the *basilica maior* from the other *circiformi* but are found in S. Maria Maggiore, notably the trabeated colonnade that surrounds the central nave in lieu of arcades on piers. Geertman’s hypothesis remains questionable pending archaeological confirmation, but it is noteworthy that in addition to building a basilica of St. Lawrence, Pope Sixtus redecorated the altar at his tomb with porphyry and silver, and he eventually was buried there as well...¹⁰⁰ Moreover, the pope’s near successor Hilarus (461-468) developed the area around the cemetery basilica with a monastery, baths, an administrative center (*praetorium*), and two libraries, making it, in Duchesne’s words, “une sorte de villa pontificale”.¹⁰¹

Pope Sixtus III also sponsored a major renovation of the baptistery of the Lateran Cathedral (Fig. 15). In this endeavor the *Liber Pontificalis* casts him as a successor to Constantine: “[he] set up eight columns of porphyry that had been collected in the time of Emperor Constantine ... which he erected with their architraves and adorned them with verses.”¹⁰² The restructured building was a “double shell” one like S. Costanza, but with much thinner walls (.70 - .80 m). The large porphyry columns and their marble entablatures carry a second order of smaller columns, creating an internal skeleton that supported the covering of the central space as well as that of the ambulatory. Both coverings could have

⁹⁹ LP 34 c. 24, Duchesne 1886 1, p. 181; Geertman 1976 (2004). This identification has met with “scetticismo e resistenza”: Geertman 2002 (2004), pp. 120-121, note 18-19; cf. Brandenburg 2004, p. 88; La Rocca 2002, pp. 1110-1115; G. De Spirito, voce S. Laurentius quae appellatur Lucinae, in *Lexicon topographicum* 1996, pp. 183-184.

¹⁰⁰ LP 46 c. 9, Duchesne 1886 1, p. 235.

¹⁰¹ LP 48 c. 12, Duchesne 1886 1, p. 245 and 247, nota 10.

¹⁰² LP 46 c. 7, Duchesne 1886 1, p. 234; Hegener 2007; Brandt 2006; Brandenburg 2004, pp. 39-50; Brandt 2002; B. Belardini, voce Lateranense, Battistero, in *Materiali e tecniche* 2001, pp. 272-277; Previtero 1996, pp. 7-12; De Blaauw 1994, 1, pp. 129-135; Romano 1991.

been thin vaults of clay tubes.¹⁰³ Although the double-shell or baldachin principle was not new, its execution in this thin-walled format was daring. There is a striking analogy in the clay-tube dome inserted over the pre-existing thin-walled octagon of the Baptistery of the Orthodox in Ravenna a few decades later, in the time of Bishop Neon (451-473), and it seems likely that Pope Sixtus had access to the skilled and inventive architects who were active in the ambient of the imperial court.

Imperial assistance is undeniable in the stunning spoliata ornament of the Sixtine baptistery and its vestibule, which has two more porphyry columns in its entrance (Fig. 16). The marble entablatures inside and out, and the gorgeous Composite capitals and decorated bases of the entrance columns have been traced to the Temple of the Divine Hadrian and the Temple of Venus Genetrix respectively, both in the heart of the city. It would have been impossible to remove these pieces without imperial permission: *quod Valentinianus Augustus concessit* must have been true also here.

Pope Sixtus' reconstruction of the baptistery should be seen against two opposing trends of the fifth century: the continuing multiplication of baptisteries within Rome (Sixtus himself built one at S. Maria Maggiore), and the emergence of the free-standing, monumental baptistery as an icon of episcopal authority elsewhere, in cities where baptism was the bishop's prerogative.¹⁰⁴ Sixtus' lavish rebuilding of the Lateran cathedral baptistery was symbolic: in appropriating the imperial foundation the pope reaffirmed its status as the baptistery of Rome *par excellence*, and also announced the status of Rome itself as the grandest and most powerful see in Italy.

10. The Empire's last flowering

Pope Sixtus' successor Leo I (440-461), whose reign saw the assassination of Valentinian III (455) and the consequent sack of Rome by the Vandals, is known more for his repairs than for

¹⁰³ See the reconstruction in Brandenburg 2004, pl. III-1. On clay-tube vaulting: Storz 1997.

¹⁰⁴ Cantino Wataghin et al. 2001, pp. 242-243; Testini et al. 1989, pp. 62-63; Wharton 1987, pp. 365-369.

new building.¹⁰⁵ His reconstruction of the Three Emperors' Basilica after the "divine fire" was extensive, including the replacement of more than half of the columns (24) in the nave colonnades, along with the walls and ceiling above them, and a probable renovation of the apostle's shrine.¹⁰⁶ Pope Leo evidently had the same authorization as his predecessor to remove materials from still-standing (but possibly damaged) public buildings, since among the *spolia* used to repair St. Paul's colonnades are unusual third-century Corinthian capitals that seem to have come from the Porticus of Octavia.¹⁰⁷ His fluted *pavonazetto* (purple-veined) marble column shafts were more admired by later visitors than the three emperors' original shafts from Proconnesus. The most influential aspect of the restoration, however, was the wholesale pictorial decoration. The walls above the colonnades were covered with two rows of narrative scenes from the Old and New Testaments, 42 painted fields on each side. The triumphal arch was coated with a great mosaic depicting motifs from the Apocalypse (Fig. 1).¹⁰⁸ The use of the flat walls above the colonnades as a billboard-like display space for edifying imagery was relatively new in the mid-fifth century, and at St. Paul's (and St. Peter's, which was similarly decorated around the same time) the extent of the pictorialized surface was overwhelming; imagery suddenly rivaled ornament as the building's most attractive and conspicuous feature.

Like preceding popes, Leo I realized his architectural projects by orchestrating the evergetism of prominent donors. The emperor's mother Galla Placidia (d. 450) sponsored the triumphal arch mosaic of St. Paul's; Marinianus, a former consul, and his wife Anastasia donated a similarly-themed mosaic on the façade of St. Peter's.¹⁰⁹ A lady named Demetrias, granddaughter of the Anicia Faltonia Proba who was responsible for the apsidal mausoleum at

¹⁰⁵ LP 47 c. 6, Duchesne 1886 1, p. 239.

¹⁰⁶ Brandenburg 2004, pp. 124-125; Filippi 2004; Filippi e De Blaauw 2000, p. 18; Filippi 2000, pp. 60-61.

¹⁰⁷ Tedeschi Grisanti 1999.

¹⁰⁸ Docci 2006, pp. 51-54; Kessler 1985 (2002).

¹⁰⁹ Docci 2006, p. 31; Krautheimer et al. 1980, p. 179; Martindale 1980, voce Fl. Avitus Marinianus 3, pp. 723-724.

St. Peter's, by her dying wish established a new church dedicated to St. Stephen (Fig. 17).¹¹⁰ It was erected in Demetrias' suburban villa at the third mile of via Latina, while the rest of the villa remained in private use or was adapted to support the new foundation. Although located in an area of tombs, S. Stefano in via Latina was evidently not a cemetery basilica (*coemeterium*) but a *parochia*, a church that provided the "care of souls" for the local population, and as such it was the first clearly identifiable example of a papal basilica intended to minister to the living, rather than the dead, in the *suburbium*. Others soon followed.¹¹¹ A modestly scaled version of the normal titular basilica (ca. 36 m long, 8 columns per side), S. Stefano had a masonry altar on the chord of the apse and a longitudinal enclosure leading to the altar in the nave. Under the enclosure was a crypt, and there was also a relic cavity in the altar; if these features are original, the basilica of Demetrias was another example of the marriage of the eucharistic liturgy with the cult of saints' remains already seen at St. Paul's. A square baptistery with a fan-shaped font stood at the end of the north aisle.

A different tone was set by the buildings of Pope Hilarus (461-468), who returned to the sites and innovations of Pope Sixtus III. This pope surrounded the Lateran Baptistery with three new "oratories," two of which were attached to the east and west sides of the octagon (Fig. 15).¹¹² Dedicated respectively to St. John the Evangelist and St. John the Baptist, the attached chapels were comparable to fifth-century precedents in Ravenna and elsewhere: exquisite small spaces decorated "entirely of silver and precious stones," according to the *Liber Pontificalis*, communicating directly with the Baptistery through bronze doors.

The third oratory, dedicated to the Holy Cross, was a much larger, free-standing building of extraordinary form that stood north of the Baptistery and was connected to it by a

¹¹⁰ LP 47 c. 1, Duchesne 1886 1, p. 238; Chavarría Arnau 2007; Cooper 2007, pp. 181-184, 187-189; Fiocchi Nicolai 2007, pp. 108-112; Kurdock 2007, pp. 214-224; Brandenburg 2004, pp. 235-236; Cantino Wataghin et al. 2001, pp. 248-249; Fiocchi Nicolai e Gelichi 2001, pp. 307-308; Sorrenti 1996; Martindale 1980, voce Demetrias, pp. 351-352.

¹¹¹ LP 51 cc. 4-5, Duchesne 1886 1, p. 255; LP 53 c. 8, Duchesne 1886 1, p. 262; LP 54 c. 1, Duchesne 1886 1, p. 269.

¹¹² LP 48 cc. 2-4, Duchesne 1886 1, pp. 242-243 and 245 nota 3.

courtyard.¹¹³ Renaissance architects were fascinated by this chapel and drew it multiple times before it was destroyed by Pope Sixtus V (1585-1590), but the *Liber Pontificalis* dwells on its courtyard (*nymphaeum et triporticum*), describing the enormous columns “called six-fivers” (*exatonpentaicas*); three fountains, including a porphyry basin containing a sarcophagus and surrounded by bronze screens and columns with architraves and pediments; and decoration “everywhere” of mosaic and multi-colored columns.¹¹⁴ The chapel itself was an inscribed Greek cross with internal dimensions of about 12 m in all directions (length, breadth, and height), and the unique embellishment of tiny hexagonal vaulted chambers at the four corners of the square. The cross arms were visible externally but the building also appeared octagonal over the crossing, where eight straight walls rose to support a clay-tube cloister vault under a roof.

The baroque complication of the design of the Oratory of the Holy Cross and its exuberantly showy courtyard recall the *jeux d’esprit* of Roman villa architecture to such an extent that Krautheimer and others have maintained that these were pre-Christian structures appropriated and redecorated, rather than built from scratch in the fifth century. Certainly the oratory was erected within the remains of the imperial villa that stood on the site before Constantine, a “filthy mound” of ruins that the pope had to clear away, according to his dedicatory inscription, but the prevailing opinion holds that the oratory was a new construction of Pope Hilarus. It shows notable connections not only with ancient villa architecture, but with contemporary Ravenna in the use of clay tubes and the extravagant and colorful ornamentation. As in the Orthodox Baptistery, the oratory’s interior decoration combined virtually every form of surface ornament known to the period, including *opus sectile*, stucco, figural painting and mosaic.

¹¹³ Brandenburg 2004, pp. 50-53; Brandt 2004; Mackie 1997; Romano 1996; Johnson 1995; De Blaauw 1994, 1, pp. 135-136.

¹¹⁴ On the meaning of “exatonpentaicas”: Romano 1996, p. 338 nota 5.

Built as a kind of *martyrium* to house a relic of the Cross, the Oratory of the Holy Cross created a new cult site at the Lateran and seems to have been part of an ecclesiastical campaign to bring commemorative stational observances inside the city.¹¹⁵ At the same time, regular liturgical practices were established at the cemetery basilicas *extra muros*, especially St. Peter's and S. Lorenzo. The cemetery churches now catered to pilgrims as much as to the remembrance of the ordinary dead, a trend that correlates with a tendency, well documented by the sixth century, to make new burials inside the city rather than in the cemeteries outside the walls.¹¹⁶ At S. Lorenzo, as described above, Pope Hilarus constructed a complex of buildings that made the site more like a cathedral than a cemetery.¹¹⁷

Like his name, the jewel-like foundations of Pope Hilarus belie the dire political circumstances of his pontificate, which began with the assassination of Emperor Majorian (461) and saw the rapid unraveling of Roman rule in Italy. Even more incongruous is the association of “the last major building of antiquity”, S. Stefano Rotondo, with Pope Simplicius (468-483), in whose papacy the western Roman empire met its end in 476.¹¹⁸ A grand and mysterious round basilica, S. Stefano is a thin-walled double-shell structure in principle like the Baptistery as restructured by Pope Sixtus III, but it is much larger and more complex (Figs. 18-19). The plan comprises three concentric circles: a solid outer wall 65 m in diameter, a ring of 28 columns carrying arches, and a second, inner ring of 22 columns supporting architraves. The elevation is that of a longitudinal basilica, with a high wall and clerestory rising above the inner colonnade and a lower, windowless wall on the outer arcade. In the outer ring, the circular design was complicated by radial walls that divided it into eight unequal segments. The shorter segments were taller, with roofs on radial axes that created a cruciform effect. The longer segments were divided concentrically into two parts, one of

¹¹⁵ De Blaauw 1994, 1, pp. 139-140.

¹¹⁶ Ermini Pani 2007, pp. 37-38; Costambeys 2002; Costambeys 2001; Meneghini e Santangeli Valenzani 1993.

¹¹⁷ LP 48 c. 12, Duchesne 1886 1, p. 245.

¹¹⁸ LP 49 c. 1, Duchesne 1886 1, p. 249; Pavolini 2007; Brandenburg 2004, pp. 200-214, pl. XXXI-1-23; Brandenburg 2000; *Santo Stefano Rotondo* 2000; Krautheimer et al. 1976, pp. 191-229; on the context: R. Mathisen, G. S. Nathan, in Mathisen 1997, voce Romulus Augustulus (475-476 A.D.) – Two Views.

which was originally unroofed.¹¹⁹ The covering of the center space has been much discussed; current opinion favors a clay-tube dome.

The ornament of S. Stefano Rotondo was a mix of recently made elements and ancient *spolia*. The mostly granite column shafts are reused. The architrave blocks and Ionic capitals of the inner colonnade are fifth-century products (Fig. 20), while the outer ring contains two sets of Corinthian capitals, including four identical to those in S. Sabina, marking one of the axes of the cross. The quality of the architectural ornament overall is not on a par with the building's sophisticated concept, yet other aspects of the decoration, especially the pavements, were magnificent.¹²⁰

Although it is monumental rather than precious, S. Stefano Rotondo seems to have been conceived in the spirit of Pope Hilarus' oratories at the Lateran, with an open, seemingly impractical design and a rich play of inter-penetrating spaces and views resembling the "pavilion architecture" of gardens and villas. It may be that the same architects were involved, but if so it is not clear who sponsored them. The scale of S. Stefano, the ambition and difficulty of its design, and its location on state property, over the site of the *castra peregrina*, all argue for imperial patronage, but unless it came from Constantinople, it is hard to imagine which of the short-lived rulers in the years leading up to 476 could have managed it.¹²¹ The *Liber Pontificalis* is silent about the founder, saying only that the pope dedicated the basilica (as Pope Siricius dedicated the Three Emperors' Basilica a century before). The basilica seems to have been created as a station church, that is, as a stage for a specifically papal liturgy. In that respect it seems to follow a program established with S. Maria Maggiore, which it also resembles in its Ionic colonnade.

11. Liturgical accommodations

¹¹⁹ See the reconstruction in Brandenburg 2004, pl. XXXI-7-8.

¹²⁰ Cf. Brandenburg 2004, pp. 208-211, figs. 120-123.

¹²¹ The chief promoters of the relics and the cult of St. Stephen were the eastern empresses: Costambeys e Leyser 2007, p. 278.

The foundation of S. Maria Maggiore and the papal constructions at the Lateran, S. Lorenzo, and possibly S. Stefano Rotondo testify to the emergence of a peripatetic papal liturgy that integrated urban and suburban churches and was distinct from the regular liturgy of the *tituli*.¹²² This new system of “stations” – Masses celebrated by the pope on designated days in the patriarchal basilicas and other sites – is mentioned explicitly for the first time in the life of Pope Hilarus, who “created a set of vessels (*ministeria*) that would circulate to the established stations,” comprising one large gold “stational cup” (*scyphum stationarium*) for wine and three sets of 25 silver cups of various shapes for distributing it.¹²³ Twenty-five is the number of the *tituli*, and each *titulus* evidently was represented at each station. Initially confined to a few main feast days and basilicas, the stational rotation became increasingly elaborate during the sixth and seventh centuries, expanding to include most of the *tituli* during Lent.

Of necessity, the stational liturgy could be adapted to a variety of physical configurations, but liturgical arrangements may also have become more standardized in the fifth century. The documentary evidence of the fourth-century accoutrements of the altar, especially the hanging lamps that would have required some kind of structure from which to suspend them, indicates that even then the place of the altar in any given church was quasi-permanent. The altar itself, however, evidently was considered a precious ornament and remained a notionally portable object rather than a component of the architecture. Thus the altar donated to S. Maria Maggiore by Pope Sixtus III was, on the Constantinian model, “of purest silver,” probably beaten silver over a wooden frame. Though very heavy with 300 pounds of silver, it could in theory have been moved.¹²⁴ The first traces of built liturgical structures – masonry altars and chancels – appeared shortly afterward.¹²⁵ The masonry altar in

¹²² Carmassi 2001; Saxer 2001, pp. 109-146; Saxer, *Le stazioni* 2000; Baldovin 1987, pp. 105-166.

¹²³ LP 48 c. 11, Duchesne 1886 1, p. 244.

¹²⁴ LP 46 c. 3, Duchesne 1886 1, p. 232; De Blaauw 1994, 1, pp. 377-378.

¹²⁵ De Blaauw 2001; Guidobaldi 2001; Guidobaldi, *I cyboria* 2000; Guidobaldi, *Struttura e cronologia delle recinzioni* 2000; Saxer *Recinzioni liturgiche* 2000.

S. Stefano in Via Latina (Fig. 17) is one of the first known examples of a built altar in a non-cemetery setting.

The altar in S. Stefano is associated with an elongated masonry enclosure that has parallels in *tituli* (S. Pietro in Vincoli, possibly the earliest; S. Marco, S. Crisogono) and also in cemetery churches. Often called *solea* in modern terminology because of their raised pavements (*sola*), these enclosures extended from the area of the altar sometimes far into the nave, and often they had two parts, a narrower one toward the entrance to the basilica and a wider one toward the altar.¹²⁶ Beyond the obvious fact that they segregated the clergy from the lay congregation, it is not known how these enclosures were used. One theory is that they evolved from a narrow pathway designed for processions to shorter, more spacious precincts for the offertory and distribution of the consecrated bread and wine.

Fancier versions of altars and chancels were made with marble plaques carved with patterns or ornamental symbols (*plutei*). An especially beautiful example was the enclosure donated to S. Clemente by Pope John II (533-535; Fig. 7). Nineteen of its elegant *plutei* ornamented with crosses, wreathed monograms, and other motifs were reused in the twelfth-century canons' choir in the present church.¹²⁷ The *plutei* are of Proconnesian marble and were almost certainly made in Constantinople by artisans working in the most up-to-date style of Hagia Sophia, but two equally Byzantine-looking column capitals in the same church, donated by the pope before 533 when he was still the presbyter Mercurius, are of Luna marble and were probably made by Byzantine sculptors working in Rome.¹²⁸ The capitals are too small for a ciborium and must have belonged to some other form of liturgical micro-architecture.

Altar canopies, called *ciborium* or *tegurium* (*tiburium*) in the *Liber Pontificalis*, followed the introduction of fixed altars, but possibly only in the early sixth century under

¹²⁶ See the plans in Guidobaldi, *Struttura e cronologia delle recinzioni* 2000.

¹²⁷ Guiglia Guidobaldi 2002, pp. 1483-1488; reconstruction in Guidobaldi, *Struttura e cronologia delle recinzioni* 2000, p. 82.

¹²⁸ Barsanti 2002, pp. 1477-1478.

Byzantine influence. The first mention of an altar ciborium in Rome is in the life of Pope Symmachus (498-514), who is credited by De Blaauw with introducing fixed liturgical arrangements at St. Peter's.¹²⁹ Described as a "*tiburium* of purest silver ... weighing 120 pounds," the ciborium would have been of wood covered with beaten silver sheets; it was likely a superstructure supported by precious marble columns. Four exquisite Byzantine capitals originally in SS. Cosma e Damiano may have been made for the columns of a similar ciborium given to the new foundation of Pope Felix IV (526-530); they bear the monogram of Pope John II, who was evidently a major promoter of Byzantine imports.¹³⁰ In other eras the columns and their capitals would have been Roman *spolia*. Ciboria "of the very purest silver" continued to appear as papal donations, and there are many examples with much larger weights of silver in the biographies of popes of the eighth and ninth centuries.¹³¹ In the seventh century Pope Honorius I (625-638) presented a gilded bronze ciborium "of amazing size" to the church he erected over the tomb of St. Agnes, and Pope Sergius I (687-701) replaced a wooden ciborium in S. Susanna with one of marble.¹³²

The reading platform (*ambo*) was also adopted from Byzantium, but the evidence for *ambones* is very sparse. The first reference to one in Rome is in the life of Pope Pelagius I (556-561), who is said to have ascended the ambo in St. Peter's to publically swear that he had not done any harm to his predecessor Pope Vigilius. This may be an anachronistic reference to the ambo donated to St. Peter's by the second Pope Pelagius (579-590), which is known from a copy of the donor's inscription.¹³³ In the early eighth century Pope John VII (705-707) gave an ambo to S. Maria Antiqua as part of his extensive refurbishing of that

¹²⁹ LP 53 c. 6, Duchesne 1886 1, p. 261; Guidobaldi 2001, p. 182; Guidobaldi, *I cyboria* 2000, p. 57; De Blaauw 1994, 2, pp. 506-507.

¹³⁰ Barsanti 2002, pp. 1475-1476.

¹³¹ See the extracts in Guidobaldi, *I cyboria* 2000, pp. 66-69.

¹³² LP 72 c. 3; LP 86 c. 13, Duchesne 1886 1, pp. 323, 375; Guidobaldi, *I cyboria* 2000, p. 66 nos. 4, 7.

¹³³ LP 62 c. 2, Duchesne 1886 1, p. 303; De Blaauw 1994, 2, pp. 484-485.

church. Its marble platform was found in the nave when the church was excavated. It is an elongated octagon with a Greek inscription commemorating the pope's donation.¹³⁴

12. After 476: The early middle ages

The century following the collapse of the western Roman empire saw the brief flourishing of a Romanized Ostrogothic kingdom in Ravenna, followed by a prolonged and devastating war against the Goths waged by Justinian's general Belisarius and his rival Narses, in which Rome was a target for both sides. That war had barely ended when the peninsula was invaded by the Lombards, whose kingdom disrupted Rome's connection to the imperial bastion of Ravenna and was a source of harassment for two hundred years. The lives of the popes from John II (523-526) to Deusdedit (615-618) are a litany of manmade and natural disasters: fires, famines, plagues, floods, earthquakes, sieges, assassinations, and exiles.¹³⁵ Against such a background it is not surprising that the history of ecclesiastical architecture in this period is spotty and without the unifying drive to create authoritative and distinctly Roman buildings that characterized the fourth and fifth centuries. The churches that were built in this era show an openness to non-Roman, especially Byzantine, innovations, and many of the most important new foundations were not new constructions at all, but conversions of pre-existing ones.

Conversions were effected by the simple addition of liturgical furniture and new imagery. The hall of the mansion of Junius Bassus was bequeathed to Pope Simplicius by the Romanized Gothic general Flavius Valila; it was given a Christian apse mosaic and became a church of St. Andrew (S. Andrea cata Barbara) without losing its fourth-century *opus sectile* representations of nude mythological figures and ancient Egyptian gods and devotees (Fig.

¹³⁴ LP 88 c. 2, Duchesne 1886 1, p. 385; Romanelli e Nordhagen 1964, p. 16 e fig. 5C.

¹³⁵ Ermini Pani 2007, pp. 19-26.

7).¹³⁶ Pope Felix IV (526-530) similarly “made” a basilica of SS. Cosma e Damiano in a room of the Forum Pacis by installing an altar and the ciborium mentioned above under a mosaic depicting the pope as founder, holding an architectural model (Fig. 21) in a formula that would become standard in the middle ages.¹³⁷ The hall at the foot of the Palatine hill that eventually became known as S. Maria Antiqua was also Christianized by the addition of mural paintings.¹³⁸

Surviving new churches are few and modest in size. The *ecclesia Gothorum*, founded as a place for Arian worship by the German general Flavius Ricimer around 470 and later known as S. Agata dei Goti, measured 32 m X 16 m (six columns per side).¹³⁹ It is distinguished by Ionic arcades with impost blocks, a standard feature in Ravenna that was generally eschewed in Roman arcades (cf. Figs. 1, 11) until this period, when impost blocks also appeared over some capitals in S. Stefano Rotondo. Another form of Ravennate influence is seen in the church of St. John *iuxta portam Latinam*, which is roughly dated to the sixth century by its masonry.¹⁴⁰ The east end of this small basilica is distinctly Byzantine, with apsed chambers at the ends of the aisles and a main apse that is polygonal (three sides of an octagon) on the exterior.

The survivors are not fully representative, however, as sources attest some ambitious projects that have disappeared. In the time of Theoderic Pope Symmachus (498-514) undertook a major redevelopment of the area of St. Peter’s, which emulated and surpassed Pope Hilarus’ additions to the Lateran Baptistery and S. Lorenzo. Symmachus’ work included three new oratories “at the font” (carrying the same dedications as those at the Lateran

¹³⁶ LP 49 c. 1, Duchesne 1886 1, p. 249; Brandenburg 2004, pp. 218-219; Mazzoleni 2002, pp. 267-273; M. Cecchelli, voce S. Andreas, S. Andreas Apostolus, S. Andreas cata Barbara; Ecclesia, Monasterium, in *Lexicon topographicum* 1993, p. 39; Martindale 1980, voce Fl. Valila *qui et* Theodosius, p. 1147.

¹³⁷ LP 56 c. 2, Duchesne 1886 1, p. 279; Brandenburg 2004, pp. 222-230, pl. XXXVII.

¹³⁸ Brandenburg 2004, pp. 231-232.

¹³⁹ Rededicated by Pope Gregory I: LP 66 c. 4, Duchesne 1886 1, p. 312; Brandenburg 2004, pp. 219-220; M. C. Cartocci, voce Sant’ Agata dei Goti, in *Il Cristianesimo a Roma* 2003, pp. 63-64; Mazzoleni 2002, pp. 273-278; M. C. Cartocci, voce S. Agata dei Goti, in *Materiali e tecniche* 2001, pp. 205-207.

¹⁴⁰ Brandenburg 2004, pp. 220-222, pl. XXXVI-1; A. Milella, voce S. Giovanni a Porta Latina, in *Materiali e tecniche* 2001, pp. 264-268.

Baptistry) and a massive re-landscaping to improve access and create better facilities for worshippers and pilgrims: fountains, latrines, pleasant outdoor spaces and new stairways.¹⁴¹ Symmachus also converted the empty(?) eastern mausoleum into a cult attraction, a chapel dedicated to St. Andrew, where he installed the silver ciborium mentioned earlier and a *confessio*, which indicates the presence of relics.

After the Byzantine-Gothic War Pope Pelagius I (556-561), who owed his office to Narses, began a basilica of the apostles Philip and James (Ss. Apostoli) that was completed by his successor John III (561-574).¹⁴² Although it may have had a fourth-century predecessor, as discussed above, the Apostles' basilica was effectively a new foundation in the center of Rome, adjoining the Forum of Trajan. At the end of the middle ages, after several rebuildings, Ss. Apostoli was a large, two-aisled basilica with the bizarre combination of exedra-like projections from the north and south aisle walls and a transept farther east, a redundancy that cannot have been the original design (Fig. 22). A sixth-century floor mosaic visible in the south exedra proves that this apse and presumably the one opposite it belong to Pope Pelagius' basilica. All three apses, including the central one, exhibited columns that were enclosed in later walls, which suggests the apses may originally have been open to enclosing spaces. The latest proposal is that the sixth-century church was a triconch, a modification of Krautheimer's suggestion that it was a "triconch basilica" like examples in Palestine and Egypt.

Despite the paucity of surviving examples, the record of papal building in the sixth and seventh centuries shows some common trends and emphases. New construction tended to be concentrated outside the city, in the cemeteries, and was aimed at transforming the old crypts and oratories into liturgical spaces that could accommodate large numbers of

¹⁴¹ LP 53 cc. 6-7, 10, Duchesne 1886 1, pp. 261-263; Spera *Ad limina* 1998, pp. 79-80; Mackie 1997.

¹⁴² LP 62 c. 3, Duchesne 1886 1, p. 303; LP 63 c. 1, Duchesne 1886 1, p. 305; Schelbert 2007, pp. 80-94; De Blaauw 2001-2002, p. 108; De Blaauw 2000, pp. 179-186; Finocchi Ghersi 1994; Finocchi Ghersi 1992; Geertman 1986-1987 (2004); Krautheimer 1937, pp. 78-83. A further reconstruction by Schelbert is forthcoming.

worshippers, with the altar in visual or physical contact with the martyr's tomb. Inside the city, the popes were remembered less for building churches than for founding monasteries, which usually, beginning with the famous example of Gregory I, were made by converting their own homes.¹⁴³ Such conversions continued the transfer of the urban domains of the old Roman senatorial aristocracy to Christian institutional ownership, which began in the fourth century with the *tituli*.¹⁴⁴ Little is known about the architecture of these monasteries, but it seems likely that as with churches, conversion was effected principally by adding images, and that initially, at least, monks took over the inherited spaces of late antique urban villas with little change. At his monastery Pope Gregory sponsored many paintings and constructed an oratory dedicated to St. Andrew; otherwise sources mention an *atrium*, a *nymphaeum*, a *triclinium*, and a *bibliotheca*.¹⁴⁵

The most important legacy of the sixth century was the promotion of the *basilica ad corpus*, in which the liturgical area encloses or overlays the intact tomb of a martyr.¹⁴⁶ There were various ways of achieving this goal. In the cemetery of St. Hippolytus, for example, a priest named Andrew (537-555) sponsored a massive excavation that expanded the “narrow cave” where Prudentius had worshipped into an elongated underground space with normal church features, including an apse and a raised presbytery enclosing the altar, which stood over the tomb.¹⁴⁷ A more architectural solution was the semi-underground galleried basilica represented by SS. Nereo e Achilleo in the Catacomb of Domitilla, which was followed in the sixth century by a new church of St. Lawrence in his cemetery, and in the seventh century by a new basilica of St. Agnes on the via Nomentana. If SS. Nereo e Achilleo is correctly

¹⁴³ LP 66 c. 5, Duchesne 1886 1, p. 312 (Gregory I); LP 69 c. 3, Duchesne 1886 1, p.317 (Boniface IV); LP 72 c. 6**, Duchesne 1886 1, p. 324 (Honorius I); Bartoli 2007; Giuntella 2007; Ferrari 1957, pp. 76-77, 138-151, 159-162. Pope Pelagius II made his home into a poorhouse: LP 65 c. 1, Duchesne 1886 1, p. 309.

¹⁴⁴ Especially under Gregory I: Ferrari 1957, pp. 11, 53, 136, 176-178. Cooper 2007, pp. 173-175 stresses the conditional nature of these transfers.

¹⁴⁵ Bartoli 2007; Giuntella 2007, pp. 90-91; M. Cecchelli, voce S. Gregorius in clivo Scauri, *Monasterium*, in *Lexicon topographicum* 1995, pp. 373-374; Ferrari 1957, pp. 138-151.

¹⁴⁶ Spera, *Ad limina* 1998, pp. 49-54.

¹⁴⁷ Bertonière 1985, pp. 48-51, 145-155, 182-188.

attributed to Pope John I (523-526), who also “renewed” the cemeteries of SS. Felix and Adauctus and Priscilla, this design was a sixth-century innovation.¹⁴⁸

The tomb of St. Lawrence had already been architecturalized by Constantine, whose builders made it the focus of a richly adorned crypt. The new church of Pope Pelagius II (579-590) was set deep enough to replace this crypt. Later rebuildings, including the elimination of the apse in the thirteenth century when a second nave and aisles took its place, have obscured the sixth-century arrangement of the shrine, so it is not clear where in the church the saint’s tomb was located, whether it stood on or under the new pavement, nor how it was related to a room behind the apse that could be both viewed through openings in the apse wall and entered from the aisles, nor how the tomb was related to the altar, nor where the *cathedra* was placed.¹⁴⁹ In contrast to these many uncertainties, the elevation of the nave is well preserved. It is tripartite, with trabeated colonnades on the underground level, arcades at gallery or ground level, and a clerestory (Fig. 23). The basilica is laid out in Byzantine feet, and its broad proportions (ca 32 m X ca 20 m) and the continuation of the aisles and galleries around the side opposite the apse give the impression of centralization.

Pope Pelagius’ basilica is decidedly Roman, however, in the profusion of imperial-era *spolia*, including matched fluted *pavonazetto* column shafts and second-century Corinthian capitals on the lower level. As at S. Sabina the quality and regularity of the *spolia* create a classical effect, which is enhanced at S. Lorenzo by the architraves, even though they are a jumble of blocks of different dates, origins, and even functions (Fig. 24). The wealth of ornamental fragments testifies to ruined and abandoned buildings around the city, but inside the basilica their abundance seems celebratory and exuberant. The attractive resetting of the *spolia* implies a symbolism of Christian transformation of worldly debris into a space of hopeful celebration. This message is explicit in the pair of third-century capitals carved with

¹⁴⁸ LP 55 c. 7, Duchesne 1886 1, p. 276.

¹⁴⁹ Brandenburg 2004, pp. 236-240, pl. XLII; Ciranna 2002; Mondini 2001, pp. 207-214; Serra 2000. Geertman 1995 argues that there was already a Constantinian basilica over the tomb, which Pope Pelagius demolished.

military trophies and victories that was placed prominently at the apse end of the lower colonnades. These images evoked a long homiletical tradition that cast Christ's death as a glorious victory, in which the martyrs and all Christians would participate.¹⁵⁰

At St. Peter's, the original *basilica ad corpus*, the movement to integrate altar and tomb led to a retrofitting of the transept and apse, where the Apostle's tomb was free-standing, to accommodate the altar. The inspired solution, attributed to Pope Gregory I in the *Liber Pontificalis*, was to rebury the shrine under a higher pavement so that an altar could be set directly above it, and to provide access to the tomb by means of a crypt in the platform that supported the new pavement.¹⁵¹ Famously, this crypt took the form of a corridor following the semicircular line of the apse, bisected by an axial passage that connected this half-circle to the rear face of the tomb.¹⁵² Something similar was done at St. Paul's, although there the problem was not to integrate the tomb with an altar – this had already been accomplished – but to allow greater access to the tomb. A chamber was dug out under the new altar platform, which was raised to a height of 1.8 m over its fourth-century level (Fig. 4).¹⁵³ Both solutions recreated, perhaps not without some nostalgia, the catacomb experience that the new *basilicae ad corpus* were eliminating.

After a century of misery and disaster the biography of Honorius I (625-638), Pope Gregory's disciple and ally, suggests a new era, beginning as it does with gifts to St. Peter's totaling nearly 1300 pounds of silver.¹⁵⁴ By then the organized cult of the martyrs was in full swing, and Pope Honorius sponsored new *basilicae ad corpus* at two popular sites, the tombs of St. Agnes and St. Pancratius. One basilica followed the model of S. Lorenzo (Fig. 25) and

¹⁵⁰ Tedeschi Grisanti 1992.

¹⁵¹ LP 66 c. 4, Duchesne 1886 1, p. 312.

¹⁵² Cecchelli 2007; Brandenburg 2004, pl. XI-16-17; Leyser 2000; pp. 299-303; De Blaauw 1994, 2, pp. 530-561; Krautheimer et al. 1980, pp. 265-267.

¹⁵³ Filippi 2005-2006, p. 285; Filippi 2004; Filippi e De Blaauw 2000. Cecchelli 2007 argues, against all other reconstructions, for a semiannular crypt at St. Paul's.

¹⁵⁴ LP 72 cc. 1-2, Duchesne 1886 1, p. 323; on Honorius and Gregory: Leyser 2000, pp. 292, 304.

the other the model of St. Peter's.¹⁵⁵ One, S. Agnese, is the last building of its kind known in Rome; the other, a transept basilica with a semiannular crypt, was taken up in northern Europe and had a rich future.

13. Outside Rome

The “capillary” spread of Christianity into the countryside beyond Rome was facilitated by the vast land-holdings of the evergetic aristocracy, whose properties – like the villa of Demetrias – often became the sites of churches.¹⁵⁶ Regulations established by Popes Gelasius (492-496) and Pelagius I (556-561) required that such foundations have papal authorization and guaranteed funding, and prohibited burials inside them. For the most part the oratories or basilicas thus established are known only by name, but the foundation document of a basilica erected in 471 on an estate near Tivoli by Valila, the same Ostrogoth who left the hall of Junius Bassus to Pope Simplicius, itemizes the donor's offerings and so provides a rare glimpse of the late Roman splendor of a church with this level of patronage. Valila's basilica was outfitted like an urban *titulus* with silver vessels and lamps, colorful hangings, silk and linen vestments for the clergy, for whom he also made *habitacula*, and books of the four Gospels and the psalms.¹⁵⁷

On the other hand, the rural church at Mola di Monte Gelato, a villa site about 30 km north of Rome, vividly illustrates the situation in areas where benefactors like Demetrias and Valila did not exist.¹⁵⁸ The villa had been destroyed and abandoned in the third century and was reoccupied by a small, near-subsistence community of farmers and artisans around 350. The church constructed for these residents about 400 was utterly basic: an apsed room

¹⁵⁵ S. Agnese: Brandenburg 2004, pp. 241-248; Geertman 1995, p. 147. S. Pancrazio: Cecchelli 2007, p. 118; Brandenburg 2004, p. 248; Leyser 2000, pp. 303-305; Verrando 1990, pp. 31-53.

¹⁵⁶ Chavarría Arnau 2007; Fiocchi Nicolai 2007; Pietri 2002.

¹⁵⁷ Duchesne 1886 1, pp. CXLVI-CXLVII; Fiocchi Nicolai 2007, pp. 112-113; Hillner 2007, p. 242 notes that the authenticity of the document has been questioned.

¹⁵⁸ Fiocchi Nicolai 2007, pp. 114-117; Fiocchi Nicolai 2003, p. 320; Fiocchi Nicolai 2000, pp. 371-373; Potter e King 1997, pp. 71-77, 423-424; Potter 1993.

measuring about 12.4 m X 7.6 m, with relatively high walls and possibly a porch (Fig. 26).

Burials inside the church began immediately; nevertheless, the excavators speculated that the site may have been papal property, and perhaps a monastery.¹⁵⁹ The settlement was evidently unstable and declined quickly; the buildings decayed and had collapsed by the mid-sixth century, when the site was again abandoned.

In addition to expanding Roman influence in the countryside, the fifth century saw a dramatic increase in new bishoprics in central Italy. By the sixth century there were at least 194 dioceses in this area, 41 of them in Lazio.¹⁶⁰ Unlike Rome, however, where a number of fourth- and fifth-century churches are still standing, the cathedrals of these dioceses have largely disappeared. In some cases the loss reflects the vigor of the episcopal city in the later middle ages, when old cathedrals were demolished and rebuilt, sometimes repeatedly; in others, it illustrates the “watershed” of the mid-sixth century, a turning point between the Byzantine-Gothic War and the arrival of the Lombards, from which some centers recovered slowly or not at all.¹⁶¹

In Lazio, one of the best known cities is the port of Ostia at the mouth of the Tiber. Ostia and the neighboring artificial harbor “Portus Augusti” (Porto) were already important Christian centers in the fourth century, and according to the *Liber Pontificalis*, Constantine built and endowed Ostia’s cathedral.¹⁶² Ostia began to decline soon afterward, however, while Porto flourished until the Byzantine-Gothic War.¹⁶³ New discoveries in Ostia, including the probable site of the cathedral, have been accompanied by reconsideration of familiar buildings once identified as churches or Christian assembly rooms.

The so-called “Basilica Cristiana” has been shown to have been a private mansion that probably belonged to a family with Roman connections, one of whose members, the priest

¹⁵⁹ Potter e King 1997, pp. 423-424; endorsed by Fiocchi Nicolai 2007, p. 114; cf. Chavarría Arnau 2007, pp. 130, 143.

¹⁶⁰ Fiocchi Nicolai 2007, p. 353; Testini et al. 1989, p. 58.

¹⁶¹ Pietri 2002, p. 262; Potter e King 1997, p. 424.

¹⁶² LP 34 c. 28, Duchesne 1886 1, pp. 183-184.

¹⁶³ Pavolini 2006, pp. 286-287; Coccia 1993..

Tigrinus, supervised the construction of S. Stefano in Via Latina.¹⁶⁴ The “basilica” was actually a nymphaeum, with an inscription that advertised the owners’ Christianity with a play on the family name Tigriniani and “Tigris”, one of the rivers of paradise. The “Building with Opus Sectile outside Porta Marina” (Fig. 27), identified upon discovery as the meeting place of a Christian association, has been reidentified as part of a fourth-century *domus* whose owners may have been pagan.¹⁶⁵ Its stupendous *opus sectile* revetment remains important for assessing the ornamentation of churches, however. The revetment was being installed when the hall collapsed and was abandoned around 395. Among the encyclopedic array of architectural, vegetal, animal, and geometric motifs in this ensemble, the *tour de force* is the simulated *opus mixtum* walls with blocked windows. The metamorphosis of the mundane – bricks and *tuffelli* – into the precious was evidently a trope of *opus sectile* decoration in this period, as it also appeared in S. Sabina slightly later, but the virtuoso artistry of the Ostian hall far surpasses that of the church (Fig. 11). Its exquisite workmanship illustrates how far the most luxurious private residences could exceed churches in quality, invention and splendor in the fourth century, though the reverse would become true in the fifth.

Like Rome, Ostia had cemetery basilicas, although perhaps not of the “circiform” type. One was discovered in 1976-1977 in the region called Pianabella (Fig. 28).¹⁶⁶ Datable to the end of the fourth century, it was a simple apsed hall nearly as long as an average Roman titular basilica (42 m X 16 m), roughly built of reused bricks and crude concrete with windows high in the walls. It opened through a triple arcade into a porch, which in turn led into an atrium; both porch and atrium incorporated parts of earlier mausolea. An unusual feature of this basilica is the precinct constructed in front of the apse in the fifth century,

¹⁶⁴ Fiocchi Nicolai 2007, pp. 108-110; Pavolini 2006, pp. 147-149; Paroli 1999, p. 25; Brenk e Pensabene 1998-1999; Krautheimer et al. 1976, pp. 230-231.

¹⁶⁵ Pavolini 2006, pp. 176-178; *Aurea Roma* 2000, cat. no. 173, pp. 530-533; Guidobaldi 2000; Zanker 1995, pp. 315-319; *Scavi di Ostia* 1969.

¹⁶⁶ Fiocchi Nicolai 2000, pp. 359-360; Paroli 1999; Paroli 1993, pp. 156-161; Spagnoli 1993, pp. 250-255; voce Pianabella, nr. Ostia, in *The Work of Sheila Gibson* 1991.

which seems to have enclosed privileged burials. Unfortunately, it is not known what was the attraction in the apse, whether a holy tomb or some relic under the altar.

Beyond Lazio, the most important early Christian building in central Italy would surely have been the Baptistery of Florence (Fig. 29) if, as recently proposed, it was built in the late fourth or early fifth century, but most scholars continue to consider it medieval.¹⁶⁷ Among other reasons, the present structure was erected on a ground level that is more than one meter higher than that of the neighboring church of S. Reparata, which is generally dated to the fifth or sixth century on the basis of its mosaic pavement.¹⁶⁸ Excavated between 1965 and 1974 under the present cathedral, S. Reparata was a standard basilica over 40 m long and about 26 m wide, with at least 12 columns per side. One of the largest early Christian basilicas in central Italy, it was still only the size of an average Roman titular basilica. The column shafts may have been constructed of stone wedges rather than marble monoliths, as would have been routine in Rome. The handsome floor mosaic commemorates the participation of fourteen donors, listing their names and the number of feet of pavement for which they paid; in this respect and in style it shows strong Adriatic connections.

S. Reparata was not the original cathedral of Florence, which was consecrated in 393 by Bishop Ambrose of Milan and is thought to have stood on the extramural site of S. Lorenzo. Whether S. Reparata was built to replace that cathedral or only acquired this function later is debated, and depends upon the history of the baptistery. Since baptisteries were the signature of an episcopal church outside Rome, it follows that S. Reparata would have been the cathedral at least by the time the baptistery was first constructed. Franklin Toker proposed that the original baptistery is to be found in an octagonal stone wall under the pavement of the present Baptistery of S. Giovanni, which had been identified as the remains of a font. In fact, a structure on this foundation would have been identical in size to the sixth-

¹⁶⁷ *Il Bel San Giovanni* 1997; cf. Bianchi e Nenci 2006; Giorgi e Matracchi 2006, p. 102

¹⁶⁸ Nenci 2006; Marino et al. 2003; Nenci 1996; Testini et al. 1989, pp. 63, 77, 80-82; 122-125; Toker, *Excavations* 1975; Toker, *Scavi* 1975.

century Arian Baptistery in Ravenna (interior width: 6.5 m).¹⁶⁹ However plausible, the idea awaits archaeological confirmation.

Another cathedral of which there are substantial remains is in Pesaro. It is best known for a spectacular mosaic pavement that was uncovered in the 1990s and visible until 1999, when it was reburied under a new floor for the Jubilee.¹⁷⁰ An equally extensive mosaic pavement directly underneath it seems to have belonged to the fifth(?) - century cathedral, which was demolished after it burned, probably in the destruction of the city by Vitiges during the Byzantine-Gothic War. The higher pavement – and presumably the building to which it belonged – was sponsored by “Johannis Vir Gloriosus”, a general (*magister militum*) and former consul, whose commemorative inscriptions appear just inside the entrance into the nave and in the aisles on either side of the sanctuary (Fig. 30). Farioli Campanati has identified the donor as the commander under Belisarius and Narses who reoccupied Pesaro in 544-545; he would have undertaken the rebuilding around mid-century. The plan is again that of a standard basilica, presumably arcaded with nine columns per side, but like the floor mosaic it is clearly inflected by Ravenna. The proportions of width to length (about 1:1.5) are broad, and the absence of mosaic in front of the apse suggests that there was a raised platform that extended into the nave for two intercolumniations. The basilica had an atrium and there was an octagonal baptistery, not on axis as in Florence but, as in Ravenna, on the north side.

We can close this chapter with a fascinating echo of Rome. The church of S. Michele Arcangelo that stands on a hill just outside the Roman wall of Perugia seems to have been erected in the sixth century, when Perugia was fought over and periodically occupied by Goths, Byzantines, and Lombards.¹⁷¹ Despite these difficult times, S. Angelo is an ambitious and complex building, a double-shell rotunda with an inner ring of 16 spoliata columns carrying arches and a clerestory. Originally, four *trifora* in the outer circular wall opened into

¹⁶⁹ Toker 1976.

¹⁷⁰ Farioli Campanati 2006; *I mosaici del Duomo* 2005; Luni 1998; De Marinis et al. 1986; Farioli Campanati 1986.

¹⁷¹ Belardi 2008; Castellani 1999; Castellani 1996; Scortecci 1991.

protruding chambers on the cardinal axes, including a rounded apse with a polygonal outer surface at the east. The cross axes are also marked in the clerestory, which is 16-sided externally but had only twelve windows, arranged in four groups of three above the chambers. Although the effect is somewhat different because of the smaller scale and the faceting of the exterior, conceptually the combination of circle and cross evokes S. Stefano Rotondo, and it has been argued that the dimensions of S. Angelo are a proportional reduction of those of the Roman rotunda.¹⁷² S. Angelo in Perugia would thus be the only known descendant of the great Roman enigma, and it is almost equally mysterious. It is not known who built it or when, but one plausible hypothesis is that it is a Lombard “translation” of a Roman idea, comparable to other such translations in Lombard culture. Although it may have been a dead-end in Rome, S. Stefano Rotonda appears to have been a window on the future for the “barbarian” middle ages.

¹⁷² Quattrini 2008, p. 202.