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Roman Image of the Christian Woman from the 4th to the 7th century

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Declaration

I hereby declare that the thesis titled *Roman Image of the Christian Woman from the 4th to the 7th century* that I have submitted for assessment is entirely my original work, and that no part of it has been taken from the work of others unless explicitly cited and acknowledged within the text of my thesis.

Brno, the 30th of April 2025

Teodora Georgievova .....

Teodora Georgievova

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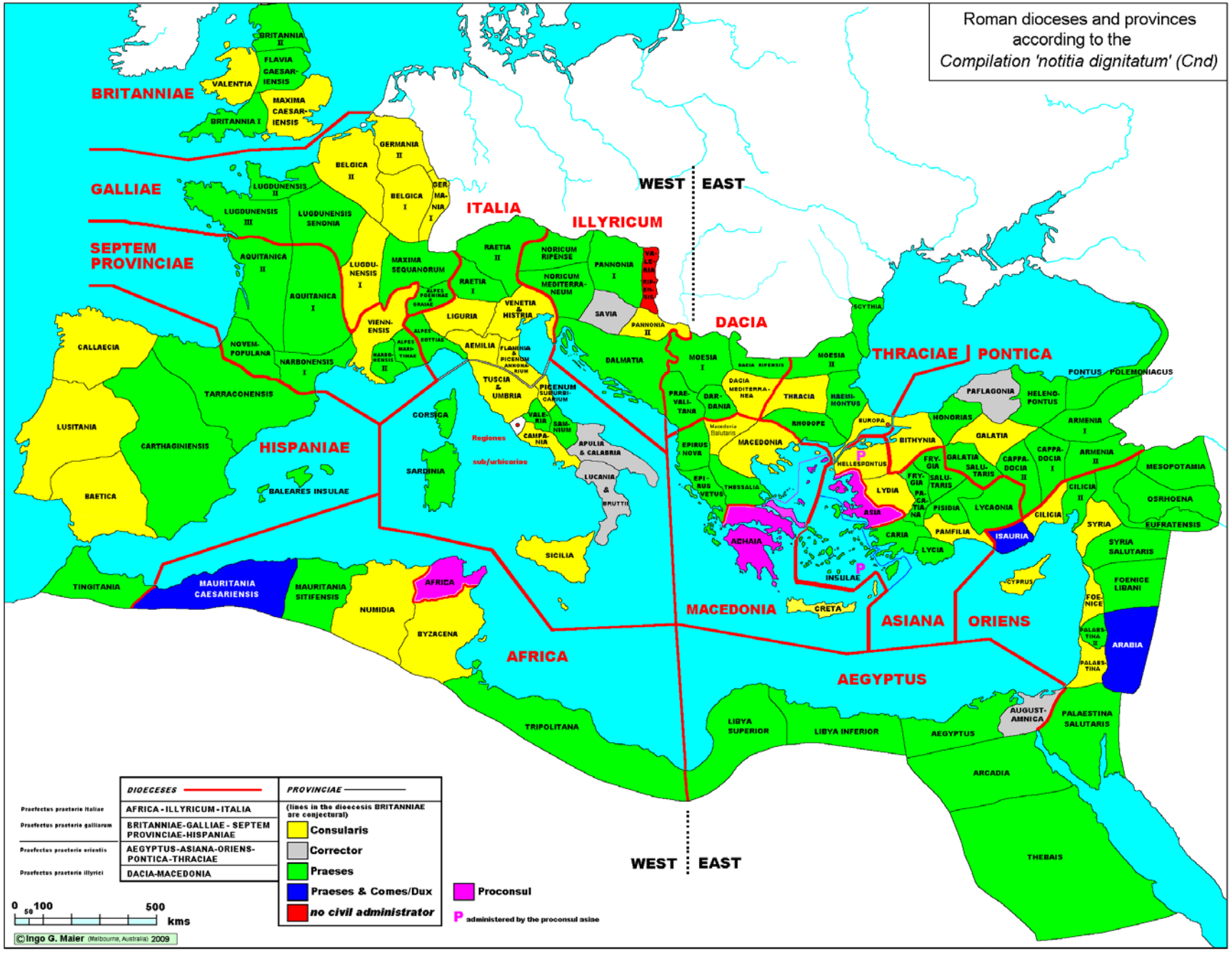
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Author's Note

When available, the dates of birth and death of the historical figures discussed in the thesis are given in brackets after their name. In the case of popes and bishops, the dates of their pontificate/episcopacy are given instead. In the case of rulers, the dates of their reign are listed. Dates for each historical figure are listed only once per chapter, when their name is mentioned in it for the first time.

This work opts to use the title "pope" for the Roman bishop to reflect the fact that it was precisely the period of interest of the research it presents in which the Roman bishops such as Siricius (384-399), Leo I (440-461) and Gregory the Great (590-604) leaned towards its exclusive use (it was used sporadically until then by all Christian bishops) in their official correspondence in order to emphasize their authority and primacy of Rome over other episcopal seas.

While the text works with terms such as "eastern Mediterranean" or "eastern/western regions of the Roman Empire" occasionally, when more specific localisation is needed, the use of the administrative division on the level of *diocese*, as recorded by *Notitia Dignitatum* on the verge of the 5th century, has been chosen (see the map on the next page).


Roman dioceses and provinces
according to the
Compilation 'notitia dignitatum' (Cnd)
BRITANNIAE
GALLIAE
SEPTEM PROVINCIAE
HISPANIAE
ITALIA
ILLYRICUM
DACIA
THRACIAE
PONTICA
ASIANA
ORIENS
MACEDONIA
AFRICA
AEGYPTUS
WEST
EAST
BRITANNIA II
FLAVIA CAESARIENSIS
VALENTIA
MAXIMA CAESARIENSIS
BRITANNIA I
GERMANIA II
BELGICA II
BELGICA I
GERMANIA I
LUGDUNENSIS II
LUGDUNENSIS III
LUGDUNENSIS SENONIA
AQUITANICA II
AQUITANICA I
LUGDUNENSIS I
MAXIMA SEQUANORUM
RAETIA II
RAETIA I
NORICUM RIPENSE
NORICUM MEDITERRANEUM
PANNONIA I
PANNONIA II
VALERIA RIPENSIS
SAVIA
VENETIA & HISTRIA
LIGURIA
VIENNENSIS
ALPES POENINAE GRAIAE
ALPES COTTIAE
ALPES MARITIMAE
AEMILIA
FLAMINIA & PICENUM ANNONARIUM
TUSCIA & UMBRIA
PICENUM SUBURBICARIUM
VALERIA
SAMNIUM
CAMPANIA
APULIA & CALABRIA
LUCANIA & BRUTTII
SICILIA
SARDINIA
CORSICA
Regiones
subjurbicariae
DALMATIA
MOESIA I
MOESIA II
DACIA RIPENSIS
DACIA MEDITERRANEA
PRAEVALITANA
DARDANIA
THRACIA
HAEMIMONTUS
RHODOPE
EUROPA
Macedonia Salutaris
MACEDONIA
EPIRUS NOVA
EPIRUS VETUS
THESSALIA
ACHAIA
CRETA
SCYTHIA
PONTUS POLEMONIACUS
PAFLAGONIA
HELENOPONTUS
HONORIAS
BITHYNIA
GALATIA
GALATIA SALUTARIS
FRYGIA
FRYGIA SALUTARIS
PACATIANA
CAPPADOCIA I
CAPPADOCIA II
ARMENIA I
ARMENIA II
MESOPOTAMIA
OSRHOENA
EUFRATENSIS
SYRIA
SYRIA SALUTARIS
CILICIA I
CILICIA II
ISAURIA
LYCAONIA
PISIDIA
PAMFILIA
LYCIA
CARIA
LYDIA
ASIA
INSULAE
HELLESPONTUS
CYPRUS
FOENICE LIBANI
FOENICE
PALAESTINA I
PALAESTINA II
PALAESTINA SALUTARIS
ARABIA
AUGUSTAMNICA
AEGYPTUS
LIBYA INFERIOR
LIBYA SUPERIOR
ARCADIA
THEBAIS
TRIPOLITANA
BYZACENA
NUMIDIA
MAURITANIA SITIFENSIS
MAURITANIA CAESARIENSIS
TINGITANIA
AFRICA
BALEARES INSULAE
CARTHAGINIENSIS
TARRACONENSIS
NARBONENSIS I
NOVEMPOPULANA
CALLAECIA
LUSITANIA
BAETICA
DIOECESES
PROVINCIAE
Praefectus praetorio Italiae
Praefectus praetorio galliarum
Praefectus praetorio orientis
Praefectus praetorio illyrici
AFRICA - ILLYRICUM - ITALIA
BRITANNIAE-GALLIAE - SEPTEM PROVINCIAE-HISPANIAE
AEGYPTUS-ASIANA-ORIENS-PONTICA-THRACIAE
DACIA-MACEDONIA
(lines in the dioecesis BRITANNIAE are conjectural)
Consularis
Corrector
Praeses
Praeses & Comes/Dux
no civil administrator
Proconsul
P administered by the proconsul asiae
0 50 100 500 kms
©Ingo G. Maier (Melbourne, Australia) 2009

Introduction

The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) represented a seismic shift in the Catholic Church's engagement with modernity, initiating a period of unprecedented self-examination of ecclesial structures, liturgical practices, and theological foundations. Pope John XXIII's (1958-1963) call for *aggiornamento* − updating of the Church's relationship with the modern world −created space for reconsideration of numerous longstanding dogmas and practices, while his commitment to *ressourcement* − returning to the sources of Christian tradition − opened new methodological possibilities for its realization.[1] Among the many issues implicitly raised by this reform momentum was the question of women's roles within the Church's hierarchical structures. While Vatican II's core documents didn't directly address women's ordination, they established theological frameworks that would later challenge traditional gender limitations through the emphasis on the universal call to holiness and the baptismal priesthood of all believers.[2]

Lumen Gentium declared that "*there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus*", echoing the Pauline declaration in Galatians.[3] *Gaudium et Spes* further acknowledged that "*every type of discrimination, whether social or cultural, whether based on sex, race, colour, social condition, language or religion, is to be overcome and eradicated as contrary to God's intent*".[4] These affirmations of equality raised questions about whether traditional exclusion of women from certain ecclesiastical roles remained theologically justifiable.[5] The methodological distinction developed by future cardinal Yves Congar (1994-1995), one of the council's most influential theologians, between the unchanging "*deposit of faith*" and its changeable historical

[1] For modern interpretation of the council's dynamics see e.g.: O'Malley 2008.
[2] For the all-embracing approach of the council towards the faithful see e.g. Lakeland 2003, pp. 78-110.
[3] Paul VI, *Lumen Gentium*, paragraph 32 (21. 11. 1964), available online at: https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html (last viewed on 24. 04. 2025).
[4] Paul VI, *Gaudium et Spes*, paragraph 29 (07. 12. 1965), available online at: https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html (last viewed on 24. 04. 2025).
[5] Cooke 1976, pp. 5-7.

expressions later provided tools for challenging gender-based restrictions as culturally contingent rather than divinely mandated.[6]

In the immediate post-conciliar period, pope Paul VI (1963-1978) established the first modern commission to examine women's roles in ministry, with particular attention to the tradition of the diaconate, acknowledging that historical evidence concerning women's roles in the early Church deserved scholarly reconsideration.[7] Feminist theologians and historians like Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Rosemary Radford Ruether, and Kari Elisabeth Børresen began challenging traditional narratives of women's subordination as divinely ordained and historically continuous by recovering and reinterpreting evidence of women's leadership in early Christianity. They argued that the early Church − particularly during the Apostolic and late antique periods − demonstrated greater gender inclusivity than the Church in later eras, suggesting that women's exclusion from ordained ministry represented a historical development rather than an Apostolic institution.[8]

The debate intensified in 1975 when the *Pontifical Biblical Commission*, tasked with examining scriptural arguments regarding women's ordination, concluded that "*it does not seem that the New Testament by itself alone will permit us to settle in a clear way and once and for all the problem of the possible accession of women to the presbyterate*".[9] This admission − that Scripture alone did not definitively prohibit women's ordination − shifted the argumentative burden to historical tradition and theological reasoning. Suddenly, the historical evidence from the late antique Church became not merely academically interesting but ecclesiologically crucial.

This shift was evident in the Vatican's 1976 document *Inter Insigniores* (Declaration on the Question of Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood), which relied heavily on arguments from tradition. The document asserted that "*the Catholic Church has never felt that priestly or episcopal ordination can be validly conferred on women,*" citing "*the Church's constant tradition*" as evidence that exclusion of women from ordination represents the permanent norm not to be changed: "*The Church's tradition in the matter has thus been so firm in the course of the centuries that the Magisterium has not felt the need to intervene in order to formulate a principle which was not attacked, or to defend a law which was not challenged.*

[6] Congar 1966.
[7] Zagano 2000, pp. 31-34.
[8] Børresen 1968; Radford Ruether 1974; Schlüssler Fiorenza 1984.
[9] Pontifical Biblical Commission, *Can Women be Priests?* (01. 07. 1976) IV.2, in: Swidler and Swidler 1977, Appendix II.

But each time that this tradition had the occasion to manifest itself, it witnessed to the Church's desire to conform to the model left her by the Lord."[10]

Both feminist and theological scholars, such as Roger Gryson, pointed to the fact that epigraphic, archaeological, and literary sources suggest women had exercised leadership roles in early Christianity that more closely resembled ordained ministry than *Inter Insigniores* acknowledged, with the feminist theologian Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza even arguing for "*hermeneutics of suspicion*" regarding patriarchal interpretations of early Church history, insinuating that evidence of women's leadership had been systematically minimized in traditional historiography. Meanwhile Catholic authorities stubbornly emphasized the distinction between historical records and their normative interpretation, pointing out that evidence of women's liturgical leadership in Late Antiquity had been misinterpreted or exaggerated by feminist scholars.[11] Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XVI) (1977-2005), for example, argued that even if women had performed diaconal functions in the early Church, this did not necessarily constitute sacramental ordination as understood in later theological development.[12]

The debate reached a critical juncture in 1994 with the promulgation of *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* (On Reserving Priestly Ordination to Men Alone), in which pope John Paul II declared that "*the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women and that this judgment is to be definitively held by all the Church's faithful*". This declaration relied significantly on historical claims about continuous practice since Apostolic times: "*The fact that the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God and Mother of the Church, received neither the mission proper to the Apostles nor the ministerial priesthood clearly shows that the non-admission of women to priestly ordination cannot mean that women are of lesser dignity, nor can it be construed as discrimination against them. Rather, it is to be seen as the faithful observance of a plan to be ascribed to the wisdom of the Lord of the universe*."[13]

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[10] Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, *Inter Insigniores*, paragraph 1 (15. 10. 1976), available online at: https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19761015_inter-insigniores_en.html (last viewed on 24. 04. 2025).

[11] Gryson 1976; Schlüssler Fiorenza 1984, pp. 41-67. For a summary of the dispute see e.g. Halter 2004, pp. 142-167.

[12] Ratzinger 1977, pp. 42-58.

[13] John Paul II, *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, paragraph 3-4 (22. 05. 1994), available online at: https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1994/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_19940522_ordinatio-sacerdotalis.html (last viewed on 24. 04. 2025).

The declaration prompted intense scholarly debate about the historical accuracy of its claims regarding continuous tradition. Researchers like Gary Macy demonstrated that the very concept of ordination had evolved significantly throughout Church history, making straightforward historical comparisons problematic. The definition of ordination that emerged in the 12th and 13th centuries − the bestowal of a particular power and authority connected to the eucharistic liturgy and limited to offices that performed that liturgy − differed substantially from early Christian understanding of ordination as a process by which one was chosen for a particular ministry or service in the Church, interchangeable with the term "consecration" or "blessing" or, in the case of nuns, "veiling". This ontological turn in the theology of ordination thus complicates historical appeals to early Church practice, as the categories through which we now understand ordained ministry do not map neatly onto late antique ministerial roles.[14]

Meanwhile, other Christian denominations were engaging in parallel debates about women's ordination, often drawing on the same historical evidence but reaching different conclusions. The Anglican Communion began ordaining women to the priesthood in various provinces beginning in the 1970s, with theologians like John Wijngaards arguing that historical evidence from Late Antiquity supported rather than contradicted women's capacity for ordained ministry.[15] Lutheran churches also began ordaining women in the same period, reasoning that historical precedent alone should not determine contemporary practice, as the church must continually reinterpret its traditions in light of developing theological understanding.[16] Orthodox theologians Elisabeth Behr-Sigel and Kallistos Ware similarly advocated for reconsideration of women's ordination based on careful historical study of women's ministerial roles in the late antique easter Mediterranean.[17]

Pope Benedict XVI's (2005-2013) 2009 modification of canon law clarifying the distinction between the diaconate and the priesthood reopened questions about whether historical evidence of deaconesses in Late Antiquity might be relevant to contemporary practice, since the diaconate could now be more clearly distinguished from the priesthood theologically. If women had served as deacons in the early Church − as substantial written and material sources suggested − and if the diaconate represented a distinct ministry rather than merely a step toward

[14] Macy 2007, pp. 23-48.
[15] Sykes and Booty 1988, pp. 46-47; Wijngaards 2001, pp. 178-195.
[16] Stendahl 1966, pp. 31-49.
[17] Behr-Siegel and Ware 2000, pp. 92-115.

priesthood, then restoration of women to the diaconate might be possible without contradicting the teaching on male-only priesthood. [18]

In 2016 his successor, pope Francis (2013-2025), established a commission, consisting of both historians who had argued for the restoration of women to the diaconate and scholars known for more conservative positions, to study the question of women deacons in the early Church.[19] The commission's focus on Late Antiquity − particularly the 4th through 6th centuries − reflected the recognition that this period represented a crucial transitional era during which ecclesiastical structures solidified and gendered roles within the Church became increasingly formalized. As Christianity changed from a persecuted minority to the dominant religious force in the Mediterranean and beyond, questions of authority, orthodoxy, and ministerial office became increasingly important. Women's roles during this period were neither as restricted as later medieval practice would suggest nor as expansive as some contemporary advocates might wish − a complexity that demanded careful historical analysis rather than simplified appeals to tradition or precedent.[20] Unfortunately, in 2019 pope Francis indicated that the members had reached no understanding on the question of whether women deacons in Late Antiquity received sacramental ordination comparable to that of male deacons. This lack of consensus reflected the genuine complexity of historical evidence, as well as the difficulty of applying modern theological categories to ancient practices. In 2020, the Pope established a second commission to continue the investigation.[21]

As the Church continues to grapple with questions of gender, ministry, and tradition through initiatives like pope Francis's commissions, historical research becomes increasingly important for informed theological reflection. Issues relevant to the past are − at least as far as the Roman Catholicism is concerned − relevant to the current discussions.

[18] Benedict XVI, *Omnium in Mentem* (26. 10. 2009), available online at: https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_letters/documents/hf_ben-xvi_apl_20091026_codex-iuris-canonici.html (last viewed on 24. 04. 2025). Among the works on deaconesses published after the modification of the cannon law see e.g.: Felle 2010; Macy *at al.* 2011. For more general treatment of female competences in the Christian Church see: Berger 2011; Zagano 2011.
[19] Burke and Yan 2016; McElwee 2016.
[20] Pylvänäinen 2020, pp. 15-17.
[21] Pullella 2019; Reis 2020. See also: Pylvänäinen 2020, pp. 16-17.

Research objectives

This thesis − dedicated primarily to images, objects, and texts from Late Antiquity − therefore contributes first and foremost to a debate that is still relevant today. By examining the complex and often ambiguous evidence of how women were represented, both visually and textually, it analyses the role of Christian women within the context of their relationship with the Church hierarchy during its formative period.

While several scholars have pursued this line of research over the last fifty years, all did so within the broader context of the Roman Empire, or more precisely those regions that fell within its 5th-century borders (the Apennine Peninsula, Dalmatia, the Balkans, Gaul, Syria, Palestine, Egypt, and present-day Algeria and Tunisia).[22] This work is greatly indebted to them, as they published rich comparative material − contemporary legislation, Church council canons, writings of Church Fathers, inscriptions, and papyri − offering useful insights against which the data collected for the research laid out in the previous pages could be weighed. Yet none examined the situation in Rome, under what they perceived to be a strong control of the "first among the bishops".

The research presented here seeks to uncover alternative pathways through which women exercised religious authority when formal ecclesiastical positions remained largely (but not entirely, as will be argued) inaccessible to them. Rather than focusing exclusively on women's ordained priestly roles, well-documented in other regions of the Empire but conspicuously absent in Roman sources − this study will examine a wider spectrum of religious participation, investigating how women engaged with sacred spaces and objects, contributed to martyr veneration, created and maintained ascetic communities, and participated in liturgical and commemorative rituals.

The thesis integrates archaeological evidence, art historical analysis, epigraphic records, and textual sources centred around the religious life in the city of Rome, into a cohesive picture that reveals patterns of female religious participation invisible when examining any single category of evidence in isolation, a methodological approach never before applied to the Roman source material in its entirety. By triangulating these diverse sources, this work strives to uncover forms of female agency that have remained hidden due to the inherent biases of ecclesiastical texts.

[22] See e.g. Gryson 1976; Otranto 1982; Martimort 1986; Otranto 1991; Eisen 2000; Madigan and Osiek 2005; Foletti 2023.

Moreover, the research presented here aims to challenge the prevailing scholarly assumption that Rome represented a monolithic environment of strict ecclesiastical control. It will instead reveal a more nuanced reality where women actively negotiated their religious roles despite formal restrictions, developing sophisticated strategies to maintain religious authority. By tracing the evolution of female religious agency over four centuries, examining how and why women's roles and their representations changed as ecclesiastical control strengthened and as Rome underwent significant political, demographic, and social transformation, the research captures both continuities and significant shifts in women's religious opportunities and expressions. In recovering women's voices and experiences from sources that often render them invisible, this work seeks to present a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of female religious participation in late antique Rome than has previously been available.

State of the art, methodological context and innovation

Previous studies have relied heavily on three types of primary sources, using tools inherent to philology for their analysis. The normative pseudo-apostolic literature, such as the *Apostolic Constitutions* and *Testamentum Domini,* has provided a rich and varied picture of Christian communities in which women assisted in anointing, undressing, and instructing other women before and during the ritual of baptism, brought Eucharist to the homes of sick women, or chaperoned encounters between presbyters, bishops, and women from their congregations. Occasionally, when the reading is done between the lines, their stern stipulations refuting the presence of women at the altar during liturgy confirm that such "transgressions" happened more often than their male authors would have preferred. However, compiled by clerics in major Christian centres in Syria and Egypt, these sources are restricted by their region of provenance, and their application outside of it is speculative at best.[23]

Inscriptions – commissioned by both women and their families – have been accepted, along with wills, endowments, and occasional letters addressed to authorities, as the sources most intimately capturing the "real" female voices across all but the lowest social strata, even if slightly distorted by the gender constructs of their time in the qualities of their subjects they put to the fore. Unfortunately, they attest copiously the presence of female presbyters and

[23] For the overview of the so-called "Ancient Church Orders" see: Bradshaw 1992, pp. 80-110. The non-exhaustive list of works using them as important or only source of information includes: Gryson 1976; Osiek 1983; Martimort 1986; Wipszycka 2000, pp. 271-290; Pylvänäinen 2020; Wijngaards 2021.

deaconesses everywhere but in Rome, as we will discuss further in chapter 4. And even in the case of inscriptions from other archaeological locations throughout the territories of the former Roman Empire, doubt arises whether women were granted the titles of *diaconissa, presbytera*, and *episcopa* on their own merit or because their husbands were part of the Church hierarchy.[24]

Hagiographical and patristic literature has offered accounts of exemplary women, though heavily filtered through male perspectives and often blending historical reality with idealized representations designed to promote particular theological or moral agendas.[25]

While valuable, full focus on these types of sources has left significant gaps in our understanding of women's religious roles in Rome specifically. The scarcity of Roman inscriptions identifying women with official Church titles, the ambiguity of visual evidence, and the relative silence of Roman sources regarding women's liturgical participation have led many scholars to either exclude Rome from their analyses or merely note the apparent void in sources.

Even in cases when Roman visual sources have been analysed, by using traditional art-historical methodologies such as the iconographical and iconological analysis, the religious and ritual aspect of many of them have been overlooked. The prominent role women played in Roman funerary rituals and care for the dead throughout antiquity has been put in the spotlight (among others) by the brilliant (but unpublished) Ph.D. thesis of Sharon Marie Salvadori *Per feminam mors, per feminam vita. Images of Women in the Early Christian Funerary Art of Rome*, submitted at New York University in 2002.[26] Among her conclusions, one especially stands out: the catacombs offer the richest repertoire of female representations, be it images of “real” women or biblical figures, because such visual stimuli carried appropriate messages for the audience most present in the labyrinth of corridors belowground, that is women themselves. The author paints a picture of a world where, largely undisturbed by men who shaped the space within city walls, women explored their agency and represented themselves with relatively few restrictions - an inclusive world where the universal experience of death and mourning united individuals across social strata. One of the iconographic motifs, prominently featured in both the painted *arcosolia* of the well-to-do inhabitants of the city, the more inexpensive funerary plaques, and fragments of gold-glass vessels (purchased by elites and middle class alike) is the

[24] Inscriptions play important role in both compendia of documentary evidence about female officeholders in late antique Church, Eisen 2000 and Madigan and Osiek 2005.
[25] Clark 1994. Among the scholars working mostly with hagiographical and patristic sources when dealing with the spiritual agency of women in Late Antiquity see e.g.: Consolino 1984; Dell’Osso 2022.
[26] Salvadori 2002.

representation of the deceased accompanied by martyrs. In most cases, interestingly, the deceased is a woman. In 2021, Cristina Cumbo interpreted this composition as a form of "spiritual insurance", securing the portrayed deceased passage to the otherworld.[27] However, what this decoding of female representation strategies omits addressing is the relationship between women and depicted martyrs in the context of the female role in the flourishing late antique cult of martyrs.

In light of recent historical research by scholars such as Heather Barkman, Robert Wiśniewski, and Grace Stafford on women's strong emotional and material investment in martyr veneration in Syria, Palestine, and northern Africa this work proposes a new interpretation of the Roman funerary images, hypothesizing that within the less restrictive underground world, women felt empowered to represent their involvement in devotional rituals not yet formalized by the Church, but nonetheless forming an intrinsic part of late antique religiosity, about which the male-authored written sources remain mostly silent. [28]

The research of Kim Bowes on private devotion and liturgy in the 4th and early 5th-century Rome, where the not-yet-fully-developed and insufficiently staffed Church hierarchy could not satisfy the population's spiritual needs – provided a nodal point for the second half of this work. The author concludes that more intimate settings beyond control of the male clergy, combined with wider circulation of Eucharist outside of the liturgy in the basilicas and *tituli*, allowed women to perform liturgical rites that would have been out of their reach if performed in the space of the sanctuary. Following these conclusions, this work investigates which approaches the female part of the population undertook to access the sacred in semi-private and "female" public spaces, such as the funerary sphere and sections of sacred buildings designed for female devotees, separated from the male ones during liturgy.[29] As this thesis argues, religious rituals performed by women in seemingly semi-private settings did in fact more often than not include not only immediate family members but also members of their social networks, which − especially in the case of women of elevated status − were of substantial number. Thus, these rituals became public enough to afford women some measure of religious authority, sometimes ignored, sometimes accepted, and sometimes actively opposed by the members of the Church hierarchy. Therefore, they should be taken into consideration in the overview of the avenues of agency expression available to Rome's female population in relation to the city's public

[27] Cumbo 2021.
[28] Barkman 2016; Wiśniewski 2019; Stafford 2019. The graffiti were published e.g. by Carletti 2008.
[29] Bowes 2008.

religious life. In this context, it is important to reexamine some types of ritual behaviour previously considered only as part of private devotion or viewed as non-devotional, taking place in spaces linked to stronger female presence and featuring woman as primary actors.

The gender studies, at the core of the interdisciplinary research, are thus offering the methodological tools to overpass the male-dominated written sources, which offer little information, if any, about such rituals, filling the gap left by them by material and visual evidence.[30] Scenes of funerary banquets, in which figures holding chalices in what appears to be a ritual gesture are almost always women, as pointed out by Janet Tulloch, confirm once again the important role of the funerary sphere as one of the primary platforms for manifestation of female ritual autonomy and authority. Yet, they are one of the sources of visual evidence remaining largely unexplored for potential religious connotations.[31]

This thesis addresses above mentioned gaps and limitations through a methodological approach that integrates exploration of material, visual, spatial, epigraphic, and textual evidence to reconstruct female religious experiences often obscured in conventional historical narratives. Rather than focusing narrowly on evidence for ordained positions—which remains scarce for Rome—this study employs a multidisciplinary approach that examines alternative forms of religious expression.

The research extensively utilizes archaeological evidence from Roman catacombs, churches, and private religious spaces. By analysing funerary art, architectural elements, votive paintings, and devotional objects, the work reveals physical traces of women's religious activities that textual sources often neglect to mention. By examining representations of women in religious contexts, it seeks to understand both how women were portrayed and how they might have used visual media to express their own religious identities and aspirations. This approach reveals how women participated in commissioning religious art and how they might have experienced and interacted with sacred imagery.[32]

[30] For the discussion about the ability of objects and paintings to serve as precious source of information when it comes to female ritual behaviour in Late Antiquity see e.g. Tulloch 2004. Gender studies in scholarship researching Roman Antiquity (Late and not) are represented e.g. by: Pomeroy 1975; Kampen 1981; Clark 1986; Clark 1990; Clark 1993; Gleason 1994; Arjava 1996; Cooper 1996; Wyke 1998; Hemelrijk 1999; Kalavrezou 2003; Cooper 2004; Cooper 2007b; James 2007; Clark 2011; Nathan 2015; Wilkinson 2015; Stafford 2020a.
[31] Tulloch 2001 and Osiek *at al.* 2006, pp. 164-193.
[32] Non-exhaustive list of works dealing with representations of women in religious context and with female commissioners of religious art and of devotional objects outside of Rome during Late Antiquity includes: Vuolanto 2002; Britt 2008; Maguire 2016; Stafford 2020a, pp. 167-216; Ellison *et al.* 2021.

Spatial analysis is used for exploration of the ways in which the gender segregation in liturgical spaces created distinct viewing experiences for female congregants, affecting their perception of religious imagery and their opportunities for participation. By reconstructing these gendered viewing experiences, the study illuminates how women navigated and sometimes subverted spatial restrictions.[33]

The thesis adopts what might be called a "negative imprint" approach, analysing prohibitions and restrictions as evidence of practices that concerned ecclesiastical authorities. This method transforms the apparent silence of sources into valuable evidence of contested religious behaviours.[34]

Finally, the research employs careful epigraphic analysis, examining the limited but significant inscriptional evidence from Rome alongside comparative material from other regions to contextualize Roman practices within broader patterns of female religious participation. Analysis of sensory experiences is used as a tool for deliberating how women engaged with sacred spaces and objects through sight, touch, sound, and movement, creating embodied religious experiences even when formal participation was limited.[35]

By combining forces of the cultural and gender studies, archaeology, philology, epigraphy, art history and history of religions the research presented on the following pages not only fills in the gaps obscuring the religious roles women played in late antique Roman liturgy and religiosity, but also reconstructs a multifaceted gendered experience in which ritualized behaviour, devotion enhanced by sensory perception, societal expectations and strategies of their subversion or acceptance all left their imprint.

[33] For gendered perception of sacred spaces in the Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages see e.g.: Taft 1998; Schleif 2005; Tibbets Schulenburg 2005; Neuman de Vegvar 2007; Berger 2011, pp. 37-66.

[34] This approach to uncovering suppressed traces of women's lives has been pioneered by Clark 1994 and Clark 1998 and promoted by Conybeare 2005 on the example of Augustine's correspondence and Kateusz 2019, who applied it to the Marian biography *Life of the Virgin.*

[35] For epigraphic analysis applied to sources linked to female religious authority outside of Rome see e.g.: Eisen 2000; Madigan and Osiek 2005. Scholarship dealing with sensory perception as intrinsic part of devotion in Late Antiquity and beyond includes but is not limited to: Pentcheva 2010; Caseau 2017; Kessler 2019; Bogdanović 2021; Taronas 2023.

Timespan and limitations

As the germane question investigated in this work is how women interacted with the early Christian Church when it came to negotiating their place within its hierarchy, performance of public ritual actions, and their involvement in shaping Rome's Christian topography, and due to the importance of research of their strategies in the *longue durée*, the inclusion of the 4th century as a starting point was imperative. This period featured not only relatively independent private spirituality, not-fully-formed Church institutions, an incomplete network of Christian sacred buildings, but it also bore witness strengthening of Church hierarchy control over the city's liturgical life by the end of the century. The chronological limit of this thesis, that is the beginning of the 8th century, was chosen based on two factors: the change in the administration of the city, where the inflated papal bureaucracy formed strong ties with the newly emerging aristocratic families, and, taking advantage of the unstable political atmosphere in Constantinople, assumed control of Rome, irrevocably changing the power dynamics in the city; and the need to verify whether female liturgical and ritual performances were limited after the 6th century, as claimed by some researchers of the late antique female religious roles in the wider Mediterranean, and, if so, to identify the main factors for such change.[36]

The limitations inevitably leading to some imprecision in conclusions about representations of female religious agency in Rome relate directly to the uneven distribution of available material and visual sources across time and social strata. While both the 4th and the 5th centuries provide abundance of objects and images for analysis, their number sharply declines in the 7th century. This sharp decline can, as per findings of this work, be attributed primarily to the decline of catacombs' funerary function after the 5th century, the difficult political and economic situation in the city during the second half of the 6th and the 7th centuries, which triggered changes in the structure of the local nobility (now with military roots and little space for female representation), and persistent warfare that diverted the population's values toward virtues seen as inherently masculine, alienating women and limiting them to the role of victims.

Similar situation can be observed when examining the distribution of objects across different social strata. In the material and visual sources for the first two centuries of interest, commissions available only to the members of the aristocracy − high-quality ivory plaques,

[36] For the changes in the administration of the city by the end of the 7th century see e.g.: Dey 2021, pp. 102-136. For the limited access of women to the active role in religious rituals after the 6th century see e.g.: Kateusz 2019, pp. 183-192; Foletti 2023, pp. 43-48, 108-117.

marble sarcophagi, mosaics with gold *tessearae*, wall paintings, and silver vessels − prevail over gold glass, devotional medallions, and funerary plaques available to less affluent members of society, despite them also being plentiful. By the second half of the 6th and the 7th centuries, only the commissions of the popes and the (prevalently male) members of aristocracy remain, silencing the voices of non-privileged women entirely. Written sources fare no better, even in rare cases where their authors do not project their own views onto the words of their female protagonists. Though they offer the reader an occasional glimpse of female advancement through asceticism, leading to opportunities for exercising informal, but nonetheless significant power in relationship with the Church hierarchy, their observations are limited to Roman *feminae clarissimae.*[37] The writings of Church Fathers like Jerome (c. 342/347-420) hint that adopting an ascetic lifestyle was not the only prerequisite for securing oneself the opportunity to wield power related to the religious life of the city. It was the noble women's vast social networks and access to advanced education and immense wealth that afforded them roles of respected Scripture teachers, financial supporters of bishops, monks, and theologians, and sponsors of sacred buildings. To reinforce one's status as a "holy" ascetic, public spectacle − available only for a precious few − was necessary.[38]

Structure of the thesis

The thesis structure reflects the exploration of different dimensions of female religious agency in late antique Rome, navigating between public and private expressions of religious participation.

Chapter 1 examines women's relationship with the cult of martyrs, a fundamental aspect of late antique Christianity in Rome. The chapter investigates how women participated in and contributed to martyr veneration through patronage, pilgrimage, and personal devotion. It explores how women strategically positioned themselves in proximity to martyrs through both physical presence at holy sites and visual representation in funerary art, using this association to secure both heavenly protection and earthly prestige.

[37] For the paradox of the female advancement through following of the norms of asceticism and humility set by the Church Fathers see: Clark 1986, pp. 175-228.
[38] For bibliography and further discussion see chapter 2 in this thesis.

Chapter 2 focuses on the ascetic movement in Rome, examining how consecrated virgins and "holy" widows created spaces of religious authority through their conformity with the ideal of chastity promoted by the Church Fathers. The chapter discusses the communities formed around powerful figures like Marcella, traces the development of female monasticism in Rome, and explores how ascetic women navigated societal expectations while creating opportunities for religious leadership. It considers both the privileges afforded to these women and the precarious nature of their status, which required constant performance and verification.

Chapter 3 investigates how women worshipped through sensory engagement with sacred spaces and objects. This innovative approach examines how gender segregation in churches created distinct viewing experiences for female congregants and how women interacted with religious art, architecture, and devotional objects to facilitate spiritual connections. The chapter reveals how sensory engagement offered women alternative avenues for religious expression when institutional participation was limited.

Chapter 4 directly addresses the central question of women's participation in liturgical practices, examining both official roles and informal ritual activities. The chapter carefully analyses the limited evidence for women holding titles within the Roman Church hierarchy while also considering how women participated in religious rituals through alternative means − caring for altar cloths, participating in ritual singing and prayer, teaching, and leading commemorative meals with potentially Eucharistic connotations.

Chapter 5 examines the significant shift in representation of female religious agency during the 6th and 7th centuries as ecclesiastical control over the religious life in Rome strengthened. The chapter traces how "real" women gradually disappeared from the religious landscape of the city, replaced by idealized female martyrs whose *passia* reinforced ecclesiastical authority rather than female agency. It considers how social and political changes in Rome contributed to this transformation and how it affected women's opportunities for religious expression.

Together, these chapters provide a comprehensive examination of the diverse ways women participated in and shaped Christian practices in late antique Rome, revealing forms of religious agency that have often been overlooked in historical narratives focused primarily on institutional positions. By examining alternative modes of active participation in religious rituals, the thesis presents a more nuanced understanding of women's roles in relation to the forming institutionalized Roman Christianity.

1. When saints open the gates of Paradise

In one of the few explicit recollections of his youth in Rome, woven into his *Commentary on Ezechiel*, in the aftermath of the sack of Rome in 410 Jerome (c. 342/7-420) reminisces on his Sunday visits to the catacombs.

"When I was a boy, studying the liberal arts in Rome, I used to make tours of the tombs of the apostles and martyrs on Sundays, together with others of my age and convictions; we used to go down into those crypts, which are excavated deep underground, and contain, on either side as you enter, the bodies of the dead buried in the walls, and it is all so dark there that the line of the prophet seems to be fulfilled, 'Let them go down living into hell.' Only occasionally is light let in to mitigate the horror of the gloom, and then you would think that the light enters not so much through a window, as through a hole. We would walk back cautiously as, surrounded by the blindness of night, the words of Vergil would come to mind: 'everywhere dread fills the heart; the very darkness too dismays.'"[39]

This passage offers striking and vivid insight into the experience which awaited the fiercely devoted, or at least curious Romans when they decided to reunite themselves with the martyrs, the graves of which inspired a budding interest of the early Christian population of Rome in the underground cemeteries. It is true that Jerome is far from being a reliable guide to the sacred topography of the city. His descriptions build up on the intention to present an image of an almost universal triumphant conversion to the new faith and to paint Rome as a centre and a symbol of the whole Roman empire in response to the threat to the status of the city as *caput mundi* by the rising power of Constantinople and opposition against Christianity by part of the Roman aristocracy. But even though Jerome's Rome "*is far more a city of books, a city of images, a city of symbols, than a material city, made of bricks and stones, and inhabited by*

[39] Grig 2012, pp. 133-134. For the Latin original see: Jerome, *Commentarii in Ezechielem* 12.40.5-13, in: Migne 1845h, col. 375: "*Dum essem Romae puer, et liberalibus studiis erudirer, solebam cum caeteris ejusdem aetatis et propositi, diebus Dominicis sepulcra apostolorum et martyrum circuire; crebroque cryptas ingredi, quae in terrarum profunda defossae, ex utraque parte ingredientium per parietes habent corpora sepultorum, et ita obscura sunt omnia, ut propemodum illud propheticum compleatur: Descendant ad infernum viventes (Ps. LIV, 16): et raro desuper lumen admissum, horrorem temperet tenebrarum, ut non tam fenestram, quam foramen demissi luminis putes: rursumque pedetentim acceditur, et caeca nocte circumdatis illud Virgilianum proponitur (Aeneid. lib. II): Horror ubique animos, simul ipsa silentia terrent.*"

historical humans", as Lucy Grig eloquently claims, his description of the devotion of the populace to the tombs of martyrs is rooted in the contemporary reality.[40]

This chapter will examine the multifaceted relationship between Roman women and the cult of martyrs, addressing the complex dynamics of female devotion in both public and private spheres. Several interconnected research questions come to the fore: How did women participate in and contribute to ritual practices associated with veneration of the martyrs, particularly the apostles Peter and Paul? To what extent did female patronage shape the physical spaces of martyr commemoration, and how did it compare to male-led initiatives? How did women interact with the sacred and its visual manifestations in their private spaces? What degrees of religious autonomy were available to women through private devotion that might have been restricted in public worship? In what ways did female devotees use representations of martyrs to negotiate their spiritual authority and social status? And finally, how did growing ecclesiastical control affect women's agency in martyr veneration over time?

By exploring these questions through archaeological evidence, epigraphic records, funerary art, and literary sources, this chapter will reveal the tension between institutional control and personal piety, demonstrating how women − particularly those from aristocratic background − created and maintained sacred spaces within which they could exercise and promote their authority, strategically positioning themselves in the vicinity of the martyrs as a means of securing both heavenly protection and earthly prestige in a religious landscape increasingly dominated by male authority.

Bicinitati coniuncta sanctorum: female devotees in the catacombs

As hypothesized by Peter Brown, the "*rise of the cult of saints*" in the second half of the 4th century does not mark its beginning, which can be found in the intense devotion to holy figures in pre-Christian Near-Eastern milieu. Instead, it is just a manifestation of successful appropriation of the cult by Christian bishops, wealthy patrons and the populace of Rome in general.[41] Nonetheless, the same cannot be said about physical contact with the martyrs' bodies,

[40] Grig 2012, pp. 136-143. For the quoted sentence see p. 143.

[41] Brown 1981, p. 33. For the precursory elements of the cult of the martyrs present in the Bible and pre-Constantinian Christianity see: Wiśniewski 2019, pp. 9-21. For the cult of martyrs in the 4th and the 5th-century Rome, especially Peter and Paul, see: Pietri 1961; Huskinson 1982; Sághy 2010; Sághy 2012; Thacker 2020.

which seems to be a Christian specialty, unattested in any other major religious group in the late antique Mediterranean.[42]

It is interesting to observe how almost in the span of one generation in the middle of the 4th century people, born into society that shied from touching physical remains of its dead, came to seek the closeness of the physical remains of the martyrs under the assumption that they transmitted divine power.[43] Under the supervision of the popes, martyrs became both patrons and the main attractions of the city.

In the first half of the 5th century pope Leo I (440-461) dedicated a homily to the *dies natalis* of Peter and Paul, stressing their role of the only true founders of Rome, in strong contrast with its mythical founders Romulus and Remus:

"These are your holy Fathers and true shepherds, who gave you claims to be numbered among the heavenly kingdoms, and built you under much better and happier auspices than they, by whose zeal the first foundations of your walls were laid: and of whom the one that gave you your name defiled you with his brother's blood."[44]

It seems to have been the feast commemorating the martyrdom of the Princes of Apostles for which Rome was most famous outside of its walls. During his stay in the city between 401 and 402, poet Prudentius (348-c. 410) reports large gatherings of the faithful in honour of the triumph of the martyrs, divided into two general directions: along the Tiber towards the Vatican Basilica and towards Via Ostiense. It is him who offers a vivacious description of the feast, observing the strong religious zeal that unites both inhabitants of the city and the pilgrims, jointly kissing the venerated tombs, anointing them with unguents and tears.[45] Letters of

[42] Wiśniewski 2019, pp. 123-124.
[43] *Ibidem*, pp. 8, 129. According to the author, two factors may have played important role in the mitigation of the revulsion in the case of martyrs' bodies: the contemporary Christian literature, which became fascinated with martyrs' tortured and dismembered bodies as signs of their victory (*trophaea*), and the lapse of time, which helped martyrs' remains lose much of their fleshiness and turned them to ashes and dry bones, often further removed from the image of the decomposing body through gold casings and silk wrappings.
[44] Leo the Great, *Sermones* 82.1, in: Migne 1846b, coll. 422: "*Isti sunt sancti patres tui verique pastores, qui te regnis coelestibus inserendam multo melius multoque felicius condiderunt, quam illi quorum studio prima moenium tuorum fundamenta locata sunt: ex quibus is qui tibi nomen dedit fraterna te caede foedavit.*"
[45] Prudetius, *Liber Peristephanon* XI, in: Krisak 2021, p. 147: "Pilgrim and Latin mix, and what they're members of/ Is one great populace joined by religious love./They kiss that gleaming silver that's so bright and sleek,/ Anointing it with balsam; tears run down their cheek." For the Latin original of the text see: Thompson 1953, p. 318: "*…conglobat in cuneum Latios simul ac peregrines/ permixtim populos religionis amor,/ oscula perspicuo figunt inpressa metallo,/ balsama defundunt, fletibus ora rigant.*"

Paulinus, bishop of Nola (c. 410-431), written between 397 and 406, record his repeated visits to Rome to partake in the celebrations and visit the graves of Peter and Paul as well.[46]

It seems that the basilicas dedicated to their memory were not only popular pilgrimage hubs, but also sought after places of refuge that proved their effectiveness for example during the sack of Rome by Visigoths of Alaric (395-410) in 410, feared and respected by the pillaging hordes, if we are to believe the accounts of Jerome and Augustine (396-430).[47]

Roman devotion to the martyrs did by no means diminish in the next century. It was in the year 500, that, according to his *vita*, Fulgentius of Ruspe (508-527/33) "came to Rome, justly called the capital of the world" and "visited the sacred places of the martyrs". And in the course of the century that followed his visit the influx of pilgrims to the *memoriae sacrae* did not change and

[46] Spera 1998, pp. 6-7. Prudetius, *Liber Peristephanon* XII, in: Krisak 2021, pp. 151-154: "Friend, why do joyous people, more than usually, now congregate?/ All over Rome, they run to celebrate./ For apostolic triumph! Two whose feast day here is annual/ famously died: Saint Peter and Saint Paul…Look all around you: see how Romulus's people make their way/ in two directions - two feats on one day!/ But let us hasten on with quickened steps, attending both of them/ And in each one enjoy some praising hymn./ We'll go some distance, till at Hadrian's bridge the roadway crosses over/ The Tiber, than seek the left bank of the river./ Our watchful bishop first performs the sacred rites on one side, than/ Hastes back to make his offering again." For the Latin version of the text see: Thompson 1953, pp. 322-326: " *'Plus solito coeunt ad gaudia : die, amice, quid sit./ Romam per omnem cursitant ovantque.'/ Festus apostolici nobis redit hie dies triumphi,/ Pauli atque Petri nobilis cruore… aspice, per bifidas plebs Romula funditur plateas,/ lux in duobus fervet una festis./ nos ad utrumque tamen gressu properemus incitato,/ et his et illis perfruamur hymnis./ ibimus ulterius qua fert via pontis Hadriani,/ laevam deinde fluminis petemus./ transtiberina prius solvit sacra pervigil sacerdos,/ mox hue recurrit duplicatque vota.*"
Paulinus of Nola, ep. 17.1 (to his friend Severus, 399): "I set out for Rome for the revered feast of the apostles, promising myself that I meet you there during that obligatory but joyful commemoration." Ep. 18.1 (to bishop of Rouen, Vittricius, 397/398): "For at Rome on the crowded occasion of the birthday of the apostles I happened to meet our brother the blessed deacon Paschasius." Ep. 20.2 (to Delfinus, bishop of Bordeaux, 400/401): "Next, when I attended the feast of the blessed apostles according to my regular custom, he [bishop Anastasius] welcomed me at Rome with as much charm as honour." In: Walsh 1988a, pp. 163, 167, 186. Ep. 43.1 (to Desiderius, c. 406): "Subsequently, since the feast of the apostles was approaching, I thought it unkind to send him away…My motive was that after he had joined with me in my vow and my annual pilgrimage, and had attended the solemn celebration of the apostles, he could report these additional activities on his return to you." In: Walsh 1988b, pp. 227-228. For the Latin version of the letters see: Migne 1861, colls. 234-235, 237, 247, 382: Ep. 17.1: "*Interea et hac aestate labente, spe tamen ea nos vel opinione palpante, Romam ad venerabilem solennitatis apostolicæ diem profecti sumus, concursunt nobis illic tuum debita quidem, sed tamen festiva meditatione promittentes.*" Ep. 18.1: "*Accidit enim Romae nobis ad celeberrimum natalis apostolici diem concurrere benedictum discomum fratrem nostrum Paschasium…*" Ep. 20.2: "*Deinde nos ipsos Romae, cum solenni consuetudine ad beatorum apostolorum natalem venissemus, tam blande quam honorifice excepit.*" Ep. 43.1: "*Postea jam vicino apostolorum natali dimittere eum inhumanum putavimus. Itaque longioribus ejus moris, quas supradictis necessitatibus dederat, brevem hanc illi moram de nostra voluntate adjecimus, ut, cum apostolicam solemnitatem voti nostri et itineris annui socius celebrasset, hujus quoque ad vos negotii nostri nuntius reverteretur.*"
[47] Spera 1998, p. 6 gives ep. 126.13 of Jerome (c. 342/7-420) and *De civitate Dei* I.4 of Augustine (396-430) as examples. In ep. 126.13 Jerome describes how Marcella and her companion Principia found salvation in the church of Apostle Paul, being taken there by the miraculously mollified "barbarians" (available online at: database *Epistolae: Medieval Women's Latin Letters*, https://epistolae.ctl.columbia.edu/letter/426.html [last viewed on 15. 03. 2024]). Augustine confirms that many inhabitants of Rome sought refuge at the *Memoria Apostolorum* (Zema, Walsh, and Gilson 2008, pp. 24-25).

even increased despite the traumatic experiences of the local society linked to floods in 589 and 590 and attacks of Goths and Longobards in the years 537, 545 and 590-593.[48]

The ever-growing throngs of faithful heading to the tombs of the most venerated Roman martyrs are confirmed by the necessity to have permanent group of clerics, responsible for the liturgy, installed in the St. Peter's Basilica and San Paolo fuori le mura. In an effort to respond to pilgrim's demands and to make the basilicas outside of the walls even more accessible to the Roman inhabitants, pope Simplicius (468-483) selected high-level clergy called *hebdomadari* from the parish churches in the city, whose task was to come to the extramural basilicas for seven days at a time and tend to the spiritual needs of the faithful there. The building activity at the sites of St. Peter's, San Paolo fuori le mura and San Lorenzo fuori le mura during the pontificate of Symmachus (498-514) also centred around the construction of baths and dormitories for the poor and for the moving masses of devotees, attracted by the *martyria*.[49]

Women in the city were by no means unresponsive when it came to the devotion to the martyrs. In the heated response to the treatises of Vigilantius, who opposed the emotional parading and kissing of the martyrs' remains in the churches of Rome, in the year 406 Jerome makes a mention of the involvement of women in the ritual worship of relics. His treatise is a precious source of information about female attraction to the martyrs, yet the overall tone of the work warranties caution. Women in it are painted as more simple-minded believers and therefore prone to exaggerate their devotion, going so far as to light lamps and candles at the tombs and behave immoderately during the night vigils in the funerary basilicas. In Jerome's discourse they thread the thin line between accepted veneration and idol worship yet escape the dangerous territory because the object of their devotion is so sacred. While the statements made by Jerome on the account of the female devotees are definitely biased and the light in which they put them when compared with their male counterparts is unflattering and degrading, the treatise is a reliable sign of active female involvement in the cult of the martyrs.[50]

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[48] Carletti 2002, pp. 334-335. For the source see: *Fulgenti ep. ruspensis vita* 13.27, in: Migne 1847b, coll. 130: "*...Romam venit, caputque mundi veraciter apellatam...sacra martyrum loca venerabiliter circuivit...*".

[49] Ferri 2018, p. 115. See: *Liber Pontificalis* I, in: Duchesne 1862, pp. 262-263: "*Item apud beatum Paulum apostolum...post absidam aquam introduxit, ubi et balneum a fundamento fecit...Item ad beatum Petrum et ad beatum Paulum et ad sanctum Laurentium pauperibus habitacula construixit.*" For the permanent groups of clergymen in the most important Roman basilicas see: *Liber Pontificalis* I (pontificate of Symmachus, 498-514), in: Duchesne 1862, p. 249: "*Hic constituit ad sanctum Petrum apostolum et ad sanctum Paulum apostolum ed ad sanctum Laurentium martyrem ebdomadas ut presbyteri manerent, propter penitentes et baptismum...*" For the *hebdomadari* in the extramural basilicas see: Camerlenghi 2018, p. 103.

[50] For original text, the translation and the commentary on Jerome, *Contra Vigilantium* see: Oh 2013, especially pp. 64-65, 67, 136-140, 148-151 (chapters 7 and 9 from the treatise). 7.1-2, 11: "*Cereos autem non clara luce accendimus, sicut frustra calumniaris, sed ut noctis tenebras hoc solacio temperemus et uigilemus ad lumen, ne*

It is again Jerome who, in his letter to Eustochium, dated to 384, gives us clues about the involvement of ascetic women in Rome in the celebrations of the *dies natalis* of the Roman martyrs: participating in vigils and parades, and exchanging small gifts marking the occasion, such as bracelets, doves, and letters.[51]

Archaeological excavations in the city are unfortunately silent about the degree of female involvement in the cult of the Princes of Apostles. Even though in the last decades the archaeological research at the site of San Paolo fuori le mura and study of the written sources about St. Peter's significantly improved our knowledge of the position and disposition of the 5th-century-buildings around the basilicas serving the needs of the poor and of the devotees, their subsequent repeated restructuring, captured in the written sources without the much needed details, prevents scholars from successfully concluding whether any of the facilities were dedicated exclusively to women and whether their "femininity" in any way shaped their structure or furnishings.[52] The tailoring of holy sites to the needs of female pilgrims and therefore specific archaeological evidence about their presence at them is much better attested in dioceses *Oriens, Aegyptus* and *Asiana*, consisting of separate wings of hostels for men and women, double spaces in bath buildings and occasionally even separate baptismal fonts.[53]

The fact that women were an intrinsic part of the pilgrim groups circulating inside the shrines and around the graves of the martyrs in Rome and praying for long life and protection is much better documented in the case of the underground cemeteries. Female names are present among the pilgrim graffiti, executed next to the graves of the Roman martyrs throughout the whole

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tecum dormiamus in tenebris. Quod si aliqui per imperitiam et simplicitatem saecularium hominum uel certe religiosarum feminarum, de quibus uere possumus dicere: "Confiteor: zelum dei habent, sed non secundum scientiam," hoc pro honore martyrum faciunt, quid inde perdis?..Illud fiebat idolis et idcirco detestandum est, hoc fit martyribus et ideo recipiendum est.." 9.1, 3: "*De uigiliis et pernoctationibus in basilicis martyrum saepe celebrandis, in altera epistula, quam ante hoc ferme biennium sancto Ripario presbytero scripseram, respondi breuiter... Error autem et culpa iuuenum uilissimarumque mulierum, qui per noctem saepe deprehenditur, non est religiosis hominibus imputandus, quia et in uigiliis Paschae tale aliquid fieri plerumque conuincitur, et tamen paucorum culpa non praeiudicat religioni, qui et absque uigiliis possunt errare uel in suis, uel in alienis domibus*." On the struggle of Church Fathers to eliminate elements of martyr worship deemed inappropriate, „pagan" and „superstitious" in the late 4th and early 5th century see: Brown 1981, pp. 26-30.

[51] Spera 1998, pp. 6-7. Jerome, ep. 31.1-2, available online at: database *Epistolae: Medieval Women's Latin Letters*, https://epistolae.ctl.columbia.edu/letter/253.html (last viewed on 15. 03. 2024): "They are small in appearance but large in charity, the gifts I receive from the virgin, bracelets, letters, and doves…It is a feast day and the birth of saint Peter is usually celebrated, and yet let the happy speech not avoid the hinge of scriptures, let us not wander far from our prescribed place." ("*Parva specie, sed caritate magna sunt munera accepisse a virgine armillas, epistulas et columbas… Festus est dies et natalis beati Petri festius solito concinendus, ita tamen, ut scripturarum cardinem iocularis sermo non fugiat nec a praescripto palestrae nostrae longius evagemur.*")

[52] For the conclusions about the buildings present on site of San Paolo fuori le mura see: Spera 2011 and Brandenburg 2006a, pp. 177-178. For St. Peter's see: Brandenburg 2003; Brandenburg 2006b; De Blaauw 2011 and Brandt 2013.

[53] For case studies of the female presence at the shrines of St. Menas, St. Simeon the Elder, and St. Thecla see: Stafford 2019.

period of our interest and beyond. Examples of their presence can be found on the wall at the entrance to the Crypt of the Popes in the cemetery of Calixtus (second half of the 4th or the first half of the 5th century), on the wall next to the crypt of Santi Pietro e Marcellino in the eponymous underground cemetery (late 4th or 5th century), or on the wall of the crypt giving access to the subterranean basilica of martyr Hippolytus on Via Tiburtina (late 6th or early 7th century).[54]

Unsurprisingly, it seems there was special form of kinship between women and female martyrs. Vows of several of the most devoted of them to Prisca/Priscilla and Felicitas were captured by inscriptions and graffiti in the eponymous cemeteries during the late 4th and 5th century.[55] Due to the less than ideal state of conservation of some of the catacombs and underground martyr shrines it is fully possible that written testaments of female presence in them were much more numerous and that vows were made to much more varied spectrum of female martyrs than the abovementioned evidence suggests.

Fecit ancilla Dei basilicam: female euergetism in the name of the martyrs

After the sack of Rome by the Visigoths of Alaric in 410, which shook the social urban fabric, it was the cult of saints that allowed women from the leading Christian families to achieve prominence through charity and building activity associated with it. One of the most memorable examples is the patronage of Demetrias, daughter of the consul Anicius Hermogenianus Olybrius and Anicia Iuliana and granddaughter of Petronius Probus of the *gens Anicii*, who

[54] See: database *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* (http://csla.history.ox.ac.uk) : evidence ID E05251, visitor graffiti from the cemetery Ad Sanctos Marcellinum et Petrum, Via Labicana, invoking the eponymous martyrs, executed on a wall in a passage close to the crypt where the two saints were probably venerated: "*[Primiti(?)]va ☧ in <n>ome[ne] Chr(isti)*" (ICUR NS VI, 15964); evidence ID E05348, Latin and Greek visitor graffiti with invocations of martyr Hippolytus, found on a plastered wall of a crypt giving access to the subterranean basilica of Hippolytus in the eponymous cemetery, Via Tiburtina: "*[- - -]ora [- - -] Petrus/ [- - -] Renata/ [in m]ente habe Ippolite/ [- - -] Ḥelene Septi-/[mia Ven]eriosa et/[fr]atre ipsas (?)*" (ICUR NS VII, 19942a); evidence ID E05236, Latin graffiti by visitors invoking martyr Clemens, found in the cemetery Ad Sanctos Marcellinum et Petrum, Via Labicana: "*+ [D]omna*" (ICUR NS VI, 15938); evidence ID E04662, scarcely legible Latin and Greek graffiti with invocations of Xystus/Sixtus II (bishop and martyr of Rome), and probably other deceased Roman bishops, on a wall at the entrance to the Crypt of the Popes, cemetery of Callixtus, Via Appia: "*Ursacia ... TIN ...*", "*διὰ τὸν (christogram) εἰς μνίαν ἔχεται LS Agnes*", "*AM Suggessum Marcia*" (ICUR NS IV, 9523).

[55] See database *Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity*, evidence ID E07539, a Latin graffiti recording vows made to Priscilla/Prisca, found in the catacombs of Priscilla (c. late 4th/early 5th century, ICUR n. not mentioned); evidence ID E07496, a Latin inscription commemorating a vow to martyr Felicitas, now lost, but probably displayed at the cemetery of Felicitas (5th century, ICUR NS VIII, 23398); evidence ID E07504, a Latin dedicatory inscription in single pentameter verse, recording a vow given probably to martyr Felicitas, now lost, but probably displayed at the cemetery of Felicitas (5th century, ICUR NS VIII, 23396).

received a virgin's veil from the bishop of Cartage in the year 413, while taking refuge in the city after having fled Rome.[56] Already in the public eye due to her powerful social connections, which were seen as highly attractive by prominent Church members in lack of high social status and funds, such as Jerome, on the brink of death she found a way to establish herself further in her public role by founding a church dedicated to martyr Stephen next to her residence on Via Latina.[57]

Demetrias's agency in the context of the religious life of the city is expressed undoubtedly by the fact that she was able to source relics of the martyr for the church which she sponsored, one of the first dedicated to him in Rome, preceding even all the papal projects in his name.[58] They were stored in a small compartment in the heart of the altar, accessible to the sight and maybe even touch of the devotees through two openings, one to the west and a narrower one facing the east.[59] On Demetrias's part the procurement of relics was undoubtedly an intentional subscription to the legacy of Melania the Younger (c. 383-439), empress Pulcheria (450-453), and Pulcheria's sister-in-law Athenais-Eudokia (421-450), who were likewise interested in Stephen's relics, following the trend originating in the end of the 4th century, according to which imperial and senatorial women used the cult of relics to "project images of dynastic strength".[60]

Having been granted with the ability to keep her doubtless generous dowry at her disposal even after accepting the virgin's veil by her mother and grandmother, who utilized their social and financial capital in support of prominent participants of contemporary theological disputes and for the benefit of the outward representation of the relatively new religion, Demetrias joined the ranks of several elite women who refused the expected life course of wives and mothers of aristocratic senators in favour of different lives. Lives filled with devotion, charity, study, and

[56] Augustine, ep. 150, in: Parsons 1953b, pp. 266-268. The prestige of the consecration of Demetrias to virginity is presented by him as far surpassing the prestige of the men of the family: "Who can express in words, who can describe with adequate praise, how incomparably more glorious and rewarding it is for Christ to have virgin spouses of your blood than for the world to have manly consuls?". For the Latin text see: Goldbacher 1904, p. 381: "*Quis uerbis explicet quis digno praeconio prosequatur, quantum incomparabiliter gloriosius atque fructuosius habeat ex uestro sanguine feminas uirgines Christus quam uiros consules mundus?*". For the biography of Demetrias and her relationship with Augustine, Jerome, and Pelagius see: Cooper and Hillner 2007, pp. 192-214.
[57] Krautheimer 1970, pp. 241-253, Brown 1981, p. 47 and Brandenburg 2013, pp. 257-258. For the source reporting on the shrine see: *Liber Pontificalis* I. (pontificate of Leo I, 440-461), Duchesne 1862, p. 238: "*Huius temporibus fecit Demetria ancilla Dei basilicam sancto Stephano via Latina, milario III, in paedio suo.*" For more information about the sources see: Bartolozzi Casti, 2008, pp. 229-232. For more information about the dependence of Church Fathers on wealthy Roman patronesses see: Cooper and Hillner 2007, pp. 193, 201-202.
[58] Bartolozzi Casti, 2008, p. 230, citing Hülsen, 1927, pp. 471-486 points out that there were more than 60 religious buildings dedicated to the martyr in Rome. About the precedence of Demetrias's project over the papal ones see: Bowes 2008, p. 96.
[59] Krautheimer 1970, p. 251.
[60] Cooper and Hillner 2007, p. 223.

contemplation, offered to them by the rapid development of the asceticism and the monastic movement.[61] Making her abundant financial resources available to the Church, just as most of her fellow female ascetics did, and being a self-proclaimed steward on behalf of the said Church, Demetrias could not wish for a better heavenly counterpart as Stephen, the first deacon of the Church of Jerusalem and steward of its resources, and thus she assured through her donation that her name will be forever linked to his.[62]

Even if the fragmented inscription in form of a poem, found in the ruins of the St. Stephen church during excavations in the middle of the 19th century, suggests that the building activity was carried from the lady's legacy posthumously on the orders of pope Leo I, the circumstances of the church's foundation still speak of Demetrias's fortuitous position in dealings with the highest echelons of the Church administration and her power to shape, at least to some extent, the make-up of the religious life in Rome. With her testamentary provisions the grand lady helped dissolve one of the greatest obstacles the early Christian Church faced: the promotion of the new faith in the countryside, which was difficult to reach for the Church officials unless they were assisted by the landowners, who decided to build churches on their estates and proclaim the Christian faith.[63] A small, fan-shaped basin, about 60 cm deep, uncovered during the mid-19th-century excavations in a chamber north-west from the apse of Demetrias's church and identified as a baptismal font on the basis of structural parallels with other late 4th- and 5th-century fonts preserved in Rome, Porto (Udine province), and Mariana (Corsica) confirms that the shrine indeed fulfilled the role of an evangelizing hub in the *extra muros* community of dependents of the powerful virgin.[64]

The church of St. Stephen is by no means the only example of a martyrial shrine sponsored or decorated by a Roman noblewoman. In fact, it is not even the first one. As *Liber Pontificalis*

[61] Clark 1990, p. 260 and note 76. Jerome, ep. 130.7 is the one to report on the destiny of the Demetrias's dowry: "All Christians praise that whatever had been prepared for her wedding was given to the virgin by the holy yoke of Christ so that, with no offense meant to the bridegroom, she, still richly endowed with her previous wealth, might come to her new promise and alleviate the poverty of the servants of God with what was about to be spent on worldly goods." Latin original: "*Fertur et omnium Christianorum laude celebratur, quicquid fuerat nuptiis praeparatum, a sancta Christi synoride uirgini traditum, ne sponso fieret iniuria, immo ut dotata pristinis opibus ueniret ad sponsum et, quod in rebus mundi periturum erat, domesticorum dei inopiam sustentaret.*", available online at: database *Epistolae: Medieval Women's Latin Letters*, https://epistolae.ctl.columbia.edu/letter/1282.html (last viewed on 28. 11. 2024). For the power wielded by the women from the family of Demetrias in the constituting of Christian church infrastructure and in shaping the outcomes of theological disputes see: Laurence 2002 and bibliography cited by Cooper and Hillner 2007, p. 192, note 7.

[62] Cooper and Hillner 2007, p. 224.

[63] Fiocchi Nicolai 2007, p. 110 and Brandenburg 2013, pp. 257-258.

[64] Krautheimer 1970, p. 249. More recently the baptistery and its possible appearance in the 5th century was discussed by Fiocchi Nicolai 2007, pp. 110-111 and Bartolozzi Casti 2008.

reports, the building of a basilica dedicated to martyrs Gervasius and Protasius (*titulus Vestinae*, now San Vitale), initiated by pope Innocenc I (401/2-417), was made possible only because of the generous donation of the *inlustris femina* Vestina, who bequeathed all her jewellery to the Church in order to provide sufficient funds for its construction and furnishing. And it seems to have been a magnificent jewellery indeed, as the pope was able to present the *titulus*, named not after the martyrs, but after its wealthy patroness, with 36 bronze chandeliers, 12 silver crowns for lighting, 8 silver chalices, 4 silver candlesticks, 2 silver patens, 1 silver chandelier, a silver vessel with a paten and a gilt dove, a silver stag pouring water for baptism, a silver vessel for chrism and a silver handbasin.[65]

The dedication to the martyrs, whose relics were found together with the martyr Vitalius by bishop Ambrose (374-397) in Milan and Bologna in 386 and 393 respectively and circulated by the bishop himself, may have been based on the deposit of particles of the relics of these saints in the Roman church.[66] Would it have been possible for Vestina to obtain the relics? As demonstrated in the case of the church of St. Stephen, such feat was not impossible for a sufficiently socially connected noblewoman. Another argument in support of this hypothesis is the identity of the titular presbyter placed in charge of the church under Vestina's will, Leopardus, who may be the same Leopardus dispatched to Milan, the city of origin of the relics, in 392/393 by pope Siricius (384-399). Would it have been possible that he had brought the relics back to Vestina, possibly his *patrona*, who expressly chose him in her will as one the administrators of "her" church because she trusted him to act as "*an agent of her desires*", as Kim Bowes insinuates?[67] It may have indeed been so. Yet, on the other hand, it was the pope who dispatched Leopardus to Milan and may have therefore been the receiver of the relics. It also seems improbable that if the Vestina were their original owner they would not be mentioned by *Liber* along her jewels and pearls. But even without the relics her gift equalled the donation of Demetrias through the way in which it helped the Christianization and pastoral care of the

[65] *Liber Pontificalis* (pontificate of Inocenc I., 401/2-417), in: Davis 1989, pp. 31-32. For more information about the basilica see: Krautheimer 1970, pp. 313-331 and Brandenburg 2013, pp. 163-164. Cooper and Hillner 2007, p. 231 argue that only the building of the *titulus* was sponsored by the sale of Vestina's possessions, and it was the pope who paid for its furnishing and secured an income for its clergy by endowing it with lands, while Pietri 1978, p. 329 considers the furnishings to be paid for from Vestina's gift. As nothing in the text of *Liber Pontificalis* suggests otherwise, I am inclined more towards Pietri's interpretation of events.

[66] Brandenburg 2013, p. 163. It was Delehaye 1930, pp. 9-10 who first suggested that Vestina's *titulus* contained relics of the two saints. For the circulation of the relics of Gervasius and Protasius see: Filipová 2019.

[67] For the record about the presence of Leopardus in Milan in the letters sent to and from pope Siricius see: *Presbyters in the Late Antique West* database of the University of Warsaw (https://presbytersproject.ihuw.pl/), ID ER 1965 and ER 1964 (last viewed on 20. 03. 2025). About the patron-client relationship titular presbyters may have had with the Roman aristocracy founding the *tituli* see: Bowes 2008, pp. 69, 71, 93.

population of one of the most populous quarters of Rome between the Quirinal and the Viminal.[68]

Approximately 20 years after the building of the church of St. Stephen on Via Latina a now lost inscription, composed of five elegiac couplets, commemorated a building project undertaken by Attica, wife of *praefectus praetorii* of *Galia*, Felix Magnus, in *titulus Damasi*. The exact definition of the *domus religiosa*, referenced by the inscription, is not possible, but it has been overwhelmingly identified as either a private chapel or an oratory and dated vaguely between the years 469 and 485, when Felix Magnus appears in the correspondence of his former schoolmate, Sidonius Apollinaris (430-489).[69] It is possible that the oratory/chapel contained contact relics, much more widespread than body particles and sufficient for consecration of a space dedicated to a martyr, spreading his/her protective and healing power in much the same way as their physical body could, but their presence is not mentioned by the inscription and is thus highly uncertain.[70] Nonetheless, even without them Attica's commission was tightly linked to the church, build by pope Damasus (366-384) "*Laurenti saeptus martyris auxilio*", which, despite originally being dedicated to Christ, was soon overtaken by the veneration of the one of the most respected Roman martyrs, whose cult was personally promoted by the pope. Thus, the respected matron may have decided to chip in and elevate her prestige by adding to the church building which must have attracted the faithful not only by the aura of its founder, but also by the vivid depiction of the Laurence's martyrium in the apse, possibly similar to the one in the 5th-century so-called mausoleum of Galla Placidia (392-450) in Ravenna.[71]

Even though, as we have seen above, female sponsors, especially widows and virgins, were nothing unusual in the late antique martyr cult financing, throughout the 4th, 5th and the 6th centuries female aristocrats more often than not made donations aimed towards venerating the martyrs in collaboration with their husbands.[72] The scarcity of the preserved written and

[68] Brandenburg 2013, p. 163.

[69] "*quisquis plena D(e)ō mysteria mente riquiris/ huc accede domus religiosa patet/ haec sunt tecta pio semper devota timori/ auuditumque D(eu)ī commodat hic p̄(re)cibus/ ergo laetiferos propera conpescere sensus/ iam p(ro)pera sacras laetus adire fores/ ut transacta quaeas deponere crimina vitae/ et quicquid scelerum noxius error habet/ Attica Felicis Magni carissima coniunx/ sumptibus hoc propriis aedificavit opus*", in: *Epigraphic Database Bari*, n. EDB42915, https://www.edb.uniba.it/epigraph/42915 (last viewed on 29. 11. 2024). For more information about Felix Magnus see: Martindale 1980, pp. 463-464.

[70] About late antique views on division of relics and contact relics see: Wiśniewski 2019, pp. 159-179.

[71] Brandenburg 2013, pp. 142-143. Quoted text was part of a dedicatory inscription located either on the apsidal arch or at the base of the apse conch: *Epigraphic Database Bari*, n. EDB42912, https://www.edb.uniba.it/epigraph/42912 (last viewed on 29. 11. 2024).

[72] Ward-Perkins 1984, pp. 239-241; Pietri 2002, pp. 255-258; Cooper and Hillner 2007, p. 225, esp. note 3. For the status of virgins and widows in the late antique Roman Church and society see chapter 2 of this thesis.

material evidence precludes any definite conclusions, but it seems that in Rome female donations were outweighed by the spousal ones minorly, recorded in 3 cases to the 4 mentioned below.

If we go chronologically, just as we did with the purely female donations, we stumble upon the first joined spousal endeavour, immortalized in a dedicatory inscription, in the basilica of St. Peter, the most important martyr of all (for Rome, at least). There is not enough evidence in the engraved lines to uncover the whole identity of Anastasia and her husband, who apparently sponsored marble decoration of a space built on the orders of pope Damasus (366-384), identified by most scholars as a baptistery, in the second half of the 4th century.[73] But from the designation of Anastasia as "*femina clarissima*" we can at least reach the conclusion that like all the other protagonists of this subchapter they belonged to the Roman nobility. The same fog surrounds the identity of Severus and Cassia, whose wealth made the project of pope Hilarius (461-468) in the church dedicated to martyr Anastasia, probably a decoration of the apse, a reality.[74]

But not all aristocratic donors remain unidentifiable. Somewhere between the year 428, in which he was made consul, and the year 430, in which he was killed in Ravenna for supposedly plotting against the general Flavius Aetius (c. 390-454), Roman patrician and *magister militium* Flavius Constantius Felix and his wife, *inlustris femina* Padusia, commissioned the mosaic for the apse of the Lateran basilica[75] Even though the exact appearance of the mosaic is unknown, apart from the fact that it contained a bust of Christ, and its relation to the martyrial cult was not explicit, the basilica itself was a place in which the most illustrious of the martyrs, the Apostles, were ostensibly venerated by the so-called *fastigium* separating the presbytery from

[73] For the bibliography on the topic of potential Damasian baptistery see: Brandt 2013, esp. pp. 81-85. For the inscription see: *Epigraphic Database Bari*, n. EDB14385, https://www.edb.uniba.it/epigraph/14385 (last viewed on 02. 12. 2024): "*[---] et Anastasia c(larissima) f(oemina) eius/ [ad augendum splendorem] basilicae apostoli Petri/ [pavimentum parietes] item coelum/ [sacri fontis quem dudum Da]masus vir sanctus in/ [ea --- exstruxit sumpt]u proprio marmoru[m]/ [cultu et musivo opere] decorarunt*".

[74] They were commemorated by a now lost inscription, recorded in the Einsiedeln and Lorsch syllogae: "*antistes Damasus picturae ornarat honore/ tecta quibus n(un)c̄ dant pulchra metalla decus/ divite testat(ur) p̄(re)tiosior aula nitore/ quos rerū(m) effectus possit habere fides/ papae Hilari meritis olim devota Severi/ nec non Cassiae mens dedit ista D(e)ō* ", in: *Epigraphic Database Bari*, n. EDB42853, https://www.edb.uniba.it/epigraph/42853 (last viewed on 02. 12. 2024). The inscription and the papal project are further discussed in: Gianandrea 2017, p. 206. The dedication of the church to the martyr in the first half of the 5th century possibly followed after translation of her relic to Rome: Brandenburg 2013, p. 140.

[75] *Ibidem*, p. 26. For more information about Flavius Constantius Felix see: Martindale 1980, pp. 461-462. The donation was commemorated by an inscription in the apse, which went lost during the restoration works undertaken by pope Nicholas IV (1288-1292): "*Fl(avius) Felix v(ir) c(larissimus) magister utriusque militiae patricius et cons(ul) ordin(arius) et Padusia eius inl(ustris) femina voti cō(m)potes de proprio fecerunt*", in: *Epigraphic Database Bari*, n. EDB42888, https://www.edb.uniba.it/epigraph/42888 (last viewed on 29. 11. 2024).

the naves, commissioned for the basilica by Constantine (306-337) and decorated on the orders of a member of his family with monumental silver statues of Christ, angels, and the aforementioned twelve Apostles.[76]

The basilica, built by Faustus Albinus iunior, member of the powerful Roman noble family of the Decii, and his wife Glaphyra, on the 27th mile of Via Trebana (Tiberina?, the tract of Via Prenestina leading to Treba Augusta, now Trevi?), *in fundum Pacianum*, their estate just outside of Rome, had a powerful protector, too, this time in the face of pope Symmachus, who consecrated the basilica to one of the Princes of Apostles (and martyrs), Peter.[77] As in the case of the donation of Attica, the foundation cannot be securely tied to deposition of relics or relics already *in situ*. Yet it was still a powerful move. Apart from securing their prestige in the eyes of the members of the Church in the city, their peers, and God in the afterlife, the senatorial couple may have also been one of the few aristocrats who were not outrun by the Church in the act of fulfilling the religious needs of the local rural communities on the verge of the 6th century.[78]

The previously reported occurrences, however, testify only about the possibilities for economic and social agency of the richest women, who profited from the fact that with the civic officials, characteristic for the community governance of the earlier Roman Empire, now largely gone, the civic status became linked more to wealth and personal connections than the civic office, which helped them become driving forces of the local patronage and face less competition from men who outranked them by the virtue of the office.[79] According to Elisabeth Clark, the Church actively sought out affluent men for priesthood positions with the expectation they would donate their wealth to the institution, while similarly encouraging prosperous women to make substantial financial contributions toward the Church's charitable initiatives and building projects.[80]

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[76] Hughes 2011. For the hypothesis about the motif in the apse of the basilica of San Giovanni in Laterano being the model for the scene of Doubting Thomas, with resurrected Christ surrounded by four Apostles, on the so-called British casket with Passion scenes (cat. n. 2.27 in this thesis) see: Foletti 2017c, pp. 148-151.
[77] The founding of the basilica is reported by *Liber Pontificalis* (pontificate of Symmachus, 498-514), in: Davis 1989, p. 46. For more information about the social position and offices of Albinus see: Martindale 1980, pp. 51-52, who identifies the road in question as Via Tiberina. Fiocchi Nicolai 2007, p. 113, on the other hand, identifies it as a tract of Via Prenestina.
[78] For the conflict between the aristocratic euergetism and the strengthening Church in the 5th century see: Pietri 2002.
[79] Stafford 2020a, p. 214.
[80] Clark 1990, p. 254.

It's true that the new focus on charity, including church building and furnishing, as a service to the community and means of achieving salvation and heavenly rewards on the basis of the relative (instead of the absolute) value of the gift theoretically liberalized the access to the donor honours. In other regions of the peninsula the prevalence of churches in need of funds and the growing focus on family- and group-based giving created opportunities for a diverse spectrum of women. Yet it seems that in Rome women beyond the very highest echelons of aristocracy had little chance to be involved in patronage.[81] And even in the case of aristocratic women this outlet for demonstration of authority within the religious context had its limitations, conditioned in the wider context by the power struggle between the papacy and the clans of Roman senatorial aristocracy.[82]

At the end of the 4th century and in the first decades of the 5th century, imperial generosity was exhausted, while an aristocratic euergetism took over. The economic and political collapse of imperial power left the popes at odds with the noble donors, due to the former's claims to some rights to control the wealth of which the latter were now the principal providers.[83]

In 483, under the leadership of the praetorian prefect Caecina Decius Maximus Basilius, Roman aristocracy, which mostly supported his rival Laurentius, accused the candidate for the seat of Peter, Symmachus, of squandering the Church's assets to play politics and prepare for papal elections. The members of the most powerful families of the Empire rebelled against the idea that he strengthens his power and even acquires more political independence by exploitation of their generous donations, aimed towards eternal salvation.[84]

Up until the pontificate of Gelasius (492-496) the aristocratic donor could expect to appoint clerical staff of their private foundation, if it mainly served the purpose of their personal devotion. Oftentimes they exercised their rights without episcopal supervision. Even in case of the *tituli* in the city of Rome itself, whose legal ownership was transferred to the Church after the foundation by a lay patron, the land ownership was not necessarily transferred with it. This can be demonstrated by the example of the church of St. Stephen on Via Latina, which, even if

[81] Stafford 2020a, pp. 173-175, 190.
[82] Pietri 1981; Pietri 2002; Cooper and Hillner 2007, pp. 225-261 with further bibliography.
[83] Pietri 1978, p. 321.
[84] Pietri 1981, pp. 430-431, 454-459.

founded after the death of the rich Roman heiress on the initiative of the pope, was built on a land that still probably belonged to the Anicii.[85]

That is why from the late 4th century onward there is copious evidence that private churches were seen as a weak point in the system of religious establishments under bishops' control. The letters of popes Gelasius, Pelagius I (556-561) and Gregory (590-604) provide glimpses of attempts of their regulation, which became increasingly strict and specific, and gradually extended to new categories of establishments founded within the perimeter of the pontifical authority. While constantly demonstrating the desire to respect the pious intention of the founder, popes strove to carefully channel these generous initiatives in order to avoid possibility for deviation from the official politics and dogmas of the Church, a feared byproduct of the authority wealthy patrons held over their foundations.[86] But the system of religious building patronage was slow to change.

Even though Gelasius made an attempt to reform the religious patronage system by requiring that founders apply for episcopal approval before establishing new foundation, as late as the pontificate of Pelagius I the custom, according to which the staffing of the foundation was subject to decision of the founder, albeit on the condition that the bishop had to approve the list of candidates, persevered.[87] Despite some imperfections, however, in the run of the 6th century the Church gradually tightened the strings of control over the foundations on private land, overseeing funding of their upkeep, deposition of relics in them and limiting the functions they could fulfil by banning presence of burials, building of baptisteries, public liturgy and appointment of regular clergy in them.[88]

And thus, the already restricted ability of women to act within the religious realm shrunk even further. Together with the other wealthy euergets, they had to leave the management of their foundations in the hands of the members of the local Church hierarchy, or have them reserved only for strictly private use, which partly defeated their representative purpose.[89] But, as we will see in chapter 2 and chapter 4, despite the adversities some women still managed to remain relevant shadow powers in the context of the Church politics, building and restoration

[85] Cooper and Hillner 2007, pp. 173, 183, 225-261. The hypothesis that the land on which the sanctuary was built continued to be the property of the family of Demetrias was put forward by De Francesco 2003, pp. 527-529 and Bowes 2008, p. 96.
[86] Pietri 2002, p. 254.
[87] Cooper and Hillner 2007, p. 173.
[88] Pietri 2002, pp. 260-261 and Fiocchi Nicolai 2007, p. 113.
[89] Pietri 2002, pp. 260-261.

campaigns, contributing either funds or their social connections. And even when they could not remain in control of their foundations, they were at least able to appropriate them as vessels for their visual representation, by either placing commemorative inscriptions or "portraits" in them.

Ieiunia pro ludo habet, orationem pro deliciis: spaces of female private devotion

As homes were the primary centres of their existence and thus also their anxieties, it is only natural that an intrinsic part of the religious life of late antique Roman women continued to develop in their privacy.[90] But how did women interact with the sacred and its visual expressions in their private spaces?

To have a private shrine inside one's home was not an unusual occurrence in the early 5th-century Rome. Roman *matrona* Melania is reported by her *vita* to have prayed in her private church, perhaps set inside her family's Caelian Hill mansion, on the festive August night around the year 405, when the too advanced stage of her pregnancy precluded her participation in the vigil of the martyr Laurence inside his funerary basilica.[91] She was not the only one to communicate with the sacred at home. Affluent new Christians from the Caelian Hill neighbourhood and the nearby Aventine, as we will see in the next pages, were, no more than the pagan aristocrats, adverse to domestic shrines and increasingly complex domestic liturgy, possibly inspired by the emperors' house-based building projects and religiosity.[92]

The pace of the religious building in the city of Rome did not manage to satisfy the demand of the rapidly Christianizing population. In close link with the pre-Christian tradition of the republican and imperial period it was the house churches that continued to host majority of the everyday liturgical rites in the 4th century, before the basilicas and *tituli* populated the urban landscape. They were also the places in which the cult of relics and the ascetic movement were nurtured in their infancy stage.[93] Kim Bowes explains that although early Christians gathered in the newly emerging basilicas and community centres, the home remained the primary setting

[90] Bowes 2008, p. 76.
[91] *Vita Melaniae* 5, in: Gorce 1962, pp. 135-137. For the discussion about the event, see: Bowes 2008, p. 61.
[92] *Ibidem*, pp. 61-63. For the imperial chapel in the palace of Constantine the Great (306-337) see: Cerrito 2002, p. 401 and note 18.
[93] Bowes 2008, pp. 62, 72-73. The hypothesis that house churches filled the void created by the insufficient public religious building activity was put forward by Pietri 1976, p. 116 and Krautheimer 2000, p. 18. For more information about the complex relationship between the popes and the households of lay aristocrats in Rome see: Lizzi Testa 2004, pp. 55-125; Sessa 2012.

for fundamental Christian rituals. Daily prayer and communion continued in domestic spaces, mirroring similar practices developing in public venues. In the increasingly numerous homes of Christian elites, these rituals expanded in both substance and physical setting. Community-oriented ceremonies like the Eucharistic mass were brought into private residences along with members of the clergy, while ritual spaces grew more elaborate, establishing the earliest household shrines and churches.[94]

As we have already discussed, the more or less independently acting aristocratic owners of the shrines and their foundations were not always viewed kindly by the episcopate, even though they were tolerated. But there were, of course, also church representatives who did not succumb to the tensions. Jerome, for example, is well known for advising his circle of aristocratic women on the Aventine to keep to their own homes in constant prayer in order to shield themselves from the corruptive power of the society and to cultivate their mind and soul.[95]

The daily private prayer, oftentimes repeated at dawn, in the evening and before mealtimes even in non-ascetic households, was part of every Christians' everyday life, fulfilling the persistent need of divine presence as a guarantee of salvation, healing and guidance. It was only natural that this private individual need was sated in the private space of one's own home.[96] And if it was possible to perform the ritual in the presence of martyrs' relics, even better.

But despite the fact that private churches were indisputably part of the Roman network of worship, with Melania the Younger and the wealthy widows Marcella and Anicia Faltonia Proba reported or suspected to have had them, and even the already famous bishop Ambrose seemingly persuaded by a *matrona* in Trastevere to officiate a mass in one, they had a dangerous potential to break down barriers between the outside world and the Church.[97] The fragile

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[94] Bowes 2008, p. 75.

[95] *Ibidem*, pp. 63, 71, 78. For the primary source see: Jerome, ep. 22.17, 38.4, 54.11, 127.9, in: Wright 2010, pp. 84-87, 162-165, 248-251, 456-457. The Christian Church was by no means centralized in the 4th century and the pope often struggled to control even some of its more prominent members, commemorated by the preserved written sources. Damasus (366-384), for example, solicited an imperial law from 370, directed against members of the clergy who lured female aristocrats in order to secure wills to their own benefit, in an attempt to curb the financial independence of the titular clergy and ascetics, who challenged funding of his own foundations: Lizzi Testa 2004, pp. 109-112. The law appears in *Codex Theodosianus* 16.2.20, in: Pharr 1952, pp. 443-444.

[96] Bowes 2008, p. 76.

[97] *Vita Melaniae* 5, in: Gorce 1962, pp. 135-137; Jerome, ep. 127.9, in: Wright 2010, pp. 456-457; Augustine, ep. 130, in: Parsons 1953a, pp. 376-401 and *Vita Ambrosii* II.10, Kaniecka 1928, pp. 48-49. This statement is based on Bowes 2008, p. 98, who comes to the conclusion that even though in the case of Marcella and Proba the epistles do not specify they were performing their prayers inside of a house church, as ascetics they probably maintained some kind of ritual space for their sake as well as that of their ascetic friends and dependents. In the case of Ambrose, counted by Bowes 2008, p. 78 as an example of private liturgy in a private oratory, Cerrito 2002, p. 401 doubts the existence of a private chapel on the basis of insufficient evidence, pointing out that the primary source only states that Ambrose was invited to perform a sacrifice "*in domo*", but the space where the sacrifice took space

dominance of the Church hierarchy over the faithful, based on the public performance of religious rituals, was threatened by the fact that private rites offered an expanded ritual role to the patrons, which were able to administer the Eucharist by their own hand in their private shrines or light the lamps in a ritual accompanied by prayer called *lucernarium*.[98] Were options to perform aforementioned rites extended to female ascetics such as Albina and Marcella, two of the early patrons of Jerome? Were they able to handle the eucharistic bread like their male counterparts, or was it one of the reasons, apart from need of scriptural advice and liturgical service, why they employed a bevy of priests and monks for their large Aventine household?[99] The questions have to remain without a conclusive answer for now, as we will deal with them in chapter 4.

However well they are attested in the contemporary textual corpus, the archaeological evidence of domestic shrines inside aristocratic homes in Rome is scarce.[100] When the *domus* of the Melania's in-laws Valerius Severus Eutropius and his wife, with whom she is said to have lived for at least part of her stay in Rome, was excavated, no church was ever found.[101] The situation on the Aventine is no better. The only oratory excavated there in the 18th century in front of the church of Santa Prisca and at first dated to the 4th century was instead linked by Alessandra Cerrito in 2002 to the oratory cited by *Liber Pontificalis* in relation to the monastery of St. Donatus, posterior to the late antique period.[102]

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is further unspecified. The Church was feeling so threatened by the private liturgical rites that it tried to gradually limit them through regulations. While the canon LVIII of the council of Laodicea (320) and the canon VI of the council of Gangra (328) conclude only that such rites are inconvenient, the canon IX of the council of Cartage (390) bans them in absence of an episcopal authorization and the canon IV of the council of Chalcedon (451) even requires an episcopal authorization of the building of private oratories inside houses. See: Cerrito 2002, p. 400, with primary sources cited.

[98] Bowes 2008, pp. 76-78, 80-82. *Lucernarium* was not exclusive to Christians, as it was practiced by both Jews and pre-Christian Romans, but in the 4th century it was already associated with the public Christian liturgy: Prudentius, *Hymnus ad incensum lucernae* (*Liber Cathemerinon* V), in: Richardson 2016, pp. 46-50. See Jerome, ep. 107.9, in: Wright 2010, p. 360 for note on existence of private form of the ritual: "…*accensaque lucernula reddere sacrificium uespertinum*".

[99] Jerome, ep. 127.3: "*Nusquam sine matre, nullum clericorum et monachorum—quod amplae domus interdum exigebat necessitas—vidit absque arbitris*". ("Nowhere would she go without her mother, never would she interview without witnesses one of the monks, or clergy, which was often necessary for the needs of her large household."), in: Wright 2010, pp. 444-445.

[100] All the written evidence is quoted by Cerrito 2002, p. 398, note 3. On the same page the author also remarks on the scarcity of the archaeological evidence. See pp. 410-418 for two excavated examples of late antique private oratories, which the author considers indubitable: the one under the Lateran hospital, discussed further in cat. n. 2.28 of this thesis, and the one excavated in Monte della Giustizia, discussed by Piazza 2006 and Caiola 2008, citing previous bibliography on the topic.

[101] Bowes 2008, p. 78; Cerrito 2002, p. 403 with further bibliographical references, which offer a mosaic of disparate arguments both for and against the interpretation of parts of the *domus* as cultic spaces.

[102] *Liber Pontificalis* (pontificate of Leo III, 795-816), in: Duchesne 1892, p. 24. For the connection between the excavated oratory and the passage in *Liber Pontificalis*, see: Cerrito 2002, pp. 403-404, with further bibliography on the oratory. For the initial dating to the 4th century, see: De Rossi 1867, p. 48.

All the more important is the existence of the late 4th- very early 5th-century shrine inside a Roman *domus* under the church of Santi Giovanni e Paolo. The prominence of the owners of the *domus* is best attested by its placement within the Caelian Hill. On the south the complex borders Clivus Scauri, an ancient street branching from the valley between the Palatine and Caelian Hill in the close vicinity of the Temple of Claudius.[103] The closeness of the imperial temple elevated the importance of the quarter, occupied, as we have already seen, by numerous aristocratic houses, whose inhabitants formed the highest echelons of the Roman society[104], and public buildings, such as the basilica Hilariana, associated with the *collegium dendrophorum* (professional corporation of tree-carriers) and their small cultic area dedicated to Attis and Cybele, and *Castra Peregrinorum*, military barracks for the Roman provincial troops.[105]

Lamps and amphoras found in the *domus* attest continuity in the use of the site between the 1st and the 7th century, even though in the last almost two centuries of its existence it seems to have served only as an auxiliary space for the pastoral activities of the *titulus Pamachii*, built above the aristocratic dwelling in the first decades of the 5th century.[106] The peak in the ceramic finds between the years 380 and 450 suggests that the general dwindling of the population of the prestigious residential area after the sack of Rome by Alaric in 410, which resulted in abandoning of the aristocratic houses, spoliation of their precious decoration and the destruction of the pavement of *vicus capitis Africae*, one of the crucial roads in the quarter, did not touch the *domus*, leaving its marble panelling and wall paintings almost intact.[107]

The scope of this thesis does not allow for detailed description and discussion of various functions of the spaces discovered since the first explorations of the site by the amateur archaeologist Father Germano di San Stanislao (1850-1909) in 1887.[108] The focus will be only on a small chamber, constructed on a mezzanine stair-landing, added in the final decades of the

[103] See the complex archeo-topographic map of Rome *Forma Urbis Romae* from Rodolfo Lanciani, pl. 35: Lanciani 2007.
[104] At the end of the 18th century construction works of the Ospedale Militare uncovered a house-complex, identified by an inscription on the floor as *domus* of Gaudentius, luxuriously restored in the 4th century. The *domus* of Symmachi, neighbouring that of Gaudentius and dated in its last phase to the 4th century, was discovered under the Ospedale Militare as well. Remains of the *domus* of Valerii was uncovered further away from the other two, near the Ospedale dell'Addolorata in the Lateran. For bibliographical references see: Coletti 2003, p. 196, note 1226.
[105] *Ibidem*, pp. 196-197.
[106] *Ibidem*, p. 196. For the discussion of the various, often confusing, architectonical strata of the site see: Collini 1944, pp. 137-196; Krautheimer 1953, pp. 265-300; Cecchelli 1978, pp. 551-562; Brenk 2003, pp. 84-113; Englen 2014, pp. 17-327; Astolfi a Englen 2022, pp. 1-86.
[107] Coletti 2003, pp. 196-197. For information about the changes of the topography of the Caelian Hill after 410 see: Pavolini 1993, pp. 161-164.
[108] Brenk 2003, p. 82.

4th century to the monumental staircase, which connected the second floor of the *domus*, later occupied by the abovementioned *titulus Pamachii*, with a courtyard *nymphaeum*, possibly an earlier ritual space, preceding the Christianisation of the *domus* (fig. 1.1).[109] It was Father Germano who, publishing the results of his research in 1894, identified the *domus* as the house of the martyrs John and Paul, who according to their 6th-century *passio* suffered martyrdom in their own dwelling during the reign of the emperor Julian the Apostate (361-363) and were buried directly at the site of their martyrdom.[110] And it was also him who interpreted the structure on the stair landing as a *confessio* above the graves of the two martyrs, a hypothesis widely accepted by researchers until the 1990s.[111] It was only then that Beat Brenk argued convincingly against such function of the chamber, pointing out that the founders of the church above did not care much about it, partially filled it with rubble and cut off the upper part of its walls, an attitude polarly opposite the then already customary veneration of the martyrs' graves.[112] Given that the intramural burial was almost non-existent in 4th-century Rome, it is highly unlikely that a contemporary aristocrat would bury two executed men in his home and would have a *confessio* built above their graves.[113] More believable solution of the conundrum which is the function of the chamber is to see in it, as Beat Brenk suggested, a private reliquary shrine.[114]

Wall paintings cover the space completely, reaching to the floor and literally forcing the viewer to kneel in order to be able to see them in detail.[115] While the ones on the upper part of the side walls depict scenes of martyrdom of one female and two male figures, which have been disparately identified as either Priscus, Priscillianus, and Benedicta, followers of John and Paul, martyred for their association with them, or Nicomedian martyrs Cyprian, Justina, and Theoktistos, brought posthumously to Rome by a group of sailors, chamber's focus is on the fresco with a male orant figure framed by two drawn curtains, surrounded by a kneeling pair of faithful in the act of *proskynesis* on the rear wall (fig. 1.2-3).[116] The use of curtains highlights

[109] Bowes 2008, pp. 88-91. For more information about *titulus Pamachii* see: Brandenburg 2013, pp. 164-172 with further bibliography.
[110] Di San Stanislao 1894. For the *passio* of the two martyrs with commentary see: Lapidge 2018, pp. 363-380.
[111] This hypothesis, proposed by Di San Stanislao 1894, pp. 236-267 and further developed by Krautheimer 1953, pp. 284-285 and Collini 1944, pp. 180-181 was subsequently repeated by all studies but the most recent ones. For complete bibliography dealing with the space and its wall paintings see cat. n. 2.19 in this thesis.
[112] Brenk 1995 and Brenk 2003, pp. 82, 101-102.
[113] Bowes 2008, p. 89.
[114] Brenk 2003, pp. 99, 102.
[115] *Ibidem*, p. 99.
[116] The martyrs were identified as Priscus, Priscillianus and Benedicta by Marucchi 1888, pp. 69-70. Franchi De'Cavalieri 1935 pointed out that the martyrdom Priscus, Priscillianus, and Benedicta appears only in the later versions of the *passio* of John and Paul, which postdates the wall paintings. Instead, he found multiple parallels

the importance of the portrayed figure. Such privilege was afforded either to the emperor, who was hidden and then displayed to the viewers in a theatrical court ceremony, or to the image of the enthroned Mother of God in the Constantinopolitan convent of Blachernae, where the curtains were drawn once per week to reveal her to the faithful.[117] The pair demonstrates the customary form of worship at a holy site, described by Prudentius for the shrine of martyr Cassian:

"In front of the tomb I fell prostrate upon the earth which the holy martyr Cassian honors with his consecrated body".[118]

The importance of the figure between the curtains is further underlined by the position of two male and two female figures on the lower portion of the side walls, possibly family members of the central couple, who are slightly turning towards it (fig. 1.4). The orant is in close relationship with the small niche higher on the wall, most probably housing a reliquary with contact relics, which touched the body of unknown martyr/martyrs (either *brandea* from cloth, or oil poured inside their tomb), dust from around their tomb, oil from the lamps which were lit over it, even bark of trees which grew around the tomb, or, which would be more unusual, small bones of the martyr/martyrs themselves.[119] The fact that one of the male figures on the left wall holds a glass chalice, which he brings to the figure of the orant as a votive offering, and the veneration afforded to it by the central couple, lead to the inevitable conclusion that it must have been a representation of a holy figure, most probably a martyr, whose remains or contact relics the reliquary contained (fig. 1.5).[120] According to Ana Munk, a devotee visiting the shrine would view the image as a reanimation of the holy remains and confirmation of the saint's living presence, reconnected with the living. The martyr's depiction represents his corporal,

between the painted compositions and the *passio* of Cyprian, Justina, and Theoktistos, written in the first half of the 5th century. Because of the fact that the Roman *matrona* who got hold of the relics after their transfer to the city was reported by the *passio* to have brought them to the Caelian Hill, and her name corresponds with the name on the *graffiti* discovered on the left wall of the chamber, this hypothesis was accepted by Wilpert 1937. The *graffiti*, however, was never precisely dated and it is uncertain that it belonged to the owner of the *domus* and the chapel. None of the martyrs in the scenes bears a name and the paintings are focused on the figures rather than the environment in which the martyrdom takes place, which makes the identification of the personages impossible.

[117] Rubery 2014, p. 141.

[118] Munk 2009, p. 15, quoting Prudentius, *Liber Peristephanon* IX. For the Latin version of the source see: Thompson 1953, pp. 220-222: "*Stratus humi tumulo advolvebar, quem sacer ornat martyr dicato Cassianus corpore.*"

[119] Brenk 2003, pp. 102-103. About various types of indirect relics and marked preference for contact relics (oil, *brandea*) in Rome see: Wiśniewski 2019, pp. 136-138, 216.

[120] Belting 1994, p. 80 and Brenk 2003, pp. 99-100.

eternal, animated self; it embodies his *virtutas*, the sacred power that remains within his relics.[121]

In the accounts of early pilgrimages to the Holy Land, there is an overwhelming emphasis on the importance of the private physical contact with the sacred.[122] Many drank from the head of St. Theodota the martyr in the Church of Holy Sion in Jerusalem, bathed in the Jordan river, reclined on the couch on which Jesus reclined in the garden of Gethsemane, and kissed the wood of the Cross to gain blessing.[123] The same is true for Rome, where Prudentius, as we have already mentioned earlier in this chapter, observes both inhabitants of the city and pilgrims kissing the tombs of the martyrs and generously bathing them with oils and tears.[124] But how close could women get to the venerated body parts or objects/substances that touched them? The notoriously famous story about the Carthaginian lady Lucilla kissing a bone of a martyr regularly just before receiving the Eucharist may be more a libelous and exaggerated pamphlet against Donatism, intended to shock its audience, than a trustworthy source of information regarding female strategies of worship in Late Antiquity.[125] Yet it does not negate the adoption

[121] Munk 2009, p. 15.

[122] Herrin 2013, p. 48. For more information on the importance of the senses in early Christian worship see chapter 3 of this thesis.

[123] Vikan 2010, pp. 13-14, quoting the 6th-century notes of the so-called Piacenza pilgrim, parts 11, 17, 20, 22 (published in: Wilkinson 1977, pp. 82-84).

[124] Wiśniewski 2019, pp. 130-134 states that apart from the ceremony of translation itself the faithful had very few possibilities to get in close contact with the relics, and even during the translation the direct access to the martyrs through touch was most often granted only to the Church officials. Periodically repeated opening of reliquaries for a wider audience and facilitation of close contact with the martyrs' bones is attested only for the late 4th-century Cappadocia, even though none of the sources confirms the contact through touch securely. Writings of Gregory of Nazianzus (329-390), Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335-c. 394) and Basil the Great (330-379) only offer evidence suggesting that relics were more accessible during festival celebrations and the faithful gathered inside the martyr's church were allowed to approach them more closely than they normally would. It is also possible that the reliquaries were opened upon request for important guests, such as high Church officials and aristocrats, who visited the sanctuary. Written sources for other parts of the Mediterranean (writings of John Chrysostom (398-407) for Syria and Constantinople, of Prudentius (348-c. 410) for Rome, of Gregory of Tours (c. 538-593/4) for Gaul) offer a picture of much more regulated and indirect access to the sacred remains, often through touching of the reliquaries or tombs (not attested well for Syria), which were believed to transfer rather than restrain the power of the relics housed inside.

[125] Wiśniewski 2011. The story of Lucilla is described by bishop Optatus of Milevis in his *Contra Parmenianum* 1.16.1, written between 364 and 367 (in: Edwards 1997, p. 16). According to him, the wealthy lady used her money and contacts to induce a group of African bishops to reject an election of Caecilian as bishop of Carthage in 311, outraged by his rebuke of her habit to kiss a bone of a martyr, who was not yet confirmed as such by the Church, before partaking in the Eucharist. The episode was generally accepted by the scholars before Wiśniewski (see note 2 of the above cited article) as a testimony of a real practice, albeit controversial. Wiśniewski refutes such interpretation of the text and points out that were the story real, Lucilla would worship the relic before the Diocletianic persecution, that is, half a century before the earliest known translations of martyrs' bodies, which makes its authenticity dubious. He instead sees the episode as a rhetoric tool, utilized by Optatus to create an image of greedy and dishonourable nobility of the city of Carthage who he blames for turning the public opinion against Caecilian and starting the Donatist schism half a century before he, Optatus, writes the treatise *Contra Parmenianum*, a polemic against none other than a Donatist bishop of Carthage Parmenianus. To build an impeccable image of his villains, Optatus therefore has them lead by, oh, horror, a woman, which venerates a bone (another transgression at a time when the bodies of martyrs were not to be divided) through *libare*, a verb used in

of physical relic veneration as one of the attitudes available for women, even if only those of substantial means, inside their private sphere.

If we focus only on the activity of lay Christians, we gain the impression that women had access to relics equal to the men's and were even more active in collecting them.[126] By the end of the 4th century, reports of relic trade include traces of hectic activity of elite Christian women with ties to Rome, some of the wealthiest and well-connected in the Empire, such as Melania the Elder, exchanging relics of the True Cross with Paulinus of Nola (c. 410-431).[127] By the beginning of the 5th century at the latest a small church dedicated to martyr Felix of Nola was bult in close vicinity to a wealthy aristocratic *domus* on the Pincian Hill, probably occupied by Anicia Faltonia Proba and her husband, consul Petronius Probus.[128] It is no surprise that the "father" of the cult of the martyr, the already mentioned Paulinus of Nola, belonged to the vast social network around the couple, and the hypothesis that he had sent them a relic as a sumptuous gift seems to be a logical conclusion, given the fact that the Pincian sanctuary is the only shrine dedicated to the martyr outside of Nola.[129] Even the later discovery of the relics of martyr Stephen roused the interest of imperial and aristocratic women like widow Galla, who, together with her daughter, carried the relics of the martyr, honoured by Augustine (396-430), to his fellow bishop Quintilianus, or Proba's granddaughter Anicia Demetrias, who, as we have already seen, had a shrine built for them.[130] Despite the fact that bishops usually thought that the relics deposited in lay houses should be ideally transferred to churches, where they would be firmly under ecclesiastical control, it seems that their powerful sponsors and friends, women included, were to be somewhat exempt from this rule.[131]

The woman from the pair kneeling in front of the figure of the martyr in the domestic shrine on the Celian Hill is depicted as equal participant in the act of worship. As a prominent inhabitant of the house she was in daily contact with the relics housed in the niche, profiting from their

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religious context of the 4th century to refer to heathen or, rarely, biblical sacrifices and spiritual offerings, not to describe contemporary pious customs.

[126] Wiśniewski 2019, p. 141.

[127] Paulinus of Nola, ep. 31.1, in: Walsh 1988b, p. 125. For more information see: Bowes 2008, pp. 84-85, 92.

[128] See Sotinel 2002 for more information about the church and Guidobaldi and Jolivet 1995 for more information about the *domus*.

[129] Bowes 2008, p. 92. See Sassi 2020 for more information about the cult of Felix in Nola and further bibliography. For the network of connections linking Paulinus to Petronius Probus and his wife see: Trout 1999, pp. 38-39.

[130] Wiśniewski 2019, p. 141. Galla, a widow, acting as a messenger for the bishop of Hippo together with her daughter, a consecrated virgin, is recorded in Augustine, ep. 212, dated around the year 425, in: Parsons 1956, pp. 51-52.

[131] Wiśniewski 2019, pp. 138-139. Jerome, for example, advises ascetic noblewoman Eustochium to stay home and to seek the help of the martyrs in her own chamber, if she wishes for it. See Jerome, ep. 22.17, in: Wright 2010, pp. 84-85: "*…martyres tibi quaerantur in cubiculo tuo*".

healing and salvific power, kneeling, praying and singing psalms in front of them and maybe even touching and kissing them in the space deliberately built in such a way as to offer an intimate setting in which the faithful could contemplate the suffering as a way to God and salvation and communicate with the sacred in solitude.[132] And depending on her familial and social ties, it is not impossible that she was the one that facilitated the transfer of the said relics to the *domus*.

Quod multi cupiunt et rari accipiunt: heading for the afterlife in the company of Peter and Paul

In the late 6th century empress Constantina (582-602) makes a plea to Gregory the Great (590-604) for a corporeal relic of Apostle Paul. Even though Gregory refutes her request, arguing that he would not dare to open the Apostle's tomb, he offers to provide her with a contact relic, a strip of cloth placed into the grave of the martyr to be sanctified by the contact and carefully weighed before and after the act to prove that it soaked in the divine power and became heavier, a process described by Gregory of Tours (c. 538-593/4) for the tomb of Apostle Peter. While we cannot know if the empress felt completely satisfied with the replacement relic offered to her, the letter together with the archaeological evidence of an opening found in the slab that covered the tomb of the Apostle in Late Antiquity, through which the *brandea* could be lowered to touch his coffin, attest for avid interest in the awe inducing miraculous powers of the Apostles' bodies.[133]

Approximately at the same time *Dialogi*, composed in a question-and-answer format and intended as edifying tales about the saints of *Italia*, written to fill the gap Gregory perceived in his homeland, feature apostle Peter as one of the three saintly figures that appear in the visions

[132] Wiśniewski 2019, pp. 140-142. According to the author, such actions were reserved for wearable relics above all others but cannot be completely excluded in the case of privately held non-portable relics as well. At the same time, he warns the reader that the sources from the dioceses *Britannia, Gallia, Italia, Septem Provinciarum* and *Hispania* are opaque on the matter and do not allow for an unambiguous conclusion that late antique people were able to freely touch the privately owned relics. See Brenk 2003, pp. 98, 101 for the idea that the message of the concise iconographic programme focuses on finding a way to God through the example of the suffering martyrs and that the chapel was deliberately built with reduced dimensions of 1.21 meters by 1.10 meters to resemble a *lararium* (pre-Christian form of a house shrine tended by the lady of the house) and to allow only one person inside. Munk 2009, p. 13 brings more arguments in support of the hypothesis that the 4th-century Christian household shrines were direct descendants of the *lararium*s.

[133] Wiśniewski 2019, p. 136, quoting Gregory the Great, ep. IV.30, in: Martyn 2011, p. 48 and his namesake, writing in the same period, Gregory of Tours, *Liber in gloria martyrum* 27, in: Van Dam 2004, pp. 24-25.

of Roman female protagonists of the books, the other two being the Virgin and oddly enough pope Felix.[134] In book IV, chapter 14, apostle Peter appears in a vision to Galla, a noblewoman who entered a convent of St. Stephan in Rome, portrayed on her deathbed. She is forgiven by him for all her sins and granted a wish of company of one of her sisters, Benedicta, in heaven. In the tale, Peter takes the function of an intercessor, allowing the dying nun contact with the otherworld and God and absolving her of the fear "of the penal sentence of death".[135]

What Gregory the Great documents in the late 6th century is a flourishing of a cult which had its roots in Rome around the time shortly after the last massive persecutions of Christians. At first the devotion to Peter and Paul was channelled through graffiti, left on the walls of the *Memoria Apostolorum* along Via Appia and in the Vatican necropolis between the 3rd and the beginning of the 4th century by the visitors of what were assumed to be respectively the cemetery where the bodies of the martyred Apostles were first deposited after the execution and the cemetery Peter's remains were transferred to shortly after (Paul's were supposedly buried near Via Ostiense).[136] Devotees, among which at least four women, Eutichia, Gaudentia, Venerosa Vea, and Verus Bonifatia, invoked the martyred Princes of Apostles and prayed to them for long life and protection.[137]

At least since the pontificate of Liberius (352-366) popes came to the basilica of St. Peter to celebrate certain great festival days, in particular Christmas. By the late 4th century, the feast of both Apostles on the 29th of June was moved from its earlier site *ad catacumbas* on Via Appia to the basilicas in the Vatican and on Via Ostiense.[138] From the very beginning of his pontificate, Leo I promoted Peter as patron of Rome, stressing that his presence in the city elevated it to the position of *caput mundi* and assigning himself primacy among the other bishops on the basis of his status of the successor of the first among the Apostles.[139] In line with this rhetoric of the

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[134] See Gregory the Great, *Dialogi* 4.14, 4.17, 4.18, in: Zimmermann 2002, pp. 206, 211-212.

[135] Neil 2015 on dreams and visions in the *Dialogi* of Gregory the Great and on the interpretation of dreams in early Christian thought. See p. 338 for the quotation.

[136] Carletti 2008, pp. 265-271. For extensive analysis of the graffiti in the Vatican necropolis see: Guarducci 1958. For more information about the burial sites of Peter and Paul according to their legends see: Thacker 2020, pp. 257-258, 260.

[137] Carletti 2008, pp. 268, 270: "*Πέτρε Παίτρε μνημόνευαι/ Τιμοκράτην καὶ Εὐ-/ τυχείαν κινα(?) καὶ/ ἐσώρα(?) ++[---]*", "*Victor Gaudentia / vivatis in Chr(isto)*", "*Venerosa Vea/ Veru Bonifatia/ Verus Bonifatia Venerosa Vea*".

[138] Thacker 2012, p. 383 and Thacker 2013, pp. 144-145. Prudentius, *Liber Peristephanon* XII.63-64, in: Krisak 2021, p. 153 describes how the bishop has to celebrate the liturgy at St. Peter's and then has to hurry to the basilica of San Paolo fuori le mura to do the same.

[139] Thacker 2012, p. 395. See Leo the Great, *Sermones* 2 (emphasis on the presence and blessing of St. Peter on the occasion of the 1st anniversary of Leo's episcopate), 4 ("*de toto mundo unus Petrus eligitur, qui et universarum gentium vocationi et omnibus apostolis cunctisque Ecclesiae Patribus praeponitur*"), 82 ("*per sacram beati Petri sedem caput totius orbis effecta*"), in: Migne 1846b, colls. 143-144, 149, 423.

pope was the mosaic on the triumphal arch of the basilica of San Paolo fuori le mura, in which the mother of emperor Valentinian III (425-455), Galla Placidia (392-450), had the Apostles Peter and Paul, depicted on either side of the arch, celebrated through an inscription as "chosen vessel of the faith for the gentiles" (Paul) and "the ruler of the Church, the rock of Christ, and the summit of honour" (Peter).[140] Interesting for our research on the relationship of Roman women with the martyrs is also the fact that apart from the Easter week and the feast of Epiphany, it were only the feast days of the Apostles when virgins could be consecrated, according to the stipulations of the decretal of pope Gelasius from May 494.[141]

It seems that every spiritual re-birth of the Christian was to be guided and accompanied by martyrs to be considered prestigious. Association of the baptism with martyrs, whose blood cleansed the sins as much as the purifying water of baptism did, was common in the later 4th century and at least according to some surviving contemporary accounts and archaeological evidence in dioceses *Africa*, *Aegyptus*, *Hispania*, and Constantinople martyrs' tombs were either visited as part of the catechesis or baptisteries became part of the frequently visited martyrs' shrines.[142] And let's not forget the baptistery-building project in the basilica of St. Peter, for which pope Damasus, the most capable Roman impresario of the martyrs, tends to be credited.[143] It should therefore come as no surprise that martyrs' presence was invoked after death, when the soul of the deceased was expected to make the difficult journey to the otherworld, as well.

In the funerary inscriptions they are invoked as companions, intercessors, and protectors of the deceased on their journey to the otherworld.[144] Once again, as with other martyrs whose cult

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[140] Thacker 2012, p. 396, esp. note 83. The mosaic is now lost. It was recorded in the 7th-century *Syllogae Turonensis*, which, however, omit the inscription associated with Paul. Giovanni Battista de Rossi reconstructed the whole mosaic, adapting a reconstruction from the 17th century based upon few surviving letters from the original inscription (ICUR II, NS, n. 4786 a, b): "*Persequitur dum vasa Dei fit Paulus Honoris/ vas se delictum genitibus esse probat*" and "*Voce Dei fis Petre Dei Petra culmen honoris/ aule celestis splendor et homne decus*". For more information about the mosaic, see: Bordi 2006, pp. 395-402.

[141] Gelasius, General Decretal/ Letter 14, paragraph 12: "By no means let them put the sacred veil on dedicated virgins, save either on Epiphany day or in the white days of Easter, or on the feast days of the apostles, unless perhaps, just as we said about baptism, they have been overcome by serious ill-health; lest they pass from the world without this gift, it should not be denied to those who pray earnestly for it." In: Neil and Allen 2014, pp. 150-151. By the "white days of Easter", Gelasius means the week after Easter, when those who had been baptised wore their white baptismal clothes (p. 150, note 23). For the Latin version of the text, see: Thiel 1867, p. 369: "*Devotis quoque Deo virginibus, nisi aut in Epiphaniarum die aut in albis paschalibus, aut in apostolorum natalitiis sacrum minime velamen imponant, nisi forsitan, sicut de baptismate dictum est, gravi languore correptis ne sine hoc munere de saeculo transeant, implorantibus non negetur.*"

[142] Hellström 2020, p. 188. For further information see: Brändle 2011 and Jensen 2011.

[143] Hellström 2020, p. 200, who is referencing Trout 2015, pp. 84-87, strongly in favour of the hypothesis. For the discussion about the position of the baptistery, see: Brandt 2013, who however is not convinced that Damasus (366-384) was its commissioner.

[144] Carletti 2008, pp. 85-86.

was present in Rome, in epitaphs women play various roles in relation to them. They are entrusted to their care in the afterlife by their loved ones ("May she live in the name of Peter, in peace")[145], they leave their family members in the presence of the Apostles ("for the merit of his life he would be associated with the saints")[146], or actively commission place for themselves near their *memoria* ("bought a sepulchre in the proximity of the *memoria* of Peter and Paul")[147].

It was mostly because of the intervention of pope Damasus (366-384), who, supported by the local aristocracy, launched a grand campaign focusing the attention of both living and dead (or more so of their kin) on the martyrs and their tombs, oftentimes creatively spinning stories of venerable men and women which did not even exist, cementing them in the collective memory through his epigrams at the cemeteries outside of the walls of the city.[148] Thus martyrs began to represent a privileged class of inhabitants of the Roman catacombs. They were, so to speak, "deceased *par excellence*", sanctified through their sacrifice and very close to God, yet with bodies securely located in the churches and underground cemeteries, possible to reach and worship by the believers. These factors played into the creation of the image of the martyrs, be it written or visual, as ideal intercessors between the believers, both alive and deceased, and the otherworld. Their names in the inscriptions and faces on wall paintings, gold glasses, and sarcophagi were believed to have salvific and apotropaic functions and were viewed as guarantors of the reunion of the soul of the faithful with God.[149]

The yearning for the martyrs was enhanced by sharpening of the sense of distance through imposing of limits on the closeness which the devotees were able to achieve in the shrine

[145]Database *Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity*, evidence ID E07493, http://csla.history.ox.ac.uk/record.php?recid=E07493 (last viewed on 30. 12. 2024): "*Ruta omnibus subdita et atfabi-/ lis bibet in nomine Petri/ in pace ☧*", now lost, but probably displayed in the cemetery of Priscilla, approximately second half of the 4th century (ICUR NS VIII, 23266).

[146] *Epigraphic Database Bari*, EDB43136 (https://www.edb.uniba.it/epigraph/43136, last viewed on 21. 09. 2024): "*hic situs est claro quondam qui nomine causas/ oravit meruitque pater conscribtus haberi/ nec longo post aevo dixit iura Viennae/ inde iter Italiam magno cumulandus honore/ ni luctu tristem linquens Eventius urbem/ neu vitae merito sanctis sociandus obisset/ bis vicenos vixit quarto recessit in anno/ et geminam prolem sexu ex utroque reliquit/ coniuge Faustina fisus quae victa dolore/ transigeret vita ⟨m⟩ sed tenta pignore karo/ [pergere]t ut parvos defuncto debet amorem/ [atque] viro castam promisit ducere vitam/ [--- ka]l(endas) aug(ustas) dd nn (: do minis nostris) Honorio VII et Theodosio II Augg (: Augustis) cons(ulibu)s*", found in the St. Peter's Basilica, now housed in the Grotte Vaticane, dated to 407.

[147] Carletti 2008, p. 177: "*[---?] deposita X++ [kal(endas) --- d(omino) n(ostro) Fl(avio) Honorio Aug(usto) III et]/ d(omino) n(ostro) Fl(avio) Ar ⟨ca⟩ dio Aug(usto) IIII cons(ulibu)s m[atri ---]/ Eros et Leo et Setema locu [emerunt ad limina Petri et]/ Pauli sub episcopatu Si[ricii a presbb(iteris) tit(uli) Byzantis Urso]/ et Proclino*", found in the cemetery of S. Sebastian, dated to 396.

[148] Thacker 2020, pp. 260-262. Sághy 2021, pp. 122-124 points out that the literary and historical evidence on Roman martyrs is relatively meagre before Damasus, and it was him who added personal memories and oral tradition to the local martyrs' lists to make them better suited for the needs of the contemporary devotional practice.

[149] Petrucci 1995, pp. 39-42

housing their remains. The holy were housed behind closed surfaces, totally hidden or only partially reachable through narrow openings. One can easily envision that, as Peter Brown has eloquently articulated, the deliberately preserved balance between remoteness and closeness guaranteed that experiencing of the physical manifestation of holiness was the most profound blessing available to Christians in Late Antiquity.[150]

Burial in the presence of the martyrs, be it physical or metaphorical, was considered to be an utmost honour, assigned to the deceased by the merit of their social stance or desirable public activity.[151] The epitaph with a eulogy of Cyriaca, probably originating from the cemetery of Cyriaca and dated to the 4th century, formulates clearly what was expected of the martyrs in the afterlife: they were to intercede on her behalf as her *advocati*, presenting to God a testimony of her pious life.[152] As attested by the now lost inscription, dedicated in 382 to a woman who merited "*sepulcrum ad limina sanctorum*" by her charitable deeds in favour of the poor, it was an honour which "many desired but few received", but when it had been merited, it was available fairly to both sexes.[153]

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[150] Brown 1981, pp. 87-88.

[151] For the late antique burials *ad sanctos* see: Wiśniewski 2019, pp. 83-100.

[152] Database *Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity*, evidence ID E05290, http://csla.history.ox.ac.uk/record.php?recid=E05290 (last viewed on 30. 12. 2024): "*[Q]uiriace/ [qua]mquam nul<l>um ab his sorte et cond<iti>one esse inmunem/ [liqu]ido constet verum id nobis dolori est quod rari exempli/ [fem]ina in qua iustitia mirabilis innocentia singularis castitas/ [inc]onparabilis obsequentissima in omnibus/ [con]tinentissima orbatis tribus libiris qui una mecu huic sepulcr<o>/ [pre]conia laudis eiusdem indiderunt inmaturis/ [ina]nis sit a nobis ad quietem pacis tr<a>nslata cuique pro vitae suae/ [tes]timonium sancti matyres aput Deum et (Christum) erunt advocati/ [qu]ae vixit mecum inculpabiliter et cum omni suavitate/ [du]lcissime annis IIII mensibus quinque diebus duodecim/vixit*" (ICUR NS VII, 17765).

[153] Janssens 1981, pp. 244-245. For the source see: ICUR NS, I, 3127: "*[…]na in dom(ino) cultrix/ […]p nutrivit/ […s]uis/ […amatrix pau]perorum/ […quae pro tanta] merita accepit/ [sepulcrum intra l]imina sanctorum/ […]t accepit,/ [quod multi cupiu]n(t) et rari accipiun(t)/ […Antonio et S]uagrio c(on)s(ulibis)*, in: *Epigraphic Database Bari*, number EDB33081, https://www.edb.uniba.it/epigraph/33081 (last viewed on 13. 12. 2024). At least 21 funerary inscriptions from the Roman underground cemeteries, invoking saints or stating burial in closeness to them, dated between the early 4th and the 5th century, can be linked to women. My conclusions are based mostly on the database *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* (http://csla.history.ox.ac.uk, last viewed on 25. 03. 2025) : evidence ID E05311, E07498, E05354, E04731, E05108, E05312, E04729, E05290, E04696, E07493, E07520, E05219, E07477, E05864, E04798, E01867, E05271 supplemented by inscriptions collected by Carletti 2008, pp. 206, 277-278. They represent different roles in which female part of the population of the city participated in the cult of saints in the funerary context: the role of the deceased "laid in the holy martyrion" ("*κατεθαίμην ἰς τὸ ἁγείον μαρτύριν*", E07520, found in the catacomba dei Giordani, Via Salaria, probably late 3rd/early 4th century), "in peace with saints" ("*in pace cum santus*", E05219, found in the cemetery of Castulus, Via Labicana, probably 4th century), "united through the vicinity with saints" ("*bicinitati con[iunc]ta sanctorum*", E05108, found at the cemetery Ad Catacumbas, near the church of San Sebastiano, Via Appia, probably second half of the 4th century), "in peace near the place of the saints" ("*ad sancto[rum] [lo]çum in pace quiescit*", E07498, found in the cemetery of Felicitas, Via Salaria, dated 390), "in peace with the saints" ("*in pace [cum sanct[is]*", E05311, found in the cemetery of Cyriaca, Via Tiburtina, probably 5th century), and the role of the commissioner of the burial space for themselves (usually as a part of a married couple) or for their loved ones "among the saints" ("*inter s[ancto]s*", E05864, found on one of the lower floors of the cemetery of Callixtus, Via Appia, probably 4th century), "near the holy martyr" ("*ad sancta martura*", E05864, found at the cemetery of Agnes, Via Nomentana, probably late 4th century), "behind

In the 4th and 5th century martyrs and saints became new invisible companions, who crowded around men and women to protect them, offer them guidance and model for emulation. They replaced other invisible forces, such as gods and *daimones*, dwelling on the peak of what Plutarch (c. 46-119) defined as multiplicity of the self, directly beneath the divine.[154] According to Peter Brown, regardless of whether this protective entity was described as a personal *daimon*, *genius*, or guardian angel, it served the same purpose: it was an unseen presence assigned to watch over the individual with such intimacy that it functioned not merely as a constant companion but almost as an elevated extension of the person themselves.[155]

Paulinus of Nola follows this ancient outline when describing his intimately close relationship with martyr Felix. He, however, transfers the sense of intimate connection and companionship from the supernatural being of the *daimon* or angel to dead human being, a martyr. By transforming the relationship to that of two human beings, the human day-to-day experience of friendships and bonds is carried into the invisible world.[156] Serving God in the same measure as their fellow humans, but closer to him due to their martyrdom, which allowed them to conquer death, martyrs could offer a degree of intimacy no intercessor of non-human nature could, helping their charges find their place in the tangible world and protecting them after death.[157]

By depicting themselves flanked by the holy figures in the underground *arcosolia* paintings and on gold glass, the deceased, often affluent members of what can be defined as middle class, could emphasize their intimate relationship with them, which was that of a patron and client or even of close spiritual friends, just as the members of the aristocracy did through sarcophagi.[158] In Rome the prestige achieved through such means doubled when the said saints were Peter and

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the saints" ("*retro sanctus*", E05312, found in the cemetery of Cyriaca, Via Tiburtina, probably second half of the 4th-first half of the 5th century).

[154] Brown 1981, pp. 50-51. For the source see: Plutarch, *Moralia. De facie quae in orbe lunae apparet* 28, in: Cherniss and Helmbold 1957, pp. 196-197: "Most people rightly hold man to be composite but wrongly hold him to be composed of only two parts. The reason is that they suppose mind to be somehow part of soul, thus erring no less than those who believe soul to be part of body, for in the same degree as soul is superior to body so is mind better and more divine than soul."

[155] Brown 1981, p. 51. For more examples of written sources from the 3rd and 4th century in support of his argument and discussion of Paulinus of Nola (c. 410-431) and Sulpicius Severus (c. 363-c. 425) as the main continuators of the tradition in early Christian Roman society see also pp. 52-55.

[156] Brown 1981, pp. 55-56. See the series of poems of Paulinus of Nola (*Natalitia*), composed between 395 and 408 to be delivered annually on the feast day of the martyr, in: Dolveck 2015, pp. 293-493, especially Natalitium XIII, pp. 463-491, written in 407, referenced by Brown.

[157] Brown 1981, pp. 60-61, 64-68 and Sághy 2021, p. 121.

[158] Thacker 2020, p. 266 comes to the conclusion that gold glass and frescoed *arcosolia* found in the catacombs point to burials of affluent, but nonetheless non-aristocratic deceased. Cumbo 2021, p. 121 distinguishes between *arcosolia* that bear names of the martyrs and the deceased and those which display anonymous images and points out that the first type alludes to higher social status of the commissioner.

Paul. Visually linked to them on a funerary portrait, they could join the "privileged club" formed by senators, the emperor, and the popes, who all tried their hand in promoting and subsequently exploiting the cults of the Apostles in the 4th and 5th centuries, furnishing and decorating the newly build basilicas dedicated to them, competing in their attempts to secure the most advantageous burial spots inside them, and giving opulent funerary feasts for the poor on their premises.[159]

One of the women who took to the Apostles in search of protection and prestige both in life and beyond, was Peregrina, whose representation was preserved on a gold-glass bottom of a plate, currently housed in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (fig. 1.6). By being broken off from the rest of the object, be it by accident or deliberately, the medallion-like plate base became one of the few portable glass late antique portraits to have survived despite their perishable nature.[160] The origin of the New York "medallion", just like the origin of all the others, discovered, according to the lacklustre records of antiquarians and collectors through the hands of which they passed before being institutionalized, all around Rome, southern Gaul, Cologne, Rhineland and even the Balkans, is only suspected. As it was acquired in Rome, it was most probably removed from a plaster sealing a *loculus* in one of the catacombs together with the majority of other similar glass medallions during their uncontrolled exploration in the 18th and 19th century. The large number of gold glasses recovered from the city and the fact that the iconography, be

[159] Thacker 2012 and Thacker 2013, referencing for St. Peter's the building of the basilica as a monument of imperial triumph by Constantine (306-337), the baptistery and fountain build in the atrium reportedly under pope Damasus (366-384), the high-profile public funeral and opulent sarcophagus of city prefect Junius Bassus close to the Constantinian *memoria* of Peter (359), paired with the sarcophagus of the former praetorian prefect Sextus Petronius Probus, commissioned by his wife Faltonia Proba (around the beginning of the 5th century), the mausoleum build by emperor Honorius (395-423) for his wife Maria (died in the year 407) and eventually for himself and other members of the imperial family, funeral feast held by senator Pammachius for his wife Paulina (395) and the mosaic on the eastern façade, funded, as we have discussed previously in this chapter, by praetorian prefect Marinianus and his wife per request of pope Leo I (440-461) in the 450s. According to the author the situation in the basilica of San Paolo fuori le mura is much less clear. There were, of course, aristocratic burials in the period between the 4th and the early 5th centuries, attested by highly representative sarcophagi discovered inside the basilica, but the interest of the most powerful inhabitants of Rome was not comparable with the case of St. Peter's. This rapidly changed in the 380s, when Theodosius I (379-395), emperor of the eastern part of the Empire, took interest in the basilica and (supposedly) initiated an ambitious re-building project, seconded by his colleague in the West, Valentinian II (375-392). Although Theodosius, who probably intended to be buried in the new complex, as the square structure attached to the southern end of the transept, internally arranged in the form of a cross and designed as a mausoleum suggests, died while the project was still unfinished, his wishes were fulfilled by his son Honorius (395-423), who had the basilica lavishly decorated and dedicated through an inscription originally placed in the apse around the year 400. Around half a century later, during the pontificate of Leo I (440-461) it was again a member of the imperial family, Galla Placidia (392-450), who funded the reconstruction of the basilica after a natural disaster, including a mosaic on the triumphal arch.

[160] The Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. n. 18.145.2. See cat. n. 4.5 in this thesis, Grig 2004b, pp. 206-209 and Howells 2015, pp. 114, 156. The term "portrait" does not exactly describe the nature of the personal representations on the gold-glass medallions. Even if they bear some individualized facial features (but only in instances when the brushed technique was applied, which is not the case of the medallion in question), the representation of the upper body on them is generic. More often than not, the faces are reduced to basic features (eyes, mouth, nose, ears).

it the attire of the laypeople or the identity of the represented martyrs, relates directly to its popular religion and prevalent artistic language, suggest that Rome was likely the manufacturing centre, from which the objects were being distributed throughout the Roman Empire.[161] The antimony and manganese, used for decolouration of the cut and incised technique gold glasses, to which the bottom of the plate in question belongs, as well as the artistic language and choice of depicted subjects point towards the wider 4th century as the production date of most of the objects, without allowing an attribution of a narrower range, except for singular cases depicting martyrs such as Agnes, Lawrence, or Hippolytus, whose fame in Rome was accelerated by the Damasus' campaigns in the second half of the 4th century.[162]

Dressed in a long tunic and belted *dalmatica*, orant Peregrina advertises her wealth, be it real or fictional, through large earrings, necklace, and a fillet in her elaborately plated hair.[163] Beside her stand two beardless male figures, slightly turned towards her and pointing at her with their hands, identified by the above running description as Peter and Paul. Their representation as beardless helps further specify the date of the gold glass in this case. It cannot be later than the middle of the 4th century when beards became a standard for depiction of the Princes of Apostles.[164] Their mere presence in the scene serves the same function as the elaborate coiffure and flashy jewellery: they both signal and strengthen the social prestige of the depicted woman. For her late antique contemporaries, for who's viewing the image was designed, it was insignificant whether it captured who Peregrina actually was. Rather, the important thing was whether the image was able to convey that she strived towards all the correct attributes associated with the ideal, appropriate for her gender and social group.[165]

It is not clear who Peregrina might have been. The possibility that she may have been an otherwise unknown Roman martyr, who wasn't included in the Damasus' martyr popularization project, cannot be excluded (Roman martyr, Agnes, for example, often appeared between Peter and Paul on gold-glass medallions). Yet it is much more likely that the female figure represents

[161] Howells 2015, pp. 53-57. Some medallions, like the one depicting St. Agnes (cat. n. 2.1 in this thesis), still remain *in situ* in the catacombs of Novatianus and Panfilo in Rome: Morey 1959, pp. 39-40 and Filippini 2000. Filacchione 2019 even traces the production of the gold glass to the mosaic workshop which produced glass *tesserae* for the St. Peter's Basilica.
[162] Howells 2015, p. 59 and Sághy 2021, pp. 131-132.
[163] The clothing and accessories on the gold-glass portraits try to emphasize individuals' idealized wealth and status through ostentatious displays of jewellery, heavy embroidered fabrics, or, as will be discussed in the next pages, signs of learning. See: Howells 2015, pp. 115, 125.
[164] Patterson Ševčenko 1979.
[165] Howells 2015, p. 114.

Roman lady Peregrina, who recommends her soul to the care of the two apostles.[166] Parallels for such composition can be found on sarcophagi that show the apostles flanking a standing female orant, obviously meant to represent the dead woman buried within and the name Peregrina, while not common, is found in nine sepulchral inscriptions from the Roman catacombs, dated to the 4th century.[167] Even if we assume that she was a relatively unremarkable member of the Christian community in Rome, not a martyr, the identity of Peregrina and her relationship to the plate which bears her witness remain in the dark. Was she a high-society lady, in whose household the gold-glass plate would be displayed along the more expensive silverware, or a member of the well-to-do family of craftsmen and merchants, wealthy enough to afford expensive glassware? Both options are plausible, as traceable gold-glass objects often came from the areas of the catacombs in which the wealthy part of the "middle class" was buried, pointing towards the fact that they were among their most valuable possessions, worthy to follow them to the land of the dead, yet pieces such as the vessel base gifted by the members of a small community of Acerentia to the prefect of Rome Orfitus show gold glass may not have been out of place even in homes of the extremely wealthy (fig. 1.7). [168]

Whether she had the plate made herself or it was gifted to her by one of her friends or relatives on a memorable occasion, such as baptism, the intent to have her soul protected by the presence of the most exclusive martyrs in the city, both during her lifetime and after her death, when the base of the plate was most probably broken off and inserted into the plaster of her burial spot in the underground cemetery, seems quite clear, and is expressed visually especially through the flowery landscape behind the figures, which alludes to Paradise. Also, it surely didn't hurt that due to the depiction of Peter and Paul the plate may have been used to commemorate the martyrs, on their feast day, just like many other drinking vessels and bowls produced in the same technique, which bear their likeness.[169]

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[166] Grig 2004b, p. 224.

[167] For the listing of all portraits of deceased flanked by Apostles on Roman sarcophagi mostly from the 4th century, sorted by gender and compared, see: Schenk 2017, pp. 411-417. For the sarcophagi with origin traceable to the city of Rome the author is referencing Deichmann, Bovini, and Brandenburg 1967. For the inscriptions see: *Epigraphic Database Bari*, EDB6755, EDB36333, EDB30294, EDB10573, EDB19357, EDB33639, EDB33383, EDB32387, EDB32334, https://www.edb.uniba.it/search/quick/do (last viewed on 17. 12. 2024).

[168] For the discussion of the production costs, owners, and potential functions of late antique gold glass see: Howells 2015, pp. 60-65 and Croci 2022b. The vessel base depicting Orfitus and his wife is currently housed in the British Museum, inv. n. 1863, 0727.3 (cat. n. 6.8 in this thesis).

[169] For the second life of gold glass objects in the Roman catacombs see: De Santis 2000. For the protective potential of gold glass medallions in the funerary context in relation to their shape, which may have symbolized the Sun or Christ as the light of the World see: Sághy 2021, p. 130. For the discussion of the paradisiacal landscape in the context of Roman funerary art see: Bisconti 2011. The potential link between gifting of gold-glass objects and baptism was explored by Hellström 2020.

The gold glass is not the sole medium on which the women of Rome appear between Peter and Paul in the early period of the constituting Christianity. After death female members of the Christian community could choose to be introduced by them to the afterlife through representations on funerary plaques as well, available in variety of execution styles, suitable for diverse budgets and social positions. They could be either made of marble, which was often recycled from architectural decoration of buildings already out of use in the 4th and 5th century, or carved from less durable material, such as limestone, making them widely available to even the less well-to-do Romans.[170]

Due to the constraints of time only one representant of the group will be discussed here, an early 5th-century limestone votive relief from the Wilshere collection of the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford (fig. 1.8). It captures a veiled woman dressed in tunic and *palla* standing in the centre, holding an open book in her left hand and making a speech gesture with the right. She is flanked by two bearded male figures clad in tunics and mantles, facing her. The man on the left extends his right hand towards her, while the man on the right makes a gesture of acclamation, hinting on the authority of the woman, just as much as the *capsae* filled with scrolls in the lower corners of the scene do. Even though the men are not named or differentiated in appearance, the composition and the previous examples of such iconography we have discussed suggest they are Apostles, most probably Peter and Paul. The authoritative image of the woman and the inscription on the plaque, testifying for a fulfilment of a vow of certain Lygirius (or Lygurius) to what has been generally suspected to be some religion-related entity ("*Lygirius votum solvit*"), has led researchers to conclude that the depicted must be either a personification of the Church, or a female martyr. However, as the inscription was clearly added to the plaque after the figures had already been carved and it was not part of the original design, it cannot be used as a guiding light in the interpretation of the identity of the female figure. And, as we will see shortly, the book and scrolls in relation to female funerary representation do not make a solitary appearance in this object.[171]

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[170] See Walker 2017, pp. 107-111 about artistic quality and recycling of material during the production of funerary plaques. Cumbo 2021, p. 122 gives an example of a plaque, found in the Roman *coemeterium Maius*, commissioned by certain Crescentia (cat. n. 4.2 in this thesis), who could only afford a schematic representation made by a less capable stone carver but nonetheless wanted to be represented accompanied by a martyr before entering the otherworld. Other examples of simpler designs of funerary plaques representing deceased women from Rome and Aquileia can be found in: Bisconti 1987, pp. 296, 299, figs. 4 and 9. See also n. 3.1, 3.2 of the catalogue of this thesis.

[171] Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, inv. n. AN 2007.43, published most recently in: Walker 2017, pp. 201-202 and by De Rossi 1872 (cat .n. 4.10 in this thesis). As mentioned above, this funerary plaque is not the only one on which a deceased woman is represented between two male martyrs, who were identified by the scholarship as Peter and Paul without the presence of an inscription, only on the basis of the duality of their image and the

The motif of a woman with a book repeats itself on the composite marble frieze from the Vatican Museums, formed by three disparate fragments of late antique sarcophagus lids, dated between 330 and 360 (fig. 1.9).[172] It is one of the 40 late 3rd to 5th century Roman sarcophagi featuring the motif of the learned woman, with either a book, a scroll, or a *capsa* full of scrolls at her feet, commissioned by members of the elite who could afford elaborate memorials carved from unrecycled Carrara marble displaying superior craftsmanship.[173] Yet, it is unique because Crispina, who is depicted one of the fragments included in the frieze in question, placed centrally among neotestamental scenes, dressed in *palla*, which modestly covers her head, and standing between two palm trees, just as Susana, the supreme early Christian chastity model, often does on catacomb wall paintings and sarcophagi, is one of the rare Christian women whose name is preserved on their funerary image. The codex she is cradling is of interest as well, as it is blatantly monogrammed with *chi rho*, leading the imagination of the viewer securely to the allusion to the Word of Christ contained in the Scriptures, whose connoisseur Crispina undoubtedly was. Her special authority is further confirmed by two male figures to her right, both looking at her and unrelated to the scene of Christ's miracle next to them, and both identified as persons of high social status and authority themselves, because of the scroll one of them is holding and the two-fingered speech gesture the other is performing across his chest.[174]

The idea of female authority is further enhanced on the mid-4th-century sarcophagus from the underground cemetery of martyr Sebastian, currently housed in the Vatican Museums together with the sarcophagus of Crispina (fig. 1.10). It is one of the 73 early Christian Roman

prevalence of the visual representations of the Princes of the Apostles over all other martyrs in Roman environment. The other two plaques with similar iconography, but much more simplistic execution style, are housed in the deposit of the Museo Pio Cristiano of the Vatican Museums (inv. n. MV. 32493, dated to the first half of the 5th century and inv. n. MV. 32496, dated to the 4th century) (cat. n. 4.1, 4.12 in this thesis). I thank prof. Uberto Utro for generously suggesting them to my attention. Both were published by: Garrucci 1880, pp. 142-143, pl. 485. The first one, probably extracted from one of the Roman underground cemeteries at an unknown date and included in the pavement of the chapel of St. Anne of the monastery Santa Maria Maddalena on the Quirinal, demolished in 1888, commemorates Victoria, who is remembered foremost for her role of a wife and is represented in an orant position, with veiled head, above which a Christogram and the heads of two Apostles pave her way to salvation. The second, excavated in the underground cemetery of Cyriaca near the basilica of San Lorenzo fuori le mura and preserved only in its upper half, depicts an anonymous woman with a head covered by *palla*. She is escorted to the afterlife by two male saints, probably to be identified with Peter and Paul. The omnipresence of God, to whom she is to be introduced by the pair, is symbolized by the letters *alpha* and *omega* which frame her head.

[172] Musei Vaticani, inv. n. MV.31552.0.0 (cat. n. 4.3 in this thesis). Published foremost by Deichmann, Bovini, and Brandenburg 1967, pp. 89-90 and Schenk 2017, pp. 195-198.

[173] See Schenk 2017, pp. 234-235 for the numbers of learned women representations on late antique sarcophagi. For the discussion of the production of late antique Roman sarcophagi see: Walker 2017, pp. 107, 110-111.

[174] Schenk 2017, pp. 195-196. For the topic of Susana as model of chastity and her early Christian visual representations see: Smith 1993.

sarcophagi on which the deceased woman, dressed in tunic with her *palla* drawn over her head and holding a scroll, is showed in the company of Apostles Peter and Paul. The apostle Paul, identified by the elongated face and pointed beard, places his arm affectionately on the woman's right arm and turns towards her in a gesture of support and protectiveness. Apostle Peter, characterized by shorter beard and a scroll he is holding, follows the woman's gaze toward the viewer. The fact that both him and his fellow martyr attend the deceased with the utmost care and respect of a level afforded to Christ on the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus or to the philosopher on the so-called Plotinus sarcophagus suggests that she must have been a well-respected woman learned in the Scriptures and this knowledge most probably opened doors to some kind of authority within her community for her.[175]

The representations of deceased women flanked by Peter and Paul repeat themselves on *arcosolia* paintings in the catacombs of Santa Tecla and Domitilla as well (fig. 1.11-12).[176] But only the *arcosolium* in the *cubiculum* of the Apostles inside the catacombs of Santa Tecla, strikingly rich in vividly colourful wall decoration, the sophistication of which suggests that the family that commissioned it at the end of the 4th century belonged to the local aristocracy, depicts the commemorated noble *matrona* with a scroll.[177] Covered in expensive jewellery and soft fabrics, she proudly displays the *rotulus* in her hands, alluding to knowledge of the Scripture, which became an accomplishment coveted by young and old aristocratic wives, widows and virgins alike ever since Jerome established his residence in the city.[178]

The omnipresent act of holding a codex, a scroll, or other attributes of learning is a symptom of a larger trend celebrating intellectual cultivation as superior form of self-representation, denoting individual's engagement in public life, which spread through Roman society in the 3rd and the 4th century.[179] Even though access to education and literary circles was a gendered

[175] Musei Vaticani, inv. n. MV.31512.0.0 (cat .n. 4.4 in this thesis), published primarily by Deichmann, Bovini, and Brandenburg 1967, pp. 68-69 and Schenk 2017, pp. 267-268. See *Ibidem*, p. 270 for the overall number of sarcophagi displaying the same motif. For the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus, dated to the year 359 and housed in the Museo del Tesoro della Basilica di San Pietro, inv. n. CSPV 0226, see cat. n. 2.10 in this thesis with bibliography. The so-called Plotinus sarcophagus, dated to ca. 275-280, is housed in Musei Vaticani under inv. n. MV.9504.0.0 and was published in: Zamora Calvo 2019.

[176] For the two cases in the catacombs of Domitilla, dated to the second half of the 4th century, see: Giuliani 2010, esp. pp. 55-56; Braconi 2017, pp. 35-36 and Giuliani 2017, pp. 105-106 (see cat. n. 4.7 for further bibliography). For the *arcosolium* in the catacombs of Santa Thecla see: Mazzei 2010, pp. 33-88 and 185-230; Bisconti 2013b; Bisconti and Ferri 2018, pp. 201-203; Cumbo 2021, pp. 118-119 (see cat. n. 4.9 for further bibliography).

[177] For the hypothesis about aristocratic commissioners of the *cubiculum* see: Bisconti 2013b, p. 116.

[178] Bisconti 2013b, p. 121 and Cumbo 2021, p. 118. For more information about Jerome's circle of ladies on the Aventine see chapter 2.

[179] About the universal Roman culture of elite's erudition and its visual representation see: Musso 2003, pp. 154-158 and Mitchell and Pickwoad 2020, p. 135.

experience, women often perceived themselves as intellectuals and successfully cultivated such image of themselves within society.[180] For wealthy women, the basic education received in childhood could continue under the tutorship of the often older husbands in marriage as an expression of marital harmony, ensuring at the same time that as mothers they would be capable instructors of their children.[181] As we will discuss in the next chapter, 4th-century Roman aristocratic women who converted to Christianity were often capable Scripture experts and/or poets. Furthermore, in his instructions to Laeta on the appropriate education of a virgin Jerome discusses at length the idea of the connection between mind, cultivated and restrained through reading and learning of the Scriptures, and well-disciplined soul. Education was not to be only the sign of wealth, but also of virtue and control.[182]

The presence of saints and, in cases such as the gold glass from the Metropolitan Museum, the otherworldly setting, indicate that the codices and scrolls the abovementioned women are holding are not generic signs of learning but represents their spiritual erudition and cultivation. According to Monica Hellström, the scroll symbolizes sacred text and the right to disseminate it – a privilege and responsibility granted to saints and Apostles – as well as the salvation promised through divine law. It functions as a shorthand for God, Christ, St. Peter and St. Paul, law and salvation, all combined into a single transferable package.[183]

In the funerary context the entrance of the deceased to Paradise is thus visually directly connected to their status of erudites with strong relationship to religious teachings recorded and transmitted in books and scrolls, dissemination and reception of which was linked to religious and social authority.[184]

As mentioned previously, the presence of Princes of Apostles served as a magnifying glass for the message already conveyed by scrolls and codices, further confirming the idea of imminent salvation and of eligibility, both terrestrial and celestial, of their protégés. By choosing an iconographic model of *introductio,* the commissioners of the images put emphasis on the protagonists' special position not only among the living, but also among the souls of the

[180] Stafford 2020a, p. 70.
[181] Stafford 2020a, pp. 71-72. For more in-depth research of opportunities late antique women had to pursue education and of their literary works see: Dean 2012.
[182] See Jerome, ep. 107, in: Wright 2010, pp. 338-371. Discussed in: Stafford 2020a, pp. 77-78.
[183] Hellström 2020, p. 197.
[184] Stafford 2020a, pp. 92-94. See also Cavallo 2003, pp. 195-197 for description of different modes of presentation and circulation of written Christian thought in the dioceses *Italia*, *Gallia* and *Africa* during the Patristic era. See Mitchell and Pickwoad 2020, p. 136 for the conclusion that books became primary emblems of the newly constituting Christian Church.

departed towards the otherworld, having their access to Christ and his Mother directly guaranteed by their protectors.[185]

Conclusions

The examination of material evidence concerning female involvement in the Roman cult of martyrs presents a nuanced image of women's religious agency that evolved significantly over time. Most compelling is the chronological pattern that emerges − the majority of archaeological and visual sources documenting female presence in the public arena of the martyrial cult dates to before the early 6th century, marking a gradual diminishment that demands explanation beyond mere coincidence or preservation bias.[186]

The archaeological record reveals that women in 4th and 5th-century Rome were not passive participants but rather assertive religious agents who strategically positioned themselves within the devotional landscape. They leveraged various material forms − sarcophagi, gold glass, wall paintings − to visually assert their spiritual authority in ways that were distinctly gendered. The statistical disparity is striking: 73 women chose to be represented between apostles Peter and Paul on sarcophagi compared to merely 10 men, while gold glass depictions of figures in apostolic company feature women exclusively. This pattern suggests women deliberately employed this type of visual rhetoric to legitimize their religious standing in ways unnecessary for their male counterparts whose authority was less contested.[187]

The catacombs provided especially fertile ground for female religious expression, operating somewhat beyond the strict control of ecclesiastical hierarchy. These underground spaces offered women, even those who lacked financial means to secure official Church favour through donations, an alternative venue for devotional representation. Yet as these burial sites gradually

[185] Cumbo 2021.
[186] The depiction of widow Turtura between martyrs Felix and Adauctus from the catacombs of Commodilla, dated either to the first half of the 6th or the middle of the 7th century, which will be discussed in the next chapter, is an exception, just as some inscriptions naming female pilgrims from the catacombs, discussed in first part of this chapter.
[187] See Schenk 2017, pp. 414-415 for sarcophagi, Morey 1959 for gold glass and Cumbo 2021, p. 118 for wall-paintings.

fell into disuse from the late 4th century onward, an important platform for women's religious visibility disappeared. [188]

This decline in women's visible participation in and self-promotion through the cult of martyrs coincided with broader transformations in the religious landscape of late antique Rome. The Church hierarchy increasingly consolidated control over both public and private religious expressions, gradually reducing its dependence on wealthy patrons, among whom aristocratic women had featured prominently. As subsequent chapters will demonstrate, this institutional centralization fundamentally reconfigured avenues for female religious authority, with political instability in the Apennine Peninsula accelerating ecclesiastical dominance over resources previously distributed among a wider network of patrons. Yet even as formal avenues diminished, the material evidence continues to testify to women's persistent creativity in finding spaces for religious agency within evolving devotional frameworks, an aspect that will shortly be explored in greater detail.

[188] About the gradual abandoning of the catacomb burials since the second half of the 4th century see: Fiocchi Nicolai 2012.

2. Widows and virgins of early Christian Rome

In the second half of the 4th century asceticism was nothing new in the Roman Empire. It has been known in the pre-Christian circles of erudites, especially among philosophers, one of the most famous cases being the Neo-Platonist Plotinus (205-270), who remained unmarried, ate as little as possible and seemed ashamed of his body's physicality.[189] At the end of the 1st century Christians could be found who remained unmarried and spent their lives in an ascetic manner as they held a belief that any sexual relationship would interfere with their contact with God. They did not yet have a special position within the Church. But the idea that people who decided to abstain from the pleasures of the flesh, with or without contracting marriage, are superior to those who didn't began developing shortly after, bringing with itself the first voices against remarriages. It was Origen (c.185-253) who defined asceticism in the form in which it was practiced in the period of our interest, tightly tied not only to the abstinence, but also to neglect of one's body and giving away of one's property as tools for freeing of the mind and soul.[190]

Although members of both sexes vied for earthly as well as posthumous exaltation by suppression of physical needs, women who raised above their supposed inherent weakness were especially extravagantly praised. An image of a powerful holy female ascetic whose presence is coveted by bishops, monks and nobles alike and whose fame crosses the borders of cities and dioceses arose.[191]

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[189] Drijvers 1987, p. 242. For the primary source see: Porphyry, *Vita Plotini* 1, in: Moser and Creuzer 1835, pp. 1-2.

[190] Drijvers 1987, pp. 242-244. For the primary source see: Eusebius of Caesarea, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 6.8.2, in: Oulton 1932, pp. 28-29. For more information on Origen and his thought see: Brown 1988, pp. 160-177.

[191] Castelli 1986, p. 75 and Clark 1986, pp. 175-176 with references to primary sources. See for example the congratulatory letter from Jerome (c. 342/347-420) to the adolescent virgin Demetrias on the occasion of her vow of virginity (ep. 130.6), available online at: database *Epistolae: Medieval Women's Latin Letters*, https://epistolae.ctl.columbia.edu/letter/1282.html (last viewed on 29. 01. 2025): "*cunctae per Africam ecclesiae quodam exultauere tripudio. non solum ad urbes, oppida uiculosque, sed ad ipsa quoque mappalia Celebris fama. penetrauit. omnes inter Africam Italiamque insulae hoc rumore repletae sunt et inoffenso pede longius gaudia cucurrere. tunc lugubres uestes Italia mutauit et semiruta urbis Romae moenia pristinum ex parte recepere fulgorem propitium sibi aestimantes deum in alumnae conuersione perfecta. putares extinctam Gothorum manum et conluuiem perfugarum atque seruorum domini desuper intonantis fulmine concidisse. non sic post Trebiam, Trasumennum et Cannas, in quibus locis Romanorum exercituum caesa sunt milia, Marcelli primum apud Nolam proelio se populus Romanus erexit. minori prius gaudio strata Gallorum agmina auro redempta nobilitas et seminarium Romani generis in arce cognouit. penetrauit hic rumor orientis litora et in mediterraneis quo que urbibus Christianae gloriae triumphus auditus est. quae uirginum Christi non huius se societate iactauit? quae mater non tuum, Iuliana, beatum clamauit uterum?*" ("…all the churches in Africa rejoiced with a celebratory dance. This great news made its way not only to cities, towns, and villages, but even to the huts. All the islands between Africa and Italy were replete with this rumour and the joys ran far and wide on unhindered feet. Then,

In the ecclesiocentric narratives, true female ascetics remained chaste for the love of Christ, in a desire to perfect themselves through humility and self-suppression. That these narratives did not always align with everyday realities of late antique women would be an understatement. Asceticism permitted women to gain knowledge and authority at a time when social prestige and power seemed locked into traditional categories of wealth, family, and marriage. It also sometimes allowed them to escape disagreeable home lives or avoid painful sex and life-threatening birth.[192]

As the literary portraits of women who chose this way of existence are distorted by the prism of the gaze of the male cleric, it is important to bring visual fragments the women in question left behind to the discussion in order to recapture the various effects the worldly renunciation and celibacy had on their lives, their relationship with the representatives of the Church, and their public representation. And this is exactly what this chapter will try to do for the ascetic women of Rome.[193]

The aim of this chapter is to examine the multifaceted phenomenon of female asceticism in early Christian Rome between the 4th and 7th centuries. It will investigate how aristocratic women created sanctioned religious spaces within the shifting cultural landscape of the late antique city, answering these key questions: How did female ascetics navigate the complex relationship between their aristocratic status and religious vocation? What specific visual strategies did consecrated virgins and widows employ to assert their spiritual authority? How did the transition from *domus*-centred communities to monasteries reshape female religious expression in Rome?

The chapter will first explore the emergence of *domus*-centred ascetic communities like Marcella's Aventine circle, tracing their evolution toward more formalized monastic institutions following Rome's political and demographic reshaping. Through careful analysis of textual

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Italy changed its clothes of mourning and the nearly ruined walls of Rome regained part of its original splendour, believing that God looked upon them favourably because of the perfect conversion of their foster-child. You would think that the band of Goths was destroyed and that the dregs of deserters and slaves had fallen because of a lightning bolt from God who thundered from above. The Romans did not rejoice this much at Marcellus´ success in battle at Nola after thousands of soldiers had fallen at Trebia, Thrasymenus, and Cannae. The nobility which had earlier been redeemed/ransomed for gold, the seminary of the Roman race, took less joy in seeing the devastation of Gallic troops from the citadel. The rumour made its way to the shores of the east and the triumph of Christian glory was also heard in the Mediterranean cities. What woman did not boast that she was among the virgins of Christ? What mother claimed that your womb was not blessed, Juliana?")

[192] Castelli 1986, pp. 61, 65; Clark 1986, pp. 180, 186-187; Cooper 1996, pp. 82-87; Shaw 1998, p. 487.

[193] For the idea that the female representations in the writings of the Church Fathers were mere constructs, often rather distanced from the contemporary reality, see e.g. Clark 1994.

evidence, it will reconstruct the daily routines, social structures, and spiritual aspirations of these female communities.

The chapter will then examine the complex interplay between social status and religious authority through studies of two categories comprising the heterogeneous group of Roman female ascetics: consecrated virgins and "holy" widows. Using rare visual evidence like Turtura's fresco from the catacomb of Commodilla, it will demonstrate how female ascetics strategically navigated contradictory expectations, simultaneously embracing visibility as exemplars of female virtues while cultivating invisibility through modest appearance. By integrating archaeological findings with textual sources, the chapter will reveal how these women created spaces for legitimate religious agency within the constraints of ecclesiastical authority, contributing significantly to the religious fabric of early Christian Rome in the process.

Being a female ascetic in early Christian Rome

Unfortunately, female ascetics, so well represented in the writings of the prominent members of the late antique Roman clergy, which offer a kaleidoscopic image of their lives and aspirations, though often distorted by the hidden motivations of their authors, remain hardly detectable in the city's visual culture. While reasons for this occurrence will be discussed in the following parts of the chapter, which will deal with the categories of women involved in the ascetic movement and their public self-promotion, this section will stop on the only image with portrait aspirations securely traceable to a female ascetic to have been preserved in the collective memory of the city. But what a magnificent representation it was!

The fresco depicting the widowed mother of pope Gregory the Great (590-604), Silvia, may have not been dissimilar in grandness to the representations of the enthroned Christ in the early 5th-century mosaics of the basilicas of Santa Maria Maggiore and Santa Pudenziana (fig. 2.1-3).[194] If we are to believe the *vita* of the pope recorded by John the Deacon (c. 852-before 882) around the year 875, almost 300 years after the events it describes, it decorated the atrium or the oratory of Gregory's family *domus* next to Clivus Scauri, which he transformed into a

[194] The most recent publications on the mosaics in Santa Maria Maggiore and Santa Pudenziana include Braconi 2016; Steigerwald 2016; Foletti 2017b; Foletti 2022; Foletti and Okáčová 2024. For more information see cat. n. 2.20 and 2.23 in this thesis.

monastery dedicated to martyr Andrew sometime before the year 587. According to John the Deacon's account, Silvia could have been seen seated in full height. Her face is vividly described by him as round, fair, wrinkled with age, but still bearing traces of great beauty, with large blue eyes, delicate eyebrows, and cheerful expression. Dressed in a tunic and *dalmatica* decorated with *clavi*, with a head covered by a veil with a cap hiding her hair underneath (*mitra matronalis*), she was performing a sign of either benediction or teaching with her right hand while holding a Book of Psalms in the left. Inscribed on the pages was the verse 175 from psalm 119: "Let my soul live, and it shall praise thee; and let thy judgements help me", which, as we will see in the following pages, may be considered a masterful summary of the main principles guiding the ascetic life of the late antique Roman women.[195]

Silvia's depiction was grander than that of her husband, described by the chronist as shown standing next to an enthroned figure of apostle Peter, invitingly outstretching his hand towards him, on an accompanying fresco.[196] Nothing apart from the description remains from the painting. If, however, the words of John the Deacon are not exaggerated, widowed Silvia was depicted in a position of power, her dress and head covering, similar to those of Veneranda in the catacomb of Domitilla and Turtura in the catacomb of Commodilla (fig. 2.4-5), hinting on her social status of a respected noblewoman, her gesture and the book she is holding giving her an air of erudition and authority. She resembled more the seated apostle Peter on the paired fresco than her husband. The agency of this pious woman, who, according to the *vita* supported her son in his search for monastic solitude and ascetic way of life and who adopted it herself, if we are to believe John the Deacon, was most probably publicly reinforced by the foundation of

[195] The fresco was researched by Wüscher-Becchi 1900, esp. pp. 241-244; Ladner 1941, pp. 70-75; Toesca 1972, p. 13; Pedrocchi 1993, p. 86; Cecchelli 2005, pp. 79-80; Bartola 2007, p. 143; Acconci 2015, p. 45. For more information on the fresco see cat. n. 6.17 in this thesis. For the description of the founding of the monastery of Sant'Andrea ad Clivum Scauri and the fresco in John the Deacon's *Vita S. Gregorii Magni* 1.6, 4.83 see: Migne 1862g, colls. 65, 229-230: "*In altera vero mater Gregorii sedens depicta est Silvia, candido velamine a dextro humero taliter contra sinistram revoluto contecta, ut sub eo manus tamquam de planeta subducat; et circa pectus sub gula inferior tunica pseudolactini coloris appareat, quae magno sinuamine super pedes defluat; duabus zonis ad similitudinem dalmaticarum, sed latioribus omnino distincta; statura plena, facies rotunda quidem et candida, sed senio iam rugosa, quam ipsa quoque senectus pulcherrimam fuisse significat; oculis glaucis et grandibus, superciliis modicis, labellis venustis, vultu hilari, ferens in capite matronalem mitram candentis brandei raritate niblatam; duobus dexterae digitis signaculo crucis se munire velle praetendens, in sinistra vero patens psalterium retinens, in quo hoc scriptum est: Vivit anima mea, et laudabit te, et judicia tua adjuvabunt me (Psalm. CXVIII, vers. penult.). A dextero vero cubito usque ad sinistrum circa scapulas versus ascendens reflectitur, qui ita se habet: Gregorius Silviae matri fecit.*" For the discussion of the source see: Dudden 1905, esp. pp. 7-8. For more information on the *domus* of Gregory the Great (590-604) and the monastery see e.g. Marrou 1931; Krautheimer 1953, pp. 317-320; Ferrari 1957, pp. 138-151; Guidobaldi 1986, pp. 198-201; Pietri 1991; De Spirito 1993; Guidobaldi 1995; Pavolini 2000; Pavolini 2003, pp. 82-86; Bartola 2007; Giuntella 2007, pp. 90-92; Guidobaldi 2016, p. 135.

[196] Wüscher-Becchi 1900, pp. 238-241 and Dudden 1905, pp. 7. For the Latin original of John the Deacon's description see Migne 1862g, col. 229: "*In quarum altera beatus Petrus sedens conspicitur stantem Gordianum regionarium, videlicet patrem Gregorii manu desterà per dexteram nihilominus suscepisse*."

a *xenodochium* with liturgical and funerary function or a monastery, predecessor of the monastery of San Saba, at the place of her mansion on the Aventine, to which she retired and which promoted her memory.[197]

Whether after the death of her husband she really pursued a path previously walked by her sisters-in-law Emiliana and Tarsilla, both consecrated virgins, who devoted their life to denial of the demands of the flesh and to prayer in seclusion of their father's home, is unknown. Yet it merits a thought, as we know from a homily of her son that she maintained close contact with them and was even present at the deathbed of Tarsilla.[198]

The ascetic life of women in the diocese *Italia* in general and in the city of Rome in particular can be discussed in its two interrelated, but separate forms. The one that started it all is represented by the aristocratic consecrated virgins and widows living either alone only with their own dependents or with other members of their extended family/social network in their familial *domus*, from which they were able to continue to exercise their authority through public building, charity and sponsorship of the prominent members of the Church who applied for their protection. As more women from different social strata joined the movement, more systematically organized groups secluded from the outside world under the care of an abbess (*abbatissa*) emerged. Even though the familial ties did not completely disappear from the networks of power inside their walls, female monastics became increasingly bound only by their shared vocation instead of blood.[199]

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[197] Wüscher-Becchi 1900, pp. 242-244 was the one to interpret the *mitra matronalis* mentioned by John the Deacon (c. 852-before 882) as a cap. For more information about the funerary images of Veneranda and Turtura see: cat. n. 4.6, 4.13 in this thesis. Turtura's representation and its message are discussed in detail in the next section of this chapter. For discussion of books and scrolls as powerful tools of female self-representation see the last section of chapter 1. For the account on the later life of the mother of Gregory the Great see: John the Deacon, *Vita S. Gregorii Magni* 1.9, Migne, 1862c, col. 66: "*In huius sacri monasterii penetralibus idem vir omnipotentis Dei Gregorius, a matre Silvia, tunc temporis iuxta portam beati Pauli apostoli, loco qui dicitur Cella nova, quo hactenus oratorium nomini eius dedicatum est, et famosum sancti Babae confessoris Christi monasterium, cuius laus in sexta et septima synodo, constitutum videtur, degente, crudis leguminibus pascebatur.*" The foundation of the predecessor of the monastery of San Saba at the time of pontificate of Gregory the Great (590-604) was discussed e.g. in: Ferrari 1957, pp. 284-286; Coates-Stephens 2007 and Bordi 2008, pp. 57-60 with further bibliography. Coates-Stephens 2007, pp. 245-252 was the one to suggest that the institution founded was not a monastery but a *xenodochium* and to link its foundation to Silvia.

[198] Gregory the Great, *Homiliae quadraginta in evangelia* 38.15, in: Hurst 1990, pp. 352-353. For the hypothesis about the monastic life of Silvia see: Cecchelli 2005, pp. 89-90.

[199] Both forms of asceticism are discussed by: Gordini 1956; Lizzi Testa 1991; Consolino 1994; Jenal 1995; Bowes 2011; Beach and Cochelin 2020.

Marcella and her "sisters"

Jerome (c. 342/347-420) insists that the foundation of the female ascetic movement in Rome was laid out shortly before the middle of the 4th century with the arrival of bishop of Alexandria Athanasius (c. 296/298-373) to Rome, where he stayed between the years 340 and 346. He recounts that the aristocratic girls and *matronae*, the main object of Jerome's interest, knew nothing about monastic life and considered the title nun degrading, until the bishop and two other clerics, who, like him, were fleeing from the Arian persecution in Alexandria, taught Roman lady Marcella, residing on the Aventine Hill, about the life of the desert father Anthony and explained to her the maxims of the ascetic life of virgins and widows.[200]

Jerome's account, however, is unsurprisingly somehow distorted. Groups of Christians dedicated to austere life and chastity were known in Rome already in the 2nd and 3rd century.[201] In *De virginibus*, a treatise on virginity written in 377 for his sister after she took the veil, Ambrose (374-397) praises at length the exemplary ascetic life and courageous death of virgin Agnes, who according to the contemporary tradition died during the Diocletianic persecution at the beginning of the 4th century.[202] The *Depositio martyrum*, a list of burials of primarily Roman martyrs compiled around the year 354, contains the name of a virginal martyr Basilla, a victim of the same wave of persecutions that took the life of Agnes.[203] And *dies natalis* of several others like her are listed in the *Martyrologium Hieronymianum*, datable to the first half of the 5th century.[204] If we are not to disregard the conclusions of Jerome completely, we can only assume that before the arrival of Athanasius the accurate description of the rules of the monastic life of Egyptian ascetics did not reach the circles of Roman aristocrats and thus they practiced their asceticism in an unorganized way.[205]

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[200] Jerome, ep. 127.5, in: Wright 2010, pp. 448-449: "*Nulla eo tempore nobilium feminarum noverat Romae propositum monachorum nec audebat propter rei novitatem ignominiosum, ut tunc putabatur, et vile in populis nomen adsumere. Haec ab Alexandras sacerdotibus papaque Athanasio et postea Petro, qui persecutionem Arrianae hereseos declinantes quasi ad tutissimum communionis suae portum Roman confugerant, vitam beati Antonii adhuc tunc viventis monasteriaque in Thebaide Pachumii et virginum ac viduarum didicit disciplinam nec erubuit profiteri, quod Christo placere cognoverat.*" The passage from the letter is discussed among others by: Gordini 1956, pp. 225-233; Drijvers 1987, pp. 244-245; Jenal 1995, p. 31; Petersen 1996, p. 22. For the duration of the Roman exile of Athanasius see: Barnes 1993, pp. 47-55 with references to primary sources.

[201] Gordini 1956, p. 221 and Jenal 1995, pp. 28-31.

[202] Ambrose, *De virginibus* 1.2, in: Migne 1845b, colls. 200-201. For more information on *De virginibus* see e.g.: Duval 1974. On the Agnetic tradition in Rome see among others: Franchi De'Cavalieri 1899; Baert 2005 and chapter 5 in this thesis.

[203] Lapidge 2018, pp. 633-636.

[204] *Ibidem*, pp. 649-658.

[205] Athanasius's *Life of Anthony*, first biography of a holy man, focusing rather on his life than martyrdom, and written as manual for a Christian monastic, was first translated to Latin between 356, the year of the death of

The attitude of the Roman population towards asceticism is not the only detail Jerome got wrong in letter 127 to serve his own rhetoric agenda. Marcella seems to not have been the first woman to dedicate herself to ascetic life in response to the teaching activity of Athanasius, after all. Even though the teachings of the bishop left deep impression on her, she was just a girl when he resided in Rome, and it is the same letter 127 that informs the reader that she devoted her life to ascetic piety only after the premature death of her husband, which can be tentatively dated to the period around the year 358. Such change in the chronology of the events would make the first ascetic woman out of Marcellina, sister of Ambrose, virgin consecrated in the St. Peter's Basilica by pope Liberius (352-366) on the feast of Nativity somewhere between the years 353 and 356.[206]

The type of ascetic life promoted by Athanasius and Jerome was characterised by the continued residence of its adepts in the aristocratic *domus* and was mostly pursued by women. Some of them chose to completely isolate themselves from the world, like the virginal sister of Marcella, Asella, or the sister of pope Damasus (366-384), Irene.[207] For others their choice did not necessarily bring complete reclusion. As was already mentioned at the beginning of this

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Anthony, and 374. Two versions circulated, one written by Evagrius of Antioch and an anonymous one, much less popular and polished from a literary point of view, but slightly earlier than Evagrius's version. See: Gandt and Bertrand 2019.

[206] Jenal 1995, pp. 32-34. For the chronology of the life of Marcella see: Gordini 1956, pp. 226-228. On the precise the death of Marcella's husband and her adoption of ascetic lifestyle see: Jerome, ep. 127.2, in: Wright 2010, pp. 440-441: "*Orbata patris morte viro quoque post nuptias septimo mense privata est. Cumque eam Cerealis, cuius clarum inter consules nomen est, propter aetatem et antiquitatem familiae et insignem—quod maxime viris placere consuevit—decorem corporis ac insignem temperantiam ambitiosius peteret suasque longaevus polliceretur divitias et non quasi in uxorem sed quasi in filiam vellet donationem transfundere Albinaque mater tam clarum praesidium viduitati domus ultro appeteret, illa respondit: ' Si vellem nubere et non aeternae me cuperem pudicitiae dedicare, utique maritum quaererem, non hereditatem.'*" On the place and time of consecration of Marcellina see: Ambrose, *De virginibus* 3.1.1, in: Migne 1845b, col. 219: "*Quoniam quae habuimus superioribus duobus libris digessimus, tempus est, soror sancta ea quae mecum conferre soles, beatae memoriae Liberii praecepta revolvere; ut quo vir sanctior, eo sermo accedat gratior. Namque is, cum Salvatoris natali ad apostolum Petrum virginitatis professionem vestis quoque mutatione signares...*". For the exact dating of the event see: McLynn 1994, p. 34 and note 122.

[207] Gordini 1956, pp. 231-232 with reference to Jerome's ep. 24.2-3 on Asella: "*…ad ea uenio, quae post duodecimum annum sudore proprio elegit, arripuit, tenuit, coepit, inpleuit. Unius cellulae clausa angustiis latitudine paradisi fruebatur…*" ("I come to what after her twelfth year she chose with her own sweat, seized, held, began and fulfilled. Closed in a cell she enjoyed the breadth of paradise in its narrowness.") (available online at: database *Epistolae: Medieval Women's Latin Letters*, https://epistolae.ctl.columbia.edu/letter/301.html [last viewed on 24. 01. 2025]) and the epigram of pope Damasus (366-384), dedicated to his sister: "*Hoc tumulo sacrata deo nunc membra quiescunt:/ hic soror est Damasi, nomen si quaeris, Irene./ voverat haec sese Christo cum vita maneret,/ virginis ut meritum sanctus pudor ipse probaret./ bis denas hiemes necdum compleverat aetas,/ egregios mores vitae praecesserat aetas,/ propositum mentis pietas veneranda puellae,/ magnificos fluctus dederat melioribus annis./ te germana soror nostri tunc testis amoris,/ cum fugeret mundum, dederat mihi pignus honestum./ quam sibi cum raperet melior tunc regia caeli,/ non timui mortem, caelos quod libera adiret,/ sed dolui, fateor, consortia perdere vitae./ nunc veniente deo nostri reminiscere, virgo,/ ut tua per dominum praestet mihi facula lumen.*" (Damasus, *Epigrammata* 11, in: Ferrua 1942, pp. 108-109). For more information about the image of Irene as a consecrated virgin in the epigraphy of her brother see: Rákos-Zichy 2016, pp. 12-15. For more information about the life of Asella see: Petersen 1996, p. 102.

subchapter, the letters exchanged between them and their spiritual advisor Jerome point towards the fact that they often entered the new, ascetic chapter of their lives together with other women, sometimes their close kin, as was the case of mother Paula and her daughters Eustochium and Blaesilla, and more often than not their *entourage*.[208] As evidenced by the circle around Marcella, they would meet up for joint spiritual exercises, such as the study of the Scriptures and their interpretation. In contrast with monastic communities, even though the hostess and the spiritual advisor held an elevated position in the circle, every member was autonomous in their ascetic performance.[209]

Even though communities such as Marcella's consisted of both widows and virgins, there were slight differences between the treatment of both groups by the representatives of the Church. While virgins could take the vow (*propositium castitatis*) either privately or ceremoniously as part of the *consecratio* by the hand of the local bishop, there was no initiation ceremony for widows. The different level of regulation of the access to the orders was an outward expression of the unequal spiritual evaluation of virgins and widows based on their sexual condition by the contemporary religious thinkers, according to which the virgins were able to reach the highest level of chastity, while the previously sexually active widows who committed themselves to abstaining from the pleasures of the flesh could aim only for the second rank. Both groups, however, the intactness of their hymen notwithstanding, were able to claim the special protection of the bishop.[210] Their co-habitation seems to have been preferred by the Church, as

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[208] Jenal 1995, pp. 131-132 and Milella 2020, p. 77, note 2 and 3. Jerome writes about Paula and her daughters in: Jerome, ep. 22 and 108, in: Wright 2010, pp. 55-159 and available online at: database *Epistolae: Medieval Women's Latin Letters*, https://epistolae.ctl.columbia.edu/letter/445.html (last viewed on 24. 01. 2025). For more information see: Petersen 1996, pp. 123-218. For the evidence of servants as members of the ascetic communities inside the aristocratic houses see e.g.: Jerome, ep. 22.29, addressed to Eustochium: "*si quae ancillae sunt comites propositi tui, ne erigaris aduersus eas, ne infleris ut domina. unum sponsum habere coepistis, simul psallitis Christo, simul corpus accipitis…*"("If any of your handmaids have taken the vow with you, do not lift yourself up against them or pride yourself as being the mistress. From now you all have one Bridegroom; you sing psalms together; together you receive the Body of Christ."), in: Wright 2010, pp. 120-123. For more information see: Clark 2005, p. 39 and Undheim 2020, pp. 44-49.

[209] Jerome, ep. 23.1 and 45, in: Wright 2010, pp. 178-189 and available online at: database *Epistolae: Medieval Women's Latin Letters*, https://epistolae.ctl.columbia.edu/letter/300.html (last viewed on 24. 01. 2025). For more information about Marcella's Aventine circle see e.g.: Hinson 1997; Letsch-Brunner 1997; Testard 1999; Graves 2011.

[210] Brown 1988, p. 359; Cloke 1995, p. 33; Jenal 1995, p. 132; Undheim 2015, p. 59. The degree of holiness of the widows and virgins is discussed by both Jerome and Ambrose. See: Jerome, ep. 22.15, in: Wright 2010, pp. 82-83: "*et quidem molestias nuptiarum et incerta coniugii de domestico exemplo didicisti, cum soror tua Blesilla aetate maior, sed proposito minor, post acceptum maritum septimo mense uiduata est. o infelix humana condicio et futuri nescia! et uirginitatis coronam et nuptiarum perdidit uoluptatem. et quamquam secundum pudicitiae gradum teneat, tamen quas illam per momenta sustinere aestimas cruces spectantem cotidie in sorore, quod ipsa perdiderit, et, cum difficilius experta careat uoluptate, minorem continentiae habere mercedem? sit tamen et illa secura, sit gaudens: centesimus et sexagesimus fructus de uno sunt semine castitatis.*" ("As for the troubles of wedded life and the uncertainties of marriage, you know of them by an example in your own family. Your sister Blesilla, superior to you in age but inferior in firmness of will, has become a widow seven months after taking a husband.

attested by the canon 33 of the council of Carthage from 397, stipulating that after the loss of her parents a consecrated virgin should be taken under the protection of the bishop and other women of good reputation (i.e. widows), or united with other virgins. There is no such document mapping the situation of the virgins in Rome, yet it is possible to assume that it wasn't much different.[211]

During the co-habitation one of the most frequently attested and important roles of the widows recognised by the Church for their dedication to chastity became supervision of the virgins. They were meant to both train them and serve as an example worthy of emulation.[212] Following Marcella's lead other widows became heads of ascetic groups of virgins, like Lea, a force to be reckoned with in the religious life of Rome, who, though she "as a widow…held a lower place" surrounded herself with virgins to whom she "showed herself a true mother".[213] Paula, too, served as an exemplar for the young girls, still holding onto values of their previous life. "Always the least noticeable in dress, speech, action and walk", she imposed strict fasting regimens on them, kept them separated from any men, even eunuchs, to guard their purity,

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How luckless is our mortal state, how ignorant of the future! She has lost both the crown of virginity and the pleasures of wedlock. Although the widowed state ranks as the second degree of chastity, can you not imagine the crosses which every moment she must bear, seeing in her sister daily that which she herself has lost? It is harder for her than for you to forgo the delights that she once knew, and yet she receives a less reward for her present continence. Still, she too may rejoice and be not afraid. The fruit that is an hundredfold and that which is sixtyfold both spring from one seed, the seed of chastity.") See also Ambrose, *De viduis* 1.1, in: Migne 1845a, col. 247: "*Bene accidit, fratres, ut quoniam tribus libris superioribus de virginum laudibus disseruimus, viduarum tractatus incideret: neque enim inhonoras debuimus praeterire, et a virginum praeconio separare, quas apostolica sententia cum virginibus copulavit, juxta quod scriptum est : Et mulier innupta, et virgo cogitat quae sunt Domini, ut sit sancta corpore et spiritu (I Cor. VII.34)? Quodammodo enim magisterium virginitatis viduarum valescit exemplis. Quae cum viro castum cubile custodiunt, documento virginibus sunt integritatem Deo esse servandam. Et propemodum non inferioris virtutis est eo abstinere conjugio, quod aliquando delectaverit, quam conjugii oblectamenta nescire. In utroque fortes: ut eas et conjugii non poeniteat, cui fidem servent et conjugalia oblectamenta non alligent; ne videantur infirmae, quae sibi adesse non possint.*" For the English translation see: Schaff and Wace 1896b, p. 391: "Since I have treated of the honour of virgins in three books, it is fitting now, my brethren, that a treatise concerning widows should come in order; for I ought not to leave them without honour, nor to separate them from the commendation belonging to virgins, since the voice of the Apostle has joined them to virgins, according to what is written: 'The unmarried woman and the virgin careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit.' For in a certain manner the inculcation of virginity is strengthened by the example of widows. They who have preserved their marriage bed undefiled are a testimony to virgins that chastity is to be preserved for God. And it is almost a mark of no less virtue to abstain from marriage, which was once a delight, than to remain ignorant of the pleasures of wedlock. They are strong in each point, in that they regret not wedlock, the faith of which they keep, and entangle not themselves with wedded pleasures, lest they appear weak and not able to take care of themselves."

[211] Milella 2020, p. 78. For the primary source see: Mansi 1759, col. 885: "*Ut virgines sacrae, cum parentibus, a quibus custodiebantur, private fuerunt, episcopi providentia, vel presbyteri ubi episcopus absens est, in monasterio virginum, vel gravioribus feminis commendentur...*".

[212] Cloke 1995, p. 59. For the primary source see: Jerome, ep. 127.5, in: Wright 2010, pp. 450-451: "*Huius amicitiis fruita est Paula venerabilis, in huius nutrita cubiculo Eustochium, virginitatis decus, ut facilis aestimatio sit, qualis magistra, ubi tales discipulae.*" ("Her friendship was also enjoyed by the revered Paula, and in her cell that paragon of virgins Eustochium was trained. Such pupils as these make it easy for us to judge the character of their teacher.")

[213] Cloke 1995, p. 59. For the primary source see: Jerome, ep. 23.2, available online at: database *Epistolae: Medieval Women's Latin Letters*, https://epistolae.ctl.columbia.edu/letter/300.html (last viewed on 25. 01. 2025): "*ita eam totam ad dominum fuisse conuersam, ut monasterii princeps, mater uirginum fieret*."

enforced humble clothing and appearance, and kept her charges busy with Scripture learning, chores, and garment-making.[214]

Despite not being the first female ascetic in the diocese *Italia* to accept the teachings of Athanasius, Marcella, as was already hinted, was the primary force behind the forming asceticism movement in Rome in the last quarter of the 4th century. This authoritative Roman lady, an offspring of one of the most powerful senatorial families, *gens Claudia* or *gens Marcelli*, was able to excellently play her familial ties in order to assert herself into the religious fabric of Rome and to intervene on behalf of her collaborators, be it male or female, clerics or not, embodying the role of the generous *patrona* she was born to be.[215] A wealthy and youthful widow disposed to asceticism, she set her own rules, exceptional in her certainty and decisiveness in their application. Called by Gillian Cloke "the Anthony of her place and generation", she became a source of inspiration and imitation for her peers, admirable because she, unlike Anthony, worked out an ascetic lifestyle that could be lived amidst wealth and in the centre of the alluring social scene of Rome.[216]

When in 382 Jerome settled in Rome for around three years, the widow, already familiar with the rules of ascetic life and avidly interested in theological questions, turned to him, at the time an already well-known expert on the Scriptures, for instruction. On her part she facilitated his contact with the most important patrician families in the city, with which she was connected by shared blood and thus gave start to the famous circle of widows and virgins cultivating intellectual friendship with the Church Father. The interest in the Scriptures was one of the most

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[214] Cloke 1995, p. 59. For the primary source see: Jerome, ep. 108.15, 20, available online at: database *Epistolae: Medieval Women's Latin Letters*, https://epistolae.ctl.columbia.edu/letter/445.html (last viewed on 25. 01. 2025): "*et cum frequentibus choris uirginum cingeretur, et ueste et uoce et habitu et incessu minima omnium erat… post alleluiae cantatum, quo signo uocabantur ad collectam, nulli residere licitum erat, sed prima uel inter primas ueniens ceterarum operiebatur pudore et exemplo ad laborem eas prouocans, non terrore. mane, hora tertia, sexta, nona, uespera, noctis medio per ordinem Psalterium canebant nec licebat cuiquam sororum ignorare psalmos et non de scripturis sanctis cotidie aliquid discere. die tantum dominico ad ecclesiam procedebant, ex cuius habitabant latere, et unumquodque agmen matrem propriam sequebatur; atque inde pariter reuertentes instabant operi destricto et uel sibi uel ceteris indumenta faciebant. si qua erat nobilis, non permittebatur de domo sua habere comitem, ne ueterum actuum memor et lasciuientis infantiae errorem refricaret antiquum et crebra confabulatione renouaret. unus omnium habitus; linteamine ad tergendas solum manus utebantur. a uiris tanta separatio, ut ab spadonibus quoque eas se iungeret, ne ullam daret occasionem linguae maledicae, quae sanctos carpere solita est in solacium delinquendi. si qua uel tardior conueniebat ad psalmos et in opere pigrior, uariis eam modis adgrediebatur. si erat iracunda, blanditiis, si patiens, correptione, illud apostoli imitans: quid uultis? in uirga ueniam ad uos an in spiritu lenitatis et mansuetudinis? excepto uictu atque uestitu nullam habere quid patiebatur dicente Paulo: habentes uictum atque uestitum his contenti sumus, ne consuetudine plus habendi praeberet locum auaritiae, quae nullis expletur opibus et, quanto amplius habuerit, plus requirit et neque copia neque inopia minuetur. iurgantes inter se sermone lenissimo foederabat. lasciuientem adulescentularum carnem crebris et duplicatis frangebat ieiuniis malens eas stomachum dolere quam mentem.*"

[215] On the aristocratic pedigree of Marcella see e.g.: Gordini 1956, p. 244.

[216] Cloke 1995, p. 56.

important characteristics of the group, whose members' names have been preserved in Jerome's letters. On the initiative of Marcella, they met to read them, discuss problems related to asceticism and theological dogmas and practice oral and written exegesis. Inspired by each other's example they abandoned comfortable way of life for abstinence from food and luxuries, dressed themselves simply in only a tunic without any ornaments and put much effort into charity. They never left the house if the necessity did not call for it and even then navigated the bustling city exclusively in the company of close female family members or their fellow virgins and widows.[217] Or at least this is the image Jerome's letters craft in sync with the opinion of his religious peers that the immobility equals to sanctity and shutting oneself up in one's chamber in emulation of the Desert Fathers is the best practice for the virgin, who should await the coming of Christ, her bridegroom, in her bridal chamber.[218] Jerome's virgin is a precious object to be locked away from the world, in order to be protected from corruption. Even if the Church Father pictures her free from the obligations and social expectations of the wife and mother, he still prefers her submitted to some kind of male authority, such as her spiritual advisor and/or a bishop (if they were two different people).[219] It is not to say that the aristocratic virgins and widows in the late 4th and early 5th-century Rome did not focus on the spiritual cultivation in the safe heaven of their *domus*, but their everyday reality differed from the ideal described by their mentor. They continued to be powerful members of the most exalted families in the city and as such they had to see and be seen by the right people, making frequent visits and keeping appearances, adapting only the modes of public representation to their new state. Being not only

[217] Jenal 1997, pp. 23-26. Life of Marcella is described by Jerome in ep. 127, in: Wright 2010, pp. 439-467. The group that met at the house of Marcella on the Aventine Hill consisted of her mother Albina (Jerome, ep. 45.7, 127.2, in: Wright 2010, pp. 186-187, 440-441 and ep. 32.2, available online at: database *Epistolae: Medieval Women's Latin Letters*, https://epistolae.ctl.columbia.edu/letter/305.html (last viewed on 29. 02. 2024)), virgin Asella (ep. 24.1, 5, available online at: database *Epistolae: Medieval Women's Latin Letters*, https://epistolae.ctl.columbia.edu/letter/301.html (last viewed on 29. 02. 2024)), virgin Principia (ep. 127, in: Wright 2010, pp. 439-467 and ep. 65.2, available online at: database *Epistolae: Medieval Women's Latin Letters*, https://epistolae.ctl.columbia.edu/letter/425.html (last viewed on 29. 02. 2024)), joined on occasion by widow Paula with daughters Eustochium and Blaesilla (ep. 127.5, in: Wright 2010, pp. 450-451 and ep. 30, 32.1, available online at: database *Epistolae: Medieval Women's Latin Letters*, https://epistolae.ctl.columbia.edu/letter/278.html, https://epistolae.ctl.columbia.edu/letter/305.html (last viewed on 29. 02. 2024)) and possibly widow Lea as well (ep. 23, available online at: database *Epistolae: Medieval Women's Latin Letters*, https://epistolae.ctl.columbia.edu/letter/300.html (last viewed on 29. 02. 2024)). For more information on the duration of Jerome's stay in Rome see: Davidson 1975, pp. 80-115. For more information about the relationship between Jerome and the aristocratic women see e.g.: Krumeich 1993 and Jenal 1995, pp. 328-340. For the location of the house of Marcella see: Gordini 1956, p. 244.

[218] Undheim 2015, pp. 59-62. For the primary source see: Jerome, ep. 22.26, in: Wright 2010, pp. 110-111: "*Foris vagentur virgines stultae, tu intrinsecus esto cum Sponso; quia si ostium clauseris, et secundum Evangelii praeceptum in occulto oraveris Patrem tuum, veniet, et pulsabit.*" ("Let foolish virgins stray abroad, but for your part stay at home with the Bridegroom; for if you shut your door, and, according to the precept of the Gospel, pray to your Father in secret, He will come and knock.").

[219] Burnett McInerey 2003, pp. 65-66.

noble, but also ascetic, the thoroughly veiled, modestly dressed and thoroughly guarded virgins and widows appearing in the most noticeable way in the martyria and basilicas of Rome became highly visual manifestations of the new religious ideology, marking the moral standards and religious identity of a new social and religious elite. The more anonymous they looked, while still letting their nobility and humility shine through, the more they were able to communicate this ideology without compromising their state, susceptible to even an evil glance or a corrupting word, when they moved outside of their own house. [220]

In the case of Marcella, her status of an erudite and the organizer of the study group of her aristocratic friends completely precluded her from living an isolated life. And it seems that this state of affairs continued even after Jerome's departure for Betlehem in 385. He himself, well informed about her actions through letters they sent back and forth to continue their intellectual exchange, notes that her authority as a Scripture interpreter was such that her house was often visited by those who sought to solve a theological dispute, a fact confirmed by the prominent role she played in the Origenist controversy, in which she not only supported her "client"

[220] Undheim 2015, pp. 61-68; Ivanovici and Undheim 2019, unpaginated. For more information about the evil eye as a corrupting factor see: Huxtable Elliott 2016. For the primary source see: Jerome, ep. 22.13 on false virgins, 22.23-24 on the easy corruptibility of the virginal state, 22.25 on thorough covering of the face, 107.9 on virgins and widows visiting martyr shrines and basilicas, in: Wright 2010, pp. 78-79, 102-109, 358-359: "*Hae sunt, quae per publicum notabiliter incedunt, et furtivis oculorum nutibus, adolescentium greges post se trahunt…Purpura tantum in veste tenuis, et laxius, ut crines decidant, ligatum caput, soccus vilior, et super humeros hyacinthine laena maforte volitans: succinctae manichae brachiis adhaerentes, et solutis genubus factus incessus. Haec est apud illas tota virginitas. Habeant istiusmodi laudatores suos, ut sub virginali nomine lucrosius pereant.*" "*Itaque obtestor te coram Deo, et Christo Jesu, et electis Angelis ejus ut custodias quae coepisti, ne vasa templi Domini, quae solis Sacerdotibus videre concessum est, facile in publicum proferas; ne sacrarium Dei quisquam profanus aspiciat...Tu quidem simpliciter loqueris, et ignotos quosque blanda non despicis, sed aliter vident impudici oculi. Non norunt animae pulchritudinem considerare...Ne declines aurem tuam in verba malitiae. Saepe enim indecens aliquid loquentes, tentant mentis arbitrium, si libenter audias virgo quod dicitur, si ad ridicula quaeque solvaris, quidquid dixeris, laudant...*" "*Zelotypus est Jesus, non vult ab aliis videri faciem tuam.*" "*Nunquam absque te procedat in publicum. Basilicas Martyrum et Ecclesias sine matre non adeat.*" ("When they go out they do their best to attract notice, and with nods and winks encourage troops of young fellows to follow them…Their robes have but a narrow purple stripe, it is true; and their head-dress is somewhat loose, so as to leave the hair free. From their shoulders flutters the lilac mantle which they call 'ma-forte'; they have their feet in cheap slippers and their arms tucked up tightfitting sleeves. Add to these marks of their profession an easy gait, and you have all the virginity that they possess. Such may have eulogizers of their own, and may fetch a higher price in the market of perdition, merely because they are called virgins." "Therefore I conjure you before God and Jesus Christ and His elect angels to guard that which you have received, not readily exposing to the public gaze the vessels of the Lord's temple (which only the priests are by right allowed to see), that no profane person may look upon God's sanctuary…You indeed may speak in all simplicity, and from motives of amiability may treat with courtesy the veriest strangers, but unchaste eyes see nothing aright. They fail to appreciate the beauty of the soul, and only value that of the body… Never incline your ear to words of mischief. For men often say an improper word to make trial of a virgin's steadfastness, to see if she hears it with pleasure, and if she is ready to unbend at every silly jest." "Jesus is jealous. He does not choose that your face should be seen of others." "Let her never visit a church or a martyr's shrine unless with her mother.").

Jerome but even directly participated by publicly speaking and maybe writing treatises of her own, which, however, did not resist the ravages of time.[221]

The relatively safe ascetic world of the city was turned upside down by the invasion of Alaric (395-410) in 410. Looting and destruction was followed by violence, which did not bypass the aristocratic ladies. Neither consecrated virgins nor widows were spared from rape, having to live the consequences: humiliation from the loss of their physical integrity, which defined them in the eyes of society and the Church and the resulting psychological trauma, as we would call it today.[222] The faith was shaken, the economic resources were depleted, the population dropped

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[221] Jerome, ep. 127.7, speaking about Marcella's authority and their intellectual relationship and 127.10 on Marcella's role in the Origenist controversy, in: Wright 2010, pp. 452-455, 458-459: "*Denique cum et me Romam cum sanctis Pontificibus, Paulino et Epiphanio, Ecclesiastica traxisset necessitas (quorum alter Antiochenam Syriae, alter Salaminiam Cypri rexit Ecclesiam) et verecunde nobilium feminarum oculos declinarem, ita egit secundum Apostolum, importune, opportune (2. Tim. 4), ut pudorem meum sua superaret industria. Et quia alicujus tunc nominis esse 956 existimabar super studio Scripturarum, nunquam convenit, quin de Scripturis aliquid interrogaret: nec ut statim [al. nec statim] acquiesceret, sed moveret e contrario quaestiones; non ut contenderet, sed ut quaerendo disceret earum solutiones, quas opponi posse intelligebat. Quid in illa virtutum, quid ingenii, quid sanctitatis, quid puritatis invenerim, vereor dicere, ne fidem credulitatis excedam, et tibi majorem dolorem incutiam, recordanti quanto bono carueris. Hoc solum dicam, quod quidquid in nobis longo fuit studio congregatum, et meditatione diuturna, quasi in naturam versum; hoc illa libavit, hoc didicit, atque possedit: ita ut post profectionem nostram, si de aliquo testimonio Scripturarum esset oborta contentio, ad illam judicem pergeretur.*" "*Damnationis haereticorum haec fuit principium: dum adducit testes, qui prius ab eis eruditi, et postea ab haeretico fuerant errore correpti: dum ostendit multitudinem deceptorum, dum impia περὶ ἀρχῶν ingerit volumina, quae emendata manu scorpii monstrabantur: dum acciti frequentibus litteris haeretici, ut se defenderent, venire non sunt ausi: tantaque vis conscientiae fuit, ut magis absentes damnari, quam praesentes coargui maluerint. Hujus tam gloriosae victoriae origo Marcella est…*" ("When the needs of the Church at length brought me to Rome in company with the reverend pontiffs, Paulinus and Epiphanius — the first of whom ruled the church of the Syrian Antioch while the second presided over that of Salamis in Cyprus — I in my modesty was for avoiding the eyes of highborn ladies, yet she pleaded so earnestly, both in season and out of season 2 Timothy 4:2 as the apostle says, that at last her perseverance overcame my reluctance. And, as in those days my name was held in some renown as that of a student of the scriptures, she never came to see me that she did not ask me some question concerning them, nor would she at once acquiesce in my explanations but on the contrary would dispute them; not, however, for argument's sake but to learn the answers to those objections which might, as she saw, be made to my statements. How much virtue and ability, how much holiness and purity I found in her I am afraid to say; both lest I may exceed the bounds of men's belief and lest I may increase your sorrow by reminding you of the blessings that you have lost. This much only will I say, that whatever in me was the fruit of long study and as such made by constant meditation a part of my nature, this she tasted, this she learned and made her own. Consequently after my departure from Rome, in case of a dispute arising as to the testimony of scripture on any subject, recourse was had to her to settle it." "She it was who originated the condemnation of the heretics. She it was who furnished witnesses first taught by them and then carried away by their heretical teaching. She it was who showed how large a number they had deceived and who brought up against them the impious books On First Principles, books which were passing from hand to hand after being 'improved' by the hand of the scorpion. She it was lastly who called on the heretics in letter after letter to appear in their own defense. They did not indeed venture to come, for they were so conscience-stricken that they let the case go against them by default rather than face their accusers and be convicted by them. This glorious victory originated with Marcella, she was the source and cause of this great blessing.") More on the role of Marcella in the Origenist controversy: Clark 1992, pp. 8, 29-32, 144-146. For Marcella's leading role in the female scholarly circle around Jerome and her correspondence with Jerome see: Hinson 1997; Graves 2011.

[222] Undheim 2020, p. 163. Violence against female ascetics inside and outside of monasteries did not come only from the hands of invaders. *Liber Pontificalis* records that during the revolt against pope Symmachus (498-514) Roman senators stripped *sanctimoniales mulieres et vergines* and injured them with cuts and blows. See: *Liber Pontificalis* I (pontificate of Symmachus, 498-514), in: Duchesne 1862, pp. 260-261: "*Eodem tempore Festus caput senati excons. et Probianus excons. coeperunt intra urbem Romam pugnere cum aliis senatoribus...etiam et*

due to the exile of many aristocrats and the casualties, the sense of security and invincibility of the city was destroyed.[223] The opulent residences of the members of the highest echelons of the Roman aristocracy were partly ruined by violent fire. This fate was shared by the residence of ascetics Melania and Pinianus, which according to the recent research can be linked to a *domus* excavated on the Cealian Hill, owned by one of the branches of the aristocratic family of Valerii. While the first attempt of the couple to sell the residence in order to finance works of charity failed due to its excessive value, after the sack of 410 and its semi-destruction by fire it was sold almost for nothing, as *Vita Melaniae* tells us. The archaeological excavations attest that it was never restored to its former glory and was probably abandoned.[224] Not even Marcella's house on the Aventine, to which she retreated from her countryside house-monastery preceding the arrival of the troops, was spared by the conquerors. As Jerome informs, she and her companion Principia were ambushed inside the *domus* by Visigoths looking for treasures and gold. Yet Marcella did not waver and fearlessly pointed out her self-chosen poverty. While trying to protect the younger woman from violence, she was whipped and beaten by the intruders. Despite being saved by a miraculous intervention from God and escorted to the safety of the basilica of San Paolo fuori le mura, she died soon after the events.[225] Deeply shaken, several of the aristocratic ladies left Rome never to return again, as was the case with Melania the Younger and Anicia Faltonia Proba.[226]

Proba, Redempta, Herundo

After the partial return of the landed aristocracy a short period of economic conjuncture ensued, with massive rebuilding of churches and estates as its result. However, it seems that the collapse of the Roman provinces and administration, Gothic war of 534-554, degradation of Rome from the centre of the Empire to mere centre of one of the provinces, the erosion of the landed wealth of Rome's aristocratic families and subsequent abandonment of many of the properties inside the city walls has taken its toll on the *domus*-centred form of ascetic life.[227]

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sanctimoniales mulieres et virgines deponentes de monasteria vel habitaculis suis, denudantes sexum femineum, caedibus plagarum adflictas vulnerabantur."

[223] Spera 2012, pp. 116-117.

[224] Santangeli Valenzani 2012, pp. 220-221 with further bibliographical references. For the source see *Vita Melaniae* 14, in: Gorce, 1962, pp. 154-157.

[225] Jerome, ep. 127.12-13, in: Wright 2010, pp. 462-465. For more information of the house-monasteries in the countryside as centres of private devotion see: Bowes 2008, pp. 125-188 with further bibliography.

[226] For Melania the Younger see: Jenal 1995, pp. 80-83. For Anicia Faltonia Proba see: Jenal 1995, pp. 111-118.

[227] For the information about the effect of political instability on the Roman aristocracy see: Cooper and Hillner 2007, pp. 1-3 and Santangeli Valenzani 2012, pp. 222-225.

Despite all this, examples of small groups of aristocratic female ascetics can be found in the correspondence of bishop of Ruspe, Fulgentius (508-527/533), who, despite not being resident of Rome, kept in frequent contact with the members of the Roman nobility, to whom he addressed several treatises on ascetic life, dated around the 520s.[228] Three of these treatises were written for the merit of Galla and Proba, who most scholars identify as daughters of consul Symmachus from the powerful *gens Anicii*.[229]

As Galla will be dealt with later in the chapter, let's focus on her sister. A noblewoman in the centre of a circle of erudites dedicated to the reading of works of Augustine (396-430), frequented by Fulgentius and abbot of the monastic community *castellum Lucullanum* in Campania, Eugippius, and owner of one of the most complete personal libraries on Augustine, she illustrates well how the exercising of female authority and its acceptance in the religious context went hand in hand with the elevated social status and prominent place in the relationship networks of the Roman aristocracy.[230]

In letters addressed to her, Fulgentius lauds the ideal of the consecrated virgin, based on patristic tradition and easily practicable in the confines of one's own home. Motives such as dedication to works of charity, dressing in simple and unadorned garb without any jewellery, fasting until the skin loses its rosy hue, praying frequently and continuously examining one's own heart, abstaining from life comforts such as perfumes, frequent baths, or soft beds are not dissimilar to the guidelines of Jerome. Fulgentius warns Proba that the fasting should be moderated as not to exhaust the body completely, but the meals should be made as simple as possible, because the opulence in quantity and taste can diminish the compassion felt for the poor. On the topic of dress appropriate for the virgins he stops to note that any extravagance and vanity mirrored by the outer appearance straps the soul from its virtuous splendour.[231] Even if it is impossible to define the extent to which the life of the consecrated virgin followed the prescribed ideal, the letters can at least shed some light on the expectations she had to live to and against which her actions were compared.

[228] Fulgentius of Ruspe, ep. 2-4, in: Isola 1999, pp. 51-130. See Verardi 2018, p. 274 and note n. 9 for the discussion about the dating of the letters and further bibliography on the topic.
[229] For the discussion of the identity of both women see: Isola 1999, pp. 51-53 and 83-86. On Symmachus see: Martindale 1980, pp. 1044-1045.
[230] Verardi 2018, p. 275.
[231] Fulgentius, of Ruspe, ep. 3-4, in: Isola 1999, pp. 83-130. For the discussion of the prescriptions for female ascetics in the letters of Fulgentius see: Verardi 2018, p. 283.

The final decades of the 6th century brought change in the patronage of the ascetic and monastic life in Rome, where after decades of unrest economic support from the aristocracy was replaced by initiatives of the high-ranking clergy and the pope. This development is evident in the activity of Gregory the Great, a former monk who promoted models of ascetic life rooted in the tradition of Jerome and Fulgentius, taking upon himself the spiritual and material care of pre-existent and new ascetic groups in the city, woven into its fabric in the aftermath of the flood of Lombards in the northern part of the peninsula.[232]

It is to Gregory that we owe the mention of Redempta, ascetic *matrona* living together with two disciples, one of which named Romula, in seclusion in the precinct of Santa Maria Maggiore during his youth. A pupil of female recluse and miracle worker Herundo, who supposedly lived outside of the city in the mountains of Praeneste, adopting the Eastern, eremitic form of ascetic life, the spiritual leader of the group is lauded for her remarkable patience in confronts of her affliction with paralysis, obedience, and continuous prayer.[233] It is evident that nothing substantial changed in the female ascetic ideal, prescribed by the Church, in the period of our interest.

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[232] Capo 2018, p. 305 and Verardi 2018, pp. 284-290. For more information about the financial dependence of the ascetic communities formed in the late 4th and early 5th century around aristocratic Roman women on their wealth see e.g.: Clark 1986, pp. 209-228 and Cooper and Hillner 2007, pp. 165-189. More in general on the papacy and legacy of Gregory the Great (590-604) see e.g.: Markus 1997; Boesch Gajano 2011; Bronwen 2013. In his epistle 7, dated to 597, the pope mentions 3000 nuns in need of assistance from the Church, having fled the Lombard invasion and residing in Rome. See: Gregory the Great, ep. 7.26, in: Migne, 1862b, col. 881: "*Mox autem medietatem pecuniae quam transmisistis, in eorum redemptionem transmisi. De medietate vero ancillis Dei, quas vos Graeca lingua monastrias dicitis, lectisternia emere disposui, quia in lectis suis gravi nuditate in hujus hiemis vehementissimo frigore laborant, quae in hac urbe multae sunt. Nam juxta notitiam qua dispensantur tria millia reperiuntur. Et quidem de sancti Petri apostolorum principis rebus octoginta annuas libras accipiunt.*" For the English translation see: Martyn 2004, p. 476: "I immediately sent over half the money that you had sent for their ransom. And for the other half, I have arranged to purchase some bed coverings for the nuns, whom you call 'monastic women' in Greek, because they are suffering from a terrible lack of bedclothes in the extremely bitter cold of the city. And there are many of them in the city. Indeed three thousand of them are found listed in the census, and they receive eighty pounds a year from the goods of Saint Peter, prince of the apostles."

[233] The trope of physical disability is used by Gregory to demonstrate her spiritual growth at the expense of the suffering of the flesh. See: Gregory the Great, *Dialogi* 4.16, in: Zimmermann 2002, pp. 208-210. For the Latin version of the text see: Migne 1862a, col. 344-345: "*Eo namque tempore quo monasterium petii, anus quaedam Redempta nomine, in sanctimoniali habitu constituta in urbe hac juxta beatae Mariae semper virginis ecclesiam manebat. Haec illius Herundinis discipula fuerat, quae magnis virtutibus pollens, super Praenestinos montes vitam eremiticam duxisse ferebatur. Huic autem Redemptae duae in eodem habitu discipulae aderant, una nomine Romula, et altera, quae nunc adhuc superest, quam quidem facie scio, sed nomine nescio. Tres itaque hae in uno habitaculo commanentes, morum quidem divitiis plenam, sed tamen rebus pauperem vitam ducebant. Haec autem quam praefatus sum Romula aliam quam praedixi condiscipulam suam magnis vitae meritis anteibat. Erat quippe mirae patientiae, summae obedientiae, custos oris sui ad silentium, studiosa valde ad continuae orationis usum… haec quam praediximus Romula ea quam Graeco vocabulo medici paralysin vocant molestia corporali percussa est, multisque annis in lectulo decubans, pene omni jacebat membrorum officio destituta, nec tamen haec eadem ejus mentem ad impatientiam flagella perduxerant. Nam ipsa ei detrimenta membrorum facta fuerant incrementa virtutum, quia tanto sollicitius ad usum orationis excreverat, quanto et aliud quodlibet agere nequaquam valebat.*"

Life in the female monasteries

Early evidence of female monasteries in Rome

The existence of female monasteries in Rome before the end of the 6th century is attested by funerary inscriptions commemorating women labelled as *abbatissa*, found in the cemetery dedicated to martyr Sebastian along Via Appia (425-474)[234], under the choir pavement of the basilica Sant'Agnese fuori le mura (514),[235] and under a medieval house across the square from the basilica of Santa Cecilia in Trastevere (late 6th century).[236] Group of inscriptions dedicated

[234] Fragmentary text identifies the buried woman as an abbess of an unknown monastery. No other sources, however, testify for a convent in the location. It is fully possible that the abbess was devoted to the martyr Sebastian and therefore wished to be buried next to his tomb. For more information see: Ferrari 1957, pp. 164-165. The inscription was published in: *Epigraphic Database Bari*, n. EDB4435, https://www.edb.uniba.it/epigraph/4435 (last viewed on 26. 01. 2025): *"[--- Quadrag?]esima abbatis[sa ---]/[--- me]ns(es) III dep(osita) [---]"* (ICVR NS V, 13670).

[235] The inscription commemorates abbess Serena, who died 85-years-old, in the year 514: De Rossi 1901, p. 298: "HIC REQVIESCIT IN PACE/SERENA ABBATTISSA SV (sacra virgo?)/QVAE VIXIT ANNVS PM LXXXV/DEP II ID MAI SENATORE/ VC CONS" (dated by the consular reference). Even though it is impossible to completely deny the link between the inscription and the tradition of a convent founded by Constantine's daughter to honour the tomb of martyr Agnes, hinted on by De Rossi and Metz 1954, p. 81, I must agree with Ferrari 1957, p. 29 that without confirmation from an independent source we cannot take the existence of the inscription at the spot as a definitive proof of a female monastery. However, we can at least state that the virgin martyr attracted devotion of many virgins in the city, which may have been the reason abbess Serena chose to be buried next to her tomb. An account of pseudo-Ambrose from the first half of the 5th century comes to our aid, recounting how many virgins looked up to Agnes and persevered in their vocation due to her example: quoted in Ferrari 1957, p. 29; for the Latin original see: Migne 1845e, col. 742: "*Et quia fides mortis damna non patitur, usque in hodiernum diem multae virgins Romae Agnem beatissimam quasi in corpore manentem adspiciunt et eius exemplum agentes viriliter et integre perserverant credentes sine dubio, quod perserverantes perpetuae victoriae palmam acquirunt.*" This information is confirmed by the Greek legend about the martyrdom of Agnes, dated to the same period, which describes her not as a child but as a mature virgin of rare virtue, gathering around herself Roman virgins who flock to her to listen to her teachings: Franchi De' Cavalieri 1899, pp. 28-32 (quoted in Cecchelli 2005, p. 18). Even though the sources do not offer strong evidence of existence of a female monastery on Via Nomentana at the beginning of the 4th century, it is still tempting to imagine a more unorganized community of female ascetics preceding the one on the Aventine. But due to the dating of the legend of the martyr to the 5th century it is much more probable that the literary image of the female ascetic group formed around her was inspired by the monastic communities in Rome at the time of its writing and cannot be applied to the 4th century: Jenal 1995, pp. 29-30 with references to bibliography documenting the disparate opinions of the scholars on the topic.

[236] The inscription mentions abbess with the name Gratiosa. The tomb to which it belonged was found intact in front of the atrium of the basilica. Orazio Marucchi, who reported on the excavations in 1909, was of the opinion that the tomb must have belonged to a superior of a convent adjoining the basilica. However, even he admits that after the loss of interest in burying of the dead in the cemeteries outside of the walls locations near the most famous basilicas in the city became especially popular and due to their exclusive status they attracted members of the Christian congregation from all over Rome, their pre-burial dwelling location notwithstanding: Marucchi 1909, pp. 141-143: "HIC REQVIESCIT IN PA/CE ARGENTIA QVI BIX/IT PLVS MINVS ANNOS XL LO/CVM

to consecrated virgins, uncovered in the cemetery of Ciriaca near the basilica of San Lorenzo fuori le mura, datable to the period between the 4th and the end of the 5th century, corroborates the evidence.[237] Unfortunately, due to the fragmentary written sources and lack of further geographical markers in the epigraphical ones the monasteries cannot be satisfactorily localized, even though attempts to link them to the place of the discovery of the inscriptions were made.[238]

It is also dubitable whether the aristocratic consecrated virgin Demetrias, already discussed in chapter 1, founded a monastery next to the church of martyr Sebastian she had sponsored, as hypothesized by Margherita Cecchelli and Alessandra Milella on the basis of the noblewoman's connections with the highest echelons of the Church hierarchy, as well as the fact that both her mother Anicia Iuliana and her grandmother Proba founded monasteries in Africa.[239]

Thus the earliest securely localizable female monastery in Rome can be traced only to the letter dated between September 591 and August 592, in which Gregory the Great instructs a subdeacon Sabinus to offer material assistance to a convent of nuns of Euprepia by endowing them with a proprietary right to the garden of dead presbyter Felicianus, located in front of the steps of Santa Sabina.[240] The convent is attested solely by this letter and disappears into the void. It is not clear whether it shared the location of the garden next to the basilica of Santa Sabina. And even if it would be tempting to imagine a convent rooted in the tradition of the

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BERO QVEM SIBI BENERABI/LIS ABBATISSA GRATIOSA PREPA/RABERAT SE VIBAM MIHI EVM CES/SIT CONIVRO PER PATREM ET FI/LIVM ET SPIRITVM SCVM ET DI/EM TRAMENDAM IVDICII VT NVL/LVS PRESVMAT LOCVM ISTVM VBI REQVIESCO VIOLARE QVOD/SI QVI POT ANC CONVIRA/TIONEM PRESVVMSERIT ANA/TEMA ABEAT DE IVDA ET RE/PR ANAMAN SYRI ABEAT." Since the existence of a female monastery in Trastevere at the end of the 6th century is not recorded anywhere else in the sources, the inscription can only be taken as an evidence of a female monastic abode somewhere in the city: Ferrari 1957, p. 24. For an interpretation in favour of an early Christian female monastery near the basilica see: Cecchelli 2014, p. 887.

[237] The cemetery of Ciriaca can boast 5 inscriptions from the period between the 4th and the 5th century referencing virgins consecrated to God. The proportion of those inscriptions to all others uncovered at the site is greater than at any other Roman cemetery. Yet, there are no other sources that would support the hypothesis of existence of a convent adjacent to the nearby basilica San Lorenzo fuori le mura: Ferrari 1957, p. 186 and Carletti, 2008, p. 61: "*[locu]s Agnetis [---] sacrae vir/ gines*" (300-399, ICVR NS VII, 18400); "*sponsa diu nubit per sacra vela Deo...Iuliana virgo*" (350-450, ICVR NS VII, 18944); "*[hic] iacet Labinia ` virg´o dei...*" (409, ICVR NS VII, 17545); "*P]raetextata/ virgo sacra*" (464, ICVR VII, 17583).

[238] Ferrari 1957, pp. 24, 28, 186, 258. For newer discussion of the evidence see: Pani Ermini 1981, pp. 28-30, who corroborates the statement of Ferrari that the evidence is insufficient.

[239] Cecchelli 2014, p. 882 and Milella 2020, pp. 80-81. For more information on the activities of Demetrias and her female kin see: Laurence 2002.

[240] Gregory the Great, ep. 2.46, in: Martyn 2004, p. 227. For the Latin original see: Migne 1862b, colls. 540-541: "*Ideoque experientiae tuae hac auctoritate praecipimus, ut hortum quondam Feliciani presbyteri positum in regione prima, ante gradus sanctae Sabinae, excusatione postposita, monasterio Euprepiae, in quo ancillarum Dei congregatio esse dignoscitur, iure proprietario possidendum trader sine ambiguitate festinet...*".

house monasteries of the ladies of the circle around Jerome on the Aventine Hill, without any further archaeological proof it remains a wishful thinking.[241]

Another letter of the pope from January 593, this time addressed to the Roman administrator of the Church's patrimony, subdeacon Gratiosus, testifies for Gregory's intention to found female monastery near the Viminal. In the letter he orders Gratiosus to "…hand over the…property to the Abbess Flora, with the right of possession for her indubitable ownership." He divulges that the property he has in mind is a "house…located in this city in the fourth region, next to place called the 'White Hens', the property of the Holy Church of Rome, over which we preside with God's authority, and in which a patrician lady, Campana, is known to have once lived." Gratiosus should "hand it over with the garden and also the lodgings, which a doorway encloses within the same house. Thus with Christ's help, the abbess can construct a convent in this house, where she can live with her community, so that she, and also her successor in status and position, can possess the above-mentioned house and garden and all things belonging to them as we have said, with a peaceful and inalienable right, as granted by us, due to our respect for her piety."[242]

Nothing is known about the fate of abbess Flora and her nuns. The precise location of the monastery is hard to determine from the indications in the letter. The toponym *Gallinae Albae* has been preserved in the name of the now lost church of San Sisto in Gallina Alba, which was traced by Christian Hülsen in the 1920s to a place on the western slope of the Viminal near the church of San Lorenzo in Panisperna. There is no reason to assume that the church has anything to do with the female monastery in question. However, the toponym indicates that they most likely existed in the same general vicinity.[243]

The first decade of Gregory's pontificate abounded with charitable activity, aimed to support the female convents in the city.[244] In the year 599, in a letter to abbess Bona, whose convent was almost in ruins, he expresses an intention to donate to her and her nuns a home bequeathed to the Holy See by presbyter John. In accordance to the will the pope granted the abbess not

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[241] The hypothesis about the existence of a female monastery on the slopes of Aventine was postulated by: Cecchelli and Armellini 1942, p. 722. It was refuted by Ferrari 1957, p. 136.

[242] Gregory the Great, ep. 3.17, in: Martyn 2004, pp. 247-248. For the Latin original see: Migne 1862b, col. 617: "*Idcirco praesenti tibi auctoritate praecipimus quatenus domum positam in hac urbe, regione quarta, iuxta locum qui apellatur Gallinas albas, vel hortum iuris sanctae Romanae Ecclesiae, cui, Deo auctore, praesidemus, in qua Campana quondam Patritia mansisse dignoscitur, simul et hortum atque hospitia, quae intra eamdem domum ianua concludit, Florae abbatissae debeas tradere, proprietatis iure procul dubio possidendam. In qua domo monasterium, ubi cum congregatione sua habitare possit, Christo queat adiuvante costruere, ut tam ipsa quam etiam quae in eius loco honoreque successerit praedictam domum et hortum cum omnibus ad se pertinentibus, sicut diximus, quieto inconcussoque iure, a nobis pietatis consideratione concessa, valeat possidere.*"

[243] Ferrari, 1957 pp. 11-12, quoting Hülsen 1927, p. 471, and Pani Ermini 1981, p. 31.

[244] On the attitude of Gregory towards virgins and nuns see: Martyn 2009.

only the ownership of the house and a garden located in Rome near the baths of Agrippa, probably in the precinct of the *area sacra* on Largo Argentina, but also an estate along Via Nomentana, a tavern in the city and a *salgamum* near the future monastery.[245] The presence of the latter, most probably a storage or a dispensary of food outside of the confines of the *domus*, may signify that both presbyter John and the nuns were involved in feeding of the poor.[246] After an undetermined period of hardship Bona and her nuns were to be generously provided for both in property and income. That is, if the intention of the pope came to be realized. There is no further evidence to assure us that Bona's convent was moved to the new location.[247]

If we are to trust the opinions of the pope and of bishop Fulgentius of Ruspe, the most exalted Roman female monastic of the 6th century was noblewoman Galla from the powerful *gens Anicii*, which previously gave the city and its Christian community female authorities such as Faltonia Betitia Proba, the author of the famous Cento, exploring the life of Christ through Vergillian verses, the correspondent of Augustine, Anicia Faltonia Proba, or the already mentioned patroness Demetrias.[248]

Similarly to Marcella and other noble ladies from the circle of Jerome, it was Galla's elevated social status that allowed her to fully develop her authority in the religious context, at least the type of authority defined by Christine Schenk as "the power to influence others by one's accepted knowledge or commanding manner".[249] What we know about her is contained in a letter from Fulgentius, written around the year 523 to offer consolation to the young widow, and in the *Dialogues* of Gregory the Great, which describe her life prior and after the joining of

[245] Gregory the Great, ep. 9.138, in: Martyn 2004, pp. 624-625. For the Latin original see: Migne 1862b, colls. 633-635: "*...Cognovimus itaque Ioannem quondam presbyterum sanctae Romanae Ecclesiae, cui Deo auctore deservimus, in domo iuris sui posita in hac urbe Roma, iuxta thermas Agrippianas, oratorium construxisse, ibique quosdam reditus legati titulo per testamenti sui seriem reliquisse; in quo etiam oratorio servorum Dei congregationem esse constituit... Sed quia, morte occupatus, hoc non occurrit implere, et domus ipsa cum horto suo ab actoribus nostrae Ecclesiae detinetur... Sed quoniam illic, pro difficultate temporis, nova servorum Dei congregatio adhiberi non potuit, feminarum saltem congregationem constituendam esse decernimus, atque ideo et locum ipsum solemniter dedicare. Et quia monasterium ubi tu prius fuisti in ruinae erat periculo constitutum, te illic cum congregatione tua consistere per omnia debere... Considerantes igitur antedicti presbyteri voluntatem, perpetuo illic tempore monasterium esse, atque ad id eamdem domum in integro cum horto suo et rebus inferius designatis, quae a testatore relictae sunt, proprietatis iure constituimus pertinere; id est, massam Magulianensem cum appendicibus suis via Numentana milliario plus minus undecimo, tabernam in hac urbe, quae est posita iuxta Palacenis, et Salgamum positum ante domum suprascripti monasterii.*" The arguments for the location are based on results of excavations in the area of Largo Argentina. See: Cecchelli 2014, pp. 910-911, quoting Santangeli Valenzani 1994.

[246] Pani Ermini 1981, pp. 32-33.

[247] Ferrari 1957, pp. 176-178.

[248] Quacquarelli 1991, p. 19 and Isola 1999, p. 51. On the Vergillian *Cento* see Clark 1986, pp. 153-171; Curran 2012; Dean 2012, pp. 62-73, 252-257; Schottenius Cullhed 2015. For the English edition of the text see: Reedy *et al.* 1981. On Anicia Faltonia Proba see: Laurence 2002.

[249] Schenk 2017, pp. XV-XVI.

the female monastery next to the St. Peter's Basilica.[250] The letter of Fulgentius depicts Galla only as "illustrious lady" and is silent about her spiritual qualities and capabilities.[251] On the other hand, Gregory the Great reconstructs them boldly, creating an image of a "noble girl…daughter of the consul and patrician Symmachus", having lived "in the time of the Goths", who, after the premature death of her husband, decided to "lay aside her secular garb" and dedicate herself to simple life, tireless prayer and works of charity.[252] Using biographic snippets, the pope constructs an exemplary woman dedicated to monastic life and worthy of imitating.[253]

Yet even though the text intends to laud the noble deeds and spiritual highness of the patrician, it does not entirely pass over the infirmities of her sex. At the beginning of the account, the pope describes her passionate nature, which, not gratified by second marriage, inflicts the body of Galla with a beard growth, that she happily accepts, as "her body was not the object of her heavenly spouse's love".[254] Thus the spiritual maturation is conditioned by denial of interest for the body and in this case further strengthened by accepting of male physical qualities.

Gregory's rhetoric turn is not so surprising if we consider the genesis of the ascetic monastic life, which, despite the fact that it attracted women *en masse*, started as male endeavour. When women courageously entered the uncharted realm, they were living up to an ideal which was, in the eyes of contemporaries, not always compatible with the expected characteristics of their sex. Male Church authors considered virginal women to be honorary men, because the restraint and virtue required to acquire the status of purity of the soul were viewed as inherent to

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[250] Fulgentius of Ruspe, ep. 2, in: Isola, 1999, pp. 51-82 and Gregory the Great, *Dialogi* 4.14, in: Zimmermann, 2002, pp. 205-207. For more information see: Saxer 1991, p. 30 and Isola 1991, pp. 9-10 offering arguments in support of the hypothesis about the coincidence of the identity of the two Gallas.

[251] Fulgentius of Ruspe, ep. 2, in: Isola 1999, p. 52. For the Latin version of the text see: Migne 1847a, col. 311: "*Dominae vere illustri et in Christi timore venerabili filiae GALLAE FULGENTIUS, servorum Christi famulus, in Domino salutem.*" For more information about the image of Galla in the letter see: Isola 1991, pp. 12-13.

[252] Gregory the Great, *Dialogi* 4.14, in: Zimmermann 2002, p. 207. For the Latin text see: Migne 1862a, col. 310: "*Gothorum namque temporibus Galla hujus urbis nobilissima puella Symmachi consulis ac patricii filia, intra adolescentiae tempora marito tradita, in unius anni spatio ejus est morte viduata...abjecto saeculari habitu…ibique multis annis simplicitati cordis atque orationi dedita, larga indigentibus eleemosynarum opera impendit.*".

[253] Quacquarelli 1991, pp. 17-18. For the primary source see: Gregory the Great, *Dialogi* 4.14, in: Zimmermann 2002, p. 207: "*This event is still one of the memorable events of that convent. The younger sisters now in the community, who heard the story from the older ones, can tell it in all its details exactly as if they themselves had witnessed the miracle*." For the Latin version see: Migne 1862a, col. 310: "*Quod factum nunc usque in eodem monasterio manet memorabile, sicque hoc a praecedentibus Matribus traditum narrare illic solent subtiliter iuniores quae nunc sunt sanctimoniales virgines, ac si illo in tempore huic tam grandi miraculo et ipsae adfuissent.*"

[254] Gregory the Great, *Dialogi* 4.14, Zimmermann 2002, p. 206. For the Latin text see: Migne 1862a, col. 310: "*Huic autem cum valde ignea conspersio corporis inesset, coeperunt medici dicere, quia nisi ad amplexus viriles rediret, calore nimio contra naturam barbas esset habitura, quod ita quoque post factum est. Sed sancta mulier nihil exterioris deformitatis timuit, quae interioris sponsi speciem amavit, nec verita est si hoc in illa foedaretur, quod a coelesti sponso in ea non amaretur.*"

masculinity. Even though no accounts of crossdressing female ascetics exist in Rome, contrary to Byzantium, Roman aristocrats, for which more elaborate accounts about their ascetic lives remain, are often represented with masculine attributes. Due to the idea of femaleness as second-rate, it was imperative for them to transcend the limitations of their gender and referring to them as having manly soul or even physical traits was sign of high praise.[255]

As mentioned above, in book IV of his *Dialogi* Gregory the Great stresses that after the passing of her husband the venerable widow "…dedicated herself to the service of God in the convent at the Church of St. Peter the Apostle".[256] Even though it would seem that by indicating that the monastery adjoined the St. Peter's Basilica the pope made its identification straightforward, it is not the case. Unfortunately, the only known information about the monasteries around the basilica is that at the end of the 5th and the beginning of the 6th century contrary to the situation after the 7th century there were only two of them, one being a male monastery called *Maior*. There is a hypothesis that the female convent may have been a predecessor of the convent of Santo Stephano *cata* Galla Patricia, first recorded in the year 757 in the letter of pope Stephen II (752-757) to Fulradus, abbot of Saint-Denis, in which he gave some of the convent's property to the abbot. However, as the link between the two mostly depends on association of names and cannot be traced in the sources, it is most improbable.[257]

That in the early 7th century a female monastery existed not only near St. Peter's, but also next to the basilica of San Paolo fuori le mura is evidenced by a letter of Gregory the Great to the subdeacon Felix from 604. In his request to allot different farms between Via Ostiense and Via Appia to the patrimony of the basilica of San Paolo, the pope mentions a garden of "the convent of St. Stephen, located near St. Paul and belonging to the nuns". The text of the letter locates the garden between the Tiber and the porticus of the basilica, but the location of the monastery

[255] Hunt 2019. For more information about crossdressing female ascetics in the Greek-written sources see: Patlagean 1976 and Davis 2002.
[256] Gregory the Great, *Dialogi* 4.14, in: Zimmermann 2002, pp. 205-207. For the Latin original see: Migne 1862a, col. 310: "*Gothorum namque temporibus Galla huius urbis nobilissima puella Symmachi consulis ac patricii filia, intra adolescentiae tempora marito tradita, in unius anni spatio eius est morte viduata... Mox ergo ut eius maritus defunctus est, abiecto saeculari habitu, ad omnipotentis Dei servitium sese apud beati Petri apostoli ecclesiam monasterio tradidit, ibique multis annis simplicitati cordis atque orationi dedita, larga indigentibus eleemosynarum opera impendit*." For more information on the image of Galla in the *Dialogi* see: Proja 1954 and Quacquarelli 1991.
[257] Ferrari 1957, pp. 322-324. For the letter of pope Stephen II (752-757) see: Mansi 1766, p. 552. The 6th-century name of the male monastery, recorded in the later medieval sources mostly as SS. Iohannis and Pauli, can be found in a letter of pope Pelagius II (579-590) to the bishops of Istria, dated between 585-586. See: database *Fontes Istriae Medievalis*, https://fontesistrie.eu/585_PPH1 (last viewed on 14. 02. 2024).

itself or its previous history is unknown.[258] Ferrari suggests that it may have been connected to the oratory of martyr Stephen, recorded by *De Locis Sanctis* in the middle of the 7th century and probably located in front of the basilica.[259] By the 8th century the many invasions and sacks of Rome must have taken its toll on the monasteries, both male and female, in the vicinity of the basilica, and caused a retirement of their members inside the city walls, as during the pontificate of Gregory II (715-731) papal chancery observes that "the monastery of the martyr of Christ Stephen which lays within the atrium of the apostle Paul, has for some time been devoid of monks or nuns…". The document, included in the so-called *Liber Diurnus*, adds to our knowledge of the location of the monastery.[260] The formulation "*intro atrio*" probably does not mean that the monastery actually laid within the atrium itself. It may have instead flanked the structure and shared one of its entrances with it.[261]

The last female monastery that hovers on the verge of our period of interest is the one mentioned in the *Miraculum sancti Anastasii martyris* from 713-714. The work recounts the miraculous cure of the daughter of a Syrian bishop at Aquas Salvias and describes how the bishop, rather than give his daughter's hand in marriage, sent her to the female monastery of St. Cassian near the basilica of San Lorenzo fuori le mura.[262] The text does not go to great lengths to describe the monastery, so the question how long it existed before the young girl became a nun remains open. We can hypothesize that it may have been operational at least from the end of the 7th century. However, it may potentially have been much older, with roots in the pontificate of

[258] Gregory the Great, ep. 14.14, in: Martyn 2004, pp. 880-881. For the Latin original, see Migne 1862b, coll. 1319: "*...adjicientes etiam eidem cessioni hortos duos inter Tiberim et porticum ipsius ecclesiae, euntibus a porta civitatis parte dextera, quos dividit fluvius Almon, inter affines horti monasterii sancti Stephani, quod est ancillarum Dei, positum ad sanctum Paulum...*".

[259] Ferrari 1957, p. 259, note 8, quoting *De Locis sanctis*: "*In parte autem australi civitatis, iuxta viam Ostiensem, Paulus apostolus corpore pausat...et ante frontem eiusdem basilicae oratorium est Stephani martyris...*", in: Valentini and Zucchetti 1942, pp. 108-109.

[260] Ferrari 1957, p. 260. Existence of multiple monasteries is attested by the biography of pope Gregory II (715-731) in *Liber Pontificalis*, which records reconstruction of the basilica undertaken by him and explicitly mentions "*…monasteria ad solitudinem deducta…*", in: Duchesne 1862, p. 397. For *Liber Diurnus*, formula 87, see: Foerster 1958, p. 167: "*…monasterium sancti Christi martyris Stephani quod intro atrio beati apostoli Pauli fundatum est, omnino constat iam elapse tempore congregatione servorum aut ancillarum dei nudatu et sollitudine*…". The translation to English is my own.

[261] Ferrari 1957, pp. 261 and Pani Ermini 1981, pp. 27-28.

[262] Both the Greek original and the Latin translation of the miracles of martyr Anastasius are discussed by Franklin 2014, who follows the spread of the Roman cult of the martyr in the 8th century in relation to the strongly present communities of Greek monks in the city. The location of the monastery dedicated to Cassian can be determined with the help of *Liber Pontificalis* entry for pope Leo III (795-816), which mentions a monastery next to San Lorenzo fuori le mura dedicated to St. Cassian. Since no other convent of this name is known in Rome, it is probably the same as the one mentioned in the account of Anthony's miracles a century before. For more information see: Ferrari 1957, p. 185. For the entry in *Liber Pontificalis* see: Duchesne 1892, p. 23: "*…et in monasterio sancti Cassiani qui ponitur iuxta sanctum Laurentium foris murum fecit canistrum ex argento.*…".

Gregory the Great. Such hypothesis can be postulated on the basis of a letter from the pope to two freed slaves, Montana and Thomas, in which he writes to Montana:

"And because you, Montana, claim to have applied your mind to a monastic way of life, for that reason we give and concede for you today the two ounces of gold which the one-time priest, Gaudiosus, is known to have left you recently in his last will and testament, for your investiture, all of which will of course benefit the convent of Saint Laurence, where Constantina is in charge as an abbess…".[263]

It is not possible to establish whether the convent dedicated to martyr Laurence was located near the basilica of San Lorenzo and may be therefore identified with the later convent of St. Cassian, but the chance exists.

Thorough analysis, to which the early medieval monasteries of Rome have been subjected by Guy Ferrari in the 1950s, indicates that while female convents were not entirely non-existent in the period of interest of this work, they were much scarcer than the male ones. And those which existed had a very obscure fate. It appears that in the 6th century the four documented female monasteries made 1/4 of all named and identified monasteries in Rome and the ratio dropped to 1/5 in the 7th century (5 female to 20 male).[264] As for their location, female convents did not by any means deviate from the general pattern of monastery building in the city: they were constructed either in the vicinity of the major basilicas such as San Lorenzo fuori le mura (*monasterium Sancti Cassiani*), San Paolo fuori le mura (*monasterium Sancti Stephani*), St. Peter's Basilica (*monasterium Sancti Stephani*) or inside the city walls on plots gifted to them by the papal administration (monasteries *Ad Gallinas Albas*, *Iuxta thermas Agrippianas*, *Euprepiae*).

The physical space of female monasteries

[263] Ferrari 1957, pp. 185-186. For the source see: Gregory the Great, ep. 4.12, in: Martyn 2004, pp. 410-411. For the Latin version see: Migne 1862b, col. 804: "*Et quia tu, Montana, animum te ad conversionem fateris appulisse monachicam, idcirco duas uncias, quas tibi quondam Gaudiosus presbyter per supremae suae voluntatis arbitrium institutionis modo noscitur reliquisse, hac die tibi donamus, atque concedimus, omnia scilicet monasterio sancti Laurentii, cui Constantina abbatissa praeest...*".
[264] Ferrari 1957, pp. 411-415.

The early medieval Roman written sources remain silent about the internal structure of the early medieval monasteries. And on this occasion archaeology remains quite helpless as well, as especially the female monasteries were overwhelmingly located within the protected confines of city walls, and thus in places often occupied continuously from antiquity to the present, subject to constant remodelling.[265] We cannot assume that all the monasteries founded between the 5th and the 7th century looked alike and we are definitely in the dark about the differences between female and male monasteries. What we know of, however, is the fact that in the case of monasteries *Ad Gallinas Albas* and *Iuxta Thermas Agrippianas* abbesses Flora and Bona were both to be given an aristocratic *domus* by the Church officials to transfer their community of nuns to. The letter of Gregory the Great explicitly states that the property with which abbess Flora was to be bestowed was previously inhabited by a patrician *matrona* Campana, probably a pious woman of substantial means.[266] The extent of wealth of presbyter John, whose *domus Iuxta Thermas Agrippianas* was to be transferred to abbess Bona, remains unknown, but the fact that together with the house he was able to leave an estate outside of Rome and a tavern inside the city to the Church in his will testifies that it must have been significant.[267]

Gregory the Great, too, is reported by his *vita* to have had his own *domus* on the Celian Hill transformed to a monastery dedicated to martyr Andrew, which was discussed briefly at the beginning of this chapter.[268] And it is only this monastery that is described in some detail, and even this one in a source postdating the events and places captured in it by almost 300 years. John the Deacon recounts that the complex contained an atrium with *nymphaeum* and a fountain, cells for the monks and a courtyard, which was only accessible from within the complex. Indispensable part of every noble Roman *domus*, a *triclinium* offered the monks much sought after refuge in the hot afternoons. Two oratories, located possibly in the vicinity of the

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[265] Beach and Cochelin 2020, p. 87.

[266] Gregory the Great, ep. 3.17, in: Martyn 2004, p. 247. For the Latin original see: Migne 1862b, col. 617: "*…in qua Campana quondam Patritia mansisse…*".

[267] Gregory the Great, ep. 9.138, in: Martyn 2004, pp. 624-625. For the Latin original see: Migne 1862b, colls. 633-635. The building types in the 6th-century Rome are not documented due to the lack of archaeological evidence. It is possible to hypothesize that the *domus* repeated the forms from the 4th century, with one floor or more (if the surrounding landscape allowed for it), without a predefined floor plan, separated from the surrounding buildings by outer walls without windows and boasting a central hall of much grander dimensions than the rest of the inner spaces. See: Pani Ermini 1981, p. 34.

[268] John the Deacon, *Vita S. Gregorii Magni* 1.6: Migne 1862g, coll. 65: "*…intra Romanae urbis moenia, sub bonore sancti Andreae apostoli, juxta basilicam sanctorum Joannis et Pauli ad clivum Scauri, monasterium in proprio domate fabricavit.*" Even though the existence of the monastery "*sancti Andreae apostoli…quod apellatur Clivus Scauri*" is corroborated by a letter of Gregory the Great (590-604) to abbot of the same monastery Maximianus, dated to 590-591, the story about the foundation of the monastery in the aristocratic dwelling where he was born is reported only later in *Liber Pontificalis* (compiled between the 6th and the 9th century). For the letter see Martyn 2004, Appendix 2, p. 884. For the report on the pontificate of Gregory the Great in *Liber Pontificalis* see: Duchesne 1862, p. 312.

triclinium, were built for the spiritual needs of the community, one dedicated to the Virgin and the other, reserved only for the personal devotion of Gregory, to martyr Barbara. There was also a further undescribed hall with a niche adjacent to a cellar in which the founder of the monastery was represented inside a painted tondo. The monastery was also endowed with a stable for horses, a library, and a cemetery.[269]

Archaeological evidence, despite its scarceness, offers at least some clues about the Roman monastic architecture in the 6th century. In the 1990s structures identified as the monastery belonging to the family of Boethius (480-524/525) were brought to light on Largo Argentina. The complex was built in the abandoned temple area. One of the temples was converted into a consecrated building to serve the religious community, whose members were most likely lodged in cells arranged along its rear wall, while the area in front was used as a vegetable garden. On the opposite side of the complex, a rectangular building that communicated with the adjacent street served as a refectory or reception room. A smaller building not far from it has been identified as the storage area of the monastery. All of these structures were enclosed by walls that had previously defined the temple area, with the entrances now closed off in order to create a clear separation between the internal space and the surrounding world.[270]

Yet the rather detailed knowledge of the layout of two monasteries does not mean we can extrapolate it to all others. Even if we may assume that at least partially the functional characteristics of the different spaces inside the late antique and early medieval monasteries were similar, archaeological evidence from dioceses *Italiae*, *Galliae*, *Septem Provinciae*,

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[269] Pani Ermini 1981, pp. 35-37 and Cecchelli 2005, pp. 23, 80-81. For the atrium and *nymphaeum* see: John the Deacon, *Vita S. Gregorii Magni* 4.83, in: Migne 1862g, col. 229: "*In cuius venerabilis monasterii atrio, jussu Gregorii, juxta nymphium duae iconiae veterrimae artificialiter depictae usque hactenus videntur.*" For the hall with the tondo representing Gregory see: *Vita S. Gregorii Magni* 4.84, in: Migne 1862g, col. 230: "*Sed et in absidula post fratrum cellarium Gregorius ejusdem artificis magisterio in rota gypsea pictus ostenditur...*". For the oratories see: *Vita S. Gregorii Magni* 4.89, in: Migne 1862g, col. 234: "*Eodem nihilominus tempore post absidem oratorii sanctae Mariae semper Virginis oratorio sanctae Barbarae, ubi Gregorius laudes Domino celebrare solebat, conjuncti, daemon apparuit...*". For the stables and the *triclinium* see: *Vita S. Gregorii Magni* 4.89, in: Migne 1862g, col. 234: "*Nonnunquam equos de stabulis auferens audiebatur tota nocte discurrere, quorum duos praecipitio demersisse probatus est. Cumque pavore tanti sonitus monachos a triclinio, in quo ad auram propter fervorem caumatis iacere solebant, penitus avertisset, unus eorum confisus in virtute Dei omnipotentis ante foramen decumbens, oratione facta, coepit dormire*." For the fountain and the courtyard see: *Vita S. Gregorii Magni* 4.97, in: Migne 1862g, col. 239-240: "*Si Ioannes papa hinc abiit, sanctus Gregorius hic remansit, qui monasterii sui claustra solito more perlustrans, a te suum fontem reperit dissipatum, et nos ex eius tegminibus tuae meretriculae furnum ac necessarium vidimus coopertum. Quod presbyter ut audivit, erubescens intremuit, eorumque violentia se in corte monasterii teneri conspiciens...*". For the library see: *Anonimus Einsiedlensis* (9th century), in: Valentini and Zucchetti 1942, p. 168: "*In Bibliotheca sancti Gregorii quae est in monasterio Clitauri ubi ipse Dyalogorum scripsit...*". For the cemetery see: Gregory the Great, *Dialogi* 4.47, in: Migne 1862a, col. 409: "*Ante hoc autem triennium, cum quidam frater fuisset mortuus, atque in ejusdem monasterii coemeterio a nobis sepultus, cunctis nobis ab eodem coemeterio exeuntibus...*".

[270] Santangeli Valenzani 1994; Beach and Cochelin 2020, p. 236.

Hispaniae and *Africae* suggests that between the 4th and the 7th century the spaces inhabited by ascetics did not easily lend themselves to standardized taxonomies and took very varied shapes.[271]

Even if it is the richest source of information for the given period, it would be dangerous to interpret the textual discourse of the Church Fathers as normative for the contemporary monastic praxis. Contrary to the image of the subdued and humble surroundings of the ascetic men and women they created, archaeological evidence proves that the spiritual cultivation of the owners of the 5th-century villas in Gaul or the *domus* on Caelian Hill (associated with Melania the Younger) did not necessarily preclude them from inhabiting spaces decorated with pavements of coloured marbles, sculpture collections, and mosaics.[272] As described by Kim Bowes, the ascetic space was a psychological rather than material construct, relying on the strength of one's devotion and not on the physical confirmation of one's ascetic vocation.[273]

Daily life and labour in female monastic communities

The ground plans of the monasteries aside, what did the everyday life of the late antique female ascetic look like? In the centuries of interest we cannot talk about a single monastic order. The convents and ascetic groups were guided by general principles, formulated by Church Fathers, such as Jerome, Augustine, and John Cassian (c. 360-c. 435), or by traditions specific for the respective monasteries. The monastic life in Rome of the 5th and 6th century was largely unregulated, local, and without central authority, even though it developed with the benediction of the pope.[274] In 388, the life of ascetic communities in the city was described by Augustine as similar to the life of those in the eastern dioceses of the Roman Empire. According to his treatise *De moribus ecclesiae catholicae*, the communities were presided by a personage of superior knowledge, authority, prudence, and morals. Most prominent characteristics of such groups was their self-sustainability, achieved by manual labour and dedication to charity. Abstaining from food and drink for several days was not an uncommon occurrence, which Augustine finds extraordinary, as according to his observations taking one meal daily was common elsewhere.

[271] Bowes 2011 and Beach and Cochelin 2020, pp. 85-92, 232-257.
[272] For the *domus* of Melania the Younger see: Santangeli Valenzani 2012, p. 220. For villas in Gaul see: Bowes 2011, pp. 342-343.
[273] *Ibidem*, pp. 343-344.
[274] Grégoire 1981, pp. 7-8 about Rome. For attempts to codify rules of monastic life elsewhere in the Roman Empire see: Quacquarelli 1991, p. 20; Jenal 1995, pp. 144-264 and Beach and Cochelin 2020, pp. 163-181.

He also observes that no one is forced to endure such restrictions if they find themselves unfit or in poor health. Yet even they should choose to abstain from wine and meat.[275]

In a letter to ascetic-virgin-in-training Demetrias from the year 414, Jerome describes the ideal of the life inside an enclosed female ascetic community as follows: its members are to recite psalms and pray 6 times a day − in the third, sixth and ninth hour, in the evening, at midnight and at dawn, learn Holy Scripture, and read in order to instruct their soul. He does not elaborate on the nature of the literature to be read, but he probably has lives of martyrs and treatises of Church Fathers in mind. Jerome advises Demetrias to fill the rest of the day with manual work, specifically to "always keep wool in your hands, or draw down the threads with your thumb, or place them on the shuttles to be woven, or gather others´ woven threads into a ball, or place them to be woven by others. Inspect what has been woven, critique what is flawed, and establish what needs to be done". By occupying her hands, she will bring salvation to herself and her companions, as her mind, focused on the work, will think of nothing other than serving God.[276]

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[275] Capo 2018, p. 305. For the primary source see: Augustine, *De moribus ecclesiae catholicae* 33, in: Schaff 1887a, pp. 60-61. For the Latin original see: Bauer 1992, pp. 74-79: "*Vidi ego sanctorum diversorium Mediolani non paucorum hominum, quibus unus presbyter praeerat vir optimus et doctissimus. Romae etiam plura cognovi, in quibus singuli gravitate atque prudentia et divina scientia praepollentes ceteris secum habitantibus praesunt christiana caritate, sanctitate, libertate viventibus; ne ipsi quidem cuiquam onerosi sunt, sed orientis more et Pauli apostoli auctoritate manibus suis se transigunt. Ieiunia etiam prorsus incredibilia multos exercere didici, non quotidie semel sub noctem reficiendo corpus, quod est usquequaque usitatissimum, sed continuum triduum vel amplius saepissime sine cibo ac potu ducere. Neque hoc in viris tantum sed etiam in feminis; quibus item multis viduis et virginibus simul habitantibus et lana ac tela victum quaeritantibus praesunt singulae gravissimae ac probatissimae, non tantum in instituendis componendisque moribus sed etiam instruendis mentibus peritae ac paratae... Atque inter haec nemo urgetur in aspera quae ferre non potest, nulli quod recusat imponitur nec ideo condemnatur a ceteris, quod in eis imitandis se fatetur invalidum... Lege cetera, nam longum est omnia interponere, et invenies praeceptum his qui possunt ista contemnere, id est firmioribus et securioribus, ideo tamen esse temperandum, ne offendantur illi quibus adhuc pro sua imbecillitate huiuscemodi opus est temperantia... Ita multi neque vescuntur carnibus neque tamen eas immundas superstitiose putant. Itaque iidem ipsi qui salvi temperant, si ratio valetudinis cogat, aegroti sine ulla formidine accipiunt. Multi vinum non bibunt nec tamen eo se coinquinari arbitrantur, nam et quibusdam languidioribus et prorsus omnibus qui sine illo nequeunt salutem corporis obtinere, humanissime ac modestissime praeberi faciunt. Et stulte nonnullos recusantes fraterne admonent, ne vana superstitione debiliores citius quam sanctiores fiant... Caritas praecipue custoditur; caritati victus, caritati sermo, caritati habitus, caritati vultus aptatur*."

[276] Quacquarelli 1985, pp. 240-241; Cloke 1995, pp. 40-41. For the source see: Jerome, ep. 130.15, available online at: database *Epistolae: Medieval Women's Latin Letters*, https://epistolae.ctl.columbia.edu/letter/1282.html (last viewed on 21. 02. 2024): "*Nunc tantum ad virginem loquar, id est non ea quae extra te, sed in te sunt, tantum considerans. Praeter psalmorum et orationis ordinem, quod tibi Hora Tertia, Sexta, Nona, ad Vesperum, Media nocte, et Mane semper est exercendum, statue quot horis sanctam Scripturam ediscere debeas; quanto tempore legere, non ad laborem, sed ad delectationem et instructionem animae. Cumque haec finieris spatia, et frequenter te ad figenda genua, sollicitudo animae suscitaverit, habeto lanam semper in manibus, vel staminis pollice fila deducito, vel ad torquenda subtegmina in alveolis fusa vertantur; aliarumque neta, aut in globum collige, aut texenda compone. Quae texta sunt, inspice: quae errata, reprehende: quae facienda, constitue. Si tantis operum varietatibus fueris occupata, nunquam dies tibi longi erunt: sed quamvis aestivis tendantur solibus, breves videbuntur, in quibus aliquid operis praetermissum est. Haec observans, et teipsam salvabis, et alias, et eris magistra sanctae conversationis, multarumque castitatem lucrum tuum facies, Scriptura dicente: In desideriis est omnis anima otiosi. Nec idcirco tibi ab opere cessandum est, quia Deo propitio nulla re indiges: sed ideo cum omnibus laborandum est, ut per occasionem operis, nihil aliud cogites, nisi quod ad Domini pertinet servitutem.*"

The letters of Gregory the Great to the administrators of the Church in Rome regarding the female convents imply that they were endowed with gardens, estates, and sometimes even establishments inside the city walls, which were either part of their foundation or were bequeathed to them. After the 5th century, when the powerful aristocratic ladies who were able to sustain the ascetic life of themselves and their dependents became rare commodity, manual labour served to guarantee at least relative economic sustainability of the female monastic communities and their ability to care for the poor, an activity expected from the nuns ever since, with potential to enhance the authority of women without sufficient family background in the eyes of the population of the city.[277]

The need for spiritual instruction coupled with the extremely reduced dimensions and economic inaccessibility of the market for codices in the late antique Rome led both male and female monastic communities to forced self-sustainability in this regard.[278] No direct written evidence for the scribal activities of nuns inside the early Roman convents has been preserved, but we may extrapolate the description of such activities inside the monastery in Jerusalem, founded by the Roman matron Melania the Younger at the beginning of the 5th century, in the lady's *vita*. Its author creates an image of Melania as highly educated woman with deep knowledge of Greek and Latin, filling all her spare time with either reading or writing down books from the Scriptures, lives of Church Fathers and homilies inside small codices. Her manuscripts served not only the liturgical needs of her community but were also sold for the purpose of the maintenance of the monastery.[279] Almost one century earlier Eusebius of Caesarea (c.260/265-339) notes in his *Historia Ecclesiastica* that Origen was provided by his friend Ambrose with

[277] Beach and Cochelin 2020, pp. 263-264. Already Augustine in his work *De moribus ecclesiae catholicae* 31, in: Schaff 1887a, p. 60 talks about nuns spinning wool and exchanging the final products of their work with the members of the Christian community outside of the walls of the convent for food. For the Latin original see: Bauer 1992, p. 72: "*Lanificio namque corpus exercent atque sustentant, vestesque ipsas fratribus tradunt, ab iis invicem quod victui opus est resumentes*." Even if the convents were at least partially self-sustainable, they sometimes fell into disrepair (like the convent of abbess Bona) and had to be supported directly by the papal administration. This may be the case especially for monasteries without sufficient lands outside of the city, as inside the city walls they lacked the space for manual labour, which placed them in a disadvantage in an economy based on agriculture. For more information see: Grégoire 1981, p. 14. In his letters Gregory the Great references several times his willingness to support monastic communities in peril in order to allow them to maintain their devotion to the religious life and worship: "*Religiosam vitam eligentibus (Grat. 12, q. 2, c. 75) congrua nos oportet consideratione prospicere, ne cuiusdam necessitatis occasio aut desides faciat, aut robur, quod absit, conversationis infringat.*" (ep. 3.17); "*Officio pietatis impellimur monasteriis provida consideratione ferre consultum, ne hi qui in servitio Dei deputati esse noscuntur, necessitatem aliquam, quod avertat Dominus, possint sustinere*." (ep. 2.4): in: Migne 1862b, colls. 540, 617.

[278] Quacquarelli 1985, pp. 247-249.

[279] *Vita Melaniae* 23, 26, 33, in: Gorce 1962, pp. 174, 178-180, 188. For more information about Melania and her literary activity see e.g.: Jenal 1995, pp. 80-83, 484-487; Petersen 1996, pp. 281-362; Haines-Eitzen 1998, pp. 641-642; Chin and Schroeder 2017; Clark 2021.

shorthand writers, copyists, and "girls trained in beautiful writing".[280] In the first half of the 6th century the abbess Caesaria of Arles is reported to have trained the virgins in her convent to "beautifully copy out the books".[281] And a letter from a monastery on the Theban Hills in Egypt, dated to the 7th century, addressed to a local nun by two men who apparently ordered a codex and urged her to send it quickly contains another hint on the fact that female monastics throughout the Mediterranean were involved in the production and trade of books.[282]

Apart from the plausible transcription of liturgical manuscripts the work of nuns remained defined by their gender, as they mostly occupied themselves with weaving and spinning of wool, suggested already by Jerome to Demetrias, Paula and Gaudentius as the most suitable activity for a young virgin, keeping away the sinful idleness and unholy thoughts.[283] In this aspect the Virgin, who was described as weaving during the Annunciation by the apocryphal text of the *Protoevangelium of James*, circulating in Rome of the 4th and 5th century, and present

[280] Haines-Eitzen 1998, pp. 629-634 and Stafford 2020a, p. 110. For the primary source see: Eusebius of Caesarea, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 6.23.2, in: Oulton 1932, pp. 68-69.
[281] Haines-Eitzen 1998, p. 642 and Stafford 2020a, pp. 110-111. For the primary source see: *Vita Sancti Caesarii* 1.44, in: Migne 1865c, col. 1022: "*Non multo igitur post monasterii matrem germanam suam Caesariam sanctam, ad praemia Christi migrantem, inter has quas praemiserat inibi ad medium throni, juxta eam quam sibi paraverat, condidit sepulturam, succedente eidem quae nunc superest, Caesaria matre, cujus opus cum sodalibus tam praecipuum viget, ut inter psalmos atque jejunia, vigilias quoque et lectiones, libros divinos pulchre scriptitent virgines Christi, ipsam magistram habentes.*"
[282] Stafford 2020a, pp. 111, quoting papyrus *O.Mon.Epiph.* 388, published in: Wilfong 2002, p. 112.
[283] Quacquarelli 1985, pp. 239-244; Consolino 1989, p. 41; Quacquarelli 1991, pp. 21-22; Wilkinson 2015, pp. 71-80. On spinning of wool as traditional female activity in the Roman Empire see: Larsson Lovén 2007 and Wilkinson 2015, pp. 36, 41. For the primary source see: Jerome ep. 107.10, 128.1, 130.15, in: Wright 2010, pp. 360-361, 468-469 and available online at: database *Epistolae: Medieval Women's Latin Letters*, https://epistolae.ctl.columbia.edu/letter/1282.html (last viewed on 28. 01. 2025): "*Discat et lanam facere, tenere colum, ponere in gremio calatum, rotare fusum, stamina pollice ducere.*" "*Interim et tenero tentet pollice fila ducere: rumpat saepe stamina, ut aliquando non rumpat.*" The Latin version of ep. 130.15 was quoted 2 pages ago ("Let her learn also to make wool, to hold the distaff, to put the basket in her lap, to turn the spindle, to shape the thread with her thumb." "She must also learn to spin, shaping the yarn with her tender thumb; for, even if she constantly breaks the threads, a day will come when she will no longer break them." "And when you have completed these duties and concern for your soul often has encouraged you to kneel in prayer, always keep wool in your hands, or draw down the threads with your thumb, or place them on the shuttles to be woven, or gather others´ woven threads into a ball, or place them to be woven by others. Inspect what has been woven, critique what is flawed, and establish what needs to be done. If you are busy with such a great variety of work, your days will never be long, and, even though they are extended by the summer sun, the days will seem short when work remains undone. By doing these things, you will save yourself as well as others, you will be a teacher of a holy way of life, and you will have the chastity of many women as your gain. As Scripture says, "The soul of every idler has desires" [Prov.13:4]. For this reason, you must not stop working just because you lack nothing when God is well-disposed; instead, you must work along with everyone so that during work you may think of nothing other than serving God. I will put it simply: although you offer all of your property to the poor, nothing is more precious to Christ than what you have made with your hands either for your own purpose or as an example to other virgins; or, you may offer something to your grandmother or your mother in order to receive greater sums from them to restore the poor.").

with a basket of wool and a spindle in her hand, on the arch mosaic in the basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore, dated to 430s, may have served as their spiritual example.[284]

But what were the requirements one had to fulfil to become a virgin or a widow accepted and respected by Church representatives? And what strategies members of both groups employed in order to visually represent their authority?

"Holy" widows and where to find them

In 1720, former keeper of the saint relics and cemeteries of pope Inocenc IX (1676-1689) Marcantonio Boldetti (1662-1749) managed to reach the heart of the cemetery of Commodilla, the underground basilica of martyrs Felix and Adauctus. He left a summary description of it, before it was buried under a fallen vault, to be rediscovered almost two centuries later, during an archaeological campaign in 1902-1904, prompted by dangerous changes in the surrounding terrain. One of the few preserved wall decorations of the basilica that attracted Boldetti's attention was the painting depicting an enthroned Virgin with Child, surrounded by martyrs Felix and Adauctus, introducing a deceased woman, identified by the accompanying inscription as widow Turtura, to her (fig. 2.5).[285]

The iconography of the painting shifts between the established conventions of funerary representations from earlier centuries and the timeless, static quality typical for votive images.[286] The central figure is the Virgin, seated on a gold throne adorned with cushions and embellished with pearls and gemstones. She wears what appears to be a dark, loose tunic and *palla,* her head concealed beneath a white cap. In her right hand, she holds a delicate *mappa*, reminiscent of those used in consular games, while with her left hand she supports the infant Jesus on her lap, who, clad in gold, holds a scroll.[287] The basilica's titular saints stand on either

[284] For the portrayal of the Virgin in the apocryphal narrative of the *Protoevangelium of James* see: Vuong 2013. For the visual reflection of the Virgin spinning in the early Christian Roman Empire see: Gines Taylor 2018.
[285] Bisconti and Ferri 2018, pp. 140-141, 175. For the description of the basilica and the catacombs at the beginning of the 18th century see: Boldetti 1720, pp. 542-548. The excavations at the beginning of the 20th century have been reported by Kanzler 1904; Marucchi 1904 and Wilpert 1904. The wall painting has been discussed also by e.g. Russo 1979; Minasi 2000; Denzey 2007, pp. 205-2011; Karambinis 2009; Stafford 2020a, pp. 152-164; Jussen 2023. For more bibliographical references see cat. n. 4.13 in this thesis.
[286] See chapter 1 for the discussion of the motif of the deceased flanked by martyrs in the late antique funerary context. The painting is compared to the contemporary portable votive images e.g. by: Wilpert 1904; Bagatti 1936, pp. 103-105; Denzey 2007, pp. 206-207; Karambinis 2009, p. 146; Bisconti and Ferri 2018, pp. 175-177; Jussen 2023, pp. 38-39.
[287] Jussen 2023, p. 39 with further bibliography.

side of her, dressed as members of the clergy in tunics with *clavi* and *pallia*.[288] They are the only figures introducing movement into the scene: Felix makes a speech gesture, while Adauctus places a hand on Turtura's shoulder. The widow is depicted in a smaller scale on the left side of the fresco, her face elongated and marked by deep lines around the mouth and nose. She is dressed in a simple long tunic and dark purple *palla* covering her head, mirroring the Virgin's attire.[289] She holds an object, covered by translucent white cloth, which she offers to the Virgin in a gesture of reverence.

The lower portion of the painting holds a heartfelt Latin inscription:

"Now take up your tears, mother, and surviving son's lamentations that/ he pours out in your praise./ After father's death, thus widowed you chastely preserved/ for thirty-six years your husband's trust in you./ You performed the duty of father and mother for your son;/ your husband Obas lived on for you in your son's face./ You are named Turtura, but you were a true 'turtle dove',/ for whom there was no other love after your husband's death./ There is a single reason why a woman draws praise,/ which you show devoting yourself to your marriage./ Here rests in peace Turtura, who lived for sixty years, more or less."[290]

The image is highly performative, promoting the wealth and the access to power networks of a woman probably belonging to the higher echelons of the Roman society.[291] If we follow the life span indication from the inscription and lean towards the dating of the fresco proposed by John Osborne, that is 525-535, after the restoration of the site by pope John I (523-526), documented by *Liber Pontificalis*, but before the Gothic wars, Turtura would have been born around the year 470.[292] She would thus barely have reached girlhood when foreign Roman officer Flavius Odoacer (476-493) pensioned the last Roman child-emperor Romulus Augustulus (475-476), sent the imperial insignia to Constantinople and proceeded to rule the western part of the Roman Empire under the title *rex.*[293] She would have outlived both him and his successor Theoderic (471-526), the product of the so-called migration period, born in Pannonia, but raised at the

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[288] Minasi 2000, p. 657 and Karambinis 2009, p. 144.

[289] Denzey 2007, pp. 207-208, 210.

[290] *Ibidem*, p. 209. For the Latin version of the inscription see: Bisconti and Ferri 2018, pp. 178-179: "*Suscipe nunc lacrimas mater natique suprestis/ quas fundet gemitus laudibus ecce tuis/ post mortem patris servasti casta mariti/ sex triginta annis sic viduata fidem/ officium nato patris matrisque gerebas/ in subolis faciem vir tibi vixit Obas/ Turtura nomen abis set turtur vera fuisti/ cui coniunx moriens non fuit alter amor/ unica materia est quo sumit femina laudem/ quod te coniugio exibuisse doces/ his requiexcit in pace Turtura/ que bisit pl(us) m(inus) annus LX.*"

[291] Jussen 2023, p. 25. See also: Denzey 2007, p. 210.

[292] Osborne 1985, pp. 301-302. For the note on the restoration of the underground basilica during the pontificate of John I (523-526) in *Liber Pontificalis* see: Duchesne 1862, p. 276.

[293] Jussen 2023, p. 28. For more information regarding the turbulent period see: Sašel Kos 2008 with further bibliography.

imperial court in Constantinople.[294] She would also have had indirectly witnessed the death of John I, to whom she would have most probably owned the honour of being buried in such a prominent place and who died a martyrial death in the Theoderic's dungeons in Ravenna.[295]

If we were to lean more towards the equally convincing dating proposed by Michael Karambinis, based on the closeness between the aforementioned painting, the votive panels depicting the Mother of God with Roman provenance and the votive images from the church of Santa Maria Antiqua, then Turtura would have been born somewhere in the second quarter of the 7th century.[296] She would have lived through the transformation of Rome from the peripheric city of the empire, which lost its governing organ, the Senate, with the pope, its religious and political administrator, answering to Constantinople, to an autonomous counterpart of the imperial power in the East, with new aristocracy, rooted in the military, forming its social and cultural identity separately from the papacy.[297]

The 6th and the 7th century in Rome were characterised by diminishing population, reduced from c. 500 000 inhabitants in the year 400 to c. 50 000 inhabitants after the Gothic Wars (535-554).[298] Over the course of two centuries, the city has been sacked, shaken by several earthquakes, devastated by pest epidemies and lost its grain shipments from Africa.[299] But how the transformation of the Roman world, in which the aristocracy, whose member Turtura seems to have been, was both an active subject and an object of change, may have shaped who she was and how she was able to engage both with the society at large and the Church?

Despite the distortion of the urban fabric Rome did not lose all its aristocratic families, who continued to reside in luxurious dwellings, some of which were even enlarged and redecorated at the time. They also remained the moving power behind several restoration campaigns of representative public spaces, motivated by the effort to preserve the monumentality of the city.[300]

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[294] For more information on Theodoric's reign see: Moorhead 1992 and Wiemer 2023.
[295] Wiemer 2023, pp. 388-394.
[296] Karambinis 2009, pp. 152-165. For more information on the Roman votive panels depicting Mother of God see cat. n. 2.33, 2.35, 2.36 in this thesis. The votive wall paintings from the church of Santa Maria Antiqua are discussed in chapter 3.
[297] Delogu 2022, pp. 59-61 with further bibliographical references.
[298] Arnold *et al.* 2016, pp. 9, 17-41.
[299] *Ibidem*, p. 240. For more information regarding the demography, politics and social structure of the city in the 6th and the 7th century see: Llewellyn 1996, pp. 21-199 and Delogu 2022, pp. 11-143. The impact of the political and socio-economic changes on the female representation in the city will be discussed in chapter 5.
[300] Delogu 2022, pp. 17-18.

When Turtura died, the heyday of the catacomb burials was over, outshined by the interest for the burials in the churches aboveground.[301] Yet her son eccentrically chose to have her represented belowground, in the cultic space surrounding the venerated burial place of martyrs Felix and Adauctus, making her posthumous image the last Roman female funerary portrait to ever appear in such context. This decision may have been heavily influenced by the influx of visitors to the graves of both martyrs, which were the main attraction of the catacomb since the times of pope Damasus. It is not hard to conclude that the place was "suffering" from an onslaught of devout believers, given the gradual disrepair of the Damasian *basilichetta*, which required an intervention from John I in the first half of the 6th century.[302]

Entering the church through a darkened corridor and, if the hypothesis of Albrecht Weiland about the basilica rising aboveground is to be accepted, stepping into daylight streaming through the windows, opening just slightly to the left of the niche hiding the remains of the venerable martyrs, visitors immediately saw the almost life-size funerary image surpassing the dimensions of all the other elements of the *basilichetta*'s decorative concept, including the now fragmentarily preserved apse decoration (fig. 2.6).[303] Even if we know nothing about Turtura, her son, and her husband Obas, the dimensions and the position of the panel point out to the exclusivity of the relationship between the commissioner of the panel and its subject, Turtura, with the Church hierarchy in the city. Patronage seems to be the only plausible explanation of the privileges granted to the representation of the deceased. If the dating to the first half of the 6th century is to be accepted, it may have been Turtura's family who supplied part of the funds

[301] Fiocchi Nicolai 2012, who follows the systematic transfer of interest from the secular burials in the catacombs to the martyrial basilicas, mostly above ground, already from the second half of the 4th century and refuses the pivotal role of the sack of 410 in their abandonment.

[302] *Liber Pontificalis* (Duchesne 1862, p. 276) mentions that John I (523-526) reconstructed the cemetery of the martyrs ("…*item renovavit cymiterium sanctorum Felicis et Adaucti*"), but the general consensus points to the underground basilica as the most probable candidate for restoration and interprets the rebuilding as an endeavour to incorporate the space into the systemic martyr cult under the tutelage of the Church: Karambinis 2009, pp. 143-144; Bisconti and Ferri 2018, pp. 148-149; Jussen 2023, p. 32, 35. On the monumentalizing of the cult of the two martyrs (introduction of marble *transenna* supported by two columns framing the niche with the grave and marble plaque with *carmen* in their honour) at the time of pope Damasus (366-384) see: Ferrua 1942, pp. 98-101 and Weiland 1994, pp. 633-634.

[303] *Ibidem*, p. 627. The exact placement of the grave of the martyrs remains subject to debate, but relatively recently it was linked to the niche in the back wall of the *basilichetta*, hosting two superimposed *loculi* on the basis of clues obtained from the *carmen* of Damasus (366-384) and *De Locis Sanctis* itinerary, which suggest that the martyrs were buried in close proximity to one another: Carletti 1994, pp. 13-14 and Bisconti and Ferri 2018, p. 143. The itinerary, written in Rome between 642 and 683, describes the burial of the martyrs as follows: "*Et non longe inde ecclesia sancti Felicis est ubi ipse dormit, cum quo quando ad caelum migrauit, pariter properabat Adauctus; et ambo requiescunt in uno loco*.", in: Valentini and Zucchetti 1942, pp. 109-110. In the *carmen* of Damasus it is described like this: "…*Damaso rectore iubente,/ conposuit tumulum sanctorum limina adornans*", in: Trout 2015, pp. 94-96. For the discussion of all frescoes in the *basilichetta* dated to the 6th century see: Bisconti and Ferri 2018, pp. 168-169, who interpret its decorative concept as a product of several commissions and highlight the votive function of the paintings.

for the reconstruction of the *basilichetta*. If we were to be more daring, we could even speculate together with Vincenzo Fiocchi Niccolai, Nicola Denzey and Bernhard Jussen that the widow herself may have amply participated in the endeavour.[304]

Even though the author of the last study on the depiction, Bernhard Jussen, interprets the representation of Turtura as a typical example of a donor portrait, with the exception of the fact that she is holding a donation document instead of a model of the *basilichetta*, the decoding of her role and the message her representation transmitted is not so straightforward.[305] After the enhancing of the outlines of the objects and figures on Turtura's panel with the help of the image processing app DStretch, it became evident that the object the widow is holding is not a scroll attesting to donation, but a codex instead (fig. 2.7). While not directly confirming Turtura's patronage activity, in the context of late antique female self-representation the codex makes a disguised power statement. It adds a new layer of meaning to an image otherwise created for the purpose of private devotion, a function hinted on by the composition with the static *Theotokos* and saints introducing the smaller figure of the widow on an abstract blue background, close to the now lost icon-like mid-6th-century mosaic with Maria, miraculously born child of a wealthy family, who possibly became a consecrated virgin later in life, introduced to the Virgin by an angel, from the church of Hagios Demetrios in Thessaloniki (fig. 2.8).[306] Much like in the case of her fellow Crispina on the sarcophagus from the Vatican Museums the presence of the martyrs and the codex hint on the elevated status of the widow Turtura, fashioning herself as an erudite with strong relationship to religious teaching, whose authority has been publicly accepted (fig. 1.9).[307]

Turtura's sombre attire is very cleverly chosen as well. It represents her as *univira* who never stopped mourning her husband, while the image as a whole creates a picture of devoted woman, exalted by her position next to the saints, in sync with the literary sources, who present committed widowhood as socially privileged and of special sanctity.[308]

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[304] Fiocchi Nicolai 2001, p. 125; Denzey 2007, pp. 207-211; Bisconti and Ferri 2018, p. 148 and Jussen 2023, p. 32, 37 all hypothesize about the participation of the widow but do not bring any evidence to the discussion, sans the indirect one, namely the position of the image and its dimensions.

[305] Jussen 2023, p. 41.

[306] Karambinis 2009, pp. 146-152. For more information on the three mosaic panels featuring Maria see: Brubaker 2004; Connor 2004, pp. 103-105, who was the one to interpret the last panel as a hint on Maria's status of a consecrated virgin; Bakirtzes 2012, pp. 148-158; Stafford 2020a, pp. 123-126. The DStretch app is available at: https://www.dstretch.com/ (last viewed on 09. 01. 2025).

[307] For the discussion of the sarcophagus in the context of the representation of the agency and erudition of deceased women in late antique Rome see chapter 1.

[308] Stafford 2020a, p. 154. On the mourning attire in the Roman milieu see: Olson 2004.

At the time of her death, this praiseworthy female role was only relatively recently codified by the writings of Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine. In their eyes the women who made a lifelong commitment of loving remembering and abstinence were spiritually purer than wives and widows who remarried.[309] Ambrose held them in such high regard that he called upon them through his treatise *De viduis* to help return Christian morals to Rome, whose Christian community was badly shaken after the attempt of emperor Julian Apostate (361-363) to reinstate pagan worship in the city.[310] Thus, from the second half of the 4th century committed widowhood became one of the tools of social elevation, accepted by both the Church hierarchy and the Christian community in general. For some widows the retention of the status of *univira* also created the possibility to keep the possession of substantial wealth, a combination of a dowry, betrothal gift from the groom, inheritance from the woman's parents and her children's inheritance she could control until they reached majority, and the legal ability to dispose of it as she has seen fit, often in the form of benefaction.[311]

Turtura is the only visually represented widow in Rome we know of. This fact in itself seems to speak volumes about her exceptional status in society and about the authority and financial means that must have been at her disposal. Outliving one's husband was not the same as cultivating the image of the "holy" widow with its religious connotations, as Jerome's letter to Eustochium suggests. In it he scorns the ostentatious widows that display their wealth publicly and don a pious façade only to hide their immodesty and pride behind it, and contrasts them with those who saw in the death of their husbands an opportunity to live a modest and spiritual life.[312] It took considerable privilege and fulfilment of several criteria to emulate the ideal set

[309] Jussen 2023, pp. 41-42. For the discussion of the increasingly positive relationship of the Fathers of the Church towards lifelong widows see: Bremmer 2017, pp. 56-61. As the bodily physicality became something of no importance, best to be forgotten and even shameful and its suppression at the expense of spiritual cultivation became viewed as something to be admired, widows were advised not to remarry and to renounce sexuality permanently. Those who did not resist the comforts of the married life were considered to be inferior, even, in the harsh words of Jerome, hardly better than whores (Ambrose, *De viduis*, in: Migne 1845a; Jerome, ep. 54 and 123, in: *Epistolae: Medieval Women's Latin Letters*, https://epistolae.ctl.columbia.edu/letter/423.html and https://epistolae.ctl.columbia.edu/letter/1222.html (last viewed on 09. 01. 2025); Augustine, *De bono viduitatis*, in: Zycha 1900, pp. 303-343).

[310] Nicolaides 2022, p. 3. For the primary source see note above.

[311] On the economic status of the widow through the lens of the late antique Roman law see: Arjava 1996, pp. 174-175; Kuefler 2015, pp. 31-39 and Stafford 2020a, p. 153 with references to the relevant corpus of primary sources.

[312] Jerome, ep. 22.16, in: Wright 2010, pp. 82-85: "…*sed etiam eas fuge, quas uiduas necessitas fecit, non quo mortem optare debuerint maritorum, sed quo datam occasionem pudicitiae libenter arripere. nunc uero tantum ueste mutata pristina non mutatur ambitio. praecedit caueas basternarum ordo semiuir et rubentibus buccia cutis farsa distenditur, ut eas putes maritos non amisisse, sed quaerere. plena adulatoribus domus, plena conuiuia. clerici ipsi, quos et magisterio esse oportuerat et timori, osculantur capita patronarum et extenta manu, ut benedicere eos putes uelle, si nescias, pretium accipiunt salutandi. illae interim, quae sacerdotes suo uident indigere praesidio, eriguntur in superbiam et, quia maritorum expertae dominatum uiduitatis praeferunt libertatem, castae uocantur et nonnae et post cenam dubiam apostolos somniant*.". The letter is further discussed by Bremmer 2017, p. 61 and Stafford 2020a, pp. 155-156. On different levels of widowhood as perceived by the

by him and his contemporaries mentioned above. The famous widows who financially supported Jerome, Marcella and Blaesilla, were widowed very young, probably before their 20th year, and one of them, Marcella (325-410), lived chastely to a ripe old age, as did Turtura, widowed at 24 and deceased at 60, and another Roman widow, remembered only by an inscription from the 4th or the 5th century, Regina, widowed at 20 and deceased at 80. That the latter belonged to the order of the "holy" widows, recognised by the Church in the city, maybe exactly because of her long and committed widowhood dedicated to chastity and piety, can be concluded from the presence of the formula "*sedit vidua*", used exclusively in connection with Church officeholders, such as presbyter Romanus, who "*sedit presbyter*" until he was buried in the cemetery of Santi Pietro e Marcellino either in 461 or in 482.[313]

The epigraphic evidence and the treatises of the Church Fathers discussed above point to the fact that remarriage or widowhood later in life seems to have been disqualifying for the adepts of the venerable status of the "holy" widow. And to not remarry at the time when widows all over the Roman Empire petitioned against economical mistreatment, manipulation and poor living conditions or even became destitute and completely dependent on the subsidies from their local Church was a viable life choice only for a selected few.[314] Considerable wealth was needed in order to support oneself and one's household and to publicly perform one's virtue through giving away the said wealth. As paradoxical as it sounds, poverty had to be voluntary to lead to sanctity, and the same can be said about the state of widowhood itself, a fact which

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Church Fathers see also: Cloke 1995, pp. 52-54. For the discussion of performance of modesty in late antiquity see: Wilkinson 2015.

[313] Jerome is the one to report on the ages when the ladies from his circle entered widowhood, in ep. 39.1 and 127.2., available at: database *Epistolae: Medieval Women's Latin Letters*, https://epistolae.ctl.columbia.edu/letter/280.html (last viewed on 10. 01. 2025) and Wright 2010, pp. 440-441. Widow Regina, buried at the cemetery of Saturninus, is discussed by Stafford 2020a, p. 156, referencing Eisen 2000, pp. 145-146: "*Rigine vene merenti filia sua fecit/ vene. Rigine matri viduae que se-/ dit vidua annos LX et eclesa/ numqua(m) gravavit, unibyra, que/ vixit annos LXXX, mesis V,/ dies XXVI.*" For more information about the inscription of presbyter Romanus see: Carletti 2008, pp. 211-212. Other 3 Roman inscriptions, reported by Eisen 2000, pp. 146-148 (with full-length transcripts and further bibliography) as describing Church-recognised widows with potential liturgical roles, are much more open to interpretation and especially the last two may allude more to the personal faith of the deceased than to their official role in the religious life of the city: "*viduae Dei*", "*in Deo vives*", and "*Deo vixit*". See also: Schaefer 2013, p. 175.

[314] Stafford 2020a, p. 156 gives examples of Egyptian papyri recording a widowed mother who had to put her daughter for adoption because she could not afford to raise her (dated to 554, *Oxyrhynchus Papyri* XVI.1895, in: Rowlandson 1998, pp. 298-299); a widow who complained about misconduct of her property managers (dated to 303, *Oxyrhynchus Papyri* I.71, in: Rowlandson 1998, pp. 239-240); a widow who petitioned the local bishop to intercede with the authorities on her behalf, as she is about to lose her house due to unpaid taxes (dated to c. 630, SB Kopt. 1.295, in: Bagnall and Cribiore 2006, pp. 242-243). Arjava 1996, p. 172 reports many North African widows selling off their land. For poor widows, dependent on the Church, see e. g.: Jerome, ep. 1.13, 64.2 and 123.5, in: Wright 2010, pp. 14-15 and available online at: database *Epistolae: Medieval Women's Latin Letters*, https://epistolae.ctl.columbia.edu/letter/364.html and https://epistolae.ctl.columbia.edu/letter/1222.html (last viewed on 10. 01. 2025) or Gregory the Great, ep. 9.48, in: Martyn 2004, pp. 574-575. The topic of destitute widows dependent of the Christian Church hierarchy is discussed also by: Wipszycka 2000, p. 278.

disqualified those women who were too poor to donate and/or became widows too old and did not remarry not by choice, but due to the impossibility to find a suitable husband.[315] And thus the few that managed to cultivate the image of the "holy" widow were indeed extraordinary and visible, true outliners of their sex.

It was again the immense wealth that allowed widows to freely act in the religious sphere. Despite his harsh words on the account of immoderate widows, in the letter to Eustochium Jerome sheds some light on the financial power that they held over the lower clergy, stating:

"The very clergy, whose teaching and authority ought to inspire respect, kiss these ladies on the forehead, and then stretch out their hand…to receive the fee for their visit. The women meanwhile, seeing that priests need their help, are lifted up with pride."[316]

Let's not forget that despite criticising the ostentatious manner of some widows Jerome did not shun all of those who received clerics in their household. His pupil and patron Marcella, who we discussed earlier in this chapter, was not only one of them, but she even went a step further. Like other aristocratic ladies from powerful senatorial families dating back centuries, she was used to running large household and being obeyed. Therefore, even after striking intellectual relationship with Jerome and adopting ascetic lifestyle, she leaned towards more active role in the religious community. After becoming thoroughly educated in the interpretation of the Scripture she began spreading it both inside and outside of her circle of erudite friends, being allegedly sought out by members of the clergy who applied to her for advice on "obscure and doubtful points" of the biblical teachings. And she may not have been the only one of her peers to not only lead prayers in her household, but to give religious instruction as well. [317] Widows

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[315] Stafford 2020a, pp. 157-158. About the lack of suitable partners for older single women as a phenomenon common for all late antique Mediterranean societies see: Pudsey 2012.

[316] Jerome, ep. 22.16, in: Wright 2010, pp. 82-85: "*Clerici ipsi, quos et magisterio esse oportuerat et timori, osculatur capita patronarum et extenta manu...si nescias, pretium accipiunt salutandi. Illae interim, quae sacerdotes suo vident indigere praesidio, eriguntur in superbiam...*".

[317] Bremmer 2017, p. 63. For more information about the religious practices of Marcella see e.g. Cloke 1995, pp. 55-56 and Sajovic 2023. The teaching activity of Marcella is described by Jerome, ep. 127.7, in: Wright 2010, pp. 452-455: "*Hoc solum dicam, quod, quiequid in nobis longo fuit studio congregatum et meditatione diuturna quasi in naturam versum, hoc illa libavit, hoc didicit atque possedit, ita ut post perfectionem nostram, si aliquo testimonio scripturarum esset oborta contentio, ad illam iudicem pergeretur. Et quia valde prudens erat et noverat illud, quod appellant philosophi to prepon [Greek], id est decere, quod facias, sic interrogata respondebat, ut etiam sua non sua diceret, sed vel mea vel cuiuslibet alterius, ut et in ipso, quod docebat, se discipulam fateretur—sciebat enim dictum ab apostolo: 'Docere autem mulieri non permitto'—ne virili sexui et interdum sacerdotibus de obscuris et ambiguis sciscitantibus facere videretur iniuriam.*" ("This only will I say; all that I had gathered together by long study, and by constant meditation made part of my nature, she first sipped, then learned, and finally took for her own. Consequently, after my departure from Rome, if any argument arose concerning the testimony of the Scriptures, it was to her verdict that appeal was made. She was extremely prudent and always followed the rules of what philosophers call to uritriu, that is, propriety of conduct. Therefore, even when her answers to questions were her own, she said they came not from her but from me or someone else, admitting herself to be a pupil even when she was teaching—for she knew that the apostle said: ' I do not allow a woman to

like her were not to be stopped, as the members of the Church that most closely surrounded them, like Jerome, relied largely on their economic support in order to be able to dedicate themselves to scholarship.[318]

The power wealthy Roman widows held over their family's fortune and over some members of the Church is attested also by imperial laws passed at the last quarter of the 4th century. An edict read in the Roman churches on the 30th of July 370 stipulated that clerics are not allowed to accept gifts and legacies from widows in an attempt to protect the interests of the (especially aristocratic) families who risked losing everything due to religious zeal of their female members. The backlash, however, must have been quite severe, because the law had to be further reinforced in June of 390, only to be withdrawn in two months.[319]

By supporting men such as Jerome and building monasteries, churches and accommodations for pilgrims and the poor the widows had taken over the strategy of male aristocrats to establish their social position through euergetism.[320] For the area of Lazio the primary sources let us know about the widow Fabiola, who spent her money supporting monasteries and building a hospital and a guesthouse for pilgrims in Ostia.[321] Roman lady Paula splurged on the monastery in Betlehem and on the poor to such extent that at the end there was no money left for the inheritance of her own children, and her peer Marcella would have divested of all her wealth in the name of the same cause wouldn't her mother object.[322] The letters of Gregory the Great also document 10 women founding monasteries and oratories in Sardinia, Sicily, Naples and Rimini, at least two of whom, Pompeiana and Theodosia, both founders of monasteries in Cagliari, are explicitly identified as widows.[323]

The grave of Turtura is not the only female resting place in the catacomb of Commodilla that received the privilege to be close to the martyrs. After the Damasian institutionalization of the cult of Felix and Adauctus the *basilichetta* and the gallery B adhering to it became a popular place of female commemoration. The west wall of the gallery B hosts the inscription from the

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teach '— so that she might not seem to do a wrong to the male sex, and sometimes even to priests, when they asked questions on obscure and doubtful points.")

[318] Kuefler 2015, p. 28 with further bibliography.

[319] *Codex Theodosianus* 16.2.20, 16.2.27, 16.2.28, in: Pharr 1952, pp. 443-445. For more information see: Bremmer 2017, pp. 61-62, referencing Lizzi Testa 1989.

[320] Bremmer 2017, p. 62. For more information about euergetism of the late antique Roman elites see chapter 1 of this thesis with further bibliography.

[321] Clark 1990, pp. 260-261. The benefaction of Fabiola is mentioned by Jerome's ep. 77.6-10, in: Wright 2010, pp. 322-325, 332-335.

[322] Clark 1990, p. 260; Cloke 1995, p. 57 and Bremmer 2017, p. 62. The source reporting on the activity of both widows is Jerome, ep. 107 and 108, in: Wright 2010, pp. 338-367 and available online at: database *Epistolae: Medieval Women's Latin Letters*, https://epistolae.ctl.columbia.edu/letter/445.html (last viewed on 10. 01. 2025).

[323] Pietri 2002, pp. 256-258. Pompeiana is mentioned in Gregory the Great's ep. 1.46 and Theodosia in ep. 4.8, in: Martyn 2004, pp. 172, 292.

second half of the 4th century remembering certain Capriola and below it the *loculus* of *virgo* Quadragesima, dated to the year 432. Next to the niche with the burial of the martyrs inside the *basilichetta* a graffito from the last quarter of the 4th century reads: "*Faustina/ in mente te/ abeat martyri/ in hac bia et becas/ omnis amicus/ tuus.*"[324] But it was the grave of Turtura which brought the female representation to perfection.

By choosing an iconographic model of *introductio* by the principal martyrs of the catacomb, capturing the scene in a more expensive medium of fresco, employing inscriptions so there would be no doubt about the identity of the figures, and having the deceased depicted with personalized facial features, as well as a heavy black garb, veil and white cloth underneath it, creating a visual parallel between her and the similarly dressed Virgin, the commissioner of the panel put emphasis on Turtura's privileged social status not only among the living, but also among the dead.[325]

The making and the ruin of the consecrated virgin

Consecrated virginity and how to recognise it

As the previous pages demonstrated, in the changing religious landscape of the city Roman aristocracy began to shape new social hierarchy based on claims to asceticism, forming privileged clusters with substantial economic power and social capital. Celibacy of some kind was a prerequisite for access to those clusters, but the degrees of renunciation varied. In spite of slight deviations in their perception in the writings of different late antique authors, primary sources make clear that when renunciations were being ranked, it were the virgins, especially the consecrated ones, who achieved an almost unsurpassed status of individual sanctity not only in the eyes of the lay members of society, but above all in the eyes of the prominent members of the Church.[326]

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[324] "*Capriola in pace/ qui vixit annis II/ m(ensibus) VIIII d(iebus) XXVI*" (ICUR NS II, 6160); "*[hi]c Quadrage-/ sima virgo ex(ivit)/die XVI kal(endas) iul(ias) cons(ulatu) Aeti v(iri) c(larissimi) requiesesi-/t in pace*" (ICUR NS II, 6083). The graffito commemorating Faustina was published in ICUR NS II, 6449.15. All the inscriptions were quoted by: Bisconti and Ferri 2018, pp. 144-145.

[325] Cumbo 2021, pp. 121-122. See also last section of chapter 1 in this thesis.

[326] Undheim 2015, p. 59; Ivanovici and Undheim 2019, unpaginated. For overview of the religious writings that construct the late antique image of the virgin across Mediterranean see: Giannarelli 1980, pp. 29-47; Cloke 1995, pp. 34-37; Shaw 1998; Grossi 2018, pp. 169-207.

The treatises of the Church Fathers give only vague indications about what a consecrated virgin in the diocese of *Italia* might have looked like, focusing instead solely on the question of what she should not be wearing. In his letters to the virgins Demetrias, Laeta, and Eustochium, Jerome, for example, deigns worthy to mention only that the virginal attire should be modest, covering the body and keeping it warm without any excessive luxuries, yet at the same time not too neglected as its shabbiness may be considered as attention grabbing as boastful opulence would be. At the same time, his compelling description of the transformation of Demetrias to a devout virgin suggests that changing of one's dress was one of the most important visual markers of adoption of this role:

"Stirred by these goads, she cast off all finery and worldly attire as though they were impediments to her purpose. She returned her expensive necklaces, valuable pearls, and gleaming gems to their boxes; then, she put on a cheap tunic, covered herself with an even cheaper cloak, and suddenly cast herself at her grandmother´s knees with such weeping and lamentation that she showed herself for who she was…".[327]

[327] Metz 1954, pp. 136-138; Stafford 2020a, p. 160; Undheim 2020, pp. 79-80. See Jerome, ep. 22.13, 27, 29: "*purpura tantum in ueste sit tenuis et laxius, ut crines decidant, ligatum caput, soccus uilior et per umeros maforte uolitans, strictae manicae bracchiis adhaerentes et solutis genibus fractus incessus: haec est apud illas tota uirginitas. habeant istiusmodi laudatores suos et sub uirginali omine lucrosius pereant: libenter talibus non placemus…uestis nec satis munda nec sordida et nulla diuersitate notabilis, ne ad te obuia praetereuntium turba consistat et digito demonstreris…uestis nec satis munda nec sordida et nulla diuersitate notabilis, ne ad te obuia praetereuntium turba consistat et digito demonstreris…*" ("Let them have only a little purple in their dress, and loose bandeau on their head to leave the hair free; cheap slippers, and a Maforte fluttering from their shoulders; sleeves fitting close to their arms, and a loose-kneed walk: there you have all their marks of virginity. Such women may have their admirers, and it may cost more to ruin them because they are called virgins. But to such virgins as these I prefer to be displeasing…But beware lest your contempt for the world's boastfulness breed in you a boastfulness of another kind. Harbour not the secret thought that as you have ceased to please in cloth of gold you may now try to please in homespun…Neither an affected shabbiness nor an elaborate elegance of attire becomes a Christian."), in: Wright 2010, pp. 78-79; ep. 107.5, 10: "*Ipse habitus et uestitus doceat eam, cui promissa sit. caue, ne aures perfores, ne cerussa et purpurisso consecrata Christo ora depingas, ne collum margaritis et auro premas, ne caput gemmis oneres, ne capillum inrufes et ei aliquid de gehennae ignibus auspiceris…spernat bombycum telas, Serum uellera et aurum in fila lentescens. talia uestimenta paret, quibus pellatur frigus, non quibus corpora uestita nudentur.*" ("Let her very dress and garb remind her to Whom she is promised. Do not pierce her ears or paint her face consecrated to Christ with white lead or rouge. Do not hang gold or pearls about her neck or load her head with jewels, or by reddening her hair make it suggest the fires of gehenna…Let her put away with disdain silken fabrics, Chinese fleeces, and gold brocades: the clothing which she makes for herself should keep out the cold and not expose the body which it professes to cover."), in: Wright 2010, pp. 350-351, 360-361; ep. 130.5, 18: "*his inflammata stimulis omnem corporis cultum et habitum saecularem quasi propositi sui inpedimenta proiecit. pretiosa monilia et graues censibus uniones ardentesque gemmae redduntur scriniis, uili tunica induitur, uiliori tegitur pallio et insperata auiae genibus repente prouoluitur fletu tantum et planctibus, quae esset, ostendens. obstipuit sancta et grauis femina alienum habitum in nepte conspiciens, mater gaudio stabat adtonita…fuge lasciuiam puellarum, quae ornant capita, crines a fronte demittunt, cutem poliunt, utuntur lomentis, adstrictas habent manicas, uestimenta sine ruga soccosque crispantes, ut sub nomine uirginali uendibilius pereant. mores enim et studia dominarum plerumque ex ancillarum et comitum moribus iudicantur. illa sit tibi pulchra, illa amabilis, illa habenda inter socias, quae nescit esse se pulchram, quae neglegit formae bonum et procedens ad publicum non pectus et colla denudat nec pallio reuelato ceruices aperit, sed quae celat faciem et uix uno oculo, qui uiae necessarius est, patente ingreditur.*" ("Stirred by these goads, she cast off all finery and worldly attire as though they were impediments to her purpose. She returned her expensive necklaces,

Available sources do not make clear whether for a consecrated virgin there was a time limit on when this almost ritual changing of the dress had to take place. From the previously quoted excerpts of Jerome's letters, it can be concluded at least that the space where the change of attire took place was a private one, inside the virgin's home or possibly within the ascetic community to which she belonged, if the two differed. According to the convincing argument of Grace Stafford, the virgin may have received the modest clothing that was now expected of her either on entering the monastery or on the occasion of the veiling ceremony.[328]

The permeating sentiment of the patristic treatises, in sync with the Roman notions of correspondence between spirit and body, is that there is no need to describe the consecrated virgin, a vessel of the Holy, to the reader, as she will be made instantly recognisable through the internal state of virtue that will shine outwards and would leave no doubt regarding her status.[329] This lacklustre approach, however, makes the distinction between the visual representations of the Roman virgins recognised by the Church and ordinary modest *matronae*, for which restraint in dressing and avoidance of expensive jewellery, elaborate coiffure and ostentatious fabrics was also advisable, even if they did not always take the words of the Church Fathers to heart, impossible for the modern scholar.[330] The situation is completely opposite the

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valuable pearls, and gleaming gems to their boxes; then, she put on a cheap tunic, covered herself with an even cheaper cloak, and suddenly cast herself at her grandmother´s knees with such weeping and lamentation that she showed herself for who she was….Stay away from the playfulness of girls who adorn their heads, let their hair down on the forehead,, polish their nails, use face powder, wear tight sleeves, clothes without creases, and crisp slippers so that under the guise of virginity they may be ruined [appearing to be] for sale. For the morals and pursuits of mistresses are generally judged from the behavior of her handmaidens and attendants. May you consider beautiful, amiable, desirable as a friend the woman who does not know that she is beautiful, who disregards her appearance and, when going out in public, does not bare her chest and her neck by opening her cloak, but instead conceals her face and walks with scarcely one eye visible to see her path."), available online at: database *Epistolae: Medieval Women's Latin Letters*, https://epistolae.ctl.columbia.edu/letter/1282.html (last viewed on 13. 01. 2025).

[328] Stafford 2020a, p. 160. On clothing of women in late antique monastic communities in general see: Krawiec 2009. For more information on the specifics of the Roman monastic communities see first part of this chapter.

[329] Ivanovici and Undheim 2019, unpaginated; Stafford 2020a, p. 160. Among the treatises on virginity see especially Ambrose, *De virginibus* 1.6.30: "*Vos vero, beatae virgines, quae talia tormenta potius quam ornamenta nescitis: quibus pudor sanctus verecunda suffusus ora, et bona castitas est decori: non humanis addictae oculis, alieno errore merita vestra pensatis. Habetis sane et vos vestrae militiam pulchritudinis, cui virtutis militat forma, non corporis: quam nulla exstinguit aetas, nulla eripere mors potest, nulla aegritudo corrumpere. Solus formae arbiter petatur Deus, qui etiam in corpore minus pulchro diligat animas pulchriores. Non uteri onus notum, non dolor partus; et tamen numerosior soboles piae mentis, quae omnes pro liberis habet: fecunda successoribus, sterilis orbitatibus, nescit funera, novit haeredes*.", in: Migne 1845b, col. 197. For the English translation see: Schaff and Wace 1896a, p. 368: "But you, O happy virgins, who know not such torments, rather than ornaments, whose holy modesty, beaming in your bashful cheeks, and sweet chastity are a beauty, ye do not, intent upon the eyes of men, consider as merits what is gained by the errors of others. You, too, have indeed your own beauty, furnished by the comeliness of virtue, not of the body, to which age puts not an end, which death cannot take away, nor any sickness injure. Let God alone be sought as the judge of loveliness, Who loves even in less beautiful bodies the more beautiful souls. You know nothing of the burden and pain of childbearing, but more are the offspring of a pious soul, which esteems all as its children, which is rich in successors, barren of all bereavements, which knows no deaths, but has many heirs."

[330] For the discussion about the changes in the attire (and sometimes also lack thereof) of the inhabitants of the Roman Empire after the adoption of Christianity see e. g.: Martorelli 2004 and Upson-Saia 2011.

one in the dioceses *Aegyptus* and *Oriens*, for which the dome painting in the Chapel of Exodus in the El Bagawit Necropolis, dated to the 4th or the 5th century, and the illumination with Foolish and Wise Virgins on fol. 2v of *Codex Rossanensis*, dated to the late 6th century, attest resplendent white-gold mantles and head coverings visually reinforcing the idea of holiness and angelic beauty of the consecrated virgins (fig. 2.9-10).[331]

The difficulties to uncover the consecrated virgins hidden among female visual representations of Roman provenance can be well illustrated on the case studies of two objects of different materiality and use, a late 4th century gold-glass fragment of a bowl found in an unspecified Roman catacomb, and a similarly dated sarcophagus, housed since at least the 17th century in the chapel Notre-Dame-de-Confession of the abbey of Saint-Victor in Marseilles, but identified by the *Repertorium der christlich-antiken sarkophage* as a product of a Roman workshop, which most probably found its way to one of the burials in the early 5th-century basilica, an alleged resting place of the relics of martyr Victor, around the time of the shrine's construction.[332]

The fragment of the glass bowl, broken away from the rest of the object at an unspecifiable point of its existence, but most probably already in the 4th century, depicts a barefoot bearded male figure, dressed in tunic and *pallium* (fig. 2.11). Like an ancient philosopher he sits on a folding stool, holding a scroll and performing a gesture of speech/teaching towards the second figure present in the composition. The half-preserved inscription spelling "PET…", the appearance and the attributes of the man hint strongly on the fact that he is apostle Peter.[333] Accompanying him is a woman, from whom only the lower portion survives. Her identity is obscured by the fragmentary state of the glass, the breaking of which destroyed the majority of the inscription, which most probably gave her name together with that of the Prince of Apostles. Her attire consists of a tunic and *palla*, above which a border of a veil remains visible. Dressed as such, being taught by Peter and elevating her hands towards Heaven in orant gesture, a

[331] Ivanovici and Undheim 2019, unpaginated. For the paintings in El Bagawit see also: Davis 2008, pp. 166-172; Peppard 2012 and Candido 2017. For the Syro-Palestinian *Codex Rossanensis*, currently kept in Museo Diocesano e del Codex, Rossano, under inv. n. cod. 1, see e. g.: De'Maffei 2011, pp. 107-118 and Sebastiani *et al.* 2019.
[332] The gold-glass base of a bowl is currently housed in the British Museum under inv. n. 1854,0722.3. The inventory number of the sarcophagus, deposited in the abbey Saint-Victor-de-Marseilles is unknown to the author. It was identified as Roman object by: Christern-Briesenick *et al.* 2003, p. 148. On the history of the abbey see e.g.: Fixot and Pelletier 2004. For bibliographic references on the two objects see cat. n. 4.8 and cat. n. 2.16 in this thesis.
[333] Howells 2015, pp. 86-87. For more information on the use and life cycle of gold-glass objects in late antique Rome see the last part of chapter 1. Peter is also represented as a philosopher on a gold-glass medallion from the Musei Vaticani, inv. n. MV.60790.0.0, published in: Donati 2000, p. 223 with further bibliography. For more information on representations of Christ and Apostles as philosophers see e. g.: Jensen 2020.

conclusion that can be made based on the absence of outlines of hands at her sides, she resembles the virginal paragons Mary and Agnes, representations of whom circulated in abundance in the 4th-century Rome.[334] Unfortunately, as we have seen in chapter 1 and as some funerary plaques, contemporary with the gold-glass we are discussing, demonstrate, nor the attire, nor the presence of Peter are exclusive to the depictions of holy virgins. Yet, I would like to argue that the fact that Peter is represented teaching the female orant may indeed point to the fact that she can be identified either as one of the virgin students of the Apostle (Petronilla, Pudentiana, or Praxede), as already hypothesized by Raffaele Garrucci and Ormonde Dalton more than a century ago, or, more importantly, as a Roman consecrated virgin, who chose to be represented as a virgin martyr.[335]

And it seems that her attitude towards self-representation would not have been completely out of the ordinary in the late-4th-century Rome. A briefly mentioned sarcophagus with scenes of suffering and arrest of Peter and Paul, currently in Marseille, features a young female figure dressed in tunic and *dalmatica* peeking from behind a tree and performing a speech gesture amidst a scene in which a bearded man dressed in tunic and *paenula* closes a rope around the neck of a similarly clothed male figure, decorating the second panel from the left (fig. 2.12). Several scholars reached the conclusion that the female figure may be Thecla, with Joseph Wilpert going a step further and identifying the scene itself as the only remaining example of the capturing of apostle Paul in Iconium at the behest of Thecla's jealous suitor, Thamyris, recounted in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*.[336]

The figure's frontality, the gaze turned towards the viewer and the rendering of the face similar to the late antique *clipei* portraits decorating numerous Roman sarcophagi led to the assumption of the last two scholars studying the sarcophagus, Christine Schenk and Brigitte Christern-Briesenick that it may represent the deceased inhabitant of the sarcophagus, posing as Thecla.[337] The merging between portrait-like depictions of deceased women and biblical figures or martyrs is not unheard of in the case of late antique sarcophagi produced either in Rome or the

[334] Howells 2015, p. 87 is the one to suggest that the female figure is depicted in orant position. For the representations of Agnes and Mary on 4th-century gold-glass objects see chapter 5.
[335] Garrucci 1864, p. 102 and Dalton 1901, p. 128.
[336] Christern-Briesenick *et al.* 2003, pp. 147-148 and Schenk 2017, p. 317. For the identification of the female figure as martyr Thecla along the previously cited scholars see: Garrucci 1879, p. 38; Wilpert 1938, p. 306; Brezzi *et al.* 1969, pp. 83-87. The English translation and commentary of the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* were published by: Barrier 2009.
[337] Christern-Briesenick *et al.* 2003, pp. 147-148 and Schenk 2017, pp. 317-318. The hypothesis that the female figure may represent the deceased buried in the sarcophagus was first formulated by Drocourt-Dubreuil 1989, pp. 26-34, but the researcher did not consider its connection with the scene from the life of Paul probable.

diocese *Septem Provinciarum*. At least 8 sarcophagi, dated between the first third of the 4th and the first third of the 5th century and currently housed in Rome, Arles, Toulouse, Lucq-de-Béarn, and Saint-Maximin-la-Sainte-Baume feature deceased or their family members in the disguise of the virtuous wife and mother Sarah (2 instances), virginal Jairus' daughter (3 instances), the witness of Christ's death and resurrection Mary of Magdala (1 instance), and charitable widow Tabitha (2 instances).[338] In all instances the merging of the representations of dead women and holy figures served to reflect their virtues and visually elevate their status. Such mergers were not restricted to burials of Christians, either, but appeared even in the 3rd century in the case of non-Christian sarcophagi, on which the deceased posed as mythological figures.[339]

If we are to accept that in the case of the sarcophagus from Marseilles it is indeed the deceased hidden behind the figure of martyr Thecla, we can hypothesize about her role in the Christian community, a role I would like to propose was that of a consecrated virgin. It is true that in this instance, unlike in the case of the female figure featured on the gold-glass fragment, the veil, indispensable for the public representation of the virgin and functioning as an *insignia* of her commitment to God, is substituted by a much more neutral head covering, a sort of a cap that may have covered equally well the head of a modest *matrona*.[340] But the conscious choice of

[338] Schenk 2017, pp. 312-327. Mother of a deceased child is represented as Sarah in the scene of Sacrifice of Isaac on two sarcophagi dated to the first third of the 5th century, both produced in a local workshop situated around Toulouse and currently housed in the abbey of Saint-Vincent-de Lucq (without inventory number) and in the Musée Saint-Raymond in Toulouse (inv. n. Ra 825), published in: Christern-Briesenick *et al.* 2003, pp. 135-136, 246-247 with further bibliographical references. A representation of a deceased child is disguised in the figure of the Jairus' daughter on three early-4th-century sarcophagi of Roman origin, currently housed in Musei Vaticani (inv. n. M.V.31542.0.0 and M.V.31440.0.0) and Musée Departmental d'Arles Antique (inv. n. FAN.92.00.2493), published in: Deichmann *et al.* 1967, pp. 7-8, 12-13 and Christern-Briesenick *et al.* 2003, pp. 15-17 with further bibliographical references. The unique representation of the deceased as Mary of Magdala, present in the scene of Peter's betrayal, can be found on a Roman sarcophagus dated to the first third of the 4th century, kept in Museo Nazionale Romano, Terme di Diocletiano (inv. n. 2400), published in: Deichmann *et al.* 1967, pp. 337-338 with further bibliography. The deceased is represented as Tabitha on two sarcophagi, produced in a Roman workshop in the last decades of the 4th century but transferred to the diocese *Septem Provinciarum* shortly after. They are currently housed in the Musée Departmental d'Arles Antique (inv. n. FAN.92.00.2502) and in the basilica Sainte-Marie-Madeleine in Saint-Maximin-la-Sainte-Baume (without inventory number), and are published in: Christern-Briesenick *et al.* 2003, pp. 52, 233-235 (for further bibliographical references see cat. n. 2.11 and 2.15 in this thesis).

[339] Newby 2010 and Schenk 2017, pp. 185-187, 312.

[340] For depictions of married women wearing caps see: cat. n. 3.7, 6.8 and 6.10 in this thesis. The veil was not exclusive to the virgins and was worn by married women, too (the marriage ceremony consisted of the imposition of the veil and a prayer of blessing). Even though in their epistles and treatises early Christian writers represent a united front, stipulating that women should cover their head as part of everyday dress and especially during prayer, visual sources suggest that the female population of Rome did not always pay heed to their opinions (see cat. n. 3.4, 4.5, 5.3, 6.2, 6.5, 6.11, 6.13 in this thesis). On the haphazard use of the head covering in the late antique visual culture see: Harlow 2004, pp. 213-214. Trends in non-liturgical veiling across the Mediterranean between the 4th and the 7th century are discussed by: Stafford 2024, with emphasis on the veil as a marker of status and as a fashion statement, the use of which depended more on the occasion and the decision of the individual woman than on the rules propagated by the religious leaders. Despite the obvious fascination of the Church Fathers with the topic of the veiling of the general female population, the image of the veil was much more strongly linked to the image of the virgin, both in the written sources, where the ritual *velatio*, the *rite de passage* every virgin had to undergo in

martyr Thecla, a strong female figure who, through her refusal to wed and successful evangelizing career following the diligent study of the Scripture directly from apostle Paul, became an ideal model of behaviour for all virginal women determined to infiltrate the Church hierarchy and take an active part in the religious life of the Christian communities throughout the Empire, may point to the fact that the deceased for whom the sarcophagus was commissioned was indeed a consecrated virgin.[341]

During the 4th century bishops constructed the idea of a female martyr as the most appropriate model for the consecrated virgins. They even presented virginal life as daily martyrdom, with Ambrose claiming that "virginity is not praiseworthy because it is found in martyrs, but because it itself makes martyrs."[342] Like the martyr, virgin is depicted as possessing power to intercede with God on behalf of her family members and emanating salvific power otherwise associated with martyrs' relics.[343] The association between virgins and martyrs was further reinforced by the veiling ritual, instituted in the 4th century as indispensable part of the consecration ceremony, through which bishops tightened their control over the number and identity of women able to access the virginal order recognised by the Church.[344]

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the process of her consecration, is interpreted as the cornerstone of the whole ceremony, and in the visual culture: Stafford 2024, pp. 35, 42-44. For the association between the veil and consecrated virginity see, for example, the papal decretal, addressed to the bishops of Gaul, attributed lately to pope Damasus (366-384), but previously associated with the pontificate of Siricius (384-398), in which the pope labels the virgin as the one "*quae…a sacerdote prece effusa benedictionis velamen accepit*" (Siricius, *Epistolae et decreta*, ep. 10, in: Migne 1843, col. 1182). On the dating of the decretal see: Duval 2005. Metz 1954, pp. 123-124, 131-132 demonstrates that the association is present in virtually all primary sources dealing with virgins. Undheim 2020, p. 81 suggests that the veils of the virgins may have has specific form in order to make them distinguishable from other women.

[341] For the discussion about Thecla as a role model for women active in the religious life and for virgins in particular see e.g.: Weiß and Weiß 2005, pp. 118-136; Davis 2008; Hylen 2015; Bremmer 2017, pp. 149-165. About the cult of Thecla in Rome see: Vella 2023.

[342] Ivanovici and Undheim 2019, unpaginated, quoting Ambrose, *De virginibus* 1.3.10: "*Non enim ideo laudabilis virginitas, quia et in martyribus reperitus, sed quia ipsa martyres faciat.*", in: Migne 1845b, col. 191. For the English version see: Schaff and Wace 1896a, p. 365. For the idea of asceticism as daily martyrdom see: Cobb 2017, p. 112.

[343] Ivanovici and Undheim 2019, unpaginated; Undheim 2020, p. 58 and note 166 with further bibliographical references. For the primary source see: Ambrose, *De virginibus* 1.7.32,39: *"Audistis, parentes, quibus erudire virtutibus, quibus instituere disciplinis filias debeatis; ut habere possitis quarum meritis vestra delicta redimantur. Virgo Dei donum est, munus parentis, sacerdotium castitatis. Virgo matris hostia est, cujus quotidiano sacrificio vis divina placatur... Primus enim odor tuus super omnia aromata, quae in Salvatoris missa sunt sepulturam (Joan. XIX, 39); et emortuos corporis motus, membrorumque redolet obiisse delicias. Secundus odor tuus sicut odor Libani, Dominici corporis integritatem, virgineae florem castitatis exhalat.*", in: Migne 1845b, coll. 198. For the English version see: Schaff and Wace 1896a, pp. 368-369: "You have heard, O parents, in what virtues and pursuits you ought to train your daughters, that you may possess those by whose merits your faults may be redeemed. The virgin is an offering for her mother, by whose daily sacrifice the divine power is appeased…Thy first odour is above all spices, which were used upon the burying of the Saviour, and the fragrance arises from the mortified motions of the body, and the perishing of the delights of the members. Thy second odour, like the odour of Lebanon, exhales the incorruption of the Lord's body, the flower of virginal chastity."

[344] Ivanovici and Undheim 2019, unpaginated. See also: Henry 2001. For the discussion of the consecration ceremony as the exclusive duty of the bishop see e.g. Metz 1954, pp. 99-102 with references to canons of Church councils. Communities of women devoted to perpetual virginity existed probably as early as the 2nd century, but

The symbolism of the veiling ceremony and the precarious nature of virginity

The performance of the consecration ritual during the great liturgical feasts, but prevalently during Easter together with the ritual of baptism, provides a rare opportunity to reconstruct its visual dimension.[345] According to *De lapsu virginis consacratae*, formerly attributed to bishop Ambrose, but now usually ascribed to Illyrian bishop Nicetas of Remesiana (before 366-414), women who were to become consecrated virgins proceeded into the church along with the newly baptized, who were dressed in white and held candles, which enveloped the virgins in resplendent light as they advanced towards the altar. To the eyes of the spectators, they would appear glowing, as much from the outside than from the inside, embodying the innocence and purity that the humankind as a whole lost due to the original sin. But, unlike the purity of the newly baptized which was recaptured by them only fleetingly, the visibly manifested holiness of the virgins was there to stay, lending them tangible power to aid the community around them to reach salvation.[346]

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the ritual of public consecration has been practiced only since the second half of the 4th century, and it seems that it was specific only for the dioceses of the western Roman Empire. For more information see: Metz 1954, pp. 77-79, Hunter 2016, p. 91; Undheim 2020, p. 14. Hunter 2016, p. 103 specifies that the bishop was the one to decide whether the virgin was worthy of consecration, who bestowed the veil, pronounced the benediction, and decided at what age the virgin can be consecrated (the age varied greatly: canon 8 of the council of Saragossa, 380, dictated a rather advanced age of 40 (Vives *et al.* 1963, pp. 16-18); a record of the North African council of 397 in *Breviarum Hipponense* set the age at 25, the same as for clerics (canon 9, in: Munier 1974, p. 33); Ambrose, *De virginitate* 7.39 does not stipulate the appropriate age of the consecrated virgin, but does state that she does not need to be of advanced years (Migne 1845c, col. 276); the age of his sister Marcella at her consecration between 353 and 356 corresponded with Ambrose's belief: according to his *vita* she was slightly older then him and he was born around the year 340, which means she accepted her virgin's veil in her teens (*Vita Sancti Ambrosii Mediolanensis Episcopi*, in: Kaniecka 1928)). On the age virgins had to reach to be eligible for veiling see also: Metz 1954, pp. 104-115 and Undheim 2020, pp. 62-75.

[345] In *De virginibus* 3.1.1. Ambrose reports that his virginal sister Marcellina received the veil from pope Liberius (352-366) on the feast of Nativity (Migne 1845b, colls. 219-220). For the overview of the dispute between scholars supporting the hypothesis that the label "*Natale Salvatoris*", applied to the feast by Ambrose, stands for Nativity, and those who interpreted it as the feast of Epiphany, see: Metz 1954, p. 127. Easter is presented as the usual time for baptism and consecration of the virgins in Ambrose, *Exhortatio virginitatis* 7.42: "*Venit Paschae dies, in toto orbe baptismi sacramenta celebrantur, uelantur sacrae uirgines*". ("*The day of Pascha has come, all over the world the sacraments of baptism are being celebrated, and consecrated virgins are receiving the veil.*"), in: Migne 1845e, col. 348. For more information and the English translation of the source see: Hunter 2016, pp. 91-92. The decree of pope Gelasius (492-496), quoted previously in chapter 1, mentions the feast of Apostles Peter and Paul as the only day apart from the Easter and Epiphany on which the veiling of the virgins can take place: Gelasius, General Decretal/ Letter 14, paragraph 12, in: Thiel 1867, p. 369. d'Izarny 1953, pp. 106-107 argues that the ritual of *velatio* was performed on the *dies natalis* of the Apostles not only in Rome, but also in Milan already in the 4th century.

[346] *De lapsu virginis consacratae* 5.19: "*Non es memorata diei sanctae Dominicae resurrectionis in quo divino altari te obtulisti velandam? In tanto, tamque solemni conventu Ecclesiaie Dei, inter lumina neophytorum splendida, inter candidatos regni coelestis quasi Regi nuptura processeras.*", in: Migne 1845j, col. 372. For the discussion of interplay between light and the virgins' bodies during the ceremony see: Hunter 2016, pp. 92-93 and Ivanovici and Undheim 2019, unpaginated. The detailed analysis of the preserved early medieval Roman

The act of the veiling itself placed virgins taking their vow in close proximity to the altar, which at the time was beginning to be used as a container for martyrs' relics.[347] In the holy space saturated by light and sound after the benediction the virgin became both the *sacerdos* able to make an offering to God in order to intercede on behalf of others and the offering itself, an image that Ambrose nimbly constructs in his treatise *De virginibus*.[348] The analogy between the virgin as a container of holiness and the altar was further strengthened by the notion that the veil, which the virgins received from the hands of the bishop, was equal to the cloth covering the altar, a belief evidenced in an anecdote retold by Ambrose, in which a young virgin sought to avoid marriage by putting her head under the altar cloth in a gesture mimicking the ritual veiling.[349] It is therefore by no means surprising that the association between the consecrated virgins, the virgin martyrs and their venerated relics, which was deliberately instilled in the minds of the faithful by the representatives of the Church during the ritual of consecration, continued beyond it. Both in life and death virgins seem to have identified themselves with these creatures who were once (at least allegedly) part of the Christian community and were generally accepted by the Church and the society as a whole as paragons of female virtues, whose purity and faith withstood the tortures of the flesh and took them to such hights of righteousness and closeness to God which were unattainable but desirable for all the devoted

sacramentaries, done by Metz 1954, pp. 138-161, demonstrates that the execution of the ritual and the liturgy performed on the occasion did not evolve substantially in the period of our interest.

[347] Ivanovici and Undheim 2019, unpaginated and Wiśniewski 2019, pp. 174-176 with references to primary sources. For more information regarding the placement of relics inside late antique altars see: Duval 2005, pp. 15-16; Röckelein 2010; Palladino 2022, pp. 89-90 (in general); Narasawa 2015, pp. 499-505 (for the dioceses of *Gallia* and *Septem Provinciarum*); Foletti 2018, pp. 27-43 and Wiśniewski 2019, pp. 155-156 (for the Ambrosian basilica in Milan); Awes Freeman 2021 (for the material and ritual parallels between reliquaries and altars).

[348] For the discussion of the development of the image of the virgin as sacrifice see: Hunter 2016, pp. 99-101 and Undheim 2020, pp. 57-58. The quoted source is Ambrose, *De virginibus* 1.7.32, in: Migne 1845b, coll. 198, which uses expressions such as "*matris hostia*" and "*sacerdotium castitatis*" to characterize the consecrated virgin, clearly hinting on the eucharistic underpinnings of the virginal consecration.

[349] Ivanovici and Undheim 2019, unpaginated. For the story recounted by Ambrose (374-397), see: Ambrose, *De virginibus* 1.12.65: "*Memoriae nostrae puella dudum nobilis in saeculo, nunc nobilior Deo, cum urgeretur ad nuptias a parentibus et propinquis, ad sacrosanctum altare confugit. Quo enim melius virgo, quam ubi sacrificium virginitatis offertur? Ne is quidem finis audaciae. Stabat ad aram Dei pudoris hostia, victima castitatis: nunc capiti dexteram sacerdotis imponens, precem poscens, nunc justae impatiens morae, ac summum altari subjecta verticem. Num melius, inquit, maforte me quam altare velabit, quod sanctificat ipsa velamina? Plus talis decet flammeus, in quo caput omnium Christus quotidie consecratur.*", in: Migne 1845b, col. 206. For the English translation see: Schaff and Wace 1896a, p. 373: "Within my memory a girl once noble in the world, now more noble in the sight of God, being urged to a marriage by her parents and kinsfolk, took refuge at the holy altar. Whither could a virgin better flee, than thither where the Virgin Sacrifice is offered? Nor was even that the limit of her boldness. She, the oblation of modesty, the victim of chastity, was standing at the altar of God, now placing upon her head the right hand of the priest, asking his prayers, and now impatient at the righteous delay, placing the top of her head under the altar. "Can any better veil," she said, "cover me better than the altar which consecrates the veils themselves? Such a bridal veil is most suitable on which Christ, the Head of all, is daily consecrated." The link between the altar and the veils virgins received from the hands of the bishop along with benediction may have been visually underlined by laying of the said veils on the altar prior to the ceremony, as d'Izarny 1953, p. 102 speculates, but the evidence is not sufficient to confirm such claim.

congregants. Utilizing the martyrs' image as their own, virgins were able to visually channel their agency without restraints.[350]

The veiling ceremony was staged around the idea of the virgin as a bride of Christ, a parallel which is evidenced for example in the letter of Jerome to Demetrias, written in the year 414 and celebrating the famous virgin's veiling which must have taken place around that time. In it the Church Father makes references to the virgin as a bride and her veil as equal to the bridal veil:

"I know that the pontiff prayed for the yellow bridal veil to cover the virgin´s head and that the statement of the apostle was celebrated: "I wish, moreover, to present you all to Christ as a chaste virgin" [2 Cor.11:2]...From this, the bride herself rejoices and says: "The king led me into his chamber" [Cant.1:3] and a chorus of companions respond: "All the glory of the king´s daughter is within" [Ps.44:14]."[351]

The letter reveals that not only the visual, but also the sonic dimension of the ceremony reinforced the idea of the bridal status of the consecrated virgin. At some point during the ritual, probably immediately after consecration, as David Hunter suggests, the newly consecrated virgin joined her fellow virgins in the ritual reciting or singing of the verses of the Song of Songs, a biblical text containing elaborate bridal imagery.[352] Even if the ceremony itself and the patristic literature as a whole associated the image of the virgin with the one of the bride, the employment of this particular part of the biblical text at the same time created a sharp boundary between ordinary women and those committed to perpetual virginity, which came to possess higher social capital, because their spiritual marriage bound them to a superior, divine husband, more beautiful and graceful than the sons of men.[353]

The steeper the fall when the consecrated virgin failed to fulfil her vows. Not only were the laws concerning the indissolubility of the marital state and obligatory fidelity within the union

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[350] See last section of chapter 1 for the discussion of the fabrication of some martyrs and stories of their persecution during the pontificate of Damasus (366-384).

[351] Jerome, ep. 130.2: "*scio, quod ad inprecationem pontificis flammeum uirginale sanctum operuerit caput et illud apostolicae uocis insigne celebratum sit: nolo autem uos omnes uirginem castam exhibere Christo…unde et ipsa sponsa laetatur ac dicit: introduxit me rex in cubiculum suum sodaliumque respondit chorus: omnis gloria filiae regis intrinsecus.*", available online at: database *Epistolae: Medieval Women's Latin Letters*, https://epistolae.ctl.columbia.edu/letter/1282.html (last viewed on 17. 01. 2025). For more information on the development of the image of the virgin as *sponsa Christi* see e.g.: Metz 1954, pp. 117-123 and Cooper 1996, pp. 45-67. For a discussion of the parallels between the 4th-century wedding ritual and the ritual of the consecration of the virgins see: d'Izarny 1953 and Metz 1954, pp. 135-136.

[352] Hunter 2016, pp. 94-95. For more information about the place of the Song of Songs in the ceremony of *velatio* see: Henry 1999 and Shuve 2016, pp. 109-172.

[353] Hunter 2016, pp. 101-102. The last sentence is a paraphrase of Ambrose, *De virginibus* 1.7.36: "*Speciosus forma prae filiis hominum, diffusa est gratia in labiis tuis (Psal. XLIV, 3).*", in: Migne 1845b, col. 199. For the English translation see: Schaff and Wace 1896a, p. 369.

applied to her and she was treated as a bigamist or adulteress by the society and the Church officials, but her transgression cost her the unique spiritual status of one of the human beings closest to God. Thus, to add insult to injury, she essentially robbed the Christian community of an intercessory figure, securing the bond between the congregation and Christ, serving as an insurance in the case of his second coming, which pushed the said Church to call for harsher punishments.[354]

In the decretal, addressing several questions regarding the clerical discipline formulated by bishops of Gaul and written probably in 383/384, pope Damasus writes at length on the punishment to be undergone by girls who acted against their promise to remain virgins consecrated to Christ, and, to a lesser degree, also by their seducers:

"If a virgin, already veiled to Christ – one who has professed her integrity by a public testimony and received the veil of blessings by the bishop after he has read the benedictions – committed her incestum either in secret or, wanting to cover over the crime, has placed upon her adulterer the name husband and has taken the members of Christ and made them into the members of a prostitute; so that she who was a bride of Christ (instead) will be called the wife of a man; in such a woman, there are as many reasons for a condemnation as there are charges! She has changed her resolution of integrity she has lost her veil, perverted her first promise and then withdrawn it to make it worthless. Of what kind and for how long the amends are needed? How severe is the penitence for her, who has brought upon herself the destruction of her flesh! It is not a small sin to have left God and gone after a man. Therefore she has to lament for exceedingly many years, so that she may in time achieve forgiveness, after she has received the dignified fruit of penitence, if she indeed will do her penitence with repentance…And regarding these [girls], it is necessary to establish the amount of time for penance to be done. Whether she was taken by force or she went willingly, she consented contrary to all appropriate behaviour, to go to the man, asking advice from neither her relatives nor her bishop with regard to the veil…The law orders them to be killed by stones, but now that this punishment is invalid, it is inflicted spiritually, so that they cannot enter the Church, as if they were dead. They nevertheless have the possibility to do penance, but they will not obtain forgiveness easily, since, according to the law, if the girl had cried [for help], and if she had contested and protested at length, she would certainly have been exempt from sin. It is therefore necessary for both of them to be suspended from communion for the same regulated period of time, to act out the

[354] Metz 1954, p. 121; Cloke 1995, p. 35 and Undheim 2020, pp. 55-57, 150.

proper penitence with lament, humility and fasts, and to redeem with compassion the crime that has been committed."[355]

The term *incestum,* used by Damasus to refer to the criminal sexual act, carried a specific meaning to the Romans when it appeared in relation to lapsed sacred virgins. It called to mind the crimes of the Vestals, who, after being found guilty of no longer being virgins, were referred to as *incestae*, an adjective which, according to the widespread etymological reading, reflected on among others by Isidore of Seville (c. 560-636), was directly linked to the adjective *incastae.*[356] And to be the negation of *castus* held a strong connotation of rule violations, of impurity by failing to abstain and by breaching ritual precautions. The fallen virgin did not only harm herself and her religious community by losing the blessing gained through chastity, but because of the fact that the crime has been committed against divinity, she also became a dark, polluted figure, who posed a threat of corruption and destruction to fellow Christians and had to be banned from entering the shrines for the order to be restored. The excommunication essentially made of her a living dead, eligible to receive the grace of communion only on the death bed following a life-long repentance.[357]

Some virgins were especially vulnerable to dalliance, having not made the choice to abstain from the pleasures of the flesh and to forgo marriage willingly, pushed by their families either because of excessive religious zeal or out of greedy attempt to save on a dowry. And the temptations lurked on every corner. Even the clerics could not be considered harmless company, as the letter in which Jerome reprimands subdeacon Sabinianus for attempted seduction of a virgin from his own Betlehem convent under the false promise of marriage demonstrates. The

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[355] Undheim 2020, pp. 145-146. For the primary source, wrongly attributed to pope Siricius (384-398), see: Siricius, *Epistolae et decreta,* ep. 10, in: Migne 1843, colls. 1182-1184: "*Si virgo velata iam ‹in› Christo, quae, intergitatem publico testimonio professa, a sacerdote prece[t] fusa benedictionis, valemen accepit, sive incestum commiserit furtim, seu, volens crimen protegere, adultero marirti nomen imposu‹er›it, tollens membra Christi, faciens membra meretricis, ut quae sponsa Christi fuerit coniunx hominis diceretur, in eiusmodi muliere quot ‹c›ausae sunt, tot reatus: integritatis propositum mutatum, velamen amissum, fides prima depravata atque ‹in› inritum devocata.Quali[s] h‹u›ic et quanta satisfactione opus est! Quam magna paenitentia ei quae interitum carnis incurrit! Non est parva culpa requilisse Deum et isse post hominem. Unde, annis quam plurimis deflendum ei est, ‹ut› dignae fructu[m] pœnitentia facto, possit aliquando ad veniam pervenire, si tamen paenitens paenitenda faciat...Et his paenitentiae agendae tempus constituendum est, quoniam, seu rapta, seu volens, ad virum ire perverso ordine consensit; nec propinquorum nec sacerdotum testimonio conrogato ad velamen...Quos lex lapidari praecepit, et nunc, cessante illa vindicta, spiritaliter feriuntur, ut ecclesiam, tamquam mortui, introire non possint. Habent tamen paenitentia agendae locum, cito non habeant veniam, quoniam, si, secundum legem, proclamasset puella et diu contestata se continuisset [et], utique fuisset inmunis a culpa. Utrisque ergo expedit, sub eadem temporis constitutione, a communione suspendi, dignam agere paenitentiam, fletu, humilitate, ieunio, misericordia, redimere crimen admissum.*"

[356] Undheim 2020, p. 150. For more information see e.g.: Lovisi 1997. For the reading of the term by Isidore of Seville see *Etymologiae* V.26.24, in: Barney *et al.* 2006, p. 123.

[357] Undheim 2020, pp. 150-151, 158-161,164-166. The details of the punishment of the fallen virgin can be found, for example, in Siricius, ep. 1.6.7, in: Migne 1843, col. 1137.

Church Father employs the metaphor of death to describe the spiritual consequences of the moral transgression:

"…what I lament is that you do not lament yourself, that you do not realize that you are dead, that like a gladiator ready for Libitina, you deck yourself out for your own funeral."[358]

But the most devoted ones could not feel safe either. Both Ambrose and Augustine include stories of violated or near-violated virginity in their respective treatises on chastity. In *De virginibus*, Ambrose tells the story of a certain Antiochian virgin, who is thrust in a brothel but is ultimately saved by a soldier who switches places with her. Throughout the narrative he affirms that it is not the body that sins, but the will, and if the accomplished rape or the attempt of one are met with sufficient resistance, the most valuable spiritual virginity remains uncorrupted:

"The Virgin of Christ can be exposed to shame, but she cannot be contaminated. Everywhere she is the Virgin of God, and the Temple of God: houses of ill-fame cannot injure chastity, but chastity does away with the ill-fame of the place."[359]

In *De civitate Dei* Augustine deals with the question how the Church and the society in general should deal with the consecrated virgins raped during the siege of Rome in 410, some of which were so horrified by the violence they were subjected to and the loss of their bodily purity, closely linked with their status within the Church, that they killed themselves. His announced subject is "whether the raping which holy virgins in captivity suffered against their will could pollute the virtue of their souls". The only consolation he comes with is that "as long as the will remains unyielding, no crime, beyond the victim's power to prevent it without sin [i.e. suicide], and which is perpetrated on the body or in the body, lays any guilt on the soul…[chastity] is a virtue of the soul, not lost even though the body be outraged by force…".[360]

Pope Leo I (440-461) ponders the nature of virginity in a letter to the bishops of *Africa* about a number of consecrated virgins, who had been raped and were anxious about the continuity of

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[358] Cloke 1995, p. 44 and Undheim 2020, pp. 157-158, quoting Jerome, ep. 147.8: "*Hoc plango, quod te ipse non plangis, quod te non sentis mortuum; quod quasi gladiator paratus libithynae, in proprium funus ornaris.*", in: Migne 1845i, col. 1201.

[359] Coyne Kelly 2000, p. 47. See Ambrose, *De virginibus* 2.4.26: "*Christi virgo prostitui potest, adulterari non potest. Ubieunque virgo Dei est, templum Dei est: nec lupanaria infamant castitatem, sed castitas etiam loci abolet infamiam.*", in: Migne 1845b, col. 225. For the English translation see: Schaff and Wace 1896a, p. 377.

[360] Coyne Kelly 2000, pp. 47-48 and Burnett McInerey 2003, pp. 78-79. See Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 1.16, XVIII, in: Migne 1864a, colls. 30-32: "*An stupris, quae etiam sacrarum forte virginum est passa captivitas, contaminari poterit virtus animi sine voluntatis assessu.*" "*[Q]uidquid alius de corpore vel in corpore fecerit quod sine peccato proprio non valeat evitari praeter culpam esse patiens...si autem animi bonum est, etiam oppresso corpore non amittitur...*". For the English translation see: Zema *et al.* 1962, pp. 2, 45-47.

their sacred state. While the pope regrets that the "handmaids of the lord who lost their perfect virginity because they were violated by barbarians" could no longer compare themselves to "undefiled virgins", he ultimately concludes that "all sin has its source in the will, and a mind which did not yield could remain uncorrupted by the pollution of the flesh" and advises the victims that they may lessen the damage if "they grieve over having lost even in their bodies what they could not lose in their minds".[361]

Patristic writers agreed on the fact that the proper object of discipline is the mind, not the body, and the defiled virgins must undergo a reduction of heavenly rank but should not be punished for losing their virginity if they did not consent. Yet the proof of resistance proved to be an almost unsurmountable caveat, the burden of which laid on the virgin herself, who, as becomes evident from the excerpt from the *De lapsu virginis consacratae* was always considered willing until proven otherwise by witnesses:

"But you say: 'I did not will this evil; I suffered violence.' That most brave Susanna, whose name you falsely wear, will answer you: 'Placed between two elders, there between two judges of the people, set alone between the trees of the garden [Dan 13:20 ff], I could not be conquered; because I did not will to be.' Could you not have shown some resistance against an inexperienced adolescent, there in the middle of the city, if you had not already wished to be corrupted? Then who heard your cries? Who observed your struggle?"[362]

Words of Damasus, Jerome, Ambrose, Augustine and Leo I prove that virginity was a fickle state, always precarious and vanishing. The consecrated woman who willingly sinned, even only in her mind, was to be condemned to metaphorical death and banished from the Church. And even the one who suffered rape and consented neither in mind nor the body lost something from her sacredness and had to publicly mourn in order to defend her image as a virtuous

[361] Coyne Kelly 2000, p. 48. See Leo I, ep. 12, in: Migne 1846a, col. 653: "*Illae autem famulae Dei quae integritatem pudoris oppressione barbarica perdiderunt, laudabiliores erunt in humilitate ac verecundia sua si se incontaminatis non audeant comparare virginibus. Quamvis enim omne peccatum ex voluntate nascatur, et potuerit corruptione carnis mens invicta non pollui, minus tamen hoc eis oberit si quod potuerunt animo non amittere, doleant se vel corpore perdidisse.*" For the English translation see: Hunt 1957, pp. 54-55.

[362] *De lapsu virginis consacratae* 4.12: "*Sed dices: Nolui hoc malum, violentiam passa sum. Respondebit tibi fortissima illa Susanna, cujus tu nomen fallaciter bajulas: Ego inter duos presbyteros posita, inter duos utique judices populi, sola inter silvas paradisi constituta (Dan. XIII, 20 et seq.) vinci non potui; quia nec volui. Tu ab uno ineptissimo adolescente, et in media civitate, quomodo vim potuisti perferre, nisi quia ultro vitiari voluisti? Quis denique tuas voces audivit? Quis obluctationes sensit?*", in: Migne 1845j, col. 386. For the English translation and discussion of the imperial and canonic legislation dealing with rape see: Undheim 2020, pp. 161-162. For more information on the treatment of rape in the Theodosian code see: Grodzinsky 1984.

woman, dependent entirely on a state that was more metaphysical than bodily and heavily relied on public scrutiny.[363]

Conclusions

The paths to female asceticism in Rome evolved significantly between the 4th and 7th centuries, reflecting broader socio-political transformations. The aristocratic *domus*-centred asceticism that flourished in the late 4th century, exemplified by Marcella's circle on the Aventine, gradually gave way to more formalized monastic communities as the traditional senatorial aristocracy declined and the city weathered invasions, war, and demographic collapse. This transformation wasn't merely a shift in organizational structure but represented a fundamental change in how female religious authority was constituted and exercised in the city.

To become a Church-approved widow or virgin was not an easy task. As we have seen, the adepts of the former state were attacked by poverty and exploitation of the land agents and neighbours, a situation which mostly allowed only the already powerful members of the top echelons of society to soar. The latter oftentimes had to act against the wishes of their families who wanted them married and even if they joined the virginal order, their state, because it was so highly appraised and viewed as having protective properties, could be lost in seconds, both in the physical and mental way, and leave them pariahs.[364] Through following the ascetic rules to the dot one could also meet an untimely death, like Blaesilla, daughter of Jerome's social and literary patroness Paula, who was a victim of excessive fasting and succumbed to what might now be understood as aggravated symptoms of anorexia. [365]

Visual evidence like the representation of Turtura in the catacomb of Commodilla demonstrates the complex performance of female ascetic identity. Through strategic visual signifiers – modest dress, proximity to sacred figures, and symbols of learning like the codex – elite widows and virgins could assert their spiritual authority while maintaining their social distinction. Contrary to the idea that they should expand their mind while keeping their tongue silent as they are

[363] Burnett McInerey 2003, p. 81 comes with the idea that virginity was a quality that could only be disproved and never proved.
[364] For young virgins acting against the wishes of their families see e.g.: Castelli 1986, pp. 81-82 and Brown 1988, pp. 343-345.
[365] Cooper 1996, p. 68. The story is captured in Jerome, ep. 39.4, available online at: database *Epistolae: Medieval Women's Latin Letters*, https://epistolae.ctl.columbia.edu/letter/280.html (last viewed on 29. 01. 2025).

morally inferior and easily swayed towards heretical though, if unguided, many of the more affluent virgins and widows proved to be capable self-promoters, utilizing both the written and spoken word and visual representations to curate their public image.[366]

The textual record, particularly the treatises of Jerome, Ambrose, and Fulgentius, reveals how deeply concerned Church authorities were with managing these expressions of female religious identity. The obsessive attention to dress, comportment, and potential sexual transgression reveals anxiety about women's public visibility and agency. Yet this very concern betrays the reality that ascetic women were visible and active participants in Rome's religious landscape.

Particularly striking is how female ascetics navigated the contradictory expectations placed upon them. Their authority depended on maintaining connections to traditional aristocratic networks while embodying the new Christian virtues of humility and renunciation at the same time. They were simultaneously expected to be invisible (secluded in their chambers awaiting Christ, their bridegroom) and highly visible as exemplars of the new faith. They were praised for masculine virtue while criticized for feminine weakness. This dialectical position created space for strategic agency, as evidenced by women like Marcella who could leverage their social connections, financial resources, and theological knowledge to intervene in ecclesiastical affairs despite formal exclusion from Church hierarchy.

Beyond the aristocratic case studies that dominate our sources, glimpses of less privileged women – like the paralyzed Romula described by Gregory the Great – suggest that asceticism could provide meaningful spiritual and social roles for women of lower status as well. The scarcity of visual representations of ascetic women coupled with the limited literacy of the lower social strata (and thus the inability to leave written records) and the model of public authority which favoured the members of the nobility unfortunately mostly hides the mental world of the lower-born female ascetics from our view.[367] Yet they are not to be forgotten.

[366] Burnett McInerey 2003, pp. 64-65. For the idea of virgins' need to be guided see: Jerome, ep. 130.17, available online at: database *Epistolae: Medieval Women's Latin Letters*, https://epistolae.ctl.columbia.edu/letter/1282.html (last viewed on 29. 01. 2025). That the public agency of both virgins and widows was most often than not tied to the money and status they possessed in their old lives is discussed extensively by: Clark 1986, pp. 188-193.

[367] Cooper 1996, pp. 84-85 demonstrates that asceticism became a way for non-aristocratic women to claim at least a semblance of religious authority exactly because the state was associated with many members of senatorial families, at least until the end of the 6th century.

3. Worshipping through the senses

Late antique devotional objects and sacred spaces were a feast to the senses. Their shimmering textured surfaces teased the eye and the hand of the faithful to see and touch, and their interplay with the liturgy or rituals of personal piety added the dimension of smell and hearing to the equation through burning of incense, prayer, and chants. Golden *tesserae* in mosaics and metal votive gifts attached to devotional images became animated organisms under the light of the flickering candles, shivering in the gusts of breath and wind. Oil lamps casted shadows, from which only the parts of the visual decoration, intentionally selected by its ideators, emerged. Touch, smell, taste, and sound were part of "seeing" of the sacred, arousing internal agitation within the pious to the point where they perceived the sensory effects surrounding the objects, images and spaces as manifestations of an indwelling holy spirit.[368]

The post-Constantine Mediterranean embraced the idea that the sacred power to heal, to bring salvation and protection, concentrated in people, spaces, and things, can be transferred through touch. The objects and places, linked to the lives of Christ, the Virgin, Apostles, and martyrs, became infused with the power of their sanctity and were able to transform and empower objects such as tokens and medallions or substances such as oil and water, which, too, became relics able to emanate holiness, brought to life by the touch of the pilgrims.[369]

Even though the ideal environment for spiritually advanced women, represented in the writings of Church Fathers such as Jerome (c. 342/7-420) and Ambrose (374-397), calls to mind images of strict askesis, dematerialization, sombre dwellings and starved saintly bodies, the following pages demonstrate that the spaces and objects Roman women came in contact with were deeply sensual and engaging. It was seeing, smelling, and touching that inspired faith in late antique and early medieval Rome.[370] And, as we will see later on, sometimes blocking of one of the senses, especially limiting of the sight through barriers, doors, or curtains installed in the liturgical space, could add to the mystical experience, generating a mental liminal space in

[368] Pentcheva 2010, pp. 1-2. For the extensive engagement of the senses in the experiencing of the sacred during the Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages see also: Kessler 2019; Bogdanović 2021, published as a tribute to Alexei Lidov, whose extensive bibliography on the same topic can be found on pp. 359-364 and Doležalová et al. 2022.
[369] Vikan 2010, pp. 24-25.
[370] For sight as crucial sense involved in construction of sanctity in early Middle Ages see: Hahn 1997. For the discussion about touch see: Caseau 2017.

which the faithful could see with their “eyes of faith” that which with their “eyes of flesh” they could not.[371]

This chapter will examine how Roman women, both consecrated and not, interacted with sacred spaces and objects through their senses. It explores three main questions: How did gender separation affect women's visual experience in liturgical spaces? What female archetypes were presented to women in church decoration? And how did portable devotional objects allow women to establish personal connections with holy figures? Through analysis of pictorial concepts in the churches Santa Maria Maggiore and Santa Maria Antiqua, alongside personal devotional items, the following pages aim to demonstrate how sensory engagement facilitated women's spiritual agency in late antique Rome.

Female Archetypes within the Gender Separated Liturgical Space

Did Roman women, especially those elevated above all others in the writings of the Church Fathers, have different perception of the liturgical space than other social and gender groups of believers? What were the main tools modifying the sight lines of the congregation inside a Roman church building during Late Antiquity? And if the gendered separation of the faithful was a reality in the city, do we have any preserved examples of the effect such separation had on the display of female archetypes within the churches?

Gender separation of the liturgical space during the highly structured Roman stational mass and the longevity of the practice, rooted in the early Middle Ages, is being explored by scholars for almost a century.[372] The classic book of Sible de Blaauw *Cultus et Decor*, published in 1994, suggests separation of women, occupying the left side of the main nave and respective lateral nave, and men, standing in the mirroring right space. Positioned thus they would be divided by the central portion of the main nave, reserved for the procession of the clergy in line with *Ordo Romanus* I, dated approximately to the first half of the 8th century, but with roots leading to liturgical practices during the pontificate of Gregory the Great (590-604) and his immediate

[371] See Foletti 2021 for the discussion of the sensory effect of the closed doors of the basilica of Santa Sabina in Rome on the catechumens. On the use of curtains and liturgical screens in late antique and early medieval Christian churches see: De Blaauw and Doležalová 2020 and Bedros and Scirocco 2020 respectively. For the terms “eyes of faith” and “eyes of flesh” see: Vikan 2010, p. 26.
[372] The most notable works on the topic include Sauer 1924; Selhorst 1931; Müller 1961; Aston 1990; Schleif 2005; Tibbetts Schulenburg 2005; Berger 2011, pp. 37-66.

predecessors.[373] Low barrier walls framing the ceremonial path for the bishop and the clergy, which were proposed by de Blaauw for the church of San Pietro in Vincoli and for the Lateran basilica, would offer tangible proof of such spatial arrangement already in use in the 5th century.[374] As for the precise design of the barriers in Roman churches before the 7th century, only the marble barrier of the early Christian basilica of San Clemente has been convincingly reconstructed (fig. 3.1).[375] This solution, with a narrower corridor (*solea*) for the procession of the clergy in the part of the nave closer to the entrance of the church, expanding to accommodate the *schola cantorum* and the lower clergy towards the apse, did not leave much space for lay believers in the main nave.[376] The remains of the masonry *transenna* from the 7th century, present in the church of Santa Maria Antiqua, confirm that at the time the processional space continued to take up most of the central nave and relegated the faithful to the lateral naves (fig. 3.2). The aforementioned barrier and contemporary or only slightly younger barriers in Santo Stefano on Via Latina and the lower church of San Marco moreover point out towards further stratification of the Roman liturgical space, as all three contain, on the level of the altar zone, two walls, perpendicular with the presbytery, probably intended for the members of the aristocracy and, as *Ordo Romanus* I attests, separated by gender.[377]

Spatial separation motivated by gender would certainly have modified the sight lines of the different groups, standing in attendance during the Mass. Even if the *transennae*, usually around one meter in height, did not hinder the community from visually participating in the liturgy or from seeing the decorative concept of the church, they limited its ability to move from the lateral naves. This paralysis, further strengthened by the social stratification within the allotted spaces, fixated the viewing range of the faithful to restricted areas of the walls around them and across

[373] De Blaauw 1994, p. 83 bases his conclusions on the description of the rites of *offertorium* and communion as described in *Ordo Romanus* I.69-115, in: Andrieu 1971, pp. 91-105. For the dating of the *Ordo Romanus* I see Andrieu 1971, pp. 38-51.
[374] De Blaauw 1994, pp. 127-129, with the barrier walls in the Lateran tentatively dated by the scholar to the first, Constantinian phase of the basilica, and in San Pietro in Vincoli circa to the year 400. This dating is moved by Guidobaldi 2000, pp. 95-96 to at least the later 5th century.
[375] On the basis of preserved marble plaques decorated by reliefs Guidobaldi 2000, p. 85 proposes marble barriers also for the churches of Santa Maria in Trastevere, Santa Maria in Cosmedin, San Martino ai Monti, Santi Cosma e Damiano, Santi Apostoli and Sant'Agata dei Goti and dates them to the later 6th century.
[376] Guidobaldi 1992, pp. 167-181. For the terminology applied to the description of the processional corridor in *Ordo Romanus* I and *Liber Pontificalis* see: Saxer 2000, pp. 71-73.
[377] Gianandrea 2022, p. 71-72. For the source see: *Ordo Romanus* I.69-75, in: Andrieu 1971, pp. 91-92. The marble barriers were substituted by masonry in the 7th and the first half of the 8th century, a shift which is documented by archaeological remains in the churches of Santa Maria Antiqua, San Crisogono, Sant'Alessandro, Santo Stefano on Via Latina, among others. For the full list see: Guidobaldi 2000, pp. 86-92.

from them.[378] The decoration on the upper part of the wall on the opposite side of the nave must have been the most visible, while the images on the "own" side of the main nave must have been seen only marginally by the faithful lucky enough to be standing in the main nave and not at all by the ones relegated to the lateral naves. The latter, on the other hand, would have been able to view the decoration of the lower portions of the space they were standing in.

Apart from liturgical barriers, curtains seem to have been another tool staging the experience of the viewer in the late antique church interior. The use of silk cloth inside the Roman churches is documented by *Liber Pontificalis* for the first time during the pontificate of Hormisdas (514-523), even if it was already frequently on display in the households of Roman aristocrats in the 4th and the 5th century.[379] The donations of several silk altar coverings to the main Roman basilicas by the imperial court in Constantinople may have been the impulse for the incorporation of other categories of precious textiles, such as curtains, to the liturgical space as well, but they are not mentioned by *Liber*.[380] Almost a century later the (probably very precious) *vela* are suddenly reported as being in use and, which is interesting for our discussion about various roles women played in relationship to the liturgy and the Church, they are (at least sometimes) donated by female patricians. This is documented by a letter of Gregory the Great from 601 to patrician Rusticiana regarding her request that the curtains she gifted to the St. Peter's Basilica be brought to its destination by a procession of clergymen, as their commissioner probably considered them to be an important *ex voto* worthy of exclusive handling.[381]

Only since the pontificate of Hadrian I (772-795) does the *Liber Pontificalis* attest the consistent use of curtains, most often donated to the Roman basilicas by popes.[382] Visual sources, however, document it much sooner. In his most recent work on curtains in liturgical space Sible de Blaauw points out that the earliest depictions of church exteriors and interiors throughout the Christian Mediterranean all show curtains in doors and colonnades. For Rome of the 5th century the author gives examples of the Acclamation scene from the doors of Santa Sabina, capturing a church building with an open facade and curtains pushed aside and tied to allow entrance, and

[378] Bedros and Scirocco 2020, pp. 71, 80. The height of the screen allowed viewers to see inside the presbytery and even to see the altar, which was usually placed in an elevated position.
[379] Petriaggi 1984, p. 37. For the passage in *Liber Pontificalis*, describing the gift of "*pallia olovera blattea cum tabulis aurotextis de clamidem vel de stolam imperialem*", sent by the emperor Justin (518-527) from Greece, see: Duchesne 1862, p. 271.
[380] De Blaauw and Doležalová 2020, p. 50.
[381] Gregory the Great, ep. 11.26, in: Martyn 2011, p. 760. The letter is quoted also by De Blaauw 2020, p. 150.
[382] Duchesne 1862, pp. 499-501.

one of the scenes on the Samagher casket, with curtains adorning a *pergula* in front of an apse of a church (fig. 3.3-4). The scholar also documents the holes preserved above the column capitals in the church of Santa Sabina, probably used for attachment of rods, from which curtains were hung (fig. 3.5).[383] A series of six holes appears above the entrance of the church as well, where a curtain could have been used to stop the sound reverberating from the famous wooden doors (fig. 3.6).[384] Whether the curtains were a staple furnishing of all late antique Roman churches and whether their position inside the church space was standardized cannot be established with precision. Yet the previously mentioned visual examples point out towards their use as markers of liminal spaces (doorways, lateral naves) and the apse as the focal point of the liturgy.[385] The employment of curtains for layering of the liturgical space culminates in pope Leo IV's (847-855) donation for the St. Peter's Basilica, where four circles of hangings can be distinguished between the altar as the symbolical centre of the basilica and the perimeters of the internal space: the ones around the altar ciborium, the presbytery, the colonnades of the nave, and the entrance to the church.[386]

Even though the indication of their direct liturgical use is missing in Rome, it is not impossible to imagine that the curtains around the altar were occasionally closed (outside of the liturgical practice) to conceal the sacred and then reopened at a later point (before the liturgy?), activating all the senses of the faithful through intricate interplay of exclusion and inclusion, seeing and not seeing. If that was indeed the case, late antique Christian liturgical practice would have followed the ritual use of curtains of the Jewish Tabernacle or their employment in the imperial ceremony, for both of which the concept of veiling and epiphany was essential.[387]

The timed activation of the senses can be suspected for the curtains hanging in the intercolumniations of the naves as well. Their use in Late Antiquity can be reconstructed with the help of the very well-known illuminations on fol. 127v in the Ashburnham Pentateuch, where they are depicted opened and secured to the column shafts (fig. 3.7).[388] Although the

[383] De Blaauw 2020, pp. 149, 155.
[384] Foletti 2021, p. 31.
[385] De Blaauw and Doležalová 2020; Foletti and Lešák 2023.
[386] De Blaauw and Doležalová 2020, pp. 50-51. For the passage in *Liber Pontificalis* see: Duchesne 1892, pp. 108-109.
[387] De Blaauw and Doležalová 2020, pp. 52, 58-59, 66. For the opening of the curtains see also: Jäggi 2020, p. 328.
[388] The circumstances of the creation of the manuscript and its origins are unknown. Recent scientific reflections offer a hypothesis about its Roman provenance. The stylistic and palaeographic analyses indicate loose dating between the middle of the 5th and the beginning of the 7th century. See: De Blaauw and Doležalová 2020, p. 57 and notes 53-54 with further bibliography.

codex does not explicitly depict any of the existing Roman monuments and cannot be uncritically considered as an "illustration" of the performative reality, it was argued that by placing an Old Testament scenes within the contemporary urban fabric of the city it helped the reader to follow the story through places already familiar to them from their daily life. It is therefore plausible that fol. 127v captures the reality of the Roman churches with some accuracy.[389] Even tied up, the curtains in the nave would form a physical barrier, permitting only a restricted perception of the whole space, including the pictorial decoration.[390] By regulating sight and light, which symbolized divine presence, they would have contributed to the emotional and sensory experience of encountering the holy, available to the crowd standing behind them.[391]

It is reasonable to assume that the patrons of the church decoration were aware of the effect of all the elements employed in the spatial division and were able to work with them in order to transmit specific messages to select groups of the audience present in the sacred space, even if this may not have been the primary purpose of the decoration as a whole, which had to be kept concise, "…with one or several layers of themes binding the entirety together into an intentional and systematically applied statement".[392]

Santa Maria Maggiore: matriarchs in the nave and the Mother of God

In Santa Maria Maggiore, with its apse oriented to the west, men would have stood in the south part of the nave, to the right of the clergy performing the Eucharist, with women standing opposite them on the north side.[393] As in the case of the liturgical space referencing of the left

[389] De Blaauw and Doležalová 2020, p. 58.
[390] *Ibidem*, p. 62.
[391] Mairhanser 2022, pp. 220-221.
[392] Neuman de Vegvar 2007, pp. 99-100.
[393] *Ibidem*, p. 102. This interpretation stems from the emphasis on the left-right division of men and women in the sacred space in relation not to the orientation of the sacred space itself, but to the celebrant in the moment of the performance of the Eucharist, who according to Vogel 1960 was always turned towards the East, and thus in the case of Santa Maggiore performed in the direction of the entrance, not the apse. Newer studies support his interpretation. Gianandrea and Scirocco 2021, pp. 77-78 emphasize the importance of the celebration of the Eucharist a*d Deum*, associated with the astronomical Eastern direction (depending on the orientation of the church the Eucharist was therefore celebrated towards the apse or towards the nave, as is the case of Santa Maria Maggiore). According to the authors, the orientation strictly *ad populum* was codified only by the revision of the missal during the Second Vatican Council. The early medieval perception of the East as the source of light, the place from which God rose at the beginning of times and from which Christ will appear at their end, is further discussed in De Blaauw 2010, pp. 15, 37-40.

and right from the point of view of the priest celebrating at the altar was the preferred way in the early Middle Ages, women were seen as standing on the left.[394] Such division of the space subscribed to the beliefs about the left side as weaker and linked to the susceptibility to the evil, deeply rooted in human society from the times of antique Greek omen reading and the New Testament's depiction of the Last Judgement through the donor portraits disposition in Renaissance Europe well into the 20th century, still harbouring the image of the left-handed as perverted, defying convention, prone to developmental issues and in need of forceful switching of the favoured hand.[395]

If the basilica, like many others in Rome, had its central section separated by *transennae* and reserved for the clergy, women in Santa Maria Maggiore would have been mostly or completely gathered in the lateral nave during liturgy. From there they would be able to observe the south wall of the main nave, with the highest concentration of early 5th-century mosaics depicting female figures.[396] As pointed out by Carolin Neuman de Vegvar, the wall which would have opposed the women of the congregation includes twenty one images of Old Testament matriarchs, evenly distributed throughout the scenes and comparable in numbers to the biblical patriarchs on the opposite wall (fig. 3.8).[397] Beginning from the apse the mosaic panels depict Sarah, who appears in the scenes of Hosting of three angels and Separation of the families of Abraham and Lot, and Rebecca in the scenes of the Blessing of Jacob and Return of Esau. In the following mosaics they are replaced by Rachel, who is present several times, first as the announcer of the arrival of Jacob to the house of Laban, and subsequently at the scene of the meeting between the two men, her courtship with Jacob, Jacob striking a marriage agreement with Laban and her wedding to Jacob. Next, she is accompanied by Lea, while Jacob recounts to them his meeting with God (fig. 3.9-11). If we are to believe the attempts of Beat Brenk and Johannes Deckers to reconstruct the iconography of the now lost scenes in the vicinity of the

[394] Schleif 2005, pp. 211-212.
[395] Schleif 2005, pp. 212-213 and Milenković et al. 2019.
[396] See Saxer 2001b and Menna 2006 for discussion about the dating of the mosaic decoration of the early Christian phase of the basilica, perceived by the scholar as the product of the pontificate of Celestine I (422-432), finalized by his successor Sixtus III (432-440), who dedicated the basilica to *Theotokos* in 434. The mosaics are also discussed in cat. n. 2.23 in this thesis. For the reconstruction of the separation of the Roman congregation during the liturgy according to *Ordo* I, see: Mathews 1962, pp. 76-77.
[397] It is true that there are 14 female figures represented on the opposite wall, too, but 10 of them are grouped in the first two mosaic panels next to the triumphal arch, namely in the scenes of Moses's adoption by the Pharaoh's daughter and of the wedding between Moses and Sephorah.

basilica's entrance, we can add representations of the death and burial of Rachel and the meeting and wedding between Isaac and Rebecca to our total count of female representations.[398]

Based on the position of the groups of mosaics inside the decorative programme in the nave it is possible to conclude that the conceptor intended to facilitate connection and identification of the audience with the biblical patriarchs and matriarchs while taking into account specific view trajectories of the different gender groups.[399]

However, the level to which the mosaic panels of reduced dimensions high up the main nave wall were visible to their audience standing a couple dozen meters away can be disputed and most probably differed depending on the position of the spectator and the potential presence of semi-drawn curtains, which may have played a role if the faithful were relegated to the lateral naves.[400] The familiarity of the mostly illiterate faithful with the meaning of the images in front of their eyes is disputable, too. Yet, according to the latest hypothesis formulated by Ivan Foletti, the narrative cycle in Santa Maria Maggiore, one of the earliest to be conceived in Rome, was strongly inspired by the nave decoration of *Basilica Ambrosiana* in Milan, whose Old Testament scenes constituted a powerful educative tool, accompanying homilies of the bishop Ambrose, simultaneously illustrating them to add to the multisensory experience of the congregation, and being explained by them.[401] The study of Elena Cavalcanti has confirmed the relationship between the iconography employed on the Santa Maria Maggiore's triumphal arch and the explanatory homilies of Leo I (440-461). According to the scholar, the homilies were delivered in front of these very mosaics not only during the pontificate of Leo, but well after his death until the high Middle Ages.[402] It is therefore possible to assume that the faithful in basilica were, even if not from the very beginning of their existence, familiar with the meaning of the stories

[398] Neuman de Vegvar 2007, p. 104. For the reconstruction of the lost scenes see: Brenk 1975, p. 116 and Deckers 1976, p. 121.
[399] Neuman de Vegvar 2007, pp. 105-108. The author is basing her argument on Muschiol 2004, pp. 206-208. See Doležalová 2019, pp. 35, 42-45, 49-51 for an example of sight lines of a specific group of faithful (catechumens) taken in consideration in the mosaic decoration of Sant'Apolinare Nuovo in Ravenna.
[400] The dimensions of the early Christian basilica were: 79 m in length, 35 m in width, 18 m in height in the nave. See: Kinney 2017, p. 78.
[401] Foletti 2022a, pp. 143, 148-152. In the study the scholar argues the existence of an Old Testament narrative cycle at the *Basilica Ambrosiana* at the time of its consecration in 386. At the same time, he offers arguments against the redating of the narrative cycle in Old St. Peter's Basilica to the last quarter of the 4th century, consecutively viewing the narrative cycle in Santa Maria Maggiore, commissioned by Celestine I (422-432), as the oldest narrative cycle in Rome and finding parallels between it and the cycle in Milan, which he sees as its direct inspiration, albeit locally modified.
[402] Cavalcanti 2000, pp. 254-261. The links between the homilies, the liturgy, and the mosaics on the triumphal arch in particular were further explored by Warland 2003 and Foletti 2017b. Summarized in: Foletti 2017b, pp. 42-43.

and were able to contemplate the (at least partially) visible mosaics illuminated by chandeliers and crown lights while the liturgy was taking place.[403]

In the light of the sermons of Leo I the mosaic decoration became tool through which the pope sought to persuade his viewers to abandon their various social, political, and religious ties in favour of the singular Christian identity under his leadership. The immersive experience of the liturgy within this vibrant visual setting activated the senses of the visitors, who became participants of the salvation narrative alongside patriarchs, prophets and Apostles, and was capable of reshaping their sense of self, together with their strategies of connecting with the community and the divine through powerful emotional reactions.[404]

The environment filled with light of the lamps and candles, rich smell of incense and the sounds of hymns and prayers reverberating from the walls encrusted with mosaics and marbles, softened only by textiles hung throughout the space, enveloped its visitors with the theological message echoed in many of the Leo's sermons:

"Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you are also built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit."[405]

In this context the high number of female figures dispersed throughout the mosaic panels can be viewed as a confirmation for the women present inside the church of their intrinsic role in the history of the salvation and as a "catalogue" of female role models to be emulated in the day-to-day domestic and spiritual struggle.

Sarah is a prototype of a pious mother, who was successfully able to overcome her infertility through unwavering belief in God. By the miraculous nature of her conception and the near

[403] For the illumination of the basilica see: *Liber Pontificalis* I, enumerating the gifts of Sixtus III (432-440), among which 32 silver crown lights (*coronae farales*) and 24 brass candlestick chandeliers (*canthara cereostata*), in: Davis 1989, p. 31. For edition of the Latin text see: Duchesne 1862, p. 233. The importance of interpreters for the decoding of the mosaics in Santa Maria Maggiore is stressed by Brenk 2005, p. 150, who, however, comes to the conclusion that such persons were generally unavailable to the public and therefore the cycle was decodable only in its entirety as chronicle of the history of salvation.

[404] Cochran 2020, pp. 198, 208, 211 with further bibliography.

[405] *Ibidem*, p. 205. Leo the Great quotes Ephesians 2:19-22 in his sermons 4.2, 26.5, 48.1, 83.1, 84B.4, in: Freeland and Conway 1996, pp. 26-27, 108-110, 205-206, 356-357, 364.

sacrifice of her son she becomes a prefiguration of Mary. Their relationship is confirmed by Augustine (396-430) in *Contra Secundinum* 1.22:

"However, that marital duty of fathers and mothers, such as Abraham and Sarah, should be measured not in relation to human society, but in relation to divine dispensation. For because it was necessary that Christ came in the flesh, Sarah's marriage was made to serve the propagation of his flesh, as was Mary's virginity."[406]

Rebecca is another mother with a special place in the history of salvation. Both in the Bible and in the mosaic decoration of Santa Maria Maggiore, she is present when Isaac gives his blessing to Jacob, an act interpreted by Augustine as the prefiguration of Christ blessing the people. In his interpretation, Isaac plays the role of Christ, while Rebecca is the embodiment of the Church.[407]

The final pair, Leah and Rachel, represent a dynamic duality of the labours of everyday life and the "eternal contemplation of God", *Sapientia*, which should be desired, searched for and loved.[408] It is Augustine, who, in his work *Contra Faustum*, uses their names, which he interprets respectively as "Suffering" and "First principle made visible", to create the idea of everyday drudgery and eternal wisdom, which are each other's polar opposites but at the same time cannot exist without each other, as the latter is attainable only by purification through endurance and suffering offered by the former:

"The action…of our mortal human life, in which we live by faith, doing many painful tasks without knowing what benefit may result from them to those in whom we are interested, is Leah, Jacob's first wife…Again, the hope of eternal contemplation of God, accompanied with a sure and delightful perception of truth, is Rachel…what a man loves in the works of righteousness is not the toil of doing and suffering. No one desires this life for its own sake; as Jacob desired not Leah, who yet was brought to him, and became his wife, and the mother of children. Though she could not be loved for herself, the Lord made her be borne with as a step to Rachel; and then she came to be approved of on the account of her children…A man would

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[406] Spain 1968, pp. 133-135 with the Latin version of the quoted source: "*Quamquam patrum et matrum, quales Abraham et Sara extuterunt, ipsum officium coniugale non ex humana societate, sed ex divina dispensatione pensandum est. Nam quia Christum in carne venire oportebat, ei carni propagandae famulatum est coniugioum Sarae, cui virginitatis Mariae.*" For the English translation see: Vermes 1997, unpaginated.

[407] Menna 2006, p. 315. For the primary source, see: Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 16.37, in: Walsh and Monahan 1962, p. 554.

[408] Eguiarte 2020, p. 542. The quotation comes from Augustine, *Contra Faustum* 22.52, in: Zycha 2013, p. 645: "*Spes vero aeternae contemplationis Dei, habens certam et delectabilem intelligentiam veritatis, ipsa est Rachel...*".

desire…to obtain at once the joys of lovely and perfect wisdom, without the endurance of toil in action and suffering; but this is impossible in mortal life. This seems to be meant, when it is said to Jacob: 'It is not the custom in our country to marry the younger before the elder.'…So, in the discipline of man, the toil of doing the work of righteousness precedes the delight of understanding the truth."[409]

As hypothesized at the beginning of this subchapter, social position of the women present inside the basilica may have modified the intended message they received through the decorative concept. *Ordo Romanus* I contains a rather detailed description of the offertory rite, which states that the pope descended first into the *senatorium*, where he received offerings of the magnates in order of their rank. Then he repeated the same in the women's area. In the passage describing the communion the pope is shown communicating the upper clergy and the laymen in the *senatorium*.[410] Elaine de Benedictis interprets the passages as sign of elevated social status of the congregation allowed to make offerings and take communion directly from the pope and reconstructs the *senatorium* and its female counterpart at the head of the space dedicated to men and women respectively, in close proximity to the sanctuary. As the *Ordo* is written deliberately so that it may be adapted to all types of church spaces, de Benedictis assumes that distinguished places for aristocratic men and women were standard feature of every church.[411] Sometimes they were physically enclosed by an architectural structure, sometimes they were only separated by means of different floor coverings.[412] If the hypothesis about the customary gathering of aristocratic women in the section of the female space close to the presbytery is applied to Santa

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[409] Augustine, *Contra Faustum* 22.52, in: Schaff 1887b, p. 292. For the Latin version see: Zycha 2013, pp. 645-646: "*Actio…humanae mortalisque vitae, in qua vivimus ex fide, multa laboriosa opera facientes, incerti quo exitu proveniant ad utilitatem eorum quibus consulere volumus, ipsa est Lia prior uxor Jacob…Spes vero aeternae contemplationis Dei, habens certam et delectabilem intelligentiam veritatis, ipsa est Rachel…Neque enim se quisquam convertit sub gratia remissionis peccatorum servire justitiae, nisi ut quiete vivat in verbo ex quo videtur principium, quod est Deus: ergo propter Rachel, non propter Liam. Nam quis tandem amaverit in operibus justitiae laborem actionum atque passionum? Quis eam vitam propter seipsam expetiverit? sicut nec Jacob Liam: sed tamen sibi nocte suppositam in usum generandi amplexus et fecunditatem ejus expertus est. Dominus enim eam, quia per seipsam diligi non poterat, primo ut ad Rachel perveniretur, tolerari fecit, deinde propter filios commendavit…Vellet enim homo, si fieri posset, sine ulla tolerantia laboris, quae in agendo patiendoque amplectenda est, statim ad pulchrae atque perfectae sapientiae delicias pervenire: sed hoc non potest in terra morientium. Hoc enim videtur significare, quod dictum est ad Jacob, Non est moris in loco nostro, ut minor nubat prius quam major...Prior est autem in recta hominis eruditione labor operandi quae justa sunt, quam voluptas intelligendi quae vera sunt.*" For more detailed discussion of the allegory offered by Augustine see: Eguiarte 2020, pp. 543-546.

[410] *Ordo Romanus* I.69, 75 (for offertory) and 113 (for communion), in: Andrieu 1971, pp. 91-92, 103-104: "*Pontifex...descendit ad senatorium...et suscipit oblationes principum per ordinem archium...Similiter ascendens pontifex in parte feminarum et complet superscriptum ordinem. Qui dum confirmaverit, id est quos papa communicat, descendit pontifex a sede, cum primicerio notariorum et primiserio defensorum [tenentibus ei manus] , ut communicet eos qui in senatorio sunt...*".

[411] De Benedictis 1981, pp. 71, 75.

[412] Verstegen 2010, pp. 591-592.

Maria Maggiore, the mosaics depicting the story of Sarah and Abraham closest to them would be especially well understood by them, given the advantage of education society matrons had over the general female population frequenting the church.[413]

But was the northern part of the nave the only part of the church accessible to women? Latest interpretations of the archaeological findings from the excavations in the 1970s and 1980s suggest otherwise. In 1971 wall fragments from the 5th century were uncovered in the space of the original apse, which was replaced in the 13th century and directly connected with the triumphal arch. After further examination during the archaeological campaign in 1985 Sible de Blaauw identified the 6 m long and 2 m tall wall, distanced approximately 8 m from the wall of the original apse and executed in *opus listatum*, as remains of a deambulatory of the same height as the lateral naves, separated from the presbytery by a colonnade topped with an architrave (fig. 3.12).[414] Most curiously a famous passage from *Liber Pontificalis* documents the annoyance of Paschal I (817-824) at the disruptions of the communication between him and his assistants during the liturgy in Santa Maria Maggiore, caused by women, standing behind the throne of the pope. The unknown author of the text describes this episode as a pretext for the installation of a raised podium for the throne on Paschal's initiative.[415]

The exact position of the pope's throne cannot be established with certainty even for the time of Paschal I., much less for the time of the original basilica. It has been variously placed either next to the main altar in the space delimitated by the last columns of the lateral naves, or in the apse.[416] If the placement of the throne in the apse, promoted by Sible de Blaauw and Ivan Foletti on the basis of a podium excavated right at the entrance to the apse in 1636, is to be believed,

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[413] See Rousseau 1995 for examples of learned women of the highest echelons of the Roman aristocracy well versed in the Scriptures living in the second half of the 4th century. In her PhD. thesis, focused on female Roman authors, Crystal Dean points out that the methods and range of female education appear to have been relatively constant at least up until the early 5th century: Dean 2012, p. 157. Martyn 2011 confirms that the trend of advanced education of aristocratic women continued well into the 6th century, copious examples of which are preserved in the letters of Gregory the Great.

[414] Lešák 2023, p. 183 with further bibliography on the original apse. See pp. 183-186 for the discussion of the first hypotheses regarding the deambulatory. Observations of Sible de Blaauw on the excavated walls were published in: De Blaauw 1986, pp. 97-102.

[415] *Liber Pontificalis* II (pontificate of Paschal I, 817-824), in: Duchesne 1892, p. 60: "*Praeterea idem sanctissimus et ortodoxus pontifex, divina inspiratione pulsatus, ecclesiam sanctae et intemeratae virginis Mariae dominae nostrae quae appellatur ad Praesepem cernens quondam tali constructam ut post sedem pontificis mulieres ad sacra missarum sollemnia stantes prope adsistere iuxta pontificem viderentur, ita ut si aliquid conloqui pontifex cum sibi adsistentibus voluisset, ex propinqua valde mulierum frequentatione nequaquam ei sine illarum interventione liceret; et largum ibidem locum inesse, qualiter inde sedem mutari valeret cerneret, dato operis studio, caepit indesinenter agere, sedem inferius positam sursum ponere, ut eo familiarius Domino preces fundere posset, quo consortia populorum modeste declinare potius constitisset; denique sedem optime quam dudum fuerat pulcherrimis marmoribus decoratam condidit, et undique ascensus quibus ad eam gradiatur construxit; pavimentumque altaris erigens pretiosissimis marmoribus stravit.*"

[416] See Lešák 2023, pp. 188 for the discussion of the different hypotheses and further bibliography.

would it be possible that the annoying women were standing in the space of the deambulatory, interpreted by de Blaauw as continuation of the lateral naves?[417] If so, were they standing there alone, separated from the main space of the apse by columns, or was the deambulatory split between them and their male counterparts just as the nave was? If so, why is Paschal I. complaining only of female voices, when men would have been equally close to his throne?[418] There is no definitive answer to the questions formulated above, especially for the period before the 9th century. As Martin Lešák correctly pointed out in his study of the deambulatory, the authors of the life of Paschal I in *Liber Pontificalis* tended to manipulate the events they described in order to enhance the importance of the papal projects and explain their purpose. Furthermore, there is no guarantee that women were standing behind the throne during the liturgy already at the time of Sixtus III.[419]

The following paragraphs contain therefore a reconstruction of a largely hypothetical situation, which may have occurred were we to accept the presence of women in the deambulatory behind the apse from the very origins of the liturgical space. In order to establish what their viewer experience may have been, we have to ask ourselves who may have been those women and how they may have accessed the deambulatory.

The U-shaped deambulatories, known from the late antique Roman basilicas *fuori muros*, were all accessed by portals, leading directly into them, allowing both members of the Roman population and pilgrims a possibility to bypass the main liturgical space and get in touch with the relics that attracted them in the first place.[420] Sible de Blaauw proposes the same architectural solution for the Lateran Basilica of Leo I and for Santa Maria Maggiore.[421] Yet as Santa Maria Maggiore was not a funerary martyrial basilica and the proposed access point is documented nor by archaeological findings, nor by the sources, the present reconstruction of the potential viewer experience of women headed for the deambulatory will work with the position of the main entrance, which has been visualised by Sible de Blaauw in the eastern part of the building, thus copying the placement of the current one.[422] If women were to reach the deambulatory from this entrance and the deambulatory were indeed the continuation of the lateral naves, easiest access would have been through the northern lateral nave. Passing through

[417] De Blaauw 1994, pp. 350-355 (deambulatory), 379-382 (throne) and Foletti 2017b, p. 49.
[418] This particular question is brought to attention by Neuman de Vegvar 2007, pp. 102-103, note 18.
[419] Lešák 2023, p. 190.
[420] *Ibidem*, pp. 191-192.
[421] De Blaauw 1986, pp. 105-109.
[422] De Blaauw 1994, pp. 347-349.

the portal, they would have gotten a glimpse of the apse and the triumphal arch (fig. 3.13). Continuous movement behind columns and potentially also in-between curtains would probably have precluded them from viewing the mosaics on the southern wall of the nave. Nearing the apse, they would have been able to see the southern portion of the triumphal arch, with the Annunciation and Adoration of the Magi, which would have unfolded before them more in detail the nearer they were. After entering the deambulatory, their sight would have been potentially partially obscured by *vela* hung in between the columns. During the liturgy and especially the Eucharist they would thus be a mere whisper away from the altar, their senses heightened by the closeness of the sacred, the chants and the incense, yet unable to fully see, which would have allowed them to contemplate the scenes they encountered entering and possibly also the mosaic decoration of the counter-façade, which, according to Joseph Wilpert and Paul Künzle, represented the Virgin and Child, surrounded by five martyrs with symbols of their martyrdom under their feet, who offered their crowns to the pair.[423] I would like to propose that it was precisely the figure of the Mother of God that was the intended object of their reflection. In order to comprehend the meaning the mosaics in the apse, on the triumphal arch, and on the counter-façade may have carried for this particular female audience, the question of its identity is pressingly pending.

As the consecrated virgins were the one category of believers that achieved almost unsurpassed status of sanctity within Christian hierarchies, it is possible that they may have been the ones standing in prominent position in the lateral nave and if the hypothesis about the deambulatory and its use in Santa Maria Maggiore is valid, had access to it.[424] Even though consecrated virgins were expected to maintain their body and mind untouched and exposure to the malevolent and lustful gaze could cancel their effort to remain chaste, according to Vladimir Ivanovici and Sissel Undheim their apotropaic effect on the community required activation through public

[423] De Blaauw 1986, p. 102 proposes that the veils, mentioned by *Liber Pontificalis* II as gifted by Paschal I (817-824) to Santa Maria Maggiore for the decoration of the presbytery were destined for the deambulatory: Duchesne 1892, p. 61: "*Domini Dei nostri Iesu Christi famulus ob amorem eidem Dominae nostrae per arcos presbiterii iamdictae ecclesiae fecit vela de chrisoclabo, habentia storiam domini nostri Iesu Christi atque Nativitatem seu Assumptionem eiusdem intemeratae virginis, numero XXVI. Pariterque et per ipsos arcos obtulit vela de quadrapulo diversis storiis circumsuta, numero XXIIII.*" For the summary of the discussion about the existence of a mosaic on the counter-façade, which according to Wilpert 1931, pp. 209-210 and Künzle 1961 coexisted with the dedicatory inscription of Sixtus III (432-440), now lost, but preserved in Panvio 1570, p. 235, see: Menna 2006, pp. 343-344 with the original text and Italian translation of the inscription. The inscription reads as follows: "*Virgo Maria tibi Xystus nova templa dicavi/ digna salutifero munera ventre tuo/ tu genetrix ignara viri te denique feta/ visceribus salvis edita nostra salus/ ecce tui testes uteri tibi praemia portant/ sub pedibusque iacet passio cuique sua/ ferrum flamma ferae fluvius saevumque venenum/ tot tamen has mortes una corona manet*". For the mosaic in the apse see also cat. n. 2.24 in this thesis.

[424] See chapter 2 for the discussion of the place of the virgins within the Church hierarchy in Rome.

presence.[425] Semi-hidden behind the curtains and columns of the deambulatory, they would have been visible and invisible at the same time, both present and protected, and participating in the creation of the sensory and spiritual experience of the congregation in much the same way as the rites at the altar and the mosaics did. Despite the fact that the proximity of the virgins in the deambulatory to the altar does not find parallels in contemporary written and material sources, there are traces of information coming from the eastern regions of the Roman Empire, confirming the practice of creating an exclusive place for them within churches. The treatise *De lapsu virginis consecratae* indicates e.g. that the space dedicated to the virgins inside the church was shielded off with panels from the rest of the building, and that they were treated in much the same way as precious reliquaries, with believers seeking to touch them and perceiving them as vessels of God.

"Now you have to remember, don't you, that place where you stood in the church separated by boards and how pious and noble women earnestly ran there, seeking your kiss…".[426]

The special place reserved for the virgins within the early Christian liturgical space is confirmed by an inscribed 4th-century marble slab from the diocese of *Africa*, currently residing in Louvre and carrying an inscription VIRGINUM CANC(ELLUS) B(ONIS) B(ENE) (fig. 3.14). According to excavation reports, it once belonged to an early Christian chancel screen in the area of Groun, Henchir Tiffa, or Aïn Sfar in the province of *Byzacena*.[427] The unique self-referential inscription must have played an active role in the division and stratification of the ecclesiastical structure it belonged to, creating a gendered space close to the most sacred part of the church, parallelling virgins standing inside it with the sacrifice taking place on the altar, in line with the words of Augustine in *De sancta virginitate*:

"…follow the Lamb, because without doubt the body of the Lamb is virginal too…you have lived devoutly and purely in the holy chastity of spotless virginity…In the end you have that supreme degree of love, such that you would lay down your life for your brothers and sisters".[428]

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[425] Ivanovici and Undheim 2019, unpaginated.

[426] Ivanovici and Undheim 2019. For the primary source, *De lapsu virginis consecratae* 6.24, see: Migne 1845j, coll. 374 (Latin) and Tilley 2000, p. 223 (English traslation): "*Nonne vel illum locum tabulis separatum, in quo in Ecclesia stabas, recordari debuisti, ad quem religiosae matronae et nobiles certatim currebant, tua oscula petentes, quae sanctiores et digniores te erant?*".

[427] Musée du Louvre, inv. n. MA3015. The fragment has been last published by Branham 2005 with further bibliography on p. 390.

[428] Branham 2005, pp. 372, 379, 381. For the primary source see: Augustine, *De sacta virginitate* 27, 40, 53, in: Zycha 1900, pp. 264, 284, 299-300: "s*equimini agnum, quia et agni caro utique virgo…viventi videlicet a pueritia religiose, pudice, pia castitate, inlibata virginitate… iam postremo illam mensuram dilectionis impletis, ut ponatis animas pro fratribus vestris*."

To maintain the aura of exclusivity and sanctity of the brides of Christ who were to be first to enter Heaven upon his second coming and brought blessing to their family and community, even if they were not standing in the deambulatory, the virgins in Santa Maria Maggiore must have had the advantage over other women of the congregation. They may have therefore been standing closest to the altar, as proposed by Van der Meer for Milan, maybe separated by a chancel, with a view of the apse and the scene of Sarah and Abraham hosting three angels across from them.[429]

If the two mosaics are interpreted in the context of their spatial relationship with the altar and the area dedicated to the virgins they offer surprising links between the pious women, their role models and the liturgy. In the mosaic with the scene of Abraham hosting three angels Sarah is depicted preparing breads for the guests in front of a building bearing a cross sign, with an entrance separated by veils, not dissimilar to a sanctuary (fig. 3.9). Being close to the altar, the mosaic establishes a visual parallel between the breads Sarah prepares, the breads offered by Melchisedek in the mosaic directly next to it, and the eucharistic bread on the altar below (fig. 3.15).[430] Sarah's role in making of the eucharistic offering is underlined by several changes made to the traditional model of the scene, present in San Vitale in Ravenna or in the Octateuch manuscripts in the Vatican Library, where the biblical matriarch stands in the doorway of the house or looks out from the window. (fig. 3.16)[431] Only in the mosaic from Santa Maria Maggiore she is captured kneading three breads which appear in front of the angels in the same scene.[432] It seems that preparation of breads and their blessing was among the lauded habits of consecrated virgins of the mid-5th century, making Sarah their fellow, even if the only written evidence describing such activity is of Syrian origin. A treatise directed to a virgin living in her parents' home proscribes a meal ritual to be performed by her. She is to say following prayer above a loaf of bread:

"We give thanks unto Thee, our Father…And as this bread which is upon this table was scattered and being gathered together even became one; so let thy church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into thy kingdom."

[429] Van der Meer 1961, p. 401 and Ivanovici and Undheim 2019, unpaginated.
[430] The connection between the Eucharist and the mosaic panels with the Offering of Melchizedek and Hosting of three angels is supported by: Menna 2006, p. 313.
[431] Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. gr. 747, fol. 39v and Vat. gr. 746, fol. 72r. On San Vitale mosaics see: Deichmann 1969, pp. 226-256; Deichmann 1976, pp. 47-206; Malafrina 2006; Pasi 2006; Jäggi 2013, pp. 238-258; Dresken-Weiland 2016, pp. 217-255.
[432] Menna 2006, p. 314.

The text prohibits performance of the ritual in the presence of catechumens, echoing the public liturgy in which the catechumens were made to leave before the eucharistic prayer. Virgin's household thus mimics the hierarchy of the public church, but she is the one who leads the ceremony.[433]

Based on the dedication of the basilica, its crucial role in the papal Nativity liturgy, and the iconographical concept of the triumphal arch, to which it adjoined, interpreted in the light of the theology of Leo I as relating to the dogma of the Incarnation, many scholars assume that the original apse bore a mosaic depicting seated Mother of God with Child in her lap (fig. 3.13).[434] She may have been dressed in the same way as in the mosaics of the triumphal arch, in white tunic and golden *dalmatica*, or, as the widely accepted reconstruction of Maria Andaloro suggests, covered completely by a *maphorion*.[435] In either case, virgins standing close to the apse would have been able to identify with her. If she was dressed as a high-ranking woman from the aristocratic family, she would have resonated with the affluent past of the aristocratic ladies who comprised the most noticeable part of the virgins in the city at the time of Jerome (c. 342/7-420) and remained the moving power behind the female spiritual life of Rome at least until the time of Gregory the Great.[436] If, however, she donned a dark mantle and a heavy veil, she would have been a mirroring image of their present. Her depiction as a demurely dressed *matrona* would echo the customary attire of the virgins, whose consecration to God became equalled with a mystic marriage to Christ in the minds of the 4th-century Church Fathers, thus necessitating the use of a heavy long veil as their distinctive trait.[437]

The attire of *Theotokos* and her omnipresence in the scenes on the triumphal arch, whose sheer number surpasses the minimum needed to visualise the Gospel story, made her into the

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[433] Bowes 2008, p. 205 and note 96 with the identification of the author of the treatise and its dating; Berger 2011, pp. 88-93; Berger 2021, pp. 92-193. The excerpt is cited from: *De virginitate* 13, in: Migne 1857a, coll. 265: "*Εὐχαριστοῦμέν σοι, Πάτερ ἡμῶν, ὑπὲρ τῆς ἁγίας ἀναστάσεώς σου· διὰ γὰρ Ἰησοῦ τοῦ Παιδός σου ἐγνώρισας ἡμῖν αὐτὴν· χαὶ χαθὼς ὁ ἄρτος οὗτος διεσχορπιτμένος ὑπῆρχεν ὁ ἐπάγω ταύτης τῆς τραπέζης, χαὶ συναχθεὶς ἐγένετο ἕν · οὕτως ἐπισυναχθήτω σου ἡ Ἐχχλησία ἀπὸ τῶν περάτων τῆς γῆς εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν σου, ὅτι σου ἐστὶν ἡ δύνᾶμις χαὶ ἡ δόξα εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων, ἀμὴν*."

[434] Menna 2006, pp. 343-344 supports the hypothesis and references other scholars with the same opinion, but at the same time makes mention of scholars opposing it and their arguments as well. For the hypothesis about the presence of Christ in the apse see: Steigerwald 2016, pp. 157-160. Brenk 1975, pp. 3-4, on the contrary, advocates for the idea of a cross in the apse.

[435] Andaloro 2006, p. 275.

[436] See chapter 2 for the discussion of the life of virgins and widows in the city of Rome and their visual representation. For the interpretation of the attire of the Virgin on the triumphal arch and potentially also in the apse of Santa Maria Maggiore see: Lidova 2015.

[437] Foletti 2023, pp. 105-108. For the link between the outward representation and qualities sought in the consecrated virgins and wedded *matrons*, as well as the similarities between the consecration and wedding ceremony see: Sena Chiesa 2009, p. 35 and Gagetti 2009, p. 76.

protagonist of the cycle, holding the narrative together, and must have forced the late antique viewer to acknowledge her individual agency.[438] Sitting solemnly in the apse, she would have reminded the spiritually distinguished women of the teachings of Ambrose, who found her to be the perfect example for the virgins.

"Let, then, the life of Mary be as it were virginity itself, set forth in a likeness, from which, as from a mirror, the appearance of chastity and the form of virtue is reflected. From this you may take your pattern of life, showing, as an example, the clear rules of virtue: what you have to correct, to effect, and to hold fast."[439]

In her representation they could find both the mirroring image of themselves and the almost unattainable ideal of virtues to which they should aspire: humility, meekness, prudence, respectfulness, charity, diligence in reading the Scriptures, purity of the body as well as of the mind. Young in age but wise beyond her years, every day she guided the consecrated women towards prayer, fasting, cultivation of the mind and abstaining from lures of the outside world in the enclosure of one's home.[440]

But at the same time, the mosaic could have been bearing a more obscured message about female ability to act within the liturgical space. The devotion to the Virgin originated within the private realm and was inextricably linked to the apocryphal literature, which was not unfamiliar neither to the ideator of the iconographical programme of Santa Maria Maggiore, nor probably to its audience.[441] In the *Proto-Gospel of James*, young Mary not only weaves the curtain for the Temple of the Lord, leaning into more domestic female role, but also serves in the Temple from the tender age of three.[442] A building with an entrance separated by curtains, similar to the

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[438] Lidova 2019, pp. 34-35.

[439] Ambrose, *De virginibus* 2.2.6, in: Schaff and Wace 1896a, p. 374. For the Latin text see: Migne 1845b, coll. 220: "*Sit igitur vobis tamquam in imagine descripta virginitas vita Mariae, de qua velut speculo refulgeat species castitatis et forma virtutis. Hinc sumatis licet exempla vivendi, ubi tamquam in exemplari magisteria expressa probitatis, quid corrigere, quid effingere, quid tenere debeatis, ostendunt.*"

[440] Ambrose, *De virginibus* 2.2.7, in: Schaff and Wace 1896a, pp. 374-375. For the discussion of Mary as model for the virgins in woks of early Christian Church fathers see: Milazzo 2002, pp. 112-117.

[441] Brenk 2010, p. 66 and Karpp 1966.

[442] *The Proto-Gospel of James* 7-10, in: Ehrman and Pleše 2011, pp. 48-49, 50-51 (both Greek text and English translation): "When the child turned three, Joachim said, "We should call the undefiled daughters of the Hebrews and have each take a torch and set them up, blazing, that the child not turn back and her heart be taken captive away from the Temple of the Lord." They did this, until they had gone up to the Lord's Temple. And the priest of the Lord received her and gave her a kiss…He set her on the third step of the altar, and the Lord God cast his grace down upon her. She danced on her feet, and the entire house of Israel loved her…Mary was in the Temple of the Lord, cared for like a dove, receiving her food from the hand of an angel… Then the priests held a council and said, "We should make a curtain for the Lord's Temple." The priest said, "Call to me the undefiled virgins from the tribe of David." The servants went out looking for them and found seven virgins. The priest then remembered that the child Mary was from the tribe of David, and that she was undefiled before God. The servants went out and led her back. And they brought them into the Lord's Temple."

one in the scene with Sarah and Abraham hosting three angels and identifiable as a temple can be seen in the Annunciation on the triumphal arch of Santa Maria Maggiore.[443] It is wholly possible that the educated virgins, gazing at the apse, may have recalled the words of the apocrypha and were encouraged by the example of the Virgin, who was able to act freely in the sacred space. Whether or not they were allowed to exercise the same agency themselves, will be the question of the next chapter.

Santa Maria Antiqua: votive paintings on the walls

The gender-motivated placement of the imagery in Santa Maria Maggiore is not unparalleled within the city of Rome. Similar space division of the wall decoration can be observed in the case of the 7th-century frescoes in Santa Maria Antiqua.[444] The preserved parts of the similarly dated low walls separating the lower choir with the ceremonial path and seats reserved for the clergy from the rest of the sacred space show that it usurped almost the entire width of the main nave (fig. 3.2). It not only divided different groups of lay believers in a visually pronounced way, relegating them almost entirely to the lateral naves, but also prevented them from accessing the two-tier elevated sanctuary.[445] This barrier between the clergy and the Greek monks on one side, and the laity on the other was further visually underlined by the presence of a geometric mosaic covering the inside of the high choir (fig. 3.17).[446] Another screen from the 7th century divided the lateral naves into the nave proper and a sort of vestibule leading to a room adjacent to the apse.[447]

That it was on the basis of their social role and gender that the faithful were separated, can be deduced, as it was stated previously, from the fresco decoration covering the piers and walls just outside the presbytery, positioned so that they were accessible for the privileged lay congregation allowed to stand close to the most sacred space of the church. The preserved

[443] See Kateusz 2020, pp. 26-28 for the suggestion that the scene of Annunciation in the mosaic contains a temple and for the discussion of the Annunciation in the Apocrypha taking place in the Jerusalem Temple precinct.
[444] For the reasoning regarding the dating of the paintings to the mid-7th century see: Andaloro 2016a, p. 184. Bordi 2021, p. 400 suggests that the dating is much wider, and proposes the period between the last quarter of the 6th and the middle of the 7th century. Brenk 2004, p. 76 widens the timespan even further to encompass the whole 7th century.
[445] The high choir and the apse space. For the 7th-century dating of the walls of the low choir with the ceremonial path see note 10 in this chapter. The reconstruction of the low and high choir with seats for the members of the clergy was published by Bordi 2022, figs. 2, 11.
[446] Lucey 2007, p. 157 and Hurst 2021, pp. 170-174.
[447] The spatial division of the lateral naves is discussed in: Rubery 2021.

portions of it contain images of the Mother of God and female martyrs concentrated in the left section of the church (from the point of view of the apse and thus the officiant during the Eucharist). Even though the Virgin can be seen depicted multiple times on the opposite side of the ceremonial path as well, which suggests her universal adoration in Santa Maria Antiqua, gender notwithstanding, the majority of the frescoes there depict Christ and male saints.[448]

The gendered polarity is reflected already in the 7th-century figure pairings, in which St. Demetrius of the south-eastern pillar close to the presbytery mirrors St. Barbara on the south-western one and Christ healing a blind man on a south-eastern column in the nave finds its counterpart in the Virgin Eleousa depicted on the north-western column (fig. 3.18-21). Yet it culminated only almost a century later, made intensely pronounced by the addition of the niche to the western (female) lateral nave, depicting three holy mothers with their children (Mary with infant Jesus, Anne with infant Mary, and Elisabeth with infant John the Baptist), and the figure of Christ among male saints to the eastern (male) lateral nave.[449] Even the Marian, Old and New Testament cycle scenes on the choir's walls and in the lateral naves, commissioned during the pontificates of John VII (705-707) and Paul I (757-767), were split in such a way as to focus on the male protagonists on the eastern (right) wall and on female protagonists on the wall opposing it.[450] This layout suggests that gender separation continued to be practiced in Rome notwithstanding the occasional change in the ethnicity of the congregation during the Byzantine administration of the city, as was the case for Santa Maria Antiqua, where the inscriptions dating to the 7th and 8th century are entirely Greek, including those with lay patronage, which points to the origin of the church goers in the eastern Mediterranean.[451]

As in the period of interest and especially after the 5th century it became increasingly harder for women to penetrate the safeguarded church ranks in Rome, and for those of limited means even outlets such as grand charitable works or sponsorship of building activities were unavailable, personal devotion became their only possibility of individualized religious expression.[452] Contrary to the situation in Santa Maria Maggiore, where the representations of female

[448] Lucey 2007, pp. 154-155.
[449] *Ibidem*, p. 155. For the detailed discussion of all 7th-century frescoes inside the church see: Nordhagen 1978. For the frescoes depicting female figures see also cat. n. 2.32 in this thesis.
[450] Osborne 2003, pp. 142-143. See Lucey 2007, pp. 155-156 and Bordi 2022 on the topic of the separation of the scenes of the Old Testament cycle based on gender. For more general description of the decoration of Santa Maria Antiqua in the 8th century, see: Andaloro 2016b, pp. 19-28. The fresco with the three saint mothers and the 8th-century decoration of the western nave, centred most probably around the life of the Virgin as described by the Apocrypha is discussed by: Gianandrea 2021.
[451] Lucey 2007, pp. 143-144.
[452] Herrin 2013, p. 65. For the discussion on the place of women within the Church structures see chapter 4 in this thesis.

archetypes are positioned high above the female audience, whose role was exclusively that of a spectator, female figures in Santa Maria Antiqua are depicted at eye level, inviting interactive devotional acts such as the attaching of votive offerings to them.[453] Their position within the church and format, not dissimilar to the portable devotional images that were being introduced to the public religious life of the city at the time, suggest that they were added to the pictorial decoration one by one and commissioned by lay donors.[454] Even though we cannot be completely certain that the frescoes in the western portion of the sacred space were not sponsored by men, given that they confirm prescribed gender roles and normative behaviour established in a society ruled and shaped by them, they not only depict holy women, but also respond to specific female concerns and bear traces of being used by them as *ex votos* in private extra-liturgical devotion.[455] As no donor portrait of a woman has survived, unlike the one of their male counterpart in the scene of Deesis, identified by his attire as a secular official, the precise social standing and aspirations of female sponsors of the church remain dubitable. Some clues, however, can be gained from the concentration of the images close to the sanctuary, where they were viewable only to the members of the elite, not only offering them contact with the sacred, but also reinforcing their rank in society through testimony of their donation (fig. 3.22).[456]

The 7th-century images representing female role models, all except the Virgin unknown to the Romans and not previously venerated in the city, were concentrated in the area of the nave neighbouring either the presbytery or the low choir, creating a hub of sanctity, contrasting with the walls of the lateral nave, which remained bare up until the decorating campaign of pope Paul I.[457] Apart from two exceptions they all occupied the northern face of the southwestern pillar close to the entrance to the sanctuary. Their "Pompeian" qualities seem to have been a product of the "perennial Hellenism" brought to Rome by the Greek community and make them stand out among other parts of the church's decoration, attesting to the access of their donors to high quality workshops and once again to the abundance of their wealth and contacts.[458]

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[453] Neuman de Vegvar 2007, pp. 107-108.
[454] Belting 1994, pp. 115-116 even suggests that the wall paintings may have been copies of unknown portable devotional images.
[455] Lucey 2007, p. 156.
[456] Regarding the lay commissioners of the wall paintings, see: *Ibidem*, p. 144 and note 26 on the same page. The author convincingly argues that the lay donors must have belonged to the aristocracy: *Ibidem*, pp. 150-155.
[457] Andaloro 2016a, p. 184. For the origin of the worship of the saints in Santa Maria Antiqua in the eastern Mediterranean see: Brenk 2010, p. 104.
[458] Belting 1994, p. 120. For the discussion of the stylistic qualities of the paintings see also: Andaloro 2016a, p. 184.

The painting depicting Solomone, the proud mother of the martyred Maccabees, surrounded by her seven sons and accompanied by their teacher Eleazar, is remarkable for its monumentality more than any of the other panels (fig. 3.23). The figure of Solomone, clad in yellow white *dalmatica* and *Theotokos*-like porphyry mantle and red shoes is the focal point of the painting, placed in the centre of the composition and distinguished from others by an intensely yellow halo outlined with blackish shades. Her left hand is holding to a white cloth, probably *mappa*, sign of her privileged standing. Her right hand is held out in front of her chest, palm forward, which can be interpreted as a speaking gesture, and which certainly reinforced the connection between her and the believers praying in front of the image.[459] Private veneration of the painting is confirmed by four nail holes close to the throat of Solomone, which up until the excavation of the church in 1900-1901 contained four silver nails. The object they secured is long lost, but it may have been a brooch from precious metal donated by a well-to-do member of the congregation.[460]

The painting with enthroned Virgin surrounded by two angels right above the scene with the Maccabees seems to be the product of the same workshop (fig. 3.24).[461] Even if much of the upper part of the panel was destroyed, traces of painted surfaces suggest that the Virgin was represented in all her splendour, seated on a red-brown throne with ornamentally decorated cushion, dressed in blue *palla*, her feet clad in red imperial shoes propped on a large ochre-brown footstool. No signs of votive offerings were preserved, but it is unclear whether this should be attributed to the plaster deterioration, or such objects were never present.

The corner of the pillar is occupied by the painting of St. Barbara on one side and a further unidentifiable figure of female saint, from which only parts of the *dalmatica* and red shoes survived, on the other (fig. 3.19). The haloed Barbara, dressed in reddish-brown *palla*, richly embroidered with ornament consisting of clusters of white dots, and yellow white *dalmatica*, stands undisturbed, with a gaze reverted slightly from the viewer, holding a cross in her right hand.[462] Together with St. Demetrios, she was originally given lips of gold, attested by two deep holes in the plaster at the corners of her painted mouth (fig. 3.18).[463] According to Hans Belting,

[459] Nordhagen 1978, p. 117 interprets the gesture as either adoration, exclamation, or submission to the divine will.
[460] *Ibidem* and Nordhagen 1987, p. 454.
[461] Nordhagen 1978, p. 122.
[462] *Ibidem*, p. 120.
[463] *Ibidem*, p. 121 and Nordhagen 1987, p. 454.

it was expected that the saint would listen to the requests of the faithful and answer them, mirroring the activity in the antique oracles.[464]

The fine garments of St. Barbara, who was a daughter of a satrap of Nicomedia in life, locked in a tower to be prevented from receiving Christian instruction, may allude to the social status of the fresco's commissioner. The same can be said about a number of the votive offerings mentioned above, which adorned the hands and necks of male and female holy figures. Even though on some level the finery may have been linked to the contemporary discourse which equated it with the heavenly prestige, the visual parallel drawn between the outward appearance of the aristocratic commissioners and their saintly patrons must have been striking. It hinted on the subjective identification of the former with the latter, in search for intimate contact with the heavenly realm and easing of their daily anxieties.[465] That the veneration of the saints' images was intense and long-lasting is attested by the actions of pope John VII, whose painters went out of their way to spare all wall paintings adorned by votive gifts and lamps, even to the point of incorporating them into the new decorative programme, an attitude that, given the lack of cancellation signs on the images, was followed up until the destruction of the church in 847.[466]

Votive images in Santa Maria Antiqua were able to assuage worries and become relatable to women of different life stages and social roles. Leading motif in them is the emphasis on motherhood and fertility. This thematic focus can be seen not only in the paintings close to the presbytery depicting Solomone first and foremost as the mother of the Maccabees and strictly avoiding any reference to her martyrdom, and the Virgin enthroned among the angels on the same wall, but also in the images much more available to the general female audience, removed from the presbytery to the depths of the western nave.[467] In the 7th century women standing there were able to pray to the figure of the Virgin Eleousa on the second column, now strongly damaged but identified as such through the dark purplish colour of her cloak, a negative outline of a cross on the only preserved shoulder and traces of the figure of the Child, who was sitting sideways in Mother's hands, gently touching her shoulder (fig. 3.21).[468] She was reinforced by a half-length depiction of the Virgin with Child in a niche cut in a pillar little bit further down the nave, in close contact with the chancel area, but provisionally separated from the rest of the

[464] Belting 1994, p. 116.
[465] Lucey 2007, pp. 156-157. For the aristocratic background of St. Barbara see: Vanderheyde 2020, p. 24.
[466] Nordhagen 1978, p. 142.
[467] See Gianandrea 2021, p. 349 regarding the thematic focus of the western nave. For the focus of the painting of the Maccabees on maternity, see: Brenk 2021, pp. 473-474.
[468] Nordhagen 1978, p. 130.

space as to form a sort of private chapel (fig. 3.25). When the niche was repainted in the early 8th century by orders of pope John VII, an older lamp (or maybe a large votive gift of other kind) was spared at a cost of shearing off of one of the corners of the new painting, pointing towards deeply ingrained lay piety towards the icon-like image. Nail holes in the surrounding area of the pillar also demonstrate that the image was focus of intense devotional practice, expressed in attaching *ex-votos* in its immediate vicinity.[469] Later in the mid-8th century the niche with the holy mothers, conveniently placed amidst the images reiterating the message of divine pregnancy, was added to complete the ranks of saint women who served as guides for their female audience and helped them navigate the challenges of motherhood (fig. 3.26). The narrative began with the happy resolution of the sterility of Anne, who is also found in the niche, and probably continued with the story of Elisabeth, which again relates to the themes of infertility and its resolution through faith and the will of God. Mary, John, and ultimately Christ, depicted as children accompanied by their mothers, have in common the miraculous birth brought by divine action. The message is repeated several times throughout the imagery in the niche and on the walls and must have had a soothing effect on women which visited the church to express their fears linked to infertility and to seek their resolution through faith, kneeling in front of the niche, surrounded only by a barrier so low on the wall that it allowed them intimate access to the holy figures.[470] Eileen Rubery even goes as far as to suggest that the painting is strategically placed so that a labouring woman lying down and facing the altar could reach out and touch the Christ Child, praying to Him and the Mother of God for good outcome.[471]

Close-up veneration has been confirmed in the case of the devotional images depicting St. Barbara and St. Demetrios as well. Horizontal slits were discovered in the pillars just below the paintings, indicating the presence of either stone plaques or wooden boards serving for sitting or performance of unknown religious ritual.[472] Apart from touch, sight and smell participated in the private religious acts as well. The saints' images display deep holes which confirm the existence of oil lamps illuminating them.[473] In absence of lamps they were probably venerated through lighting of candles. In Santa Maria Antiqua there are unfortunately no frescoes documenting the use of candles preserved from the 7th century. The period immediately

[469] Nordhagen 1987, p. 454; Belting 1994, pp. 118-120; Osborne 2003, p. 144 and above all the most recent and detailed analysis of the painting in the context of the decoration of the western nave and discussion of its dating by Gianandrea 2021, pp. 348-352.
[470] Lucey 2007, p. 156.
[471] Rubery 2021, p. 442.
[472] Nordhagen 1978, p. 107.
[473] *Ibidem*, p. 141.

following was, however, much more abundant with visual clues: a wall painting in the chapel of Theodotus from the period around the middle of the 8th century depicts the donor holding candles and honouring the figure of the standing Virgin together with his wife and two children, and the second Domitianic niche on the east wall of the church atrium bears an early 8th or 9th-century fragmentary fresco of a man and a woman offering candles to what appears to be a larger-then-life-size figure of the Virgin.[474] In the first place candles were tangible gifts, expressing personal devotion of the faithful through the expense he or she had to cover. But at the same time wax is also a material which becomes slowly consumed by the flame as it burns, and turns into smoke, rising to heavens, thus transforming the physical gift into a device offering contact with the otherworld.[475]

The small sources of light offered to the images by the congregation were in a sense a necessity for their viewing, as the church, immersed among older Domitianic structures on the Roman Forum, was dark, with only upper part of the central nave receiving light from the elevated clerestory and openings in the façade, whose orientation to the north-east did not, unfortunately, allow much direct light inside.[476] At the same time, the intimate lighting of the paintings in the general darkness of the space may have become a tool for strengthening of the close and personal relationship between the saints and the believers. The space this relationship inhabited was partly immaterial and perceived through the senses, activated through the movements of the faithful, their prayer, burning of lamps and incense. The distance between the saints inhabiting the otherworld and the devotees was scaled down by the light mirrored in the metallic votive offerings secured to the paintings, bringing them to life, suddenly real and moving, matching the vivid description of Venantius Fortunatus (c. 530-600) of the tomb of St. Bibianus:

"Silver coating covers the sacred tomb of Bibianus,/ the gift of Placidina, of one mind with you./ Laid upon it the sheen of gold intermingles its glimmer,/ and the unalloyed metal spreads widely its rays./ A panelled ceiling of novel and ingenious construction lends lustre;/ you'd think here the artist had brought wild animals to life."[477]

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[474] For the dating and discussion of the wall decoration of the Theodotus chapel see: Osborne 2020. The dating of the fresco in the atrium to the pontificate of John VII (705-707), proposed by Nordhagen 1968, p. 83, has been refused by Osborne 1987, p. 198 on the basis of the discrepancies between the form and the rendering of the square halo of the donor figures and similar haloes in the two portraits of the pope on the triumphal arch of Santa Maria Antiqua and on the mosaic fragment from his chapel in St. Peter's.

[475] Osborne 2003, p. 145.

[476] Mondini 2016a, p. 379.

[477] See Andaloro 2016a, pp. 184-188 for information about the relationship between the viewer and the images in Santa Maria Antiqua. For Venantius Fortunatus' *Carmine* 1.12 see: database *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity*, E05633, https://doi.org/10.25446/oxford.13872866.v1 (last viewed on 27. 10. 2024). The Latin version was taken

While most of the votive images can be found in parts of the church where they were easily accessible to the female viewer/commissioner, one of them stands out due to its position within the presbytery. It is the image of St. Anne, holding little Virgin on her arm, decorating the wall right next to the entrance to a space which in the context of the 8th-century *diaconia* served as a chapel dedicated to the veneration of healing saints Cyrus and John, but the function of which in the 7th century is unknown (fig. 3.27). Without this vital information it is impossible to reconstruct the reason for such specific placing of the votive image.[478] It is not outside of the realm of possibility that some form of access to the chapel and through it to the painting of the saint may have been granted to widows and virgins.[479] The primary focus on the child in the figural composition can be deduced from the lamp right next to its head, the existence of which has been suggested by Per Jonas Nordhagen based on the large hole in St. Anne's neck.[480] If there was indeed a lamp hanging right next to the Virgin, its light would illuminate mostly the area around her and part of her figure, drawing attention of the faithful venerating the image. And given that those faithful may perhaps have been virgins, she would once again remind them of the young girl from the apocryphal Evangelia, praying and serving in the Temple, brave, autonomous and bound for Heaven.[481] In case they were affluent, just as the commissioner of the painting must have been, further parallel between young Mary and the kind of girls the virgins were in their youth was created by the opulent jewellery the Virgin is depicted wearing: large pendant earrings with one big and one small pearl and gold necklace with tiny pendants. But given the changed relationship of the Church towards women, in that number also towards privileged categories such as educated aristocrats, widows, and virgins, after the 6th century,

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from Mondini 2016a, p. 384: "*Sacra sepulchra tegunt Bibiani argentea tecta,/ unianimus tecum quae Placidina dedit./ Quo super effusum rutilans intermicat aurum/ et spargunt radios pura metalla suos./ Ingenio perfecta nouo tabulata coruscant/ artificamque putas hic animasse feras.*"

[478] Knipp 2021, pp. 182-188 suggests that the side-chapels were already part of the Domitianic building and communicated with the exedra through large doorways. During the remodelling initiated by Theodoric (471-526) on his visit to Rome in March 500 the doorways to the exedra were narrowed and the openings towards what would become the lateral naves of the church were walled up. In this form the side rooms offered privacy for devotion or relaxation to the ruler and his courtiers. In the later 6th century, when the church became fully operational, the side rooms were again reopened towards the naves. The bibliography on Santa Maria Antiqua does not give any space for discussion of the function of the side rooms in the 7th century. Due to their position beside the apse they are called *prothesis* and *diaconicon* (Brenk 2021, p. 474 with further bibliography), but there is no evidence that they indeed served this role, especially as they were relicts of the older building. It seems that whatever function they had in the church was interrupted by the introduction of the cult of the healing saints and church's conversion to a place for pilgrims and the sick in the 8th century. It this context Rubery 2021 reconstructs the space adjacent to the presbytery on the western side as a pilgrimage site with its own vestibule for overnight sleep in the awaiting of a healing dream.

[479] Belting 1994, p. 116.

[480] Nordhagen 1978, p. 101.

[481] That the lamp was positioned in such a way as to illuminate the figure of the Virgin was suggested by Nordhagen 1987, p. 454.

their access to the outskirts of the presbytery, even with the condition that personal devotion was probably carried out outside of the liturgy, must remain a speculation.[482]

For Emulation and Protection: Archetypes on Objects of Private Devotion

Observing an image of a saint from afar, kneeling before it, lighting lamps and candles and touching it with one's hand was not the closest women (virgins and widows in that number) could get to their saintly guiding figures. In some instances, they could make their contact with them constant and almost incorporate them into their own body. As discussed in chapter 1, Roman women cultivated intimate relationship with the martyrs, often channelled through their visits to the martyr shrines, from which they brought back apotropaic souvenirs. Many of them, mostly from the dioceses *Aegyptus* and *Oriens*, including the Holy Land, circulating all around the Mediterranean and even beyond the Alps, survived.[483]

On their journey to obtain a miracle or to secure salvation travellers of both genders encountered innumerable perils and thus found themselves in need of apotropaic objects even before they reached their destination, where they may have acquired portable "blessings". Magi, perceived as archetypal travellers, who returned safely from their journey to the Holy Land guided and guarded by divine power, were ideal companions for the wandering pilgrims, visiting holy sites and encountering various life-threatening adversities on their journey.[484] This is why even though their veneration in Betlehem was only of secondary interest, they appear frequently on pilgrims' souvenirs and tokens.[485] The protective power an object featuring the scene of Adoration of the Magi was believed to cast on its travelling owner is confirmed by a gold pendant reliquary, decorated with scenes of Nativity and Adoration, currently housed in the British Museum (fig. 3.28). The object, linked by Cyril Mango to the shrines of Cosmas and Damian and the Virgin in the Constantinopolitan quarter of Blachernae and dated before the year 626, bears an inscription, wishing its owner "Secure salvation, and repulsion of all evil

[482] Extra-liturgical nature of the devotion was suggested by Lucey 2007, p. 156.
[483] As the pilgrim souvenirs are a widely discussed topic among the scholars of the late antique eastern Mediterranean, I am able to offer only a selected bibliography: Grabar 1958; Hahn 1990; Parandowski 1990; Vikan 1991; Engemann 1995; Klausen-Nottmeyer 1995; Vikan 1995; Gilli 2002; Entwistle 2005; Pentcheva 2010, pp. 17-44; Vikan 2010; Maguire 2016; Bollók 2018; Petrina 2020; Šímová 2024.
[484] Vikan 2003a; Vikan 2010, pp. 59-61.
[485] Around 40% of the tokens from the shrine of St. Symeon near Antioch feature the scene of the Adoration of the Magi, which is more than twice the proportion of any other scene, even though there was no association between Magi and the shrine: Vikan 2003a, p. 202; Vikan 2010, p. 59.

things".[486] That female travellers were equally invested in the belief in Magi's protective powers is attested by a late 6th-century golden encolpion-fibula, found in a Visigothic tomb in Granja del Turuñuelo, probably product of a Constantinopolitan workshop (fig. 3.29). The upper part of the object, closely matching the Gregory of Tours's (c. 538-593/4) description of a travel reliquary, which he inherited from his father, is wholly occupied by the scene of the Adoration of the Magi, surrounded by an inscription: "Holy Mary, Help [Her] Who Wears [This]".[487]

Even those who were not able to travel sought motifs iconographically linked to holy figures and sites. Objects featuring the image of the Virgin held special significance for female devotees, as evidenced by several late antique artifacts (textiles, rings, armbands etc.) whose female ownership is either confirmed or strongly suspected. In the case of women, both consecrated and not, Virgin fulfilled the role of intercessor more effectively than any other saintly figure could, experiencing maternal anxieties but personifying female liturgical agency at the same time.[488] The popularity her depiction enjoyed among women across the Mediterranean throughout Late Antiquity can be illustrated by two objects, whose female ownership is either confirmed or at least strongly suspected. The first object is a 6th-century silver armband with four medallions, found in eastern Anatolia (diocese *Pontica*) and currently housed in the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto (fig. 3.30). The armband is decorated by three engraved figural scenes, reduced to a few sketched lines: Women at the Tomb, Entry into Jerusalem, and enthroned Virgin with Child in her lap. And it is the last medallion that contains the name of the owner, Anna, pleading *Theotokos* for help.[489] The object belongs to a group of at least 22 early Byzantine amuletic armbands related by provenance, iconography or the rendering of the figures, which acquired their apotropaic power through the repetition of the iconography of holy personages and places, present on the pilgrim ampules, without being directly tied to the Holy Land and the pilgrimage trade.[490] Worn on the arm, at some point above

[486] The British Museum, inv. n. AF.354. The year 626 marks the destruction of the church of SS. Cosmas and Damian by an Avar siege. The object is published in: Dalton 1901, n. 284, pp. 46-47; Mango 1994; Speakman 2011; Marzinzik 2013, n. 38, pp. 84-85.

[487] Madrid, Museo Arqueológico Nacional, inv. n. 1963/56/1: Schlunk and Hauschild 1978, pp. 156ff; Vikan 2010, p. 59. The story about the travelling reliquary in Gregory of Tours' *Glory of Martyrs* 83 reads like this: "He put the sacred ashes in a gold medallion and carried it with him…He claimed that often, because of the power of these relics, he had avoided the violence of bandits, the danger of floods, the threats of turbulent men, and attacks from swords." Translation published in: Van Dam 2004, p. 79. For the Latin version see: Krusch 1969, p. 94: "*Tunc inclusos in lupino aureo sacros cineres circa eum posuit…Referre enim erat solitus, se a multis tunc periculis eruto; nam et violentias latronum et pericula fluminum, inprobitates seditiosorum et adsultus ensuum saepius se evasisse horum virtutibus, testabatur.*"

[488] Herrin 2013, p. 53. For late antique eastern Mediterranean objects featuring *Theotokos* and linked to female private piety see e.g.: Maguire 2016, summarizing previous scholarship.

[489] Royal Ontario Museum, inv. n. 986.181.93, published in: Vikan 1991, p. 41.

[490] *Ibidem*, pp. 34, 38.

the wrist, possibly in pair so that its protective power would multiply, the armband may have aided its wearer in life full of perils related to health, as would suggest the inscription *Hygia* on the medallion with Christ entering into Jerusalem.[491] And we need to only look at the choice of the medallion on which the name of the owner appears to understand with which holy figure she identified the most and whose protection she sought. It was the Virgin, who was able to conceive by a miracle, overcame the perils of childbirth and finally had to withstand the sorrows of abruptly interrupted motherhood, responding directly to the fears related to reproductive health and parenthood of late antique women.[492]

The second object, slightly predating the rapid spread of *Theotokos* cult following the council of Ephesus, is the *capsella* from San Nazaro. The point *ante quem* for its production is offered by the act of its deposition under the altar of the basilica of the Apostles in Milan, performed by bishop Ambrose in 386. Among contact relics the *capsella* hid a small oval box with bones of a saint, probably an apostle, and most importantly an inscription containing the name of the donor: DEDALIA VIVAS IN CHRISTO. All of the recent studies link the Dedalia from the inscription with Manlia Dedalia, an influential consecrated virgin with strong presence at the Milanese imperial court. Due to the fact that the economic situation of the consecrated aristocratic women in Milan at the time of Ambrose was advantageous, given the bishop's intervention ensuring they were able to keep their dowry and inheritance, and the prevalence of the importance of the relics contained in the box over the other contents of the *capsella*, it is not an impossible conclusion that the influential virgin Manlia Dedalia was able to design and commission the outward *capsella* as well.[493] It may have been first produced as an object of personal devotion and only subsequently reused by the bishop in a public ceremony, maybe gifted to him by its owner.[494] The object, whose rootedness in the theological dispute between the bishop and the imperial court led by regent Justina (375-388) over the equal nature of God and his Son has been discussed at length by Markus Löx, Adrien Palladino, and Ivan Foletti, is

[491] Vikan 1991, pp. 35, 39. The possible placement on the arm can be guessed from the diameter of the armband, measuring 7.7 cm.
[492] The presence of Mother of God on apotropaic objects related to female reproductive journey in the dioceses *Asia, Pontica, Oriens* and *Aegyptus* was discussed in the yet unpublished paper of Grace Stafford, *Fertility Management and Lived Religion in the Late Antique East* presented at the 18th International Congress of Christian Archaeology (Belgrade, 02.-06. 09. 2024).
[493] Foletti 2023, pp. 94-97. For the disproving of the arguments contradicting the contemporaneity of the *capsella* and the reliquary box of Dedalia see: Gagetti 2009, pp. 74-75. For the discussion of the identity of Dedalia see: Gagetti 2009, pp. 82-87; Palladino 2022, pp. 138-143. Gagetti, however, reaches the conclusion that the reliquary box and the *capsella* were gifted to Manlia Dedalia on the occasion of her consecration, and they were commissioned by her brother Manlius Theodorus (c. 376-409). Palladino points out that even though the link between Manlia Dedalia and the *capsella* is unverifiable, she would have been capable of such generous donation.
[494] Sena Chiesa 2009, p. 30.

important for our discourse due to its peculiar depiction of the enthroned Virgin (fig. 3.31).[495] The frontal figure of the *Theotokos* with the Child on her lap, flanked by a court of onlookers and two male figures bringing precious vessels in an act of adoration captures the trained eye with her attire.[496] The sombre elegant Virgin is covered in heavy matronly *maphorion*, which will become widespread in her iconography only a century after the production of the *capsella*. This early depiction of the *Theotokos* as a demurely dressed *matrona* echoes the customary attire of the consecrated women, whose consecration to God became equalled with a mystic marriage to Christ in the minds of the 4th century Church Fathers, thus necessitating the use of a heavy long veil as their distinctive trait.[497] In this context it is possible to hypothesize that the enthroned Virgin mirrors the image of the commissioner of the *capsella* herself, who identified with the Mother of God in her daily religious life. The closeness between the role of the Virgin in the Temple of Jerusalem and their role in the Church may have been a significant enticement for the Roman consecrated women to commission and, depending on the size, to adapt to wearing personal objects depicting *Theotokos* as their role model and protector.[498]

The connection between devotional objects and their owners was not merely visual but deeply physical and sensory. As Francesca Dell'Acqua notes, they offered the opportunity for a reassuring tactile prayer to their wearer that uplifted him/her towards the divine. These objects were meant to be experienced through multiple senses − they had to be reactivated by sight, touch and prayer to either heal or protect the bearer, to emanate the sacred presence with which they were imbued through engraving of holy images, prayer, invocation of the Holy Spirit, and burning of incense.[499] Even if they could not literally become part of their owner's body in the same way as the tokens made from the earth around the site of the column of Symeon Stylite near Antioch, dissolved in water and drunk, or massaged into the ailing body to cure illness, were able to, they still had to be experienced through the senses and held close to the body by the faithful.[500] The physical interaction with sacred objects was an essential aspect of devotional

[495] Löx 2021; Palladino 2022, p.132; Foletti 2023, pp. 101-104.
[496] Foletti 2023, pp. 102-103 with further bibliography supporting the identification of the scene as Adoration of the Magi. Palladino 2022, p. 136 points out that the male figures miss the Phrygian cap, which would identify them as belonging to one of the provinces in the dioceses *Asiana* and *Oriens*, unlike the figures in the scene of the Joseph's Judgement, and concludes that the composition recalls profane models of official imperial iconography.
[497] Foletti 2023, pp. 105-108. For the link between the outward representation and qualities sought in the consecrated virgins and wedded *matrons*, as well as the similarities between the consecration and wedding ceremony see: Sena Chiesa 2009, p. 35 and Gagetti 2009, p. 76.
[498] Kondakov 2014, p. 123. For the discussion about the link between the Mother of God and the consecrated virgins see e.g.: Cooper 2007a; Lidov 2017; Kateusz 2019; Evangelatou 2021; Foletti 2023.
[499] Dell'Acqua 2020, pp. 239-240. On tactile piety in Late antiquity and Middle Ages see e.g.: Pentcheva 2010, esp. pp. 17-19; Bynum 2011, pp. 38, 65, 104; Dyas 2014.
[500] Vikan 2003b, pp. 55-56. For further bibliography see: Pentcheva 2010, pp. 23-29 and Vikan 2010, pp. 31-33.

practices. Touched, held, looked at, and kissed, instinctively or intentionally, during prayer and meditation, these objects facilitated an intimate connection between the devotee and the divine, becoming physical mediators of spiritual experience.[501]

From the city of Rome, only three small portable devotional objects bearing imagery that can be potentially linked to female believers survive. Not much is known about their origin and owners, and they pose an interesting challenge to the scholarship from the second half of the 19th century onwards, not completely ignoring the conundrum of changing locations and obscure identities but mostly using them as comparative material.[502]

The objects in question are three medallions of discrete dimensions (around 4 cm in diameter) currently housed in the Museo Cristiano inside the Vatican Museums and dated in the internal catalogue of the institution respectively to the 4th, the end of the 5th and the 6th or the 7th century (fig. 3.32-34).[503] They belong to a larger group of artefacts, catalogized in the second half of the 19th century by Giovanni Battista de Rossi and Raffaele Garrucci, who defined their function as private *devotionalia*, basing their assumption on the form and iconography of the objects, featuring Christograms, figures of Christ, angels, martyrs, Apostles, the Good Shepard, the Adoration of the Magi, and the Sacrifice of Isaac.[504]

The bronze medallions each carry a hole in their upper part, apparently placed so that it will allow their owner to carry them close to their person, around the neck, in much the same fashion as amulets had been worn from the times when humans developed religious beliefs.[505] Not only the technique of the production, utilizing rough incisions and simplification to capture the scenes with only a couple of thick lines, but also the material, durable and affordable at the same time, hint on the general availability of such medallions to lower social strata.[506] The roughness of the relief is apparent especially when compared to another late antique devotional object kept in the Vatican Museums, a reliquary cross covered by intricate niello ornament (fig. 3.35).[507] Found in a grave under the pavement of the Constantinian basilica of San Lorenzo fuori le mura, the cross was variously dated to the period between the 5th and the 6th century or

[501] Dell'Acqua 2020, p. 239.
[502] For the bibliography on these votive objects, see n. 2.2, 2.30 and 2.34 in the catalogue.
[503] Musei Vaticani, inv. n. MV.60536.0.0, MV.60537.0.0 and MV.60539.0.0.
[504] Musei Vaticani, inv. n. MV.60570.0.0, MV.60536.0.0, MV.60979.0.0, MV.61061.0.0, MV.61061.0.0, MV.60959.0.0, MV.60538.0.0, MV.60956.0.0, MV.60954.0.0. Published in: De Rossi 1869b; Garrucci 1880, pp. 54, 125-128, pl. 435, 480.
[505] De Rossi 1869b, p. 33.
[506] See Garrucci 1880, p. 54 on the production techniques applied to the medallions.
[507] Musei Vaticani, inv. n. MV.61101.0.0. Published in: De Rossi 1863; Rosenberg 1924, pp. 52-53; Lipinsky 1962; Farioli Campanati 1990; Pitarakis 2006, p. 142.

to the 7th century.[508] The privileged position of the grave close to the tomb of the martyr and the intact state of the dead body, whose neck the cross adorned prior to the exhumation, achieved by embalming, suggest that the buried must have belonged the upper social strata of the Roman society.[509] This is further confirmed by the exquisite quality of the material and technique used in the production of the object, pointing towards goldsmith workshop catering to exclusive clientele.[510] In contrast to such expensive pieces or to the house shrines, discussed in chapter 1, the medallions were much more democratic and widespread means of private devotion. They thus offer a rare glimpse of the popular religion in the city of Rome. Due to the private and apotropaic nature of the artefacts iconographic motifs they capture can serve as examples of the innermost beliefs of the wearers, featuring protagonists that must have been perceived by them as the most able protectors against the evil and guarantors of salvation.

Devotional medallions offered their wearer a respectable source of protection, both physical and spiritual, unlike magical amulets, containing names, incantations and images mixing elements from the Christian rituals with pre-Christian beliefs about the supernatural, condemned by the leaders of the Christian Church and, which is interesting to observe, often linked by them to women in their distribution and use.[511]

In his second instruction homily addressed to the *catechumens* and given probably in Antioch around the year 390 John Chrysostom (398-407) paints the picture of old drunk hags brought to the homes of the ill to make incantations and produce amulets in order to secure their healing:

“What would you say of those who use incantations and amulets and of those who tie bronze coins of Alexander of Macedon around their heads and feet? Tell me, are these the things in which we place our hopes? After our Master died for us on the cross, will we put our hope for salvation in the image of a Greek king? Do you not know how many wrongs the cross has set right? Did it not destroy death, did it not blot out sin, did it not end the power of the devil, does it not suffice for the well-being of our body?... You carry around on your person not only amulets but even incantations; you bring into your house drunken and witless old hags. Are you

[508] The date between the 5th and the 6th century was proposed by De Rossi 1863 after the discovery of the cross and has been accepted almost unanimously throughout the bibliography. Only the most recent text on the cross, Pitarakis 2006, p. 142, proposes the 7th-century dating, but without further elaborating on the reasons.
[509] De Rossi 1863, p. 31.
[510] The question of the workshop which may have produced the cross is further discussed in: Lipinsky 1962.
[511] The bibliography detailing the use of magical amulets after the rise of Christianity in different parts of the Roman Empire is too vast to be summarized in this work. See: Spier 1993; Spier 2007, pp. 81-86 and De Bruyn 2017 for further suggestions of primary and secondary sources. For the 19th-century rebuke of the amulets in favour of the devotional medallions see: De Rossi 1869b, pp. 59-64.

not ashamed and do you not blush that, after you have been trained in true doctrine, you have been terrified by these things? And what is worse than the fraud involved is the fact that when we are exhorting people and leading them away from these practices, they think they excuse themselves by saying that the woman who chants these incantations is a Christian who says nothing but the name of God. I hate and abhor such a woman for this reason above all others, because she uses God's name insultingly and because, while she says she is a Christian, she acts like a Greek…For these reasons, then, I urge you not to be guilty of this fraud; I urge you to hold on to this word as your staff."[512]

Even a century later pope Gelasius (492-496) complains about the use of protective objects, "which are not consecrated to angels, but rather to the names of demons" and warns about their apocryphal nature, pointing towards the tendency of Christians to lean towards the protective non-Christian or mixed "magic", perceived as effective for generations, at least up until the beginning of the 6th century.[513]

There is no written trace of the link between women and magic amulets pointing towards the city of Rome specifically. Yet, two out of three late antique objects incorporating magic gems from the pre-Christian Roman Empire uncovered in the city, namely a 5th or 6th-century gold ring said to be from the church of Santa Maria dell'Orto, and two elaborate necklaces belonging to the Piazza della Consolazione treasure, dated to the 5th century, probably belonged to a female owner (fig. 3.36-37).[514] Even though the destruction of material culture has to be taken into consideration, which inevitably makes the leading role of Roman women in the magic gems' circulation less certain, in the minds of Church authorities with intellectual presence in the city,

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[512] John Chrysostom, *Ad illuminandos catechesis* 2.5, in: Harkins 1988 (here as XII.57-60), pp. 190-191. For the Greek version see: Migne 1862c, col. 240: "*Τί ἄν τις εἴποι περὶ τῶν ἐπῳδαῖς καὶ περιάπτοις κεχρημένων , καὶ νομίσματα χαλκο Αλεξάνδρου του Μακεδόνος ταῖς κεφαλαῖς καὶ τοῖς ποσὶ περιδεσμούντων; Αὗται αἱ ἐλπίδες ἡμῶν , εἰπέ μοι , ἵνα μετὰ σταυρὸν καὶ θάνατον Δεσποτικὸν εἰς Ελληνος βασιλέως εἰκόνα τὰς ἐλπίδας τῆς σωτηρίας ἔχωμεν; Οὐκ οἶδας πόσα κατώρ θωσεν ὁ σταυρός; τὸν θάνατον κατέλυσε , τὴν ἁμαρτίαν ἔσβεσε , τὸν ᾅδην ἄχρηστον ἐποίησε , τοῦ διαβόλου τὴν δύναμιν ἐξέλυσε , καὶ εἰς σώματος υγίειαν οὐκ ἔστιν ἀξιόπιστος;… Οὐ περίαπτα δὲ μόνον , ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐπῳδὰς σαυτῷ περιάγεις , γραΐδια μεθύοντα καὶ παραπαίοντα εἰς τὴν οἰκίαν σου εἰσάγων · καὶ οὐκ αἰσχύνῃ οὐδὲ ἐρυθριᾷς μετὰ τοσαύτην φιλοσοφίαν πρὸς ταῦτα ἐπτοημένος ; Καὶ τὸ χαλεπώτερον τῆς ἀπάτης · ὅταν γὰρ παραινῶμεν ταῦτα καὶ ἀπάγωμεν , δοκοῦντες ἀπολογεῖσθαί φασιν , ὅτι Χριστιανή ἐστιν ἡ γυνὴ ἡ ταῦτα ἐπᾴδουσα , καὶ οὐδὲν ἕτερον φθέγγεται , ἢ τὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ ὄνομα . Διὰ τοῦτο μὲν οὖν αὐτὴν μάλιστα μισῶ καὶ ἀποστρέφομαι , ὅτι τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ Θεοῦ πρὸς ὕβριν κατακέχρηται , ὅτι λέγουσα Χριστιανή εἶναι , τὰ τῶν Ἑλλήνων ἐπιδείκνυται… Διὰ δὴ ταῦτα παρακαλῶ τῆς ἀπάτης και θαρεύειν ταύτης , καὶ καθάπερ βακτηρίαν ἔχειν τὸ ῥῆμα τοῦτο.*"

[513] Gelasius, ep. 42.10, in: Thiel 1867, p. 469: "*Phylacteria omnia, quae non angelorum, ut illi confingunt, sed daemonum magis nominibus consecrata sunt, apocrypha.*" For more information about the survival protective non-Christian magical elements in Late Antiquity see e.g. Franek 2021 and Franek 2022.

[514] Spier 2007, p. 82. One of the necklaces is part of the collection of the Metropolitan Museum, New York (Rogers Fund, inv. n. 58.12): cat. n. 6.16 of this thesis with bibliography, while the other is in the Merz Collection, Bern (inv. n. unknown): Reynolds Brown 1979. The ring, part of the Campana collection in Rome until 1863, is currently housed in Musée du Louvre (inv. n. Bj 1290): see website of the museum for bibliography: https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010255842 (last viewed on 13.08.2024).

such as Jerome, only the "simpleminded" and the "weak women" were prone to be cowed into obedience by the "names which they draw out as if from Hebrew sources to agitate the minds…with a foreign sound so that they admire more what they do not understand."[515]

To satisfy the unrelenting demands for protective and healing amulets among the members of their own congregation, whose views on their appropriateness were based in the social approbation and their ready availability, Church leaders had to accept the objects as such and the only thing left to them was to insist on the presence of Christian iconography on them.[516] And thus Harpocrates and Hecate, who appear at the Piazza della Consolazione necklaces, became to be substituted by the martyrs and the Mother of God.

The Vatican medallion depicting martyrs Felicity and Silanus on the obverse and Christ between Peter and Paul on the reverse is good example of the change described above (fig. 3.32).[517] It was discovered in the Roman catacombs dedicated to the duo and is the only one whose origins are securely linked to the city. It is generally dated to the 4th century, characterized by the flourishing of the cult of the depicted martyrs, cultivated by pope Damasus (366-384).[518] Felicity, lauded for her virtuousness and her role of a sacrificing mother must have been an excellent example for women visiting her tomb to ask for protection, extended to them in life and death possibly also through objects such as this medallion, which could have been produced *en masse* for the celebration of the *dies natalis* of the martyr.[519]

The medallions in general often marked successful participation of Christian worshippers in the *rites de passage* such as baptism, consecration or pilgrimage to a holy place.[520] Written description of a woman as a wearer of devotional medallion can be found in the hagiographical account of the life of martyr Genovefa, the most arcane version of which was written probably in the first half of the 6th century in Merovingian Gaul. In the section describing the consecration of the young virgin by bishop Germanus of Auxerre (c. 378-c. 442/448) the author of the *vita* takes note of a metal disc with a sign of the cross which the bishop hung on the neck of the girl

[515] Jerome, ep. 75.3: "*…ceteraque magis portenta quam nomina, quae ad inperitorum et muliercularum animos concitandos quasi de Hebraicis fontibus hauriunt barbaro simplices quosque terrentes sono, ut, quod non intellegunt, plus mirentur?*" in: database *Epistolae: Medieval Women's Latin Letters*, https://epistolae.ctl.columbia.edu/letter/1031.html (last viewed on 13.08.2024).
[516] De Bruyn 2017, pp. 28-29.
[517] Musei Vaticani, inv. n. MV.60536.0.0. See cat. n. 2.2 in this thesis.
[518] Utro 2003, p. 389.
[519] Salvatori 2018, pp. 171-178 and Ferri 2023, p. 75.
[520] De Rossi 1869b, pp. 56-58.

to remind her of her eternal promise.[521] Current state of archaeological research offers us one visual representation of women with circular devotional objects around their necks as well.[522] They appear among the fourteen portrait busts decorating the mosaic pavement of the southern hall of the episcopal complex in Aquileia, dated to the second decade of the 4th century. Four of them, all depicting women and situated in the north-western corner of the mosaic carpet, are united by similar fashion and artistic expression, with only minor individualizing adjustment to the hairstyles, gestures, and facial features (fig. 3.38).[523] The subjects of the portraits are dressed in dark tunics with red-purple *clavi*, and, what is important for our discussion, unanimously wear golden necklaces with oval golden pendants, decorated in their centre by what can be broadly interpreted as some kind of coloured enamel or stone inlay. The two-dimensionality of the pendants, characteristic for all the portrait busts *in situ*, hinders the reconstruction of what they may have looked like in real life. Even though they were previously interpreted as *encolpia*, they may as likely have been medallions, even though due to the colourful inlays they were nothing like the ones housed in the Vatican Museums.[524] Many, even if not all, scholars agree that the portraits represent donors who contributed funds to the construction and/or decoration of the basilica. While some have suspected familial ties for the female group, it is not impossible that they were united by some other factor as well.[525] Even though the earliest known ascetic communities of consecrated virgins in Aquileia can be linked to the stay of Athanasius of Alexandria (c. 296/8-373) during his second exile in 345, to be captured later in the letters of Jerome, written during his sojourn in the city before his transfer to the Holy Land in 373, it is still possible that the at least 20 years older sombre looking ladies, whose united visual representation mostly depends on the shared dress and votive objects, were joined together by

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[521] *De S. Genovefa Virgine Parisiis in Gallia*, in: Bollandus and Henschenius 1643, p. 138: "*Cui S. Germanus nummum aereum Dei nutu allatum habentem a signum crucis a tellure colligens pro magno munere dedit, inquiens ad eam: Hunc trasforatum pro memoria mei a collo suspensum semper habeto; nulliusque metalli, neque auri, neque argenti, seu cuiuslibet margaritae ornamento collum saltem digitosque tuos onerari patiaris. Nam si saeculi huius vel exiguus decor tuam superaverit mentem, etiam aeternis et caelestibus carebis ornamentis.*" For the discussion on the dating of the different versions of the hagiographical account see: Poulin 1983.

[522] The visual representations of women wearing devotional objects around their necks from late antique Mediterranean is scarce notwithstanding their form. Other than the mosaics discussed in this chapter only the Coptic polychromed statue of a woman with a golden cross around her neck, dated to the 5th century and currently part of the Metropolitan Museum of Art collections (inv. n. 12.185.4) comes to mind.

[523] I thank my dear colleague Klára Doležalová for bringing the mosaic to my attention and guiding me through the sea of bibliography about the Aquileia complex. The discussion about the female portraits is, unfortunately, meagre when compared to the whole extent of the research. See: Stafford 2020a, pp. 184-186; Stafford 2020b, cat. n. M25 (with further bibliography) and Schumacher 1977, pp. 287-300.

[524] For the interpretation of the pendants as *encolpia* see: Menis 1976, p. 78.

[525] For the identification of the depicted persons as donors and members of a familial group see: Stafford 2020a, pp. 185-186.

religious role.[526] They may not have formed an organized group, closed to the world, and may not have represented themselves as ascetics, given the liberal use of golden *tesserae* on their tunics, but, being possibly members of the same extended family, cultivated their spirituality to the extent where they wore its expression on their bodies and where the votive objects formed a crucial part of their visual and social identity.

The other two Vatican medallions are much more mysterious than the one featuring martyr Felicity.[527] What becomes evident at first glance is that they share the iconography of the obverse side, where the Virgin sits on a *cathedra* with the Child in her lap, while three Magi approach them, guided by a bright star and accompanied by a dove. On the face side one of the medallions is decorated by an image of Christ, holding a codex in his left and a cross in his right hand, flanked by angels (fig. 3.33). The landscape is formed by two palm trees, sketched on the recesses of the scene, and two stars above the heads of the angels. Below the figures' feet, two deer drink from a spring surging from a hill. The other medallion carries an image of a cross in its centre, from whose shorter arm hang signs of *alpha* and *omega*. Two male figures surround it (fig. 3.34). They can be identified as martyrs, dressed in tunic and *palla*, holding a long cross in one hand and making a veneration gesture with the other. Above them a haloed bust of bearded Christ appears, crowning them with wreaths of martyrdom. The scene is completed by a small figure on the left, holding a torch, and theatrically framed by curtains on both sides.

The origin of both objects is obscure, which prevents any apart from the vaguest of hypotheses about the identity of their owners. Based on the examples of female devotional objects discussed above what can potentially link them to a female wearer is the scene of Adoration of the Magi on their reverse side, combining in itself the intercessory figure of the Virgin and the spiritual travel insurance in the form of the three Magi. In the period of interest of this thesis the scene of Adoration, displayed on the Vatican medallions, would tap right into the current trend of strengthening of the cult of the Virgin in response to the theological disputes about the human nature of Christ, present both in monumental art and private objects, in which it functioned not only as a confirmation of the Christological dogma, but also as an amulet, offering protection to their wearer.[528]

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[526] Dissaderi 2000, pp. 153-156.
[527] Musei Vaticani, inv. n. inv. n. MV.60539.0.0 and inv. n. MV.60537.0.0. See cat. n. 2.30 and 2.34 in this thesis.
[528] Maguire 2015, pp. 219, 225. Unfortunately, the fact that the cult was by no means restricted to female adherents makes the indubitable identification of the medallions as female objects impossible (see e.g. Herrin 2013, pp. 53-54).

What ties the two medallions to Rome? The one with victorious Christ flanked by angels is accounted for in the letter most probably exchanged between two Jesuit scholars, Antonio Maria Lupi (1695-1737) and Orazio Borgondio (1675-1741), before the death of Lupi in 1737. In it he notes that the object has been found with other "medaglie gentilesche" in a cave close to Rome, whose exact location is unknown to him. The time of the discovery must not have been too distant from the time of writing of the letter, as its circumstances are recorded almost as an anecdote, passed around orally in the circles of the Roman intellectuals but never before written down.[529] The medallion capturing the martyrs in an act of adoration of the Cross is documented for the first time as part of the collection of cavalier Francesco Gualdi (1574-1657), a well-connected Roman intellectual and antiquarian. Its existence in the collection, exhibited in a small museum residing in the cavalier's house, available for the erudite public at least since the 1620s, is attested *ex post* by the stamped dedication letter addressed to cardinal Francesco Barberini (1597-1679) on behalf of the pope Urban VIII (1623-1644). The richly decorated document written in verses, dated to 1630, depicts and identifies the object as a coin and attests its donation to the Vatican Library. Apart from a detailed description of the iconography it does not offer any information as to its origin.[530] The wide circulation of such medallions among the Roman erudites, noted by De Rossi on the basis of primary sources such as letters, may however point out towards the city of Rome or its suburbs as their finding place, as is the case for the medallion described by Lupi.[531]

The answer to the question how did the medallions get to the environs of Rome is not an easy one to come to, but it can aid us in the search for the function of the pieces we are discussing. In this discussion the iconography of the obverse side, which is not shared between them and is much less common than the scene of the Adoration, will be crucial. The motif of the Christ in glory, represented with an angel guard and holding a bejewelled cross in his outstretched hand, in the fashion of the victorious Roman emperor surrounded by his court, has been traced by Christa Ihm to the apse mosaic of the church of San Michele in Africisco in Ravenna, commissioned by the affluent banker Julianus Argentarius and dated to the year 545 (fig. 3.39).[532] While the iconography of the mosaic, depicting young Christ dressed originally in imperial purple tunic and *palla* embroidered with gold, with head surrounded by cruciform halo,

[529] Zaccaria 1785, p. 196.
[530] Franzoni and Tempesta 1992, pp. 1-2, 12-14. For the dedication document, preserved in Museo Civico in Modena see note 92 and Appendix I of the aforementioned article. For the discussion of the donation see: Federici 2022, pp. 198-199.
[531] De Rossi 1869b, pp. 37-38.
[532] Ihm 1960, pp. 30-31.

clutching a cross in his right hand and a Book of Divine Law in his left, accompanied by two archangels acclaiming him through a gesture of a half-raised hand, corresponds almost uncannily with the iconography of the medallion, the private character of the church suggests that it was by no means a pilgrimage hub, from which an impressed pilgrim could have taken the reminder of Christ's victory over sin, equipped with salvific powers, to the environs of Rome.[533]

Could it still be possible that the medallion is a product of its owner's journey to Ravenna, one of the most important cities in the Mediterranean, outshined only by Constantinople at the time of Justinian (527-565)?[534] It may be so, given that the image of Christ in majesty, embodying the unity of the divine and the human nature of the incarnated *logos* in line with the anti-Arian and Monophysite religious politics of the imperial court, is attested at least twice in the city's mosaics before the middle of the 6th century.[535] The second version of the composition with the triumphant Christ, this time seated on a bejewelled lyre-like throne between archangels performing acclamation in the same fashion the faithful would during the liturgy, could have been seen in the conch of the apse of Sant'Agata Maggiore before an earthquake completely destroyed it in 1668 (fig. 3.40).[536] Hypothetically the owner of the medallion could have visited Ravenna and seen both the mosaics, but as neither of the churches was catering to pilgrims and we cannot imagine a workshop producing votive objects *en masse* there, the decision to reproduce the apparition of the triumphant Christ as a keepsake for personal devotion would have had to be their own.[537] In that case they would have had to visit a local metalworking workshop and commission a singular medallion for themselves to remind them of their journey and maybe also protect them on their way home. Were it so, the medallion would indeed be a precious expression of spiritual agency of a single individual.

Yet the possible but improbable way of iconography transfer discussed above is not the only one that could explain the link between the Vatican Museums' medallion and churches in Ravenna. The sponsor of both San Michele in Africisco and Sant'Agata Maggiore mosaics,

[533] About the church of San Michele in Africisco, the original state of the apse mosaic and the unfortunate and insensitive remodelling it had suffered in the hands of Giovanni Moro in the 1850s see: Spadoni and Kniffitz 2007, esp. pp. 337-347. For the private character of the church see: White 2014, pp. 4-22.
[534] For the role of Ravenna in the Mediterranean around the middle of the 6th century see: Herrin 2020, pp. 151-202.
[535] For the interpretation of the iconographic motif in the context of the imperial Church politics see: Spadoni and Kniffitz 2007, pp. 399-409.
[536] Pasi 1973, pp. 144-149 and Torre 1986 with further bibliography.
[537] The presence of at least occasional pilgrims, visiting Ravenna's churches, is attested by low value coins, left by them as offerings: Ferreri 2020, p. 222.

Julianus Argentarius, was most probably Greek-speaking and it is possible that he commissioned workshops from one of the eastern provinces of the Empire to create them, which would point towards another artwork, not taken into consideration during the previous discussion, as possible source of inspiration for both the medallion and the mosaics.[538] The possibility that the medallion's iconography could have been conceived in one of the pilgrimage hubs in *Asiana*, *Pontus*, *Aegyptus*, or *Oriens* (more precisely the area of the Holy Land and modern day Syria), attracting faithful from all over well into the 7th century, is supported by the painting found in the tomb of Theodosia, a *cappelletta* of a small basilica in Antinoë (*Aegyptus*), dated generally to the middle of the 6th century, featuring young Christ, dressed in imperial purple and seated on a throne, holding a codex and flanked by two archangels. The scene is identical to the one decorating the apse of Sant'Agata Maggiore in Ravenna down to the gestures performed by the figures, and is framed by two palm trees that make a re-appearance in the Vatican medallion.[539] The predecessor of the scene in the apse of San Michele in Africisco may also be seen in the 4th-century lamp from Timgad (province *Numidia*), currently housed in the Louvre, which represents victorious Christ flanked by two archangels in an act of stomping over a serpent and a lion, the incarnations of the evil.[540] That the composition, celebrating victorious Christ in the same way the Vatican medallion does, must have been spread all around the Mediterranean, is attested by the existence of a 4th-century terracotta paten from Alexandria, featuring standing Christ holding a *crux gemmata* in his left hand, surrounded by two winged *putti*, prefigurations of the archangels that will substitute them in the following centuries.[541] It is therefore possible that our anonymous owner travelled much further than Ravenna to obtain the medallion, but the destination of their journey ultimately remains a mystery.[542]

The exact location of the iconography source for the Vatican medallion with the Adoration of the Cross by two martyrs, crowned by the bust of Christ descending from Heaven in the presence of the venerating owner of the medallion, holding a flaming torch, lamp or candle, is even harder to pinpoint.[543] The *crux gemmata*, sign of Christ's victory over death, at the centre of the scene provides only general direction in which one should look. In all its variations which

[538] Pasi 1973, p. 154.
[539] About the late antique pilgrimage places and pilgrims' attitudes see: Vikan 2010, pp. 3-17. For the wall painting in Antinoë see: Pasi 1973, pp. 157-160 and Stafford 2020b, cat. n. P1 with updated bibliography.
[540] Pasi 1973, p. 180.
[541] *Ibidem*, p. 181.
[542] It is also possible that they did not have to travel at all as archaeological evidence suggests that devotional objects carrying "blessings" from pilgrimage sites were sold on an open market and pilgrims, too, often collected them for their friends and kin who remained at home: Bollók 2018, p. 89.
[543] The smaller figure was interpreted as the venerating faithful by: Garrucci 1880, p 125.

we will discuss in the following lines the motif bore strong allusion to the relic of the Christ's cross, kept in the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, one of the most precious relics of all, whose particles were sent only to the most powerful, while the others had to settle for touch relics or visual reproductions of both the Cross and the Sepulchre, which can be seen on the Holy Land pilgrim ampoules containing sacred oil, preserved since the early 7th century in the cathedral of Monza and Bobbio (fig. 3.41).[544]

On the front side of a Dumbarton Oaks ampulla, most explicitly referencing the Holy Cross relic and its shrine, an equal-armed cross is rising above the hill of Golgotha, from which flow four rivers of Paradise. Above it the bust of bearded Christ can be seen among the sun and the moon, underscoring the cosmic significance of his victory. Two faithful pilgrims crouch at the foot of the cross in an act of veneration.[545] Even though several of the elements appear on the medallion from the Vatican Museums, too, the martyrs to be crowned are missing, as well as the signs of *alpha* and *omega* hanging from the cross.

In the first half of the 7th century the Adoration of the Cross re-appears on the lid of the so-called *capsella Vaticana* of an unknown provenance, found in the chapel of the Sancta Sanctorum in 1905, having served previously either as a reliquary for the piece of the Holy Cross or as an eucharistic pyx (fig. 3.42). In this case the large *crux gemmata* is adorated by two winged angels, the bust of Christ being substituted by the hand of God, reinforced by a dove, holding a wreath in its beak.[546] Once again, there are several discrepancies with the iconography of the Vatican medallion, even if the ultimate message remains the same.

If we look for comparative material from the 6th century, several pieces match closely the scene that can be observed on the enigmatic medallion. The glass eucharistic chalice probably from Syria, dated to the verge of the 7th century, not only brought to mind of the faithful the shrine of the Holy Cross through a representation of a small sacred building with a cross flanked by angels on display, but also depicted on its other side a pair of male figures, one of which is now lost, praying before a large bejewelled cross, accompanied by stars and the signs of *alpha* and *omega* (fig. 3.43). The figure of Christ is missing in this case, but the letters in themselves attest to his omnipresence and his return at the end of time.[547] That the iconography of the Adoration

[544] Dumbarton Oaks, inv. n. BZ 1948.18, in: Jäggi 2017, p. 215; Vikan 2010, pp. 36-40.
[545] *Ibidem*, pp. 38-39; Ihm 1960, pp. 83-84.
[546] Vatican Museums, inv. n. MV.61039.0.0. For further bibliography see: Noga-Banai 2008, pp. 162-163 and Palladino 2022, pp. 96-97.
[547] Dumbarton Oaks, inv. n. BZ.1937.21, in: Elbern 1962. See: http://museum.doaks.org/objects-1/info/27167 (last viewed on 14. 11. 2024) for updated dating and bibliography.

of the Cross by martyrs does not date to the late 6th century, but must have been circulating in the eastern Mediterranean and being transferred by pilgrims outside of it at least several decades earlier is attested by the now lost 6th-century apse mosaics of the martyrial basilica of Sant'Eusebio in Vercelli and of the church of San Gregorio fuori le mura in Rimini (fig. 3.44-45). In them local saints were represented venerating the cross, standing on a hill from which paradisiac rivers were flowing. In the case of the church in Rimini even the palm trees such as those on the Vatican medallion appeared on the fringes of the scene and the martyrs held the crowns of their martyrdom in their hands, but the bust of Christ was absent.[548]

Even though the medallion from the Vatican Museums is officially dated to the end of the 5th century, the possible iconographic parallels mentioned above and the fact that the depictions of the bust of Christ above the cross seem to have been produced only for a limited amount of time between the second half of the 6th century and the first half of the 7th century suggest that the object may be younger than previously accepted.[549] Despite being closely related to a handful of artefacts and mosaics produced and circulating around the Mediterranean, its closest source of inspiration is impossible to find. It can be hypothesized that it was created in the Holy Land as a pilgrim souvenir to remind its owner of the relic of the Holy Cross they saw. But, as the following paragraph will demonstrate, it may as well have been related to the city of Rome, to which its later life can be traced.

The iconography of the cross flanked by two martyrs crowned by Christ, with intentional references made to the Holy Land relic, appears in the apse mosaic of the chapel of Primus and Felicianus in Santo Stefano Rotondo in Rome, commissioned in the middle of the 7th century (fig. 3.46). In it the pontifex of Jerusalemite origin, Theodore (642-649), had the martyrs, whose remains were venerated *in loco* after their transfer from the *extra muros* sanctuary, represented on the sides of a massive *crux gemmata*, placed in a paradisiacal flowery meadow, above which the bust of Christ induced the mental connection between the cross and the physical death instrument on Golgotha.[550] On one hand, the composition in the apse reveals a certain nostalgic memory of the True Cross, restored shortly before the creation of the mosaic by bishop Modestos (632-634) after Jerusalem had shaken off the Persian occupation. Commemoration

[548] Aimone and Tossini 2022, pp. 54-56, fig. 63-64. For the objects of personal devotion instrumental for the spreading of the iconography around the Mediterranean see: Warland 1986, p. 118 and cat. n. E3-E7, E9-E10.
[549] For the depictions of the bust of Christ above the cross see: Warland 1986, pp. 116-120. The stylistic analysis is of no use in the case of the medallions, as due to the simplicity of their designs, discussed in previous pages, the execution of the motifs does not differ much between the 4th and the 7th century.
[550] Warland 1986, pp. 118 and Taddei 2022 with the complete bibliography on the chapel.

of a Holy Land site, especially potent in a church where the Jerusalemite cult of St. Stephen flourished for centuries, was completely in sync with the continuous referencing and reflections of Jerusalem as "the ideological centre of the Christian empire" in Rome, rising as the new spiritual capital of the Christian world, in motion after the legendary pilgrimage of the Constantine's mother Helena to the Holy Land and the diffusion of the cult of the Cross relics all over the empire.[551] On the other hand, the presence of the two martyrs on the sides of the cross resonated with the local tradition of martyr veneration and martyr *memoria*, flourishing ever since the initial growth spurt during the pontificate of Damasus.[552]

It is also noteworthy that several motifs from the Vatican medallion can be seen on the walls of the two central rooms of the Roman Catacomba di Ponziano, the so-called "sanctuary of the barred gallery", dedicated to the veneration of the relics of martyrs Pollion, Milix, Pymenius, Abdon, and Senen, and the adjacent baptistery, which was in function since the later 6th or the first half of the 7th century, when the space was redecorated with the paintings currently in place.[553] On the right wall of the sanctuary above what Simone Piazza and Mara Minasi identified as *fenestella confessionis* that allowed the pilgrims to peek at their relics, Milix and Pymenius were depicted flanking a *crux gemmata* rising from a paradisiacal tuft of plants (fig. 3.47).[554] Another bejewelled cross, this time decorated by *pendilia* with letters A and Ω and rising from the purifying waters, greeted the pilgrim when they reached the depths of earth, descending into the baptistery (fig. 3.48). The powerful symbol of salvation, now completely obliterated by the rising water level, visually communicated with the scene of the Baptism of Christ directly above it, creating the death-resurrection axis present in the late antique baptismal *praxis*. To the left Christ crowned Persian martyrs Abdon and Senen, putting his hands on their heads in the same gesture that John the Baptist performs in the scene of Christ's baptism.[555] While it is impossible to say with precision whether the owner of the medallion may have been a pilgrim who descended to the catacomb to venerate local saints' relics and wanted to preserve their blessing by replicating the figures and decorative elements *in situ*, or a neophyte who had

[551] The places most strongly referencing Jerusalem or transferring it, either as a mental construct or physically, to late antique Rome, were: Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, Santa Pudenziana, Santa Maria Maggiore: Taddei 2022, pp. 178,194; De Blaauw 2014, esp. pp. 136-137.
[552] Taddei 2022, p. 194.
[553] *Ibidem*, pp. 194-197; Piazza 2013, pp. 103-105; Minasi 2012 with further bibliography. Taddei 2022, p. 194 notes that some form of sanctuary, primarily dedicated to the worship of Abdon and Senen, was operational since the 5th century. For the discussion about the function and different phases of existence of the space most often identified as baptistery see: Ricciardi 2001.
[554] Piazza 2013, p. 103; Minasi 2012, p. 574.
[555] Minasi 2012, p. 573.

the medallion made to commemorate their death and resurrection through baptism at the site, both hypotheses are not improbable. Be as it may, in its concrete form, the cross on the medallion brough the death of Christ into the present as a continuous act of salvation. It served not as an immaterial symbol, but as a tangible object, the pure materiality of which could offer the wearer of the medallion, endangered by primal fears, protection and salvation, activated through touch.[556]

Conclusions

The late antique devotional experience in Rome was fundamentally a synaesthetic one, where the sacred was apprehended not merely through a single sense but through a complex interplay of all sensory faculties. This sensory saturation – a deliberate strategy employed in sacred spaces – created what the Byzantine tradition would later term *teleiosis*, a ritual completion and fulfilment through sacred performance.[557] In the churches we have examined, especially Santa Maria Maggiore and Santa Maria Antiqua, this manifested in architectural and decorative programs that deliberately structured the sensory experiences of the faithful according to their gender and social status.

Both sacred spaces and objects affected the faithful of Rome (and Mediterranean in general, as the city was by no means isolated island when it comes to the mechanisms of faith) through multisensory overload of smells, sounds, tactility of textured materials and specifically designed viewpoints and highlights, intermingling to create a mental space where humans could get closer to holy figures, who offered them salvation and protection. Incense smoke rising in columns, oil lamps casting intricate shadows across gilded surfaces, light reflecting from precious materials, and the resonance of chants all contributed to what Byzantine sources described as *pathema* – an internal agitation that prepared the faithful for divine encounter.[558]

Women, as we have seen, were by no means excluded from this kind of elevated spiritual experience. On the contrary, it seems that they often accessed the spiritual space be it through sight, touch, or prayer, to seek guidance from the female biblical figures, martyrs and the Mother of God, who were able to offer them positive role models in the different life and social

[556] Warland 1986, pp. 118-119.
[557] Pentcheva 2010, pp. 1-5.
[558] *Ibidem*, pp. 1-2.

roles they fulfilled, including their role of virgins and widows. And as we have discussed in the case of Santa Maria Maggiore, within their relationship with the Church and more specifically inside the liturgical space the “sacred” women could become both consumers and sources of faith-inducing sensory experience.

The strategic placement of the votive images within sacred spaces reveals a sophisticated understanding of embodied faith. The physicality of devotion − the act of kneeling before them, touching them with hands and lips, leaving offerings − demonstrates how the faithful’s bodies became instruments of worship that activated the sacred power believed to reside in these sacred artefacts. The personal devotional objects (medallions, reliquaries, and amulets) further extended this sensory engagement beyond the confines of sacred buildings. Through these portable items, the faithful carried the material connections to divine presence with them and incorporated them into their own bodies.

What emerges from our investigation is a picture of late antique Roman devotion as a richly textured, embodied practice where the boundaries between material and immaterial, visible and invisible, present and absent were constantly negotiated through sensory engagement. Women participated fully in this devotional economy, not merely as passive recipients but as active agents who shaped devotional practices through their patronage, prayer, and physical presence within sacred spaces. These experiences were particularly significant for them as they offered alternative pathways to spiritual agency in a period when female institutional roles within the Church were becoming increasingly constrained.

4. Women participating in liturgical practices: reality or wishful thinking?

Ancient Church orders are one of the most fascinating genres of early Christian literature, intended to offer prescriptions for liturgical practice and ecclesiastical discipline, rooted in the wisdom of the Apostolic times.[559] Prior to the year 1800 only one such text, the *Apostolic Constitutions*, was generally known, as it was published already in 1563.[560] In the span of less than a century, however, discoveries of other Church orders dramatically increased the knowledge of what was perceived as a pattern of religious organization of the first centuries of Christianity. In 1843 Johann Wilhelm Bickell published the Greek text of what he called the *Apostolic Church Order* (also known as *Constitutiones Ecclesiasticae Apostolorum*). Just five years later Henry Tattam produced an edition comprising not only of the Bickell's order and of a different recension of the *Apostolic Constitutions*, but also enriched with a previously unknown document, nicknamed for the lack of better title the *Egyptian Church Order* (also known as *Apostolic Tradition*). In 1854 Paul de Lagarde added to the collection by editing a Syriac version of a document generally referred to as the *Didascalia Apostolorum*. Shortly after the same erudite went to publish a Greek text of a work that became known as the *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles through Hippolytus*. In 1870 Daniel von Haneberg made public an Arabic text of what he claimed to be the *Cannons of Hippolytus* and finally on the verge of the new century Ignatius Rahmani translated a Syriac document, the *Testamentum Domini*, which topped all the previously published orders by claiming to be the transcript of words of Jesus himself to the Apostles after his resurrection.[561]

Parts of the different orders exhibited pronounced similarities that could have been explained only by a direct literary relationship. What was the nature of this relationship was the question that did not let the researchers sleep, causing an inordinate number of discussions and hypotheses. Although the authenticity of the texts did not go entirely unchallenged, in the first stages of their research they were accepted by many as genuine apostolic works.[562] And even after the more-or-less successful reconstruction of the network of relationships by which they

[559] Bradshaw 1992, p. 80.
[560] Torrigo 1563.
[561] Bradshaw 1992, pp. 80-82. See: Bickell 1843, pp. 107-132; Tattam 1848; De Lagarde 1854; De Lagarde 1856, pp. 1-23; De Haneberg 1870; Rahmani 1899.
[562] Bradshaw 1992, pp. 80, 82-83.

were connected and establishing of their provenance and dating in the course of the 20th century, disproving the hypothesis that they go as far as the first Church of the Apostles, they retained the image of authoritative normative treatises that are referred to every time some aspect of the ecclesiastical hierarchy is brought into question, an excellent example being the relatively recent activity of the *Study Commission on the Women's Diaconate*, created by pope Francis to study the possibility of allowing women to serve as deacons in the Catholic Church and active between the years 2016 and 2019, searching for arguments in support and against the female ordination by examining the text of the *Apostolic Constitutions*.[563]

While the ancient Church orders don't exactly crawl with women, substantial part of them is by no means silent about the fact that they played an active role in the religious life of the early Christian communities. Both the *Didascalia Apostolorum* and the *Apostolic Constitutions* take the existence of female deacons with official role within the Church hierarchy equal to the role of the male ones for granted, with the *Apostolic Constitutions* being more vocal about the specifics of their everyday service, which included the duty to accompany any woman who approached a male deacon or a bishop, presumably for confidential conversation, in order to guarantee the propriety of the encounters; the guarding of the female entrance to the liturgical space to guarantee proper attire and orderliness of the female part of the congregation; pastoral visits to the homes of sick women and anointing of the naked bodies of female catechumens during baptism. To the last responsibility the *Didascalia Apostolorum* add the post-baptismal instruction regarding the maintenance of the holiness of baptism in ongoing life.[564] The *Testamentum Domini* even testifies that the deaconesses held a sacramental office, as they gave

[563] Pylvänäinen 2020, pp. 15-17, quoting various press releases regarding the activity of the commission.

[564] Madigan and Osiek 2005, pp. 106-108, 110-112 with English translation of the sources: *Didascalia Apostolorum*/ *Apostolic Constitutions* 2.26.6, 2.57.10, 2.58.6, 3.16.2,4 (parts specific only for the *Apostolic Constitutions* are put in brackets): "Also let the female deacon be honoured by you as the type of the Holy Spirit, doing or saying nothing apart from the deacon, [just as the Paraclete does or says nothing of himself but glorifying Christ, remains according to his will. And just as no one can believe in Christ without the teaching of the Spirit, so let no woman approach the male deacon or the bishop without the female deacon]." "[And let the porters stand in the entrances of the men in order to guard them and let the female deacons stand at those of the women...]". "If any poor person should come, either local or visitor, whether elderly or young in age, and there is no room, let [the deacon] with all his heart find room for such as these, so that his regard be not merely human, but that his ministry might be pleasing to God. [And let the female deacons do the same thing for the women as they come forward, whether they be poor or rich]." "For we stand in need of a woman deacon for many reasons, first in the baptism of women, [the male deacon] will anoint [only their foreheads] with [holy] oil [and after him], the female deacon [shall anoint] them; for there is no necessity for the women to be seen by the men…". "You therefore, O bishop anoint the head of those who are to be baptized, whether men or women, [with holy oil as a type of the spiritual baptism]. Then, either you, [the bishop] or the presbyter under you say the sacred formula upon them invoking [Father, Son, and Holy Spirit], and baptize them [in the water]. And [let the male deacon] receive [the man] and the female deacon the women, so that the distribution of the benefits of the seal of baptism may be done with sobriety. [And after this, let the bishop anoint with ointment those who have been baptized.]" For the Greek text see: Funk 1906, pp. 104-105, 163, 168-169, 208-211. See also the in-depth study of the role of the deaconess in the *Apostolic Constitutions* by: Pylvänäinen 2020.

the bread and wine to pregnant women and celebrated communion with them when they were unable to participate in the Eucharistic liturgy at church.[565]

In contrast with the rest of the orders the *Testamentum Domini* goes to great lengths to describe the place of the widow within the local Christian congregations and ritual roles linked to her status. And the competences detailed in the first and second book of the order are generous indeed. Her prayers for the salvation of others are perceived as more powerful and closer to the ears of God as any other, a recurrent opinion which was previously reflected in the stipulations of the *Didascalia Apostolorum*, the *Apostolic Tradition* and the *Canons of Hippolytus* that widows are appointed mainly for the sake of prayer (*Canons* add that they are to take care of the sick as well and *Didascalia* allow them to give counsel on the topic of righteousness and faith in God).[566] The widow is not only to guard the morals of the virgins and instruct them in the intricacies of the ascetic lifestyle, but also to be responsible for the proper conduct of women at church, especially during the ritual of baptism, for home visits of ill female members of the congregation, for the instruction of female catechumens and for their anointing. As becomes clear from the previous lines, the role of the widow is interpreted as superior to that of the deaconess, but she is by no means allowed to exercise her authority over men, a limit set for female members of the Church hierarchy by all orders in question. [567] The *Apostolic Church*

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[565] Eisen 2000, p. 150, quoting Testamentum Domini 2.20: "Similarly if a woman be pregnant (and) sick, and cannot fast these two days, let her fast that…one day…, taking on the first (day) bread and water. And if she cannot come, let a deaconess carry the Offering to her." For the Latin version of the source see: Rahmani 1899, p. 143: "*Si mulier praegnans aegrotet, et nequeat observare jejunium illis duobus diebus, jejunet altera die, sumatque in prima panem et aquam, et si nequit accedere (ad ecclesiam), diaconissa ad ipsam deferat communionem.*"

[566] Eisen 2000, pp. 144-145, 148-149, 151-152. For *Traditio Apostolica* 10 see: Bradshaw 2023, p. 45: "Let the widow be appointed by the word, becoming enrolled with the rest, but she does not receive ordination by the hand because she does not teach but is appointed only for prayer, which is allowed to all." For the Latin version of the text see: Botte 1984, 66: "*Vidua autem instituitur propter orationem: haec autem est omnium.*" For *Canones Hippolyti* 9 see: De Haneberg 1870, p. 69: "*Viduis propter copiosas precationes, infirmorum curam et frequens jejunium praecipuus (honor) tribuatur.*" For *Didascalia Apostolorum* 3.5.1-3 see: Funk 1906, pp. 186-188: "*Qui enim dona dant, non suis manibus ea viduis dent, sed tibi conferant, ut tu, qui calamitosos maxime cognoscis, tanquam bonus dispensator eis dispertias e donis tibi datis…Nihil autem aliud curet vidua nisi orare pro dantibus et pro tota ecclesia. Ab aliquo quidpiam interrogata ne protinus respondeat praeterquam de iustitia solum ac de fide in Deum*." For the English translation see: Stewart-Sykes 2009, p. 184: "For a widow should have no other concern except to pray for those who give and for the entire church. And if anybody should ask her about anything she should not answer quickly, except concerning righteousness and faith in God…".

[567] Madigan and Osiek 2005, pp. 153-154, 157-158 with English translation of the source: *Testamentum Domini* 1.40, 2.4, 2.8: "Let her exhort disobedient women, let her instruct the ignorant, convert the guilty, and let her teach those, that they be chaste, and let her examine carefully the deaconesses. Let her make known to those who enter how and who they ought to be and let her exhort those who remain outside. To those who hear, let her patiently offer counsel concerning those things that are good… Let her foster those who long to be in virginity or purity…Let her reprehend privately those saying superfluous and vain things. If they refuse to listen, let her take with her a woman advanced in age, or let her take the matter to a hearing of the bishop… Let her visit the sick women, every Sunday taking with her one or two deacons to help them…Her supplications to God will be accepted, and they will be the sacrifice and altar of God." "Let women not ornament themselves…lest the young men and church be snared; but let them behave with modesty and with knowledge: otherwise, let them be admonished by the widows who sit in front". "Let the women be anointed by the widows who sit in front, while the presbyter recites over

Order offers even more intriguing image of the duties of the "holy" widows, who are not only intercessors between the ordinary members of the congregation and the presbyters and caregivers to the sick, but are on occasion receivers of prophetic revelations.[568]

The *Testamentum Domini* also takes notice of the *presbyterae*, who pray together with the bishop during the Paschal liturgy. Even though we know nothing more about their ritual role, this small fragment confirms their special status and place within the Church hierarchy.[569]

But it is too soon for the researcher who is interested in the role women played in the religious life in the city of Rome to rejoice. The reasons for scepticism become obvious after the provenance and the circulation of the "apostolic" orders come under scrutiny.

The *Didascalia Apostolorum* appear to be a Greek-written compilatory work of at least two authors, sourcing majority of the text from further unidentifiable intermediary manuscript, intended as a pastoral and disciplinary manual, which joined together an early 2nd-century ancient Church order, shared between the *Didascalia* and the *Apostolic Church Order*, and a late 1st-century catechetical manual of the so-called *Two Ways* tradition type, a common ancestor of both *Didascalia* and the 2nd-century Syriac order *Didache*, parts of which one of the later redactions of *Didascalia* most probably also employed. Especially the sections concerned with baptism and the role of widows, which fall into the scope of interest of this thesis, seem to have been sourced from the primordial ancient Church order mentioned above. The complex

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them the formula. And also at the baptism let those widows receive the women wrapped in a veil while the bishop offers the formulas of profession; and again while he offers the formulas of renunciation." For the Latin edition of the source see: Rahmani 1899, pp. 96-97, 116-119, 128-131: "*Exhortetur mulieres inobedientes, erudiat ignorantes, reas convertat, doceatque illas, ut sint pudicae, diaconissasque perquirat. Quae introeunt, efficiat ut sciant, quomodo et quaenam ipsae esse debeant; et, quae extra manent, adhortetur. Eis, quae audiunt, consilium patienter praebeat de iis, quae bona sunt…Foveat illas, quae cupiunt esse in virginitate vel puritate…Superflua et vana loquentes privatim reprehendat, si vero non audiunt, sibi adjungat mulierem aetate provectam, aut deferat ad aures episcopi...visitet aegrotas, omni die dominico secum adducens diaconum unum aut duos, easdemque adjuvet…Ipsius supplicationes ad Deum erunt acceptae, eruntque holocaustum et altare Dei.*" "*Mulieres sese exhibeant graves et decentes in suo omatu...ne forte juvenes, qui in ecclesia sunt, irretiantur. Itaque mulieres in ecclesia stent modeste et scienter: secus a viduis habentibus praecedentiam sessionis admoneantur…*". "*Mulieres a viduis habentibus praecedentiam sessionis ungantur, cum presbyter recitat super illas (formulam). Item in collatione baptismi esedem viduae intra velum teneant mulieres obducto velo, cum epi-scopus profert formulas professionis ; itemque dum profert formulas abrenuntiationis.*". See also: Eisen 2000, p. 150.

[568] Eisen 2000, pp. 66, 149. For the primary source see: *Apostolic Church Order* 21, in: Stewart-Sykes 2006, p. 112: "Kephas said: Three widows should be appointed. Two are to continue in prayer for all who are in temptation and for revelations concerning whatever is necessary. One is to assist women who are being troubled by sickness. She is to be a good minister, discreet in communicating what is necessary to the presbyters, not avaricious, not fond of much wine, so that she may be sober in her service during the night, and in whatever other acts of charity she desires to perform." See also Greek original on pp. 100-101.

[569] Madigan and Osiek 2005, p. 158 with the English translation of the source: *Testamentum Domini* 2.19: "Let the female presbyters remain with the bishop until the dawn, praying and resting." For the Latin edition see: Rahmani 1899, pp. 140-141: "*Presbyterae maneant apud episcopum usque ad tempus matutinum, orantes et requiescentes.*" For the interpretation of the *presbyterae* in the order as female presbyters see e.g.: Eisen 2000, pp. 126-127 and Karras 2007, pp. 333-337.

process of the creation of the *Didascalia* occurred most probably between the second quarter of the 3rd and the first quarter of the 4th century. Early on they circulated in the region of Syria, from which they originated. As early as the 4th century the Syriac and Latin translations were made, the latter of which, incorporated into the so-called *Fragmentum Veronense*, will be analysed more in depth below.[570]

The so-called *Apostolic Church Order* is likewise a composite work. After an epistolary opening describing the gathering of the Apostles there follows an ethical section consisting of the *Two Ways* tradition type material, in which different sections are attributed to different Apostles. The list of Apostles has reached the compiler through an intercessory text, which has common roots with the apocryphal *Epistula Apostolorum*, usually traced to the early 2nd-century Middle East. After this there is a section concerning ministries, and then a discussion of the ministries of women. The former section was sourced from a previously existing Church order, which included a passage dealing with the ministry of widows, created not later than the middle of the 2nd century. This predecessor was a source of inspiration for the section dealing with widows in *Didascalia Apostolorum* as well. The redactorial joining and extension of the disparate parts came from the hands of a single Greek-writing scribe, to be traced to Cappadocia or Syria of the early 3rd century.[571] Different sections of the order have been translated into Syriac, Ethiopic, Arabic, Sahidic, Bohairic and Latin throughout the Middle Ages.[572]

The Greek title of the *Apostolic Constitutions* and their inner structure, which gives the Apostles the role of speakers and quotes New Testament in a way suggesting continuity between the two texts, simulates the appearance of a document containing commandments given by the Apostles themselves and distributed by Clement of Rome (92-100). In fact, however, the order was compiled in Syria around the year 380, a conclusion that can be reached on the basis of the appearance of regionally and temporally specific liturgical celebrations and names of months, as well as from the fact that the compiler was clearly inspired by the canons of the council of Laodicea (364). The liturgy described in the document is that of a large urban settlement with access to other episcopacies, most probably Antioch. Despite the fact that the *Apostolic Constitutions* are a mosaic of various reworked fragments of older authoritative texts, their inner coherence, cross-referencing and constancy with which certain concepts permeate the text as a whole suggest that is was compiled by only one editor or a workshop with an erudite leading

[570] Stewart-Sykes 2009, pp. 11-55. The *Two Ways* tradition's name is derived from the fact that it presents the Scriptural teaching in the form of the way of life and the way of death.
[571] Stewart-Sykes 2006, pp. 1-86.
[572] Bradshaw 1992, p. 88.

figure and is not a product of consecutive redactions. The parts concerning the activity of the deaconesses (books 2 and 3) are heavily reliant on the *Didascalia Apostolorum*, while the books 7 and 8 source their content mainly from the *Didache* and the *Apostolic Tradition*, which will be discussed below and with which the *Apostolic Constitutions* share the sections dealing with the appointment of widows and virgins. The compiler also incorporated some older Jewish liturgical prayers and citations from the Scripture (as preserved in the version of Lucian of Antioch (c 240-312), used in the Antiochene area) and Apocryphal Acts, as well as the Clementine literature in order to strengthen the pseudo-epigraphic character of the work. At the same time, he was aiming to create a wholly new document, not just a copy of older sources, thus he wrote many passages himself.[573] The last section of the *Apostolic Constitutions*, the so-called *Apostolic Canons*, gained importance as a separate text with a life of its own. That it must have circulated in the dioceses with Latin liturgy can be concluded from the fact that the early 6th-century *Decretum Gelasianum* felt the need to reject it as heretical due to the suspicion of Arianic tendencies of the author. Despite this, it must have remained authoritative in some religious intellectual circles, given that Dionisius Exiguus (c. 470-c. 544) translated the first 50 canons to Latin during his stay in Rome in the first half of the 6th century.[574] Whether at least part of other books of the *Apostolic Constitutions* was also circulated in Rome cannot be neither proven nor disproven, even less when our interest lies in only two of them, dealing with the activity of the deaconesses.

And finally let's have a look at the *Apostolic Tradition* and its derivatives. This piece of Church order literature contains instructions and regulations dealing with ordinations, the offering of the Eucharist and other community meals, the catechumenate and baptism, the offering of prayer and individual study. It has been conventionally attributed to a 3rd-century figure of Hippolytus of Rome (c. 170-c. 235).[575] In the last four decades, however, several authors successfully casted doubt over the traditional interpretation of the text as a work of a single authoritative figure, pointing out that its lack of unity, logical progression, frequent incoherencies, doublets and contradictions suggest that it is rather a collection of community rules from disparate traditions brought together by various hands. Some of the words the order employs fell out of use after the 2nd century, some were not used until the 3rd or the 4th century. The chapter dealing with the prayer of the widows falls within the oldest material, to be dated

[573] Pylvänäinen 2020, pp. 47-78.
[574] Metzger 1985, pp. 73-74. For the discussion about whether or not the compiler of the text was Arian and why he was perceived as such through much of the existence of the order see: Pylvänäinen 2020, pp. 79-120.
[575] Stewart-Sykes 2001, p. 11.

to the 2nd century, most probably also a patchwork of directions for admission to different Church offices, instructions for performance of baptism, and some scattered instructions regarding other aspects of religious life, including the Eucharist, brought together around the first half of the 3rd century to form the earliest version of the *Apostolic Tradition*, which was subsequently modified by further additions in the course of the 3rd and the early 4th century.[576] The parallels between the liturgical practices described in the document and the later Roman rite are scarce and even those that are present may have entered the Roman liturgy as a result of import of the *Apostolic Tradition* or some intermediary text to Rome. The Greek-written order circulated more widely in the dioceses *Aegyptus*, *Oriens* and *Asiana* than in the dioceses where the liturgy was celebrated in Latin, which may suggest that the order was first compiled in the eastern Mediterranean, but as so little is known about the Roman liturgical practice before the 6th century, the Roman origin of the document cannot be completely disproven.[577] Even if the order is a work of a member of the Roman Church or if it circulated widely within the Italian diocese, it is notorious for the refusal of any feminine ministry apart from the public prayer of the widows, making for insufficient source in the search for female agency within the religious life of Rome.[578]

The last two orders that discuss religious roles of women are, as already signalled at the beginning of the previous paragraph, derivatives of the Greek manuscript of the *Apostolic Tradition*, possibly datable to the 4th century. The first one, the *Canons of Hippolytus*, maintain the tradition of the Hippolytic authorship of the regulations they contain. Written in Egypt in the second third of the 4th century, they are the earliest known spin-off of the *Apostolic Tradition* and although their author seems to have freely paraphrased, supplemented, and adapted his source in the light of his own ecclesiastical situation and liturgical tradition, he did not significantly change its scope when it comes to women, thus also speaking only about the prayer of the widows. This order most probably circulated exclusively in the areas of Egypt and the Middle East, as it survives only in an Arabic version which derives from a lost Coptic translation of the original Greek manuscript.[579] On the other hand, the late 4th or 5th-century *Testamentum Domini*, compiled possibly in Syria on the basis of the same Greek manuscript of the *Apostolic Tradition* that gave rise to the *Canons of Hippolytus*, enriched with a further unidentified source

[576] Bradshaw *et al.* 2002, pp. 2-5 and Bradshaw 2023, pp. 3-5.
[577] Bradshaw *et al.* 2002, pp. 5-6. For more arguments in support of the Roman provenance see: Stewart-Sykes 2001, pp. 18-19, 22-32, 38-45, 49-50 and Stewart-Sykes 2004.
[578] For the conclusion that there is no true place for women in the rituals described by the *Apostolic Tradition* see: Martimort 1986, p. 187.
[579] Bradshaw 1992, pp. 92-93 and Stewart-Sykes 2004, pp. 240-241.

containing the description of the Apocalypse and various addenda from the hands of the compiler himself, extensively treats the liturgical and extra-liturgical role of both widows and deaconesses. It is, however, of not much use for the purposes of the discussion about the situation in the Church of Rome, as its subsequent translations first to Coptic and then to Syriac, Arabic and Ethiopic suggest that it circulated above all in the same areas as the *Canons of Hippolytus*.[580]

Apart from the *Apostolic Tradition*, which may have or may have not stemmed from the Roman milieu and circulated around the diocese *Italiae* as soon as the 4th century, *Didascalia Apostolorum* and the *Apostolic Church Order* seeped into the consciousness of at least some erudite circles on the peninsula when they were compiled together with the *Apostolic Tradition* and translated to Latin most probably in the last decades of the 4th century. Although the extent of the original translation is unknown, fragments of it survived in the so-called *Fragmentum Veronense*, a palimpsest datable to the late 5th century and created possibly in Verona, a location implied by the half-uncial used in it and typical for the region. The fragmentary state of the orders included in the *Fragmentum* is due to the fact that only certain leaves of the earlier manuscript were reused for the later work, an 8th-century copy of the *Sentences* of Isidore of Seville (601-636). [581] Thus, only chapters 1-8, part of chapter 21, chapters 26-38, last part of chapter 41 and chapters 42-43 survive from the *Apostolic Tradition*, none of which deals with women as active agents in the Church hierarchy. From *Didascalia Apostolorum*, only parts of each chapter (1.1-1.2, 1.5-1.7, 1.8 (partially)-1.10, 2.1-2.2, 2.7-2.11, 2.14 (partially)-2.15 (partially), 2.18 (partially)-2.19, 2.20 (partially)-2.22 (partially), 2.23-2.24, 2.26-2.28 (partially), 2.34 (partially)-2.35 (partially), 2.58-2.59 (partially), 3.6 (partially)-3.8 (partially), 3.12 (partially)-3.13, 4.1-4.5 (partially), 5.7 (partially), 6.7 (partially)-6.12 (partially), 6.13-6.16 (partially), 6.17 (partially)-6.18 (partially), 6.19-6.23) survive within the *Fragmentum*. Thus, only the section confirming the existence of the deaconesses within the Church hierarchy is traceable, while the sections dealing with the actual activity of deaconesses and widows disappeared. Only in the case of the *Apostolic Church Order* the section 21, enlightening the reader about the role of widows, who not only pray, but also receive revelations, administer benefactions and care for the sick remained intact, along with most of the second half of the order. Even though it cannot be concluded with certainty, it is possible that the omission of most sections dealing with women is a result of the recycling of the manuscript in the 8th-century, not

[580] Bradshaw 1992, pp. 95-96; Stewart-Sykes 2004, pp. 240-241; Madigan and Osiek 2005, p. 150.
[581] The last edition of the manuscript was published by: Tidner 1963. For more information see: Bradshaw 1992, pp. 97-101; Steimer 1992, pp. 106-113; Bradshaw *et al.* 2002, pp. 7-8.

the initial intention of the late 4th-century translator. Yet even thus, while the circulation of a Church order compilation which tried to insinuate that the competences of deaconesses and widows are supported by the authority of the teachings of the Apostles may have encouraged women to exercise their agency more freely, at the same time it does not automatically guarantee that women in the dioceses with predominantly Latin liturgy where it circulated indeed fulfilled roles within the Church hierarchy. Even the extent of the circulation of the order cannot be estimated with precision. It would depend on the dogmatic background of the compiler, who was suspected of Arianism in the past.[582] Despite insubstantial evidence to back such claims, this hypothesis puts focus on the idea that in the timeframe of the late 4th century, when most of the bishops in the diocese *Italiae*, such as those of Aquilea, Verona, Trent, Brescia, Pavia, Bologna and Vercelli, but above all the Roman bishop Damasus (366-384) and the bishop of Milan Ambrose (374-397), whose legacy was perpetuated by their successors, organized their politics around the support of the Nicene creed, wider circulation of a document created in any environment deemed heretic or at least suspicious may have been possible in the northern part of the peninsula, then still a frontier zone of Christianity, with a handful of bishoprics scattered across a huge area, but certainly not in and around the cities under the direct control of the pro-Nicene bishops. Especially not in Rome where the authority of its bishop was especially pronounced.[583]

To conclude, only four of the six Church orders that make references to women as legitimate part of the Church hierarchy and as playing active role in the religious rituals, namely the *Didascalia Apostolorum*, the *Apostolic Church Order*, the *Apostolic Constitutions* and the *Testamentum Domini*, go to describe the scope of their competences in a more detailed fashion. And from those, only the *Didascalia Apostolorum* and the *Apostolic Church Order* were translated to Latin in the period of our interest and had greater chance to circulate in the diocese *Italiae*. But even then, the notoriety they were able to achieve would have depended on the

[582] Walls 1961 argues that between 380 and 430 (an estimate for the translation and possible compilation of the orders) northern regions of the Apennine Peninsula withstood a period of intense Gothic (and therefore Arian) penetration. He notes that the citations of the Scriptures within the compilatory text are dissimilar to the Vulgate, which stemmed from the contemporary "orthodox" milieu, and interprets the extreme literalness of the Latin translation, which scrupulously preserves the Greek source text, similarly to the Gothic version of the Scripture, as a sign of underlying Arianism of the translator. One of his main arguments in support of his hypothesis is that the translation disseminated in the *Fragmentum Veronense* is not the only Arian compilation using *Apostolic Tradition* as a source material, giving an example of *Apostolic Constitutions*. However, as Pauliina Pylvänäinen successfully confirmed, the perceived Arianism of the latter is much more a product of the order's condemnation at the council of Trullo (691-692) and subsequent historiographical tradition than the dogmatic preferences of the compiler: Pylvänäinen 2020, pp. 79-120.

[583] Pietri 1976, pp. 237-268, 431-441, 729-754, 832-872, 887-966; McLynn 1994, pp. 1-219, 276-290; Williams 1995; Ayres 2004, pp. 227-229, 236-240, 251, 260-267; Hanson 2005, pp. 528-530, 595-597, 658-659, 667-675, 799-823; Bowes 2008, pp. 191-196; Williams 2017.

dogmatic background of their translator and disseminators. And even if we are to assume that they were known to the members of the Christian community in Rome, it does not necessarily mean that the ideals of behaviour and organization reflected in them were applied or even applicable in the local context.

Instead of the pseudo-Apostolic literature this chapter will propose alternative methodological approaches to uncover women's religious agency in Roman liturgical context. By analysing epigraphic evidence, papal and conciliar prohibitions (which ironically reveal what women were doing by forbidding it), and material culture, it will reconstruct a more nuanced picture of female participation in the religious life of the city, limited in the previous research on female religious agency in Late Antiquity to a few sentences or long silence.

The chapter is structured around specific activities with ritual connotations, which can be assigned to women after careful examination of the abovementioned types of sources: involvement in the maintenance of the sacred spaces, singing and public prayer, assisting in religious rituals, teaching of the Scriptures, service at the altar, and potentially presiding over commemorative funerary ceremonies with Eucharistic overtones.

Thus structured, it is able to demonstrate that despite increasing ecclesiastical restrictions throughout Late Antiquity, women in Rome maintained significant religious roles, challenging conventional narratives that have minimized women's liturgical participation, and revealing a more dynamic interplay between official prohibitions and lived religious practice in the city.

Prohibition as an indicator of female involvement in liturgical practices and other fragmentary evidence

If we cannot apply the information gained from the Church orders, so popular among the scholars interested in the religious rituals from the female perspective, when researching the roles women could have played within the Church hierarchy in Rome, what other sources can we use to reconstruct the local situation during Late Antiquity? Following in the footsteps of Kevin Madigan, Carolyn Osiek and Ute Eisen in the following pages I would like to propose that substantial clues can be recovered from the epigraphic sources on one hand and epistolary material and canons of councils, linked to the authority of the bishops, on the other.[584] While in

[584] Eisen 2000 and Madigan and Osiek 2005.

the first case the funerary sphere, which borne all the inscriptions that will be analysed below, was, as we have already covered in previous chapters, much more welcoming to the uncensored expressions of female agency, the written sources of canonical nature offer what can be defined as negative imprint of female religious activity, inadvertently letting the keen eye of the researcher discover its scope especially when they most fervently deny it. And last but not least, this subchapter will follow the advice of Janet Tulloch, who already 20 years ago came to the enlightening conclusion that where the written sources, monopolized by men, fail to clearly capture the activity of women deemed controversial, the material culture and art manage to fill in the gaps.[585]

Taking care of altar cloths

The involvement of female ascetics in the rituals performed inside the churches of Rome is hard to define for the majority of the early Middle Ages. The only clue suggesting that nuns were active agents in the religious life of the city and even had access to the altar is the ban of pope Boniface I (418-422), recorded in *Liber Pontificalis*, stipulating that nuns and women in general should not touch nor wash the *palla* covering the altar or be responsible for replenishing the incense used during the liturgy, as this obligation belongs to the minister (as Andrea Verardi suggested, the presbyter).[586]

The intention to ban women from touching the altar cloths is paradoxical, given the fact that female patronage may account for some of them and many of them were sourced from the workshops located on the estates of the Roman Church, staffed most probably by female slaves.[587] Well into the central Middle Ages the making of cloth was perceived as women's work and was considered demeaning for free men, inflicted upon them only as a humiliating punishment if they became war captives or were convicted of a crime. Thus, the majority of textiles were woven by women either within their own homes or within exclusively female-staffed workshops, called *gynaecaea*, present in elite households, such as that of the pope.[588]

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[585] Tulloch 2004.
[586] Verardi 2018, p. 291. See: *Liber Pontificalis* I (pontificate of Boniface I, 418-422), in: Duchesne 1862, pp. 88, 227: "*Hic Bonifatius constituit ut nulla mulier aut monacha* [or only *feminarum* in the Cononian version of the text] *pallam sacratam contingereaut lavare aut incensum ponere in ecclesia nisi minister...*". For the role of the presbyters in the early Christian Church and their career path see e.g.: Wipszycka 2000, pp. 16-17; Saxer 2001a, pp. 563-566 and Sessa 2015, pp. 218, 222, 225-227.
[587] Miller 2014, p. 83.
[588] Herlihy 1990, pp. 1-12, 18-21, 34-39, 75-91 and Miller 2014, pp. 90-92.

Liturgical textiles were in some sense a way for elite women (because only they were so well-connected and wealthy to be able to make such gesture, despite the fact that the labour of other women was hidden behind the textiles) to be present at the altar without rousing objections of the male clerics.[589] Though altar cloths did serve a practical function, as they protected the altar table and provided clean base for the Eucharistic offerings of bread and wine, they also acquired new meaning in the cultic context. Because the altar was seen as a parallel to the sepulchre of Christ, the textile covering it brough to mind the memory of Christ's burial shroud, thus turning into a powerful representation of the divine. By donating it to the sacred space, the privileged group of women could participate in this visual demonstration of divine power.[590]

In Constantinople of the 5th century, some noblewomen went even further and donated their own garments to be used as altar cloths during the celebration of the Eucharist. First of them was Olympias, who became a deaconess and close friend of the Constantinopolitan bishop John Chrysostom (398-404) after the death of her husband. And it was the bishop who accepted her silk robe as a cover for the altar of Hagia Sophia. This gesture of devotion and asceticism, which managed to visually link the body of the holy woman with the altar in the main church of the capital was subsequently repeated by Pulcheria (388/389-453), daughter of emperor Arcadius (383-408), wife of Theodosius II (402-450) Aelia Eudocia (421-450), and the extremely wealthy ascetic Melania the Younger (c. 383-439), who was born and educated in Rome.[591]

No such grand gestures were recorded in Rome, although in the 4th century *feminae clarissimae* patronized almost half of the city's basilicas, lead in the first half of the century by the distinctive figures of the mother of emperor Constantine (306-337) Helena (c. 246/248-330) and his daughter Constantina (307/317-354), and according to *Collectio Avelana* belonged to the group of key supporters of pope Damasus in his struggle against his rival Ursinus, which would most probably have granted them access to the same possibilities of self-representation within the sacred space that were available to the most prominent female members of the Constantinopolitan court during the reign of the Theodosian dynasty. Their advantageous position when it came to their relationship with the Roman bishops up until the late 5th century

[589] More generally for the female patronage of the liturgical textiles in the Middle Ages in Europe see: Griffiths 2011.
[590] Leatherbury 2017, pp. 245, 251. See also: Coon 1997, pp. 60-61.
[591] Leatherbury 2017, p. 253. The gift of Olympias is reported by: Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca* 61.3, in: Clarke 1918, pp. 167-169. For the gift of Pulcheria, see: Sozomen, *Historia ecclesiastica* 9.1.4, in: Migne 1864c, colls. 1593-1596. For the gift of Aelia Eudocia, see: Nau 1914, pp. 117. For the gift of Melania the Younger, see: *Ad Cosmam* 5-8, in: Nau 1919, pp. 363-364. For more information about all the abovementioned aristocratic ascetics see e.g.: Holum 1982 and Elm 1996, pp. 178-183.

stemmed from the fact that they far outranked them, given the bishops' less than exalted social status before the election (they came either from non-aristocratic clerical or curial families).[592] This may have allowed the *illustris feminae* to take liberties such as asserting themselves in the space at and around the altar through gift-giving.

Paradoxically, however, the only written note about female patronage in relation to textiles comes from the period of pontificate of Gregory the Great (590-604), when Roman bishops were being elected from the members of the senatorial and provincial aristocracy and female euergetism became less conspicuous. The gift in question are the precious *vela* donated by the patrician lady Rusticiana to the St. Peter's Basilica, received with all pomp by its clergy and personally appreciated by the pope.[593] The question remains whether the donation of curtains, which, as we have seen in chapter 3, were deemed a gift worthy even of a pope throughout the early Middle Ages, may allow for suggestion that the altar cloths, seen as equally if not more precious, may have been donated by women as well. Due to the lack of written sources such suggestion must remain precisely only that, but it cannot be refuted completely.

Singing and praying

"In the future judgement of Christ, neither the steps of the choir, nor the tapestries of the chair, nor the bands of singing virgins coming to meet you will avail to your defense, when conscience begins to accuse and the arbiter of conscience to judge."

As the ironic tone of the letter, exchanged between pro-Nicene Augustine (396-430) and the Homoean bishop Maximinus in 392, suggests, at the end of the 4th century singing choirs of virgins were frowned upon when they became an integral part of the bishop's display of power and were even seen as a sign of moral weakness to be weaponized when one communicated with one's ideological opponent.[594]

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[592] Miller 2014, p. 93. For more information about the interplay of female patronage and episcopal authority in Late Antiquity see: Barnes 2014.
[593] Miller 2014, pp. 93-94. Rusticiana's gift was discussed in the first section of chapter 3 of this thesis. It appears in Gregory the Great, ep. 11.26, in: Martyn 2011, p. 760.
[594] Augustine, ep. 23.3, in: Parsons 1951, pp. 60-61. For the Latin text see: Migne 1902, col. 96: "*In futuro Christi iudicio, nec absidae gradatae, nec cathedrae velatae, nec sanctimonialium occursantium atque cantantium greges adhibebuntur ad defensionem, ubi coeperint accusare conscientiae, et conscientiarum arbiter iudicare*." Brown 1988, pp. 259-260 on the contrary interprets the practice as widespread and not at all controversial. For more information about the pro-Nicene theology of Augustine see: Barnes 2023. Homoeans taught that the Son was like the Father, but not exactly of the same substance, as opposed to the Nicene creed, which supported the idea of the

The rise of asceticism within the Roman Empire formed new religious elite which viewed sensuality as being linked to sin and alien to spiritualty. This produced a condemnatory wave which sought to eliminate all but the most rudimentary music forms in worship in general and in liturgy in particular. The ecclesiastical authority, however, met with a rather persistent opposition. The sometimes disorderly masses who congregated at vigils of the martyrs were surrounded by music in their everyday life and many learned to sing, play and dance. They wanted and needed to put these skills to use in worship. The words of Augustine, who questions whether "the establishment of these vigils in the name of Christ (did not) bring it about that citharas be banished from this place", confirm just as well the indignation of the Church Father as his helplessness in the face of persistence of ordinary Christians. The accounts of the life of bishop Eligius of Noyon (642-660), written in Gaul most probably shortly after his death, are even more clear about the opposition the interference of the Church officials met, especially when it came to celebrating martyrs. Having criticised the music and dancing with which the vigil of the Apostle Peter was being celebrated in congregations under his care, he was told: "As much as you wish to preach, Roman, you will not succeed in destroying our ancient customs".[595]

At least one instrument, the predecessor of the organ, called *hydraulis*, and its players were accepted in the public Christian worship, in contrast with the abovementioned condemnation of musical instruments and musicians. The presence of organs in Frankish and English churches and cathedrals is well documented from the 8th century onwards. The advanced constructions of the instruments adapted to the necessities of the liturgical practice hint on the fact that organs did not appear out of the blue in the places of worship.[596] A marble slab uncovered under the altar of the *confessio* of the basilica of San Paolo fuori le mura and dated loosely between the beginning of the 4th and the end of the 5th century, which contains a detailed engraving of the *hydraulis* together with an inscription proudly announcing that "*Rusticus raised* (this monument) *in his own lifetime*", hardly suggests an antagonism towards the instrument in the

same substance of the Father and the Son. For more information about the shaping of the Homoean movement as alternative to the Nicene theology during the 4th century see e.g.: Ayres 2004, pp. 133-166.

[595] Shirt 2015, pp. 173-177, 185-186 with English translations of the primary sources. For the Latin version of the primary sources see: Augustine, *In psalmum* 32.2.5, in: Migne 1845f, col. 279: "*Nonne id egit instituito in nomine Christi Vigiliarum istarum, ut ex isto loco citharae pellerentur*?".; Audoin, *Vita s. Eligii episcopi noviomagensis* 2.20, in: Krusch 1902, pp. 711-712: "*Numquam tu, Romane, quamvis haec frequenter taxes, consuetudines nostras evellere poteris.*…". For the hypotheses about employment of instrumental music in the liturgy of the early Christian Church see also: Werner 1959, p. 317 and Page 2010, p. 32.

[596] Shirt 2015, pp. 166-167 with further bibliography and primary sources.

early Christian religious context (fig. 4.1).[597] Pertinent for our discussion about female involvement in the worship is another marble plaque, dated to the second half of the 4th century and unearthed in the underground cemetery of Commodilla, depicting a small organ, this time, however, linked to a female musician of the name Gentilla, who the plaque commemorated (fig. 4.2).[598]

Even when the Church Fathers did display benevolence towards singing of psalms and hymns inside the sacred space, they did not forget to reinforce the idea that it was more the mind that should praise the Lord than the voice, making an appeal to the singers to not exaggerate their voices by using unguents on their throats to make their voice cords more flexible.[599] Giving this advice they had young male singers in mind. Devotionally singing female voice was deemed provocative and passion rousing. Women singing in public were to be suppressed by prohibitions such as: "Women are ordered not to speak in church, not even softly, nor may they sing along or take part in responses, but they should only be silent and pray to God."[600] Tertullian (c. 155-c. 220) and Jerome (c. 342/347-420) were more tolerant, but even they suggest that women should sing only in a private setting: "Women are to sing psalms in their chambers, away from the company of men".[601] Ambrose, who could be seen as a decisive force

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[597] Shirt 2015, p. 166. For more in-depth discussion of the plaque and the Latin original of the inscription see: Perrot 1971, pp. 101-102: "*Rusticus se vibu feci*".

[598] *Ibidem*, pp. 102-103. See also: *Epigraphic Database Bari*, EDB17087, available online at: https://www.edb.uniba.it/epigraph/17087 (last viewed on 12. 03. 2025).

[599] Jerome, *Commentarium in epistulam ad Ephesios* 3.5.19, in: Migne 1845g, col. 528: "*Et canere igitur et psallere, et laudare Dominum magis animo quam voce debemus. Hoc est quippe quod dicitur: Cantantes et psallentes in cordibus vestris Domino. Audiant haec adolescentuli: audiant hi quibus psallendi in ecclesia officium est, Deo non voce, sed corde cantandum: nec in tragoedorum modum guttur et fauces dulci medicamine colliniendas, ut in ecclesia theatrales moduli audiantur et cantica, sed in timore, in opere, in scientia Scripturarum.*" For more information about religious singing in early Christianity see: Shirt 2015, pp. 145-151 with further bibliography.

[600] Quasten 1983, pp. 75-87 and Shirt 2015, pp. 89-90. The critique of women singing in churches mostly comes from the late-4th century Egypt and Asia Minor. See e.g.: Isidore of Pelusium, ep. 1.90, in: Migne 1864b, colls. 244-245: "*Τὰς ἐν ἐκκλησίαις φλυαρίας καταπαῦσαι βουλόμενοι οἱ τοῦ Κυρίου ἀπόστολοι, καὶ τῆς ἡμῶν παιδευταὶ καταστάσεως, ψάλλειν ἐν αὐταῖς τὰς γυναῖκας συνετῶς συνεχώρησαν. Αλλ ' [ὡς] πάντα εἰς τοὐναντίον ἐτράπη τὰ θεοφόρα διδάγματα, καὶ τοῦτο εἰς ἔκλυσιν καὶ ἁμαρτίας ὑπόθεσιν τοῖς πλείοσι γέγονε. Καὶ κατάνυξιν μὲν ἐκ τῶν θείων ὕμνων οὐχ ὑπομένουσι · τῇ δὲ τοῦ μέλους ἡδύτητι εἰς ἐρεθισμὸν παθημάτων χρώμενοι, οὐδὲν αὐτὴν ἔχειν πλέον τῶν ἐπὶ σκηνῆς ἀσμάτων λογίζονται. Χρὴ τοίνυν, εἰ μέλλοιμεν τὸ τῷ Θεῷ ἀρέσκον ζητεῖν, καὶ τὸ κοινῇ συμφέρον ποιεῖν, παύειν ταύτας καὶ τῆς ἐν ἐκκλησίᾳ ᾠδῆς, καὶ τῆς ἐν πόλει μονῆς, ὡς Χριστοκαπήλους, καὶ τὸ θεῖον χάρισμα μισθὸν ἀπωλείας ἐργαζομένας.*" ("…women were originally permitted by the Apostles and presbyters to join in singing so as to prevent their gossiping in church. But later this permission was withdrawn since it was learned that they did not gain any salutary fruits of penance from divine song, but used the sweetness of melody for disturbances of every kind, since they looked on it in exactly the same way as theatre music.", in: Quasten 1983, p. 81); *Didascalia CCCXVIII Patrum* 8, in: Batiffol 1887, p. 18: "*γυναιξί δέ παραγγέλλεσθαι έν έκ κλησίαις μή λαλεΐν, μηδέ έν ψιΟυρισμώ, μήτε συμφάλλειν, μήτε συνυπακούειν, εί μή μόνον σιγάν καί εύχεσθαι θεω δέ έντεύξεως καί σεμνής πολιτείας.*" (English translation quoted in the main text).

[601] Quasten 1983, p. 84 and Shirt 2015, pp. 90, 93. For primary sources see: Tertullian, *Ad uxorem* 2.9, in: Migne 1844, col. 1304: "…*sonant inter duos psalmi ei hymni, et mutuo provocant, quis melius Deo suo cantet.*" ("*Let the two (spouses) sing psalms and hyms and incite each other to see who can sing better to his God.*", in: Quasten 1983, p. 84); Jerome, *Dialogus contra pelagianos* 1.25, in: Migne 1883, col. 542: "*Quis enim ignorat psallendum*

in the promotion of singing in church, was one of the few exceptions, encouraging women to "join in a psalm" as expressing devotion through singing is "fitting for both sexes".[602]

All the more surprising is the detail of the scene carved on the back panel of the so-called Samagher casket, dated around the 440s, which is most commonly interpreted as a representation of the arrangement of the tomb and access to the *memoria* of the Apostle Peter in the Constantinian basilica dedicated to him in Rome, with the emphasis on the presence of the famous twisted columns, described in the *Liber Pontificalis* (fig. 3.4).[603] Leaving aside the discussion whether the pair of mixed gender in the centre celebrates a liturgy, adores a cross positioned atop an altar, or is in the process of accessing the *memoria* to obtain a contact relic, and whether the other plaques can be interpreted as a true-to-life commemorations of sites visited by the family of aristocratic commissioners during a pilgrimage to Rome or ideal echoes of different types of places of worship, I would like to focus on the paired men and women flanking the central scene.[604]

With the exception of the attire, a tight-fitting tunic and *palla* covering the upper part of the body and head for women and tunic and *paenula* for men, their orant poses and placement

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esse feminis in cubiculis suis, et absque virorum frequentia et congregatione turbarum." (For English translation see the main text).

[602] Shirt 2015, pp. 90, 145. See Ambrose, *Enarrationes psalmi I* 9, in: Migne 1845d, col. 925: "*Mulieres Apostolus in Ecclesia tacere jubet : psalmum etiam bene clamant: hic omni dulcis aetati, hic utrique aptus est sexui.*"

[603] See the most recent study of the casket by Palladino 2022, pp. 166-186 with overview of the previous scholarship on the object and the web of hypotheses surrounding its provenance, function, and iconography. The casket is also part of the catalogue in this thesis under cat. n. 3.9. For the description of the columns in St. Peter's Basilica see: *Liber Pontificalis* I (pontificate of Silvester I, 314-335), in: Duchesne 1862, p. 176: "*Eodem tempore Augustus Constantinus fecit basilicam beato Petro apostolo in templum Apollinis, cuius loculum cum corpus sancti Petri ita recondit: ipsum loculum undique ex aere cypro conclusit, quod est inmobile : ad caput, pedes V; ad pedes, pedes V; ad latus dextrum, pedes V; ad latus sinistrum, pedes V; subter, pedes V; supra, pedes V ; sic inclusit corpus beati Petri apostoli et recondit. Et exornavit supra columnis purphyreticis et alias columnas vitineas quas de Grecias perduxit.*" ("Then the emperor Constantine built a basilica to St. Peter the Apostle, at the temple of Apollo, where he buried the tomb with St. Peter's body in this way: the actual tomb he sealed on all sides with copper to make it immovable, 5 ft each at the head, the feet, the right and left sides, the bottom and the top; thus he enclosed St. Peter's body and buried it. Above he decorated it with porphyry and other vine-scroll columns which he brought from Greece.", in: Davis 1989, p. 18). See also the discussion of the parallels between the ivory panel and the known furnishings of the Constantinian basilica in: Longhi 2006, pp. 55-65.

[604] For the hypothesis that the places of worship carved on the plaques are idealized images of sacred spaces rather than precise records of particular late antique buildings see: Klauser 1956, pp. 63, 100, 111-114 and Elsner 2019. For the identification of the structures on all of the plaques as late antique Roman buildings see especially: Cecchelli 1951, pp. 207-210; Buddensieg 1959; Künzle 1976; Guarducci 1978, pp. 58-59, 77-79; Longhi 2006, pp. 43-55, 66-96. For the hypothesis about the central couple on the back panel worshipping or donating the cross see: Guarducci 1978, pp. 99-101; Bisconti 2009, pp. 223-225; Schaefer 2013, p. 198; Palladino 2022, p. 176. For the hypothesis about the couple performing liturgy see: Kateusz 2019, pp. 164-174; Kateusz and Badini Confalonieri 2021, pp. 233-241. For the hypothesis regarding the contact relic see: Angiolini 1970, pp. 12-30. For identification of the couple which re-appears on all the panels as aristocratic pilgrims see: Künzle 1976; Longhi 1997; Elsner 2019, pp. 89, 92; Palladino 2022, pp. 182-183. For their identification as either Constantine and Helena, Galla Placidia and Theodosius II or Valentinian III and Licinia Eudoxia see: Guarducci 1978, pp. 96-101, 106-109, 115-116,126-127 and Longhi 2006, pp. 89-96, 106-137.

within the sacred space are completely alike. Despite their performance of prayer, with raised bent hands and palms upturned towards the heavens, and the fact that given the westward orientation of the St. Peter's Basilica they are standing at the head of the male and female lateral nave respectively, it cannot be stipulated with certainty that they are leading a liturgy. It can be concluded, however, that they are captured performing an act of ritual worshipping through public prayer.[605] What is noteworthy in the context of this subsection is the fact that they are carved with their mouths open, as if singing (fig. 4.3). [606]

Even though their position within the Church power structures is obscure, given their privileged position in the direct closeness to the Petrine *memoria* I would like to suggest that they may have fulfilled an official role, adding a sonic dimension to what may have been a ritual worship of one of the most important Christian saint's relics during the vigils commemorating his *dies natalis* or the celebrations of the festival of *Cathedra Petri*, both glorious occasions sometimes graced by imperial presence, which would create an ideal opportunity for the affluent central pair to access the *aedicula* of the Petrine *memoria* to either obtain a relic or to place a donation, a privilege reserved for only a precious few laypeople.[607]

Special women were not only to (occasionally) fill the sacred space with their tempting worshipping voices. As we have already discussed in chapter 2, virgins were believed to possess strong apotropaic properties and were expected to aid not only their close kin but also the congregation at large.[608] In the words of Ambrose "the virgin is [to be] an offering for her mother, by whose daily sacrifice the divine power is appeased". As I would like to argue, even though the mere presence of the consecrated virgin may have been enough to secure salvation to others, prayers, which receive such prominent place in Jerome's exhortation on the proper

[605] Elsner 2019, pp. 92-93, 101-102 and Palladino 2022, p. 185. For the identification of the figures as priests see: Kleinbauer 1982, pp. 36, 38; Schaefer 2013, pp. 197-200.
[606] Kateusz 2019, p. 166; Kateusz and Badini Confalonieri 2021, p. 236; Palladino 2022, pp. 176, 185.
[607] For the hypothesis about relics as the object of worship in the panel see: Elsner 2019, pp. 101-102. For the description of the central pair as being in front of or inside the *aedicula* and implications of their position see: Palladino 2022, pp. 176, 183. For the presence of Galla Placidia at the Peter's altar and her participation in the festival of *Cathedra Petri* in 450 see: Gillet 2001, pp. 142-147; Liverani 2013, pp. 31-32; Kateusz 2019, p. 174. For the primary source see: Leo the Great, ep. 56, in: Migne 1846a, col. 859: "*Dum in ipso ingressu civitatis antiquæ hanc curam habuissemus ut cultum beatissimo Petro apostolo redderemus, in ipso adorando altari martyris*…".
[608] Ivanovici and Undheim 2019, unpaginated; Undheim 2020, p. 58 and note 166 with further bibliographical references. For the primary source see: Ambrose, *De virginibus* 1.7.32: "*Virgo matris hostia est, cujus quotidiano sacrificio vis divina placatur.*", in: Migne 1845b, coll. 198. For the English version see: Schaff and Wace 1896a, p. 368.-369.

education of the virgin along with psalm singing, may have been viewed as even more powerful service to the community.[609]

In the dioceses *Oriens* and *Asiana* throughout our period of interest the prayer on behalf of others may have been the main obligation of the "holy" widows as well, mirrored in the following stipulations in *Traditio Apostolica*, *Didascalia Apostolorum* and *Testamentum Domini*:

"Let the widow be appointed by the word, becoming enrolled with the rest, but she does not receive ordination by the hand because she does not teach but is appointed only for prayer, which is allowed to all." "A widow should have no other concern except to pray for those who give and for the entire church." "Their supplications will be acceptable to God, for they are the holocaust and the altar of God."[610]

Even though in the diocese *Italiae* no such strong implications of the ritual role of widows survive in the written sources, link between prayer and widowhood was still able to reach the intellectual circles of Rome. An example can be seen in the letter to Roman noblewoman Anicia Faltonia Proba, written around the year 412, in which Augustine exclaims:

"For, what occupation is more fitting for your widowhood than to persevere in prayer night and day, according to the advice of the Apostle?".[611]

The fragmentary funerary plaque, housed in the depository of the Vatican Museums under the inventory number MV.32495.0.0 may be a visual expression of the role virgins and widows played in the economy of salvation in the 5th century (fig. 4.4). What has remained from it depicts an upper body of a woman with a head covered by a cap, dressed in tunic and *dalmatica*, standing in an orant position in front of a presbyterial space of a temple, separated from the rest of the world outside of the plaque by an ornamental arch. The columns with fastened curtains

[609] Jerome, ep. 107.9, in: Wright 2010, pp. 360-361: "*Praeponatur ei probae fidei et morum ac pudicitiae uirgo ueterana, quae illam doceat et adsuescat exemplo ad orationem et psalmos nocte consurgere*…" ("Set before her as a pattern some aged virgin of approved faith, character, and chastity, one who may instruct her by word, and by example accustom her to rise from her bed at night for prayer and psalm singing…").
[610] For the payer of widows in the Levante and Asia Minor see: Osiek 1983; Wipszycka 2000, pp. 277-278; Foletti 2023, pp. 67-73. For the primary sources see: *Traditio Apostolica* 10, in: Bradshaw 2023, pp. 44-46; *Didascalia Apostolorum* 3.5.2, in: Stewart-Sykes 2009, p. 183; *Testamentum Domini* 1.40, in: Osiek 1983, pp. 164-165 and Madigan and Osiek 2005, pp. 153-154. For the Latin and Greek versions of the sources see introduction to this chapter.
[611] Augustine, ep. 130.1.1, in: Parsons 1953a, p. 376. For the Latin original of the letter see: Migne 1902, col. 494: "*Quod enim majus opportuit esse negotium viduitatis tuae,quam persistere in oration nocte ac die, secundum ApostoIi admonitionem?*". For the discussion about the passage see: Cloke 1995, p. 55.

frame the sacred space and offer the viewer a glimpse of burning candles within.[612] It is interesting to note that the female figure was placed within the sanctuary between the columns at first, as suggested by the traces of colour and small lines created in the process of erasure of the initial sketch that remain visible.[613] Given the privileged position of what must be the representation of the deceased woman commemorated by the plaque, and the fact that she is captured performing prayer, I would like to suggest that the image alludes to the competence she had during her life, namely public prayer in the name of other members of the congregation.[614]

Assisting

"By the gifts of God and the blessed apostle Paul, Dometius, the deacon and manager of the treasury of the holy, apostolic, and papal chair, together with Anna, the deacon, his sister in the body, has presented this vow to the blessed Paul."

This 6th-century inscription on an architrave in the basilica of San Paolo fuori le mura is the only complete clue suggesting that women fulfilled the role of the deaconess in the city of Rome. The siblings Dometius and Anna are introduced as equals in their ministry, the nature of which is determined by the abbreviation DIAC. Even though the type of vow they made together to the apostle Paul is unclear, it cannot be excluded that it was a vow of chastity.[615]

The second, slightly earlier inscription from the underground cemetery of martyr Sebastian on Via Appia is much less dependable, as it is preserved in a fragmentary form, but if the interpretation of Carlo Carletti is to be taken for granted, the words "*diaconissa servit in*" engraved in the remains of the funerary plaque would definitely point towards a woman with an official role within the church hierarchy.[616]

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[612] Garrucci 1880, p. 143; Lega 2000, p. 407; Ehler 2008, p. 205; Spera 2013, p. 332. See also: *Epigraphic Database Bari*, EDB35579, available online at: https://www.edb.uniba.it/epigraph/35579 (last viewed on 11. 03. 2025) and cat. n. 3.8 in this thesis. I would like to thank prof. Umberto Utro for bringing this plaque to my attention.
[613] Spera 2013, p. 332, esp. note 24.
[614] For the discussion of the orant position as demonstrating female prayer and prophecy see e.g.: Jo Torjesen 1998 and Foletti 2023, pp. 69-73.
[615] Eisen 2000, pp. 182-183 with the Latin original or the inscription and English translation: DE DONIS DI ET BEATI PAVLI APOSTOLI DOMETIVS DIAC. ET ARCARIVS SCAE SED. APOSTOL. ADQVE PP. VNA CVM ANNA DIAC. EIVS GERMANA HOC VOTVM BEATO PAVLO OPTVLERVT. See also: Madigan and Osiek 2005, p. 144; Felle 2010, p. 499 and Schaefer 2013, pp. 219-220. About chastity as important part of the role of the deaconess see: Macy 2007, pp. 74-76.
[616] The inscription is dated between 490 and 524 and was published online at: *Epigraphic Database Bari*, EDB 11385, https://www.edb.uniba.it/epigraph/11385 (last viewed on 10. 03. 2025): "*(diacon)issa/ (s)ervet*

Based on the ferocity with which the canon 26 of the council of Orange, convoked in November 441, stipulates that female deacons are by no means to be ordained, and even if they have already been ordained, their ordination should be undone, it may be assumed that the practice of the ordination of women to diaconate, popular until then mostly in the dioceses *Asiana* and *Oriens*, must have spread westwards by the 5th century, possibly seeping into Rome as well, as it is improbable that the deaconess Anna emerged from a void a century later, especially in a city in which the control of the bishop strengthened progressively at the time.[617]

Some of the deaconesses may have been widows, as suggested by the council of Epaone, held in 517, which conflated the ministries of the holy widow and the deaconess, stipulating that no widows, called deaconesses, should be ordained.[618] Ausonia, a deaconess who commemorated the vow she and her (presumably adult) children made to God or a martyr by an inscription, discovered at the archaeological site of Doclea in Dalmatia and dated to the 6th century, may have been one of them, as her husband is omitted altogether, even if the inscription speaks about their family.[619]

As for the competences of the deaconesses outside of the aforementioned dioceses *Asiana, Macedonia* and *Oriens*, where this ministry of women was well established, it does seem that during the period of our interest they did not take any definitive shape and most probably consisted of local adaptations of the Eastern tradition.[620] This direction of thinking is supported by the so-called *Statuta Ecclesiae Antiqua*, compiled by a Gallic priest Gennadius of Marseilles sometime between 476 and 485. The otherwise obscure cleric gathered canons partly from African synods and partly from the Syriac *Apostolic Constitutions* in what became an influential compendium circulating around well into the high Middle Ages, which made its way even in the 12th-century collection of canon law known as *Decretum Gratiani*. While omitting the care (both physical and spiritual) for the sick women in their homes and welcoming women to

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(i)n".

[617] For the canon 26 of the council of Orange see: Mansi 1761, col. 440: "*Diaconae omnimodis non ordinandae: si quae iam sunt, benedictioni quae populo impenditur capita submittant*". For the English translation and discussion of the canon see: Madigan and Osiek 2005, pp. 145-146.

[618] Madigan and Osiek 2005, p. 146 and Macy 2007, p. 67. For the canon 21 of the council of Epaone see: Mansi 1762, col. 561: "*Veduarum consecrationem, quas diaconas uocitant, ab omni regione nostra paenitus abrogamus, sola ei paenitentiae benedictione, si converti ambiunt, inponenda.*" ("We wholly abolish throughout our region the consecration of widows, who are called deacons; if they wish to convert, let them receive only the penitential benediction.", in: Madigan and Osiek 2005, p. 146). About overlapping of the role of the widow and deaconess see also: Wipszycka 2000, p. 284.

[619] Eisen 2000, pp. 183-184: "*Ausonia diac(onissa) (p)ro voto suo et filiorum suorum f(e)c(it)*". See also: Madigan and Osiek 2005, p. 144.

[620] Madigan and Osiek 2005, pp. 148, 204. For the primary sources attesting to the presence of the deaconesses and their roles in the dioceses *Asiana, Macedonia* and *Oriens* see e.g.: Gryson 1976, pp. 51-52, 60-64, 69-74, 88-91; Martimort 1986, pp. 35-186; Eisen 2000, pp. 157-182; Madigan and Osiek 2005, pp. 25-140.

liturgical assemblies, ensuring each one of them found their place, just like deacons did with men, Gennadius confirms that "widows and holy women (sexually abstinent, possibly virgin deaconesses?)…chosen for the ministry of baptizing women…should be so instructed…that they are able clearly and wisely to teach the ignorant and rustic women how they are to respond at the time of their baptism to the questions asked by the one baptizing and how they should live having been baptized". Similarly to the *Apostolic Constitutions*, the *Statuta* allot the deaconess a role of assistant before and during baptism, while making clear that they are necessary to maintain the modesty of the baptized women and to play an intermediary role between them and the male clergy, but they are not to do the baptizing itself.[621] Whether the rules reproduced by the Gallic cleric in an environment that was much more prone to irregularities in the Church ritual than Rome can be applied to the situation of deaconesses in the city as well is uncertain, especially taking into consideration the unclear path of circulation of the *Statuta* in the diocese *Italiae*. Yet should the order have reached Rome, the inoffensiveness of its formulations, centred mostly around the preservation of modesty of the baptized women, may have translated well into the environment progressively tightening its hold over female religious activities.

Teaching

In the year 382 an affluent and intellectually advanced husband commemorated his young, deceased wife Theodora by an exquisitely versed epitaph, which he had placed over her tomb in the underground cemetery of martyr Agnes on Via Nomentana:

"During the time that chaste Aphrodite pursued a splendid life,/ she paved a pathway to the stars; now she rejoices in the palace of Christ./ She stood firm against the world, ever seeking heavenly things./ An excellent guardian of the law and teacher of faith,/ she surrendered her noble mind to the saints through the ages./ Thus she reigns amid the choice fragrances of

[621] Madigan and Osiek 2005, pp. 190-191 and Macy 2007, p. 67 who interprets *sanctimoniales* and *viduae* as deaconesses. For the primary source see: *Statuta Ecclesiae Antiqua*, canon 41 and 100, in: Munier 1963, pp. 173, 184: "*Mulier baptizare non praesumat*." "*Viduae uel sanctimoniales, quae ad ministerium baptizandarum mulierum eligunter, tam instructae sint ad id officium, ut possint aperto et sano sermone docere imperitas et rusticanas mulieres, tempore quo baptizandae sunt, qualiter baptizatoris ad interrogata respondeant et qualiter accepto baptismate uiuant.*" For more information about *Decretum Gratiani* see e.g.: Winroth 2000 and Landau 2008. For more in-depth discussion about the stipulations concerning the role of the deaconesses within the Church in the *Apostolic Constitutions* see e.g.: Gryson 1976, pp. 60-63, quoting *Apostolic Constitutions* 2.58.4-6, 3.16.1-2, 3.16.4, 3.19.1, 8.28.6, in: Funk 1906, pp. 169-171, 209-211, 213-215, 530 and above all Pylvänäinen 2020. See also: Wipszycka 2000, p. 284; Bradshaw 2012 and Foletti 2023, pp. 27-34.

paradise,/ where the grasses ever bloom along the streams,/ and she awaits God so that she may rise up to the lofty breezes./ Leaving her mortal remains behind, she set her body in this tomb,/ and her husband, Evagrius, assiduously attending, secured the place…"

This would be nothing unusual, given that approximately 350 late antique Christian *carmina epigraphica* survive in Rome, and slightly more than half of them are dedicated to women, whose virtues, real or projected on them by societal expectations, they exhort.[622] However, one detail of the Theodora's life seeping through the words of the *carmen* is not only uncommon element of the female epigraphic commemoration but also extremely pertinent for our discussion about the role played by women within the structures of the early Christian Church in the city. In the lines 4 and 5 of the inscription Evagrius identifies his wife as *optima servatrix legis* and *fides magistra*, hinting on her excellent knowledge of the Scriptures, which were described as divine law by both Origen (c. 185-c. 253) and Jerome (c. 342/347-420), and on the fact that she was a theological teacher.[623] As the example of Jerome's pupil and patroness Marcella, teaching her fellow ascetics and serving as an arbiter in theological disputes of the Roman clergy, discussed in chapter 2, or Paula, a leader of a female monastery in Betlehem, who knew the Scriptures by heart and was able to recite Psalms in Hebrew, suggests, Theodora would not have been the only woman to undertake such endeavour and be publicly recognized for it.[624]

All the more exciting is the fact that mere decade or two after the demise of Marcella a mosaic prominently featuring women holding open codices with what appears to be an allusion to Greek and Hebrew Scriptures in their hands appeared on the counter façade of the basilica of Santa Sabina on the Aventine, just a stone's throw from the Marcella's *domus* where both her and Paula, accompanied by their ascetic friends, regularly occupied themselves with the

[622] Trout 2013, with both the Latin original and the English translation on pp. 2 and 6: "*Theodora qu(a)e vixit annos XXI M VII/ D XXIII in pace est bisomu./ Amplificam sequitur vitam dum casta Afrodite, fecit ad astr /a viam; Christi modo gaudet in aula. Restitit haec mundo/ semper caelestia quaerens. Optima servatrix legis fideique/ magistra de(di)dit egregiam sanctis per secula mentem. Inde per eximios paradisi/ regnat odores, tempore continuo vernant ubi gramina rivis,/ expectatque deum superas quo surgat ad auras. Hoc posuit corpus tumulo/ mortalia linquens, fundavitque locum coniunx Evagrius instans./ Dep(osita) die . . ./ Antonio et Syacrio cons(ulibu)s*".

[623] Eisen 2000, pp. 94-95 and Schaefer 2013, pp. 201-202. About the Scriptures as divine law and learned Roman aristocratic women as its connoisseurs see: Brown 1988, pp. 369-371.

[624] Jerome, ep. 108, available online at: database *Epistolae: Medieval Women's Latin Letters*, https://epistolae.ctl.columbia.edu/letter/445.html (last viewed on 13. 03. 2025). For more information about the image of Paula in the letter see: Cain 2010.

interpretation of the Scriptures, both in their Greek and Hebrew version, of which their intellectual companion Jerome was very fond (fig. 4.5).[625]

Being identified by the monumental inscriptions as *Ecclesia ex Gentibus* and *Ecclesia ex Circumcisione*, there is no doubt that the two figures, dressed in heavy dark matronly garbs not dissimilar to the attire of the widow Turtura, already familiar to us, visually close enough to each other to make their interconnection apparent but differentiated by the form of the imaginary text in their codices and by the type of the headdress they don, were intended to make a powerful political statement.[626] When the presbyter Peter of Illyricum undertook the effort to build and decorate the basilica, most probably under the direct orders of pope Celestine I (422-432), the papacy was under pressure of the conflict with the Constantinopolitan bishop over the teaching of Nestorius (380-451) about Mary as the bearer of only the human form of Christ. At the same time, Rome was still recovering from the demographic aftermaths of the Alaric's (395-410) siege, which made the struggle for theological and political dominance especially troubling for Celestine. In order to confirm the primacy of the Roman episcopacy, the pope continued what already began with the translation of the relic of the True Cross to Rome during the reign of Constantine (306-337): laying claim on Jerusalem as the primordial source of Christianity, while also erasing its Jewish past.[627] The figures of the two *ecclesiae* in Santa Sabina can be perceived as the visual expression of Celestine's efforts. The codices in their hands hint on the past and present of the Roman Christianity, with the caveat that the past (Hebrew Scripture) no longer belongs to the Jews, as it was given to Christians by God, an idea

[625] For more information about the activity of the so-called Aventine circle of Marcella see chapter 2. The mosaic is discussed in the catalogue of this thesis under cat. n. 2.25. Jerome's preference of the Hebrew text over the *Septuagint* in the process of the creation of the Latin translation of the Scriptures is commented on in: Krupinski 2016, p. 121. See also: Kato 2013.

[626] For the discussion about the wall-panting commemorating Turtura see chapter 2. According to Krupinski 2016, p. 120 the head covering of the figure identified as *Ecclesia ex Circumcisione*, which tightly follows her head and covers her forehead is typical for Jewish women who were expected to cover their sexually charged hair when leaving their house. On the other hand, the *palla* loosely covering the head of the figure identified as *Ecclesia ex Gentibus* refers to the more relaxed rules of veiling followed by Roman women.

[627] The builder of the basilica and the pope are both eternalized by the inscription on the counter façade, which reads: CULMEN APOSTOLICUM CUM CAELESTINUS HABERET/ PRIMUS ET IN TOTO FULGERET EPISCOPUS ORBE/ HAEC QUAE MIRARIS FUNDAVIT PRESYBYTER URBIS/ ILLYRICA DE GENTE PETRUS VIR NOMINE TANTO/ DIGNUS AB EXORTU CHRISTI NUTRITUS IN AULA/ PAUPERIBUS LOCUPOLES SIBI PAUPER QUI BONA VITAE/ PRAESENTIS FUGUES MERVIT SPERARE FUTURAM ("When Celestine held the apostolic eminence shining as the foremost bishop in the whole world, Peter, a priest of the city, brought into being these things that you look at with wonder, a man Illyrican by descent and worthy of such a great name, nourished from birth in the household of Christ, wealthy to the poor, a pauper to himself, feeling the good things of the present life, he deservedly hopes for the life to come."). For the English translation and more information about the inscription see: Thunø 2007. For the demographic changes in the city at the beginning of the 5th century see: Cascio 2013. For the conflict between the Roman and the Constantinopolitan bishop see e.g.: McGuckin 1994, pp. 31-74, 101-127, 266-276. For the symbolic and material transfer of Jerusalem to Rome see e.g.: Noga-Banai 2018.

expressed by both the gold medallion with a cross that decorates the *palla* of the *Ecclesia ex Circumcisione* and the presence of a hand of God holding a closed codex, possibly representing the Old Testament, depicted at the top part of the composition according to the 17th-century drawing of the now fragmentary mosaic by Giovanni Ciampini (1633-1698) (fig. 4.6).[628]

While being intended as politically charged mementoes of the papal authority, the figures may have had another layer of meaning, conditioned by their placement in the basilica on the Aventine Hill. In this spatial context, still resonating with the memory of the erudite noblewomen around Marcella, apt in theology, they would have also represented two authoritative widows, respected by the members of the Church, performing gestures of teaching and mirroring the most venerated martyrs in the city, apostles Peter and Paul, whose activity was intrinsically linked to the dissemination of the Scriptures, standing directly above them, if we are to believe the drawing of Ciampini. Within this layer of meaning the codices become indicators of the women's erudition and tools of their catechetical activity and the white handkerchief *Ecclesia ex Gentibus* holds in her left hand a reminder of the Eucharistic *mappula*, a sign of one's participation in the highest sacraments in a position of religious authority.[629]

Serving at the altar

When Gelasius (492-496) was elected to the office of the bishop of Rome, Italy was torn by the clashing forces of Odoacer, king of Italy since 476, and the Ostrogothic warlord Theoderic (493-526), whom the emperor Zeno (474-491) sent to depose Odoacer and rule Italy in his stead. According to Procopius (c. 500-c. 565), Theoderic crossed the Alps and reached the Isonzo River in August of 489, successfully pulling a string of victories over Odoacer in Veneto and the Verona region, defeating him a year later after the battle at the river Adda. Because of the fact that his adversary fled to Ravenna, a nearly 3-year siege of the city followed, ending in

[628] Krupinski 2016, pp. 119-122. The 17th-century drawing of the mosaic without present *lacunae* can be found in: Ciampini 1690, pl. 48.
[629] Schaefer 2013, pp. 202-207 and Kateusz and Badini Confalonieri 2021, pp. 253-257, who, however, propose that the female figures represent bishops. Another two visual representation of women surrounded by open books of Gospels, identified as potential teachers of the Scriptures, can be found in the catacombs of San Gennaro in Naples. They were painted sometimes during the late 5th or early 6th century to commemorate Bitalia and Cerula, as the accompanying inscriptions suggest. See: Liccardo 1993, pp. 235-236. Kateusz 2019, pp. 156-161 and Foletti 2023, pp. 89-93 are even more daring in their proposals, seeing in both women ordained bishops or deaconesses respectively. However, neither of the hypotheses has been generally accepted by the more conservative researchers collaborating with the Pontificia Commissione dell'Archeologia Cristiana. See e.g.: Bisconti 2013a; Braconi 2016. For the interpretation of the *mappula* see: Lidov 2017, p. 17 and Kateusz and Badini Confalonieri 2021, pp. 245-248.

truce mediated by the bishop of the city, which lulled Odoacer into a false sense of security to his detriment, as he was murdered shortly after, following a celebratory banquet thrown by none other than Theoderic himself.[630] The war between the two rulers was not the only conflict generating problems in the north of the peninsula. Sensing a possibility to take advantage of the political disorder, Burgundian king Gundobad (473-516) sent his troops to Liguria. The local population was taken captive, agriculture suffered, and imminent danger as well as food shortages caused dislocation of the population in the region.[631] Additionally, around the year 491 Vandal pirates reportedly used the situation of instability to renew their raids in Sicily, forcing Theoderic, who had taken control of most of the territory, previously ruled by Odoacer, to defend the island.[632]

Mass migration to the cities, which were better equipped to withstand the onslaught of the marauding troops than the countryside, and especially to Rome, where the *annona civilis* not only provided free and subsidized food to the citizens but also supplied the markets available to the refugees and the citizens alike, ensued. This trend, on one hand, put immense strain on the city's economic system, which was adjusted to accommodate a progressively smaller number of inhabitants since the siege of Alaric. The need to substitute for the failing system of state food rations mobilized the pope himself to draw on the Church's owns estates in order to assist the refugees.[633] However, the chaos caused by the displacement of persons and raids allowed for unlawful transfer of land ownership and disrupted the revenue streams on which the Church relied for maintaining, among other things, the service to the poor. To solve the sudden economic crisis, Gelasius, whose elite support base in Rome was more then weak, was not averse to turning to land-owning *feminae illustris*, whose networks of contacts he hoped would help him return at least part of the lands back to his hands. In his letter to Firmina he

[630] Sessa 2021, p. 46. The best contemporary overview of the war is offered by Procopius of Caesarea, *De bello gothico* 5.1-25, in: Dewing 1916b, pp. 2-247. For more information about the conflict see: Moorhead 1992.
[631] Sessa 2021, pp. 46-47. For the primary sources reporting on the invasion see: Ennodius, *Vita Epiphanii*, in: Vogel 1885, pp. 138-141 and Gelasius, ep. 13, in: Thiel 1867, pp. 358-359.
[632] Sessa 2021, p. 47. The situation on the island is described by Cassiodore, *Chronica* (year 491), in: Mommsen 1894a, p. 159.
[633] Sessa 2021, pp. 48-50. The refugee crisis is reflected in Gelasius, fragment 35, published in: Thiel 1867, pp. 501-502. For more information about the Roman *annona* and the changes in the Roman population during the 5th century see e.g.: Cascio 1999; Purcell 1999, esp. pp. 138-140, 149-150; Cascio 2013. The assistance of Gelasius to the poor is described in: *Liber Pontificalis* I (pontificate of Gelasius, 492-496), in: Duchesne 1862, p. 255: "*Hic fuit amator pauperum et clerum ampliavit. Hic liberavit a periculo famis civitatem Romanam.*" ("He was a lover of the clergy and the poor and he augmented the clergy. He delivered the city of Rome from the danger of famine.", in: Davis 1989, p. 42). While Durliat 1990, pp. 134-136 interprets the passage as a sign of pope's emergency management of the *annona*, Sessa 2021, p. 50 disagrees, quoting Salzman 2017, who points out that up until the 6th century the regular food supply in Rome remained under the control of the imperial administration.

pleas for assistance in recovery of Church property and for possible repeating of the favour down the road in exchange for an *eulogium*:

"But it would most certainly redound to the total of your reward if the estates which have been stolen either by barbarians or by Romans, to our disadvantage, were to be handed back by your arrangement for the feeding of the poor. Such a multitude has converged on Rome from diverse provinces that have been laid waste by the carnage of war, that we are hardly able to satisfy it, with God as our witness. Therefore see how great would be your good works if the estates, which each bestowed for the good of his own soul, are handed back to the blessed apostle Peter, and released by your assistance, second to God. I ask that you would deign to receive with a gracious heart the gift of this blessing, which I have sent out of affection."[634]

When he had nothing to gain from them, however, Gelasius was much less tolerant towards the members of the "weaker" sex. Using the shortages of clergy in some regions, another byproduct of the raging conflict, as an excuse to change the rules of the clerical advancement and to root out local practices which undermined his authority under the disguise of an emergency management, in a letter dated to 492 the pope stipulated among other things that women should, under no circumstances, serve at the altar:

"We are constrained by the necessary disposition of affairs, and we are obliged to the governance of the apostolic see, so to balance the canonical decrees of our Fathers and to dispense the teaching of the leaders of past times and of our predecessors, that we, by applying careful consideration, may as far as possible regulate the alleviation that the exigency of present times demands for the renewal of the churches. In this we should not be regarded as wholly going beyond the formulation of the ancient rules by repairing the duties of the clerical profession, which the assault of war and famine has wasted through various parts of Italy. In many churches, as we have learned through the frequent reports of our brother and fellow-bishop John, bishop of the church of Ravenna, everywhere there is a lack of ministers to serve. If we do not relax for a short time the intervals for ecclesiastical advancement that were fixed

[634] Sessa 2021, pp. 41-42, 50-53. For the letter to Firmina see: Gelasius, fragment 35, in: Neil and Allen 2014, pp. 206-207. On p. 203 authors suggest that it may have been the same Firmina to have profited from the unstable political circumstances and to have seized the papal lands in the first place. For the Latin version of the text see: Thiel 1867, pp. 501-502: "*Ad cumulum vero mercedis vestrae pertinere certissimum est, si praedia, quae vel a barbaris vel a Romanis inconvenienter invasa sunt, vestris dispositionibus egentium victui reformentur. Cujus tanta de provinciis, quae bellorum clade vastatae sunt, Romam multitudo confluxit, ut vix ei Deo teste sufficere valeamus. Conspicitis ergo, quantum boni operis acquiratis, si beato Petro apostolo praedia, quae pro sua quisque anima contulit, vestro post Deum praesidio liberata reddantur. Cujus benedictionis eulogias, quas pro affectione direxi, peto ut grata suscipere mente digneris.*" On pope's weak position in Rome in relation to local nobility see: Demacopoulos 2013, pp. 73-102.

in ancient times, the churches will remain completely forsaken by the holy orders of the church, without which they cannot be administered. In very many places, for want of suitable help, there is a lack of support for saving souls in need of redemption, and we ourselves become involved in a serious accusation if in some measure we do not take thought for such a pressing danger…No less have we heard with impatience that such a disregard has come upon divine affairs that women are encouraged to minister at the sacred altars, and that they openly perform everything that has been assigned only to the service of the male sex, to which they do not correspond."[635]

The ban, suggesting that in some of the churches with high level of clerical autonomy women indeed had access to the altar during the liturgy at least until the end of the 5th century, was not necessarily only restricted to south-Italian regions of Lucania, Bruttium, and Sicily, to whose bishops the letter 14 was originally addressed. It was meant to address the issues in the whole suburbican Italy, falling under pope's jurisdiction, as part 15 of the letter, in which the problems with clergy in Picenum, a region in central Italy much closer to Rome, profiting off the general population's desperation for money, demonstrates.[636]

That the pope's indignation over women's liturgical activity at the altar was indeed grounded in contemporary realities can be concluded from several archaeological finds from Bruttium, Sicily, and Dalmatia, dated between the 4th and the 6th centuries. An inscription on a funerary marble tablet, dated between the 4th and the 5th century, uncovered in 1877 on the premisses of

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[635] Madigan and Osiek 2005, pp. 186-188; Madigan 2021, pp. 274-277; Sessa 2021, pp. 42, 53-56; Foletti 2023, pp. 40-42. See Gelasius, ep. 14, esp. 14.1 and 14.26, in: Thiel 1867, pp. 362, 376-377: "*Necessaria rerum dispositione constringimur et apostolicae sedis moderamine convenimur, sic canonum paternorum decreta librare et retro praesulum decessorumque nostrorum praecepta metiri, ut quae praesentium necessitas temporum restaurandis ecclesiis relaxanda deposcit, adhibita consideratione diligenti, quantum potest fieri, temperemus: quo nec in totum formam veterum videamur excedere regularum, et reparandis militiae clericalis officiis, quae per diversas Italiae partes ita belli famieque consumpsit incursio, ut in multis ecclesiis, sicut fratris et coepiscopi nostri Johannis Ravennatis ecclesiae sacerdotis frequenti relatione comperimus, usquequaque deficiente servitio ministrorum, nisi remittendo paulisper ecclesiasticis promotionibus antiquitus interralla praefixa, remaneant, sine quibus administrari nequeunt, sacris ordinibus ecclesiae funditus destitutae, atque in plurimis locis per inopiam competentis auxilii salutare subsidium redimendarum desit animarum, nosque magno reatu, si tanto coarctante periculo non aliquatenus consulamus, innecti... Nihilominus impatienter audivimus, tantum divinarum rerum subiisse despectum, ut feminae sacris altaribus ministrare firmentur, cunctaque non nisi virorum famulatui deputata sexum, cui non competunt, exhibere.*" For the English translation see: Neil and Allen 2014, pp. 145-146, 155.

[636] Otranto 1982, pp. 343-349 and Sessa 2021, pp. 53, 55-56. See Gelasius, ep. 14.15, in: Thiel 1867, p. 371: "*Consequens fuit, ut illa quoque, quae de Piceni partibus nuper ad nos missa relatio nuntiavit, non praetereunda putaremus, id est, plurimos clericorum negotiationibus inhonestis et lucris turpibus imminere, nullo pudore cernentes evangelicam lectionem...*" ("It has come about as a consequence that we think the facts related to us in a report sent to us lately from the districts of Picenum should be not overlooked, that is, that very many of the clergy are intent on dishonourable business-dealings and filthy profiteering.", in: Neil and Allen 2014, p. 151). About the *ex post* circulation of the letter in other regions of the peninsula experiencing problems dealt with in it see: Otranto 1982, p. 349 and note 50.

the Roman town Centuripae in Sicily, identifies the deceased as Kale the presbyter, who died at the age of 50. Taking into account that Kale was a Greek female name and the fact that masculine designations were routinely used as gender neutral, it is safe to assume that the person whom the inscription described was a woman serving at the altar.[637] The title *presbytera* could potentially have identified the wife of a priest, but the epithet ἀμέμπτως (without reproach), used in the inscription, testifies about her official role in the Church, as in the late antique written sources it was frequently attributed to officeholders.[638]

Between years 431 and 470 a loving husband erected a tombstone in the happy memory of *presbytera* Leta in Tropea, then part of the region of Bruttium. Because the husband's office is not mentioned anywhere in the inscription, the title of Leta cannot be interpreted as that of the wife of a presbyter, the role assigned to her by the traditional Catholic historiography, referring to the fact that wives of Church officials bore their husbands' titles, as testified for example by the canon 20 of the council of Tours (567), speaking about "*presbiter cum sua presbitera aut diaconus cum sua diaconissa aut subdiaconus cum sua subdiaconissa*".[639]

And women apparently continued to serve at the altar not only in the diocese *Italiae*, but *Illyricum* as well. An inscription on a tombstone reminds the reader that in the year 425 in the cemetery of Salona in Dalmatia Theodosius purchased a burial space from certain Flavia Vitalia, who the incomplete word PRB identifies most probably as *presbytera*. Even though the publications dealing with the inscription struggled with the definition of the nature of her role in the early Christian Church, as of late the fact that she was able to sell a tomb, an activity that fell under the obligations of Church officials in the 5th century, tips the scales towards the interpretation that she herself fulfilled the role of a presbyter, and not her husband, who is nowhere to be found in the inscription.[640]

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[637] Eisen 2000, pp. 4-5, 128-129 and Madigan and Osiek 2005, p. 171: "*ἐνθάδε κῖτε · Καλὴ πρε(σ)β(ῦτις)/ζήσα(σα) · ἔτη · ν ἀμέπτως {ἀμέμπτως}./τὸν βίον τελ(ευτᾷ) τῇ πρ(ὸ) ιθ κ(αλα)ν(δῶν)/Ὀκτωβρίων*". The marble plaque is currently kept in Museo archeologico regionale in Palermo under inv. n. 8707. Kale was identified as exclusively female name by: Ferrua 1989, p. 39, esp. note 130. For the use of masculine designations for groups of mixed gender see: Schlüssler Fiorenza 1984, pp. 44-48.

[638] Eisen 2000, p. 140, note 72.

[639] *Ibidem*, pp. 130-131; Madigan and Osiek 2005, pp. 193-195; Madigan 2021, pp. 283-285: "*B(onae) m(emoriae) s(acrum) Leta presbitera vixit ann(os) XL m(enses) VIII d(ies) VIIII / quei bene fecit maritus / precessit in pace pridie / Idus Maias*". The inscription is currently kept in Palazzo Toraldo di Francia in Tropea. For the updated version of the inscription's dating see: *Epigraphik-Datenbank Clauss/Slaby*, ID 23400015, available online at: https://db.edcs.eu/epigr/epi_ergebnis.php (last viewed on 10. 03. 2025). See also: Otranto 1982, pp. 351-353. For the canon 20 of the council of Tours see: Mansi 1763, col. 797 (here as canon 19). For more written sources attesting to the use of the title *presbytera* for the wives of presbyters see: Madigan and Osiek 2005, pp. 171-173 and Madigan 2021, pp. 261-264.

[640] Otranto 1982, pp. 353-354; Eisen 2000, pp. 131-132; Madigan and Osiek 2005, p. 196; Sanader 2014 with a summary of previous scholarship; Madigan 2021, pp. 286-287; Foletti 2023, pp. 37-38: "*D(ominis) n(ostris)*

As late as 599 the office of *presbytera* appears in the letter of pope Gregory the Great, written to the bishop of Cagliari Januarius, in which the pontiff voices his concerns about the former abbess of the monastery of martyrs Gavinus and Luxurius. Sirica, the abbess in question, not only left property of the monastery to other people in her will, but also refused to dress as a nun, preferring to keep the attire customary for the *presbyterae* in the region. The fact that she kept wearing it suggests that she was a *presbytera* before she became an abbess and that this specific role within the Church hierarchy was visually marked by a special type of clothing.[641]

What the *presbyterae* may have been up to at the altar is hinted on by the furious letter addressed in the year 511 to two presbyters from Bretagne by bishops of Tours, Angers, and Rennes. The ire expressed in the letter revolves around the fact that the rebellious presbyters travelled with women who assisted them at the altar, holding chalices and administering the consecrated wine to the congregation. Even though one source cannot be accepted as a general rule pertinent to all the cases discussed in this part of the chapter, it sheds light on at least part of the activities of the *presbyterae.*[642]

Whether Gelasius had some women in Rome in need to be disciplined in mind when he wrote his decretal is uncertain. Due to the strict papal control over the city it seems improbable that they would fulfil the role of a minister at the altar, as some of their contemporaries in less controlled churches on the peninsula apparently still did (see the use of the verb *ministrare* in the epistle). Yet taking into consideration the fact that the anonymous Roman clerics who wrote pope Boniface's biography in the Felician and Cononian version of *Liber Pontificalis* in the 520s with the express intent to find in the acts of the popes the justification to counter what they perceived as usurpation of the liturgical services at the altar by ascetics, considered it necessary

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Thaeodosio co(n)s(ule) XI et Valentiniano / viro nobelissimo Caes(are) ego Thaeodo/sius emi a Fl(avia) Vita[li]a pr(es)b(yteri) sanc(ta) matro/na auri sol(idis) III sub d(ie)". For more information about the participants in the process of selling a burial place in Late Antiquity see e.g.: Guyon 1974.

[641] Macy 2007, p. 61. For the primary source see: Gregory the Great, ep. 9.7, in: Migne 1862b, col. 946: "*Et dum de sanctitatis vestrae sollicitudine quereremur, cur res monasterio competentes ab aliis pertulerit detinere, communis filius Epiphanius archipresbyter vester praesens inventus respondit memoratam abbatissam usque diem obitus sui induisse vestem monachicam noluisse, sed in vestibus quibus loci illius utuntur presbyterae permanisse*".

[642] Gryson 1976, p. 106; Otranto 1982, pp. 354-355; Madigan and Osiek 2005, pp. 188-190; Macy 2007, pp. 61, 65 (see also pp. 23-48 for the information about variability of the duties of the different groups of ordained clergy depending of the local Church they were part of); Madigan 2021, pp. 277-279; Foletti 2023, p. 35. For the primary source see: De Labriolle 1913, pp. 227-228: "*Viri venerabilis sperati presbyteri relatione cognouimus, quod gestantes quasdam tabulas per diuersorum ciuium capanas circumferre non desinatis, et missas ibidem adhibitis mulieribus in sacrificio diuino, quas conhospitas nominastis, facere praesumastis; sic ut erogantibus uobis eucharistias illae uobis positis calices teneant et sanguinem Christe populo administrare praesumant. . . Idcirco secundum statuta partum caritati uestrae praecipimus, ut non solum huisucemodi mulierculae sacramenta divina pro inlicita administratione non polluant, sed etiam praeter matrem, auiam, sororem uel neptem intra tectum cellolae suae si quis ad cohabitandum habere voluerit, canonum sententia a sacrosanctae liminibus ecclesiae arceatur.*"

to reiterate that women should not touch the altars in churches, it seems plausible that they did retain at least some form of contact with the sanctuary well into the 6th century.[643]

Women offering wine and breaking bread

Deep in the catacombs of Santi Pietro e Marcellino, in the so-called *Cubiculo del Tricliniarca*, a scene of funerary banquet unfolds (fig. 4.7). Four adults are reclining around a semi-oval table, and one is standing next to it. The central figure is captured in the act of drinking, surrounded by two smaller figures, probably children, who, together with other two adults, prostrate their hands towards the centre of the table, where a plate of meat, possibly fish, is placed. Two female figures positioned at the far ends of the table are holding a chalice and what appears to be either a pitcher, or a rectangular box/tablet. It is noteworthy that from the point of view of the intended spectator, i.e. the family member of one of the deceased buried nearby or a *fossor* taking care of the maintenance of the place, both female figures occupied prominent places on the fresco. It is also one of them which raises a cup in front of the other banqueters in a gesture that repeats itself in six banquet scenes present within the same catacomb, generally dated between the late 3rd and the second half of the 4th century.[644]

In the Roman Empire, families and friends, be it Christian or non-Christian, gathered at the tombs and shared a meal with their loved ones, as evidenced by fragments of dishes, drinking cups and bowls uncovered in and around the burial spaces. Family tombs and *cubicula* in the underground cemeteries included facilities for pouring small amounts of wine or oil inside the graves to let the dead partake in the celebration. Grain and salt were left on the indented platforms for food offerings attached to the grave markers (*cippi*) or on tables uncovered in some of the *cubicula*. Due to the restricted space, light, and air circulation below cemeteries

[643] Verardi 2018, pp. 291-293, quoting *Liber Pontificalis* I, in: Duchesne 1862, pp. 88 (discussed above).
[644] See above all Dückers 1992; Tulloch 2001; Osiek et al. 2006, pp. 164-193; Zimmermann 2012. For further bibliography see cat. n. 3.4 in this thesis. The ritual function of the chalice raising and the number of times it is performed by a woman in the catacombs of Pietro e Marcellino was previously established by Tulloch 2001, pp. 129, 132-133, 269, 275-277, 282-285, 289-292, 296-299, 308-310, 314-317, 321-324, 329, Appendix B and Osiek *et al.* 2006, p. 165. For the dating of the paintings see: Mazzei 2001b; Zimmermann 2002, fig. 12; Zimmermann 2012, p. 175. The total number of the banquet scenes in the catacomb is 17: Zimmermann 2012, p. 175 with further bibliography. For the hypothesis that the figures in the middle and at the ends of the table were of more importance than the rest of the participants see: Zimmermann 2012, p. 180. The contents of the plate were identified as fish by Mazzei 2001b, but the state of preservation of the paintings and its partial destruction caused by the forceful opening of the *loculus* below make it hard to reach any indubitable conclusion.

also featured communal banqueting tables aboveground.[645] Pictorial representations of the deceased and mourners reclining on a couch (*kline*) appear steadily in both Greek and Roman funerary sculpture and painting from the 5th century B.C. until the 4th century, coexisting in the 3rd and 4th century with portrayals of groups of diners reclining at a semicircular table (*stibadium*). In the second case both pagan and Christian gatherings are depicted with seven (sometimes five or twelve) mourners reclining around a table sharing wine, bread, fish, and occasionally fowl, hare and chicken meat or beef.[646]

The rituals linked to mourning remained absolutely private in nature and largely outside of the interest of the Christian Church in the first centuries of its existence, a situation which began slowly changing in the second half of the 4th and the 5th century, but even then only in the case of consecrated virgins, bishops and their close kin, for whom a vigil was held inside a sacred liturgical space, accompanied by chanting of Psalms and a funerary procession.[647] As it seems, in its early stages the Christian Church hierarchy did not see the need to take responsibility for the individual commemoration of the dead, even if it was extremely important to the members of the congregation, readily leaving the rituals linked to it in their hands, unsuspecting about the potential threats their individual performance and interpretation may pose for the centralization of the episcopal authority in the city.[648]

The neglect of the rites of commemoration, which were to happen during the burial, on the seventh or the ninth and on the thirtieth or the fortieth day after death according to the writings of Augustine and Ambrose, by the official Church hierarchy is illustrated above all by the fact that they only rarely included a Eucharist celebrated by a member of the clergy, as in some parts of the Empire, such as North Africa, Church canons forbid the Eucharistic rite to be performed in the presence of the corpse, which went directly against the wishes of the bereaved family, who wanted to secure the salvation for the deceased at all costs.[649]

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[645] Alchermes 1988, pp. 290-291, 294-307, 310-311, 356-358; Osiek *et al.* 2006, pp. 168-169; Jensen 2008, pp. 117-118; Rebillard 2012, p. 142. For more information about the tables (*mensae*) in the catacombs see e.g.: Schneider 1927; Jastrzebowska 1981, pp. 197-199; Ardeleanu 2024.

[646] Jastrzebowska 1981, p. 196; Alchermes 1988, p. 375 and Jensen 2008, pp. 107-111, 117. For further information on funerary feasts in the Roman Empire between the 1st and the 5th century see e.g.: Dunbabin 2003, pp. 103-140, 187-202 and Smith 2003.

[647] Alchermes 1988, pp. 344-345; Rebillard 2012, p. 123, esp. note 1, 130, 134.

[648] Rebillard 2012, p. 164. For more information about the formation of the papal authority in relation to the private sphere see: Sessa 2012.

[649] Rebillard 2012, pp. 134-137. For the primary source see: Augustine, *Quaestiones in Heptateuchum* 1.172, in: Migne 1865b, col. 597 and Ambrose, *De excessu fratris* 2.2, in: Zimmerl-Panagl 2022, p. 159; *De obitu Theodosii* 3, published together with a commentary in: Duval 1977, pp. 280-282. For the African canon, dated to the year 393 see: *Concilium Hipponense* 4: "*Illud autem quoniam praesentibus corporibus nonnulli audeant sacrificial*

The funeral of Augustine's mother Monica in Ostia, during which a Eucharist was celebrated at the grave, and the Eucharist performed by Ambrose on the occasion of the seventh-day commemoration of his brother Satyrus suggest that the situation on the Apennine peninsula may have been different, but how often the rite was performed by a member of the clergy in cases of less exalted deceased remains disputable.[650] The question whether there may have been a Eucharistic service performed at the burial site of Christians in the absence of the clergy is not easily answered as well.

What can be established with certainty is that the Church Fathers of the 4th century did not insist on replacing the traditional funeral ceremony with Christian one and did not prescribe the performance of the Eucharist as a fixed element of the funerary rituals, as concluded by Éric Rebillard after the thorough analysis of the sermons and treatises of Augustine and John Chrysostom touching the topic.[651] Thus, the initiative to include or exclude it remained fully in the hands of the mourners themselves. And even when the funerary commemoration, resembling the pre-Christian *parentalia* with copious food and wine consumed in honour of the deceased, which continued to be sought after by the members of the Christian congregations, encountered ire of the local bishops, such as Gaudentius (c. 390-410) in Brescia and Zeno (c. 350-380) in Verona, who compared funerary banquets (*refrigeria*) to pagan sacrifices and found their participants to be distasteful drunks fond of debauchery, they continued to flourish, mainly because of the fact that the Church did not offer any alternative which would console the living and pave the path to salvation for the dead.[652]

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celebrare et partem corporis sancti cum exanimi cadauere communicare arbitror prohibendum.", in: Munier 1974, p. 21.

[650] For more information about the funeral of Monica see: Augustine, *Confessiones* 9.12.32, in: Hammond 2016, pp. 60-61. For more information about the Eucharist performed at the grave of Satyrus see: Ambrose, *De excessu fratris* 1.80, in: Faller 1955, p. 325. For the discussion about the (ir)regularity of the employment of the Eucharistic celebration in the funerary rites see: Alchermes 1988, pp. 340-343, 345-348 hypothesizing, unfortunately without any textual or material clues, that the Eucharist was celebrated not only during the funerals of the wealthy and well-connected members of the Christian congregation, but more indiscrimately, and it was performed by presbyters who took care of the underground cemeteries; Rebillard 2012, pp. 137-138, on the other hand, argues that the Eucharist was performed only in the abovementioned special cases, as there is no proof to suggest otherwise.

[651] Rebillard 2012, p. 134, analysing Augustine, *Sermones de scripturis* 102.3, 172.2-3, in: Migne 1841, colls. 612, 956-957; *De cura gerenda pro mortuis*, in: Zycha 1900, pp. 619-660 ; *In Psalmum 1 enarratio*, in: Migne 1845f, colls. 67-69 and John Chrysostom, *In Iohannem homiliae* 62.5, 85.5-6, in: Migne 1862e, colls. 347-348, 465-468; *In epistulam ad Hebraeos homiliae* 4, in: Migne 1862d, colls. 37-46; *In Matthaeum homiliae* 31.4, in: Migne 1862f, colls. 374-375.

[652] Zeno, bishop of Verona, *Tractatus* 1.25.6.11, in: Löfstedt 1971, p. 75: "*Non hi solum, qui tales sunt, displicent deo, sed et illi, qui per sepulcra discurrunt, qui foetorosis prandia cadaueribus sacrificant mortuorum, qui amore luxuriandi atque bibendi in infamibus locis lagenis et calicibus subito sibi martyres pepererunt…*".
Gaudentius, bishop of Brescia, *Tractatus* 4.14-15, in: Glück 1936, p. 42: "*Partes enim idolatriae sunt veneficia, praecantationes,suballigaturae, vanitates, auguria, sortes, observatio ominum, parentalia; parentalia, inquam, unde idolatriae malum extulit caput erroris. Nam gulae suae causa primum coeperunt homines prandia mortuis*

There is some evidence, above all from North Africa, but also from Syria, Jerusalem and Asia Minor, attesting that under special circumstances, such as an illness or fasting, believers were able to take the consecrated Eucharistic bread from the church and keep it on reserve in their homes. Even though most of the accounts such as Tertullian's note in *De oratione* about the faithful present at the Eucharistic celebration in the church, who, in order to not break their fasting took the body of Christ to their homes to receive the blessing only after the fast ended, relate to the situation in the 2nd and 3rd century, the practice seems to have continued beyond the 4th century in some parts of the Roman Empire. Augustine does report on the home storage of the Eucharist in the north-African community of Fussala without any reproach, even though in the story he tells in the treatise *Against Julian* it is misused as a remedy for the blindness of a five-year old boy Acatius. In the 6th century a letter, erroneously attributed to Basil of Caesarea (370-379) but most probably written by patriarch of Antioch Severus (512-538), makes clear that in Alexandria many members of the Christian congregation who could not attend mass regularly took the communion in their own homes. Even almost a century later John Moschus (c. 550-619) recounts a story about a monk in Cyprus making penance for having committed a grave sin while he was married and had his wife spit the Eucharist she received from their Miaphysite neighbour into the mud as they were both followers of the Monophysite patriarch Severus of Antioch.[653] Is it possible that the members of the Christian community in Rome of

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praeparare, quae ipsi comederent; post hoc etiam sacrificia ausi sunt eis sacrilegacelebrare, quamvis nec ipsi mortuis suis minus sacrificent,qui exercent parentalia, dum super sepulcrorum mensas tremulis ebrietate manibus vina fundentes spiritum sitire balbuttiunt." For more information see: Rebillard 2012, pp. 144-146.

[653] Nussbaum 1979, pp. 269-270; Taft 2003, pp. 2-3 and Rebillard 2012, p. 151. For the sources describing the handling of the Eucharist by Christians outside of the official Church ranks see also: Leclercq 1948. For the Tertullian's account see: Tertullian, *De oratione* 19, in: Evans 1953, p. 22: "*Similiter et de stationum diebus: non putant plerique sacrificiorum orationibus interveniendum, quod statio solvenda sit accepto corpore domini. ergo devotum deo obsequium eucharistia resolvit? an magis deo obligat? nonne sollemnior erit statio tua si et ad aram dei steteris? accepto corpore domini et reservato utrumque salvum est, et participatio sacrificii et exsecutio officii.*" For the Eucharist as home remedy see: Augustine, *Contra Iulianum* 3.162, in: Migne 1865a, col. 1315: "*Erat apud nos Acatius quidam, honesto apud suos ortus loco: clausis oculis natum se esse dicebat; sed quia intus sani palpebris cohaerentibus non patebant, medicum eos ferro aperire voluisse, neque hoc permisisse religiosam matrem suam, sed id effecisse imposito ex Eucharistia cataplasmate, cum jam puer quinque fere aut amplius esset annorum, unde hoc se satis meminisse narrabat.*" For the home communion in Alexandria see: Severus of Alexandria (formerly attributed to Basil of Caesarea), ep. 93, in: Deferrari 1928, pp. 144-145: "*Ἐν Ἀλεξανδρείᾳ δὲ καὶ ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ ἕκαστος καὶ τῶν ἐν λαῷ τελούντων ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πλεῖστον ἔχει κοι- νωνίαν ἐν τῷ οἴκῳ αὐτοῦ , καὶ ὅτε βούλεται, μεταλαμβάνει δι' ἑαυτοῦ.*" For the reattribution of the letter see: Voicu 1995. For the late 6th or the early 7th century story about the monk see: John Moschus, *Pratum spirituale* 30, in: Migne 1863b, colls. 2877-2878: "*Τάδαι ἐμπόριὸν ἐστιν τῆς Κύπρου. Ἐν αὐτῷ μοναστήριόν ἐστιν πλησίον τοῦ λεγομένου Φιλοξένου . Παραβαλόντες οὖν ἐκεῖ, εὕραμεν ἐν αὐτῷ μοναχὸν, τῷ μὲν γένει ' Μελιτινὸν, τῷ δὲ ὀνόματι Ἰσίδωρον. Τοῦτον ἐθεασάμεθα ἀδιαλείπτως κλαίοντα μετὰ οἰμωγῆς. Παρακαλούμενος δὲ ὑπὸ πάντων, ὥστε ἐνδοῦναι μικρὸν τοῦ πένθους, οὐκ ἐπείθετο, ἀλλὰ πᾶσιν ἔλεγεν, ὅτι Πολὺ ἁμαρτωλός εἰμι οἷος οὐ γέγονεν ἀπὸ τοῦ Ἀδὰμ μέχρι τῆς σήμερον. Ἡμῶν δὲ λεγόντων, ὅτι, Ὄντως, κῦρι ἀββᾶ μετὰ ἀληθείας οὐδεὶς ἀναμάρτητος εἰ μὴ εἰς ὁ Θεὸς, ἀπεκρίθη λέ- γων · Πείσθητς, ἀδελφοὶ, οὐχ εὗρον ἐν ἀνθρώποις ἁμαρτίαν οἵαν οὐκ ἐποίησα, οὔτε ἐγγράφως οὔτε ἀγράφως. Εἰ δὲ νομίζετε ὅτι ἐμαυτοῦ κατηγορῶ, ἀκούσατέ μου τῆς ἁμαρτίας, ἵνα καὶ ὑμεῖς ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ εὔξησθε. Ἐγὼ, φησὶν, ὅταν ἤμην ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ, γυναῖκα εἶχον. Ἤμεθα οὖν οἱ δύο τοῦ δόγματος Σευήρου. Ἐλθὼν οὖν ἐγὼ ἐν μιᾷ τῶν ἡμερῶν εἰς τὸν οἰκὸν μου, οὐχ εὗρον τὴν γυναϊκά μου, ἀλλὰ ἀκούω ὅτι ἀπῆλθεν πρὸς τὴν γείτονα κοινωνῆσαι · ἦν δὲ κοινω-*

the 4th century were also storing Eucharist in their houses and that they may have occasionally shared it with their family and friends during the commemorative feast of their loved ones in order to bring blessing to themselves and to the souls? Could have the scenes in the catacombs, containing representations of fish, wine and/or bread, deeply rooted in the earlier tradition, attained a new layer of meaning?[654]

As the home communion was most often necessitated by the scarcity of the churches in which Eucharist was performed, in the western part of the Roman Empire and especially in Rome, where the presence of the pope and emerging network of *tituli* satisfied the religious needs of the population quite efficiently, the last remnants of the practice in the sources do not go further than the end of the 4th century, but attest the home storage of the Eucharistic bread nonetheless.[655] Around the year 250 Novatian (c. 200-c. 258) condemns Christians who do not immediately go home with the Eucharist they received in church but endanger its sacredness by taking it to pagan spectacles. Zeno of Verona (c. 350-380) mentions the domestic storage of the Eucharist when he enumerates the potential complications of a marriage between Christian women and pagan men. The bishop explains that pagan and Christian holidays can occasionally fall on the same day. Even if the married couple would perform their sacrifices separately, the offerings could be deliberately or mistakenly mixed up. With a gruelling twist Zeno also adds that it would even be possible for the pagan man to snatch the vessel with the sacrifice from his Christian wife and hit her in the chest with it or disfigure her face. Last author who makes mention of the home-kept Eucharist is Jerome, who, in his letter to the Roman *patricius* Pammachius, dated to 393, discusses whether married couples should receive the Eucharist after having marital relations or abstain from it for a while. He objects to the fact that some would not go to church to receive the communion when physically unclean, but would partake in the Eucharist at home, and argues that as Christ is present equally in both places what is not permitted at church should be banned at home as well. Jerome takes the information that the Eucharist is kept in the private homes of lay people for granted, without criticizing it *per se*, if

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νοῦσα ἐκείνη εἰς τὴν ἁγίαν καθολικὴν Ἐκκλησίαν. Ἔδραμον δὲ εὐθέως κωλῦσαι αὐτήν. Εἰσελθὼν οὖν εἰς τὸν οἶκον τῆς γείτονος, εὗρον τὴν γυναῖκά μου ἤδη προσφάτως λαβοῦσαν τὴν ἁγίαν μερίδα, καὶ κοινωνοῦσαν. Δραξάμενος τοίνυν τοῦ λάρυγγος.”.

[654] For literary evidence about the importance of fish and bread for the funerary banquets even before Christianity prevailed over other religions in the city see e.g.: Alchermes 1988, p. 310 and Jensen 2008, p. 111. For the ability of the funerary meal scenes on the sarcophagi and in the catacomb paintings to transmit different meanings depending on the context in which they existed and on the audience see: Dunbabin 2003, pp. 109, 126, 140. For the hypothesis about the Eucharistic meaning of the bread and fish when linked to Christian burials see: Vogel 1978; McGowan 1999, pp. 10-17, 90-95, 127-140.

[655] The celebration of the Eucharist in the 4th century Rome in both the papal basilica in the Lateran and the emerging *tituli* is a highly speculative assumption. This organization of the communion of the Christian population in the city is securely attested only for the following century. See e.g.: Baldovin 2005.

the criteria of purity are upheld during its administration, which suggests that it was by no means a rare occurrence.[656] He is also the one to comment that the daily Eucharistic service was expected by Romans, and as it was offered by the city's clergy only since the 6th century, his words allow for the assumption that a home-based communion, performed by both men and women, was common Roman practice during his lifetime.[657]

In all the cases mentioned above, authors insist on reverence during the self-communion, yet there are no references to cultic distinction attached to the Eucharistic bread and wine, such as burning of incense, lighting of lamps and candles, processions, or other gestures of adoration. The Eucharist outside of liturgy is food to be eaten, not a cultic object to be adored.[658] In the absence of the cultic dimension as a prerequisite for the partaking in the consecrated bread and wine the emphasis on the link between their consumption and the presence of Christ, as well as the inability of the Church officials to fulfil the ritual expectations of the families of the deceased, may have lead, at least hypothetically and most probably only until the end of the 4th century, to members of the Christian community sourcing the consecrated bread during the Eucharistic liturgy and bringing it to the cemeteries, making Christ one of the participants of the commemorative festivities, thus actively working on the salvation of the celebrated deceased.

In his sermon on the resurrection of the dead Augustine rejects the literal interpretation of the verse 4:17 from the Book of Tobit: "Break your bread and pour out your wine on the tombs of the just, but do not hand it over to the unjust", which apparently was used by some members of his congregation in defence of the traditional funerary banquets, which were not an offence

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[656] Nussbaum 1979, p. 269; Taft 2003, pp. 2-3; Bowes 2008, pp. 76-78. For Novatian, *De spectaculis* 5, see: Wilhelm Hartel 1871, p. 8: "*…ausus secum sanctum in lupanar ducere, si potuisset, lo qui festinans ad spectaculum dimissus e dominico et adhuc gerens secum ut assolet eucharistiam inter corpora obscoena meretricum Christi sanctum corpus infidelis iste circumtulit plus damnationis meritus de itinere quam de spectaculi voluptate.*" For Zeno, bishop of Verona, *Tractatus* 2.7.8.14-15, see: Löfstedt 1971, pp. 174-175: "*At si discrete fiunt ista, nihil prodest. Ex uno enim proficiscendo et in unum remeando, si non confusione, vel errore fiunt una... Quod si factum non fuerit factumue displicuerit, tum tota mugiet litibus domus, blasphemabitur deus arreptoque forsitan ipso sacrificio tuo tuum pectus obtundet, tuam faciem deformabit praestans aliquando et beneficium, cum te iubet ad ecclesiam non venire.*" For Jerome, ep. 48.15, see: Migne 1845i, col. 596: "*Scio Romae hanc esse consuetudinem, ut fideles semper Christi corpus accipiant, quod nec reprehendo nec probo — unusquisque enim in sensu suo abundat — , sed ipsorum conscientiam conuenio, qui eodem die post coitum communicant et iuxta Persium noctem flumine purgant, quare ad martyres ire non audeant, quare non ingrediantur ecclesias. An alius in publico, aiius domi Christus est? Quod in ecclesia non licet, nec domi licet.*".

[657] About the daily Eucharistic celebration in 6th century Rome see e.g.: Taft 1997, p. 94 and Bowes 2008, p. 76. For the Jerome's claims about the frequent home communion as a Roman trademark, see: Jerome, ep. 48.15, in: Migne 1845i, col. 596, cited above, and ep. 71.6, in: Migne 1845i, col. 672: "*De Sabbato quod quaeris, utrum jejunandum sit: et de Eucharistia, an accipienda quotidie, quod Romana Ecclesia [al. Romanae Ecclesiae] et Hispaniae observare perhibentur, scripsit quidem et Hippolytus vir disertissimus; et carptim diversi Scriptores e variis auctoribus edidere.*".

[658] Mitchell 1990, p. 28.

against Christian faith in their eyes. The argument of the bishop against breaking of the bread and pouring of the wine suggests that the practice existed at least in the form of non-liturgical communion and was an object of tension between the ordinary Christians and their bishop.[659] The same practice seems to be alluded to by Ambrose in the brief passage in book 7 of the *Commentary on Luke*:

"There is also, in the prophetic sense, the burial that consists in laying on the tombs of our ancestors what you know reader which the infidel cannot understand: not that food or drink is ordered, but the reverent participation in the holy offering is revealed."[660]

Here I adhere to the interpretation of Éric Rebillard, who finds in the phrase a reference to the laying of the Eucharist on the tombs of those who died in faith, the only ones able to participate in the holy offering, in contrast to the non-Christians.[661]

Even though sons were ultimately responsible for the commemoration of their parents, the management of the funerary meals fell to the primary caregivers of the family: women, who could act as leading figures in the ceremonies associated with them, including those with religious subtext.[662] The female ritual activity tied to the funerary sphere was not limited to the catacombs, at least not in the 4th century. Imperial basilicas may have offered them an

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[659] Dolbeau 2020. For discussion of the passage from Augustine, *Sermones* 361.6.6, see: Rebillard 2012, pp. 150-151: "And it's obvious that this doesn't benefit the dead, and that it's a custom of the pagans, and that it doesn't flow from the channel of justice derived from our fathers the patriarchs; we read about their funerals being celebrated; we don't read of funeral sacrifices being offered for them. And as for the objection some people bring from the Scriptures: "Break your bread and pour out your wine on the tombs of the just, but do not hand it over to the unjust" (Tb 4:17), this is not the occasion, indeed, to expatiate on it; but still I will say that the faithful can understand what is being said. It is well known, after all, to the faithful how the faithful do these things out of a religious respect for their dear departed; and that such rites are not to be granted to the unjust, that is to unbelievers, because "the just man lives by faith" (Rom. 1:17), this too is known to the faithful." For the Latin version see: Migne 1863a, col. 1602: "*Et manifestum est hoc ad mortuos non pertinere, et consuetudinem hanc esse Paganorum, non venire de propagine illa et vena justitiae patrum nostrorum Patriarcharum, quibus exsequias celebratas esse legimus, parentatum esse non legimus. Hoc etiam in moribus Judaeorum animadverti potest: non enim tenuerunt inde virtutis frugem, sed tamen tenuerunt in quibusdam solemnitatibus consuetudinis vetustatem. Et quod objiciunt quidam de Scripturis, Frange panem tuum, et effunde vinum tuum super sepulcra justorum, et ne tradas eum injustis (Tob. IV, 18); non est quidem de hoc disserendum, sed tamen posse dico intelligere fideles quod dictum est. Nam quemadmodum ista fideles faciant religiose erga memorias suorum notum est fidelibus; et quia non sunt ista exhibenda injustis, id est, infidelibus, quia, Justus ex fide vivit (Rom. I, 17), etiam hoc fidelibus notum est.*" Hypothesis equalling the breaking of bread to the performance of the Eucharist was put forward by Jastrzebowska 1981, p. 203 as well, even though the scholar attributes it (without any convincing evidence from the sources, however) to the presence of clergy at the commemoration meals.

[660] Ambrose, *Expositio evangelii secundum Lucam* 7.43, in: Rebillard 2012, p. 146. For the Latin version of the text see: Adriaen and Ballerini 1957, p. 228: "*Est et illa prophetica, ut supra sepulchra maiorum quaedam ponamus, quae lector agnoscis, infidelis intellegere non debet, non quo cibus imperetur aut potus, sed sacrae oblationis veneranda communio reveletur.*".

[661] Rebillard 2012, pp. 146-147.

[662] Osiek *et al.* 2006, pp. 169-170, 172 and Barkman 2016, pp. 223, 229.

opportunity to act as active agents in the liminal rituals as well. In *Confessions* Augustine (396-430) records how his mother Monica brought cakes, bread and wine to the *memorias sanctorum* in Milan, like she used to do in Africa, only to be stopped by a gatekeeper on the orders of bishop Ambrose, who banned such offerings from the churches. On this occasion Augustine describes the general structure of the rites aimed at expressing the devotion at the tombs not only of martyrs, but also of deceased relatives, which were the object of his mother's regular visits as well:

"She, on the other hand, used to bring her basket with its festal food offerings to take a taste first and then share round, but she would never set out more than a single beaker of wine, mixed to suit her abstemious tastes, from which to sip out of respect. If it seemed appropriate to honour a number of chapels of the deceased in this way, she would carry the selfsame beaker around to set out in each place. She would share it in sips with her companions even though it was now not only very watery but also far too warm."[663]

It is unlikely that Monica was the only woman to exercise her agency within the commemorative rituals by procuring feast supplies and passing wine, a behaviour echoing traditional female roles within the Roman household. However, as the power of the bishop continued to expand, it is easy to understand why such unofficial and ambiguous authority may have led to unease among the members of the Church hierarchy and to desire to create strict boundaries which would limit the individual ritual performances.[664]

In Rome one of the places opened to the commemorative activity of women may have been the basilica of St. Peter, which, being an *ex-voto* for the victory of emperor Constantine over Licinius in 324, was intended to honour the tomb of the Apostle Peter and serve as a cemeterial church for the Christian community. In some sense the basilica was regarded as the property of the imperial family, covering the function of a public building.[665] At least until the end of the 4th century it remained largely untouched by the authority of the pope, exercise of which was restricted by the presence of *custos loci*, whose loyalty seems to have laid with the emperor,

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[663] Augustine, *Confessiones* 6.2, in: Hammond 2014, pp. 236-241: "…*sed illa cum attulisset canistrum cum sollemnibus epulis praegustandis atque largiendis, plus etiam quam unum pocillum pro suo palato satis sobrio temperatum, unde dignationem sumeret, non ponebat, et si multae essent quae illo modo videbantur honorandae memoriae defunctorum, idem ipsum unum, quod ubique poneret, circumferebat, quo iam non solum aquatissimo sed etiam tepidissimo cum suis praesentibus per sorbitiones exiguas partiretur*…". See commentary of the episode in: Alchermes 1988, pp. 407-409; Barkman 2016, pp. 247-248 and Brandenburg 2021, p. 104.

[664] Barkman 2016, pp. 248-249.

[665] See Thacker 2013, pp. 138-139 and note 9 for written sources that led the scholar to the conclusion that the Christian basilicas build by Constantine remained largely in the power orbit of the imperial family and the Roman senatorial families.

and members of the senatorial aristocracy, who safeguarded the building for the purposes of self-representation, making it less hostile space for expression of female agency.[666] The space of the basilica was separated between places envisaged for Eucharistic celebration, most probably still taking place very unregularly during the 4th century, and the commemoration of the dead in the form of funerary banquets.[667] Apparently up until the later 4th century banquets were held in the basilica of St. Peter with some frequency, which may be deduced from Augustine's critique of the daily displays of drunkenness, generally linked by the scholarship to the *refrigeria*.[668] Whether they had been perceived by their participants as having Eucharistic overtones cannot be stated with precision due to the lack of sources describing their side of the story, but we can interpret at least one of the letters of Paulinus of Nola (c. 410-431) to his friend, senator Pammachius, as a fragment pointing in this direction. In it, the bishop describes a great funeral feast, held by Pammachius in commemoration of his wife Paulina in 397, which filled not only the naves, but also the atrium of the basilica of St. Peter. The rhetoric of Paulinus, using expressions such as "…for you…offered to God pure libations as the sacred sacrifice…" and "…you offered a most acceptable sacrifice to Christ, in whose tabernacle you have offered up a sacrifice of true jubilation, by refreshing and feeding those who with many blessings

[666] Thacker 2013, pp. 140-141 reports on an episode from the *Historia Arianorum* 35-41, written by Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria (328-373) in 358, describing the refusal of pope Liberius (352-366) to comply with the request of emperor Constantius II (337-361) to condemn the Nicene creed (published in: Migne 1857b, colls. 734-742). According to the story, upon the pope's refusal emperor's agent, eunuch Eusebius, went to the *martyrium Petri apostoli* and presented his gifts and request there to the *custos loci*, warding the basilica. Liberius, angered by the actions of the warden, who accepted the gifts, threw him out, which resulted in the request of Constantius to the prefect of Rome to expel Liberius from the city. Thacker goes against the grain of the accepted interpretation of De Blaauw 1994, pp. 454-455, who sees the episode as evidence of Liberius's firm control over the new basilica and ventures to propose that the obedience of the *custos* to the imperial eunuch suggests the opposite: the administrator of the shrine may have thought himself to be primarily a member of the imperial bureaucracy in Rome, hence his insubordination to the wishes of the pope. That the pope held less authority in the basilica than previously accepted is further attested by a fragmentary inscription found in pavement of the oratory of John VII (705-707), recording an edict of emperors Gratian, Valentinian II and Theodosius (co-emperors between 379-383) from late 370s or early 380s. Addressed to Eutherius, probably prefect of Rome, and condemning the insulting of the relics of apostles and martyrs and alienation of the estates dedicated to the maintenance of their cult, with special reference to the *basilica apostoli Petri*, it suggests that the emperors still viewed themselves as patrons and proprietors of the basilica: ICUR NS II, 4099, available online at: *Epigraphic Database Bari*, https://www.edb.uniba.it/epigraph/14387 (last viewed on 24. 02. 2025). For more information about the push and pull for power between the emperors and the Roman bishops see e.g.: Cooper and Hillner 2007, pp. 21-58.

[667] Alto Bauer 2012, pp. 157-158; Thacker 2013, p. 142-144, especially fig. 7.2 with Tiberius Alfrano's plan of St. Peter's (1590), reconstructing senatorial mausolea on the outer side of the north wall of the basilica and Brandenburg 2021, pp. 104-105. For the hypothesis that the celebration of the Eucharist in the basilica was not yet regular in the 4th century see e.g.: Alto Bauer 2012, p. 157.

[668] Augustine of Hippo, ep. 29, in: Parsons 1951, p. 106. For the interpretation of the complaints as linked to *refrigeria* see: Volp 2002, pp. 234-239; Jensen 2008, pp. 132-133; Thacker 2013, p. 144 and Brandenburg 2021, p. 104.

offered to God the sacrifice of praise", call to mind not only the many occasions in which Christ fed the crowds with bread and fish, but also the pre-eucharistic offerings of Melchizedek.[669]

But back to the wall painting in the *Cubiculo del Tricliniarca*. Because of the fact that the interpretation of the scene as a visual record of an actual commemoratory meal and not a banquet of rejoicing souls in the otherworld has been already convincingly argued by Janet Tulloch, I would like to stop and ponder the nature of the actions women represented on it perform.[670] The inscriptions accompanying the figures, containing commands for wine to be mixed with hot water and offered (AGAPE MISCE NOBIS, IRENE PORGE CALDA) are not attached to any of the figures present at the banquet table in particular and may have been intended as if spoken by the deceased family member(s) from the otherworld, directed to their living kin, which would not be unusual given the pouring of libations inside the graves as an intrinsic part of the commemorative rituals of the Romans, both Christian and not, discussed above.[671] Would this be the case, the woman holding a chalice would be the one to enact the ritual mixing and pouring of the wine, but (probably) being Christian, she would not do so to appease the soul of the deceased buried under the *arcosolium*, but to nourish it so that it may be successfully resurrected after the second coming of Christ.[672] That a ritual is being depicted is not a straightforward observation but can be suspected from the fact that only two of the figures participating in the meal, namely the woman in the far left corner of the table and the man sitting in the middle, who may or may not be the visual representation of the dead present at the banquet, hold cups, to be passed around in a gesture charged with symbolic meaning.[673]

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[669] Paulinus of Nola, ep. 13.13-14, in: Walsh 1988a, pp. 129-131, esp. p. 130. For the Latin version see: de Hartel 1894, pp. 94-96: "*Quam laetum ergo tunc deo et angelis pacis et cunctis sanctorum spiritibus spectaculum praebuisti! primo de apostoli veneratione, cuius fidem ac memoriam tam multiplicata opulentiae devotione celebrasti, sacras primum hostias, casta libamina, cum acceptissima ipsius commemoratione deo deferens, deinde munificentia consequenti te ipsum in corde mundo et spiritu humiliato acceptissimum sacrificium offerens Christo, in cuius tabernaculis verae iubilationis hostias inmolasti, reficiens et pascens eos, qui benedictione numerosa laudis hostiam sacrificarent deo.*" For the thorough discussion of the feast see e.g.: Jastrzebowska 1981, pp. 199, 201 and Alchermes 1988, pp. 399-405. For the offering of Melchizedek and its early Christian interpretation in relation to the Eucharist see: Vandergriff 2020.

[670] For the summary of both currents in the research on the banquet scenes see: Dückers 1992, who prefers to see otherworldly affairs in them. For the idea that the banquet scene at least partly depicts a funerary commemorative meal, in which the deceased is sometimes represented, see e.g.: Jastrzebowska 1979, pp. 60-71; Engemann 1982, pp. 249-250; Tulloch 2001, pp. 112-122, 254-263, 278-279, 287, 293, 312, 318, 325, 328-329, 340; Osiek *et al.* 2006, p. 166; Zimmermann 2012, pp. 171, 176, 180; Kunder 2017, p. 1339.

[671] Tulloch 2001, pp. 235-238, 253-256.

[672] *Ibidem*, pp. 256-258, 329-330.

[673] *Ibidem*, pp. 280-281, 284-286; Osiek *et al.* 2006, p. 181; Zimmermann 2012, pp. 178, 181. For the hypothesis that the deceased may have been depicted among the participants of the meal see also: Engemann 1982 and Zimmermann 2007.

The possibility of employment of Eucharist in the commemorative ceremonies makes the interpretation of the object the second female figure *in cornu dextro* has in one of her hands as a rectangular box, potentially able to hold a small amount of consecrated bread, similar in its function to the *arca* mentioned by Cyprian, bishop of Cartage (248/349-258), in his cautionary tale about a woman who approached the box in which she held the Eucharist with unclean hands, only to be scared witless by the flames that emerged from it in response to her actions, very tempting.[674] Yet the conservation state of the painting allows for such disparate interpretations of the object that the one proposed above remains a wishful thinking. Nevertheless, other suggestions also point to the woman being a person of authority (if she holds a tablet) or being involved in the ritual performed by the woman with a chalice (if she holds a pitcher with wine).[675] Her ritual role is underlined by the fact that she is dressed in a long tunic with *clavi* of dark purple colour, perceived by the Romas as having apotropaic power, which would make sense for someone responsible for the ritual purity of the event.[676]

The engagement of women from the catacomb of Santi Pietro e Marcellino in a ritual with salvific power and eschatological undercurrents may find its counterpart in a slightly earlier depiction of a communal meal in the *Cappella Graeca* inside the cemetery of Priscilla (fig. 4.8).[677] Discovered in 1893-1894 by Joseph Wilpert and identified by him as the earliest visual representation of the ritual action of breaking bread before the Eucharistic communion, it has been since re-interpreted as a *refrigerium*, albeit subtly referencing the miracles of the multiplication of the loaves through seven baskets of bread depicted at the sides of the table and

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[674] Nussbaum 1979, p. 268, quoting Cyprian, *De lapsis* 26, in: Hartel 1868, p. 256: "*Et cum quaedam arcam suam in quo Domini sanctum foit manibus inmundis temptasset aperire, igne inde surgente deterrita est ne auderet adtingere. Et alius qui et ipse maculatus sacrificio a sacerdote celebrato partem cum ceteris ausus est latenter accipere, sanctumio Domini edere et contrectare non potuit, cinerem ferre se apertis manibus invenit.*" The form of the boxes in which the Eucharist was kept in the 4th century cannot be proven with certainty, as all the objects that were identified as Eucharistic containers so far are not linked to any written sources that would clarify their function and other evidence is only indirect. I thank my colleague Ruben Campini for the insight on the matter and for sharing with me bits and pieces of his dissertation thesis in progress *Vessels of Salvation: The Reception and Uses of Late Antique Ivory Pyxides (4th–7th centuries CE) with Christian Decorations*. The hypothesis about the object on the painting potentially being a box was first proposed by: Tulloch 2001, p. 63.

[675] For the hypothesis about the object being a tablet, see: Tulloch 2001, p. 63. For the hypothesis about it being a pitcher, see: Dückers 1992, p. 150. For more information about scrolls, codices etc. as signs of learning and authority utilized in female self-representation, see chapter 1 of this thesis.

[676] Tulloch 2001, pp. 277, 286. For more information about the symbolism of the attire of the Roman women see e.g.: Lynn Sebesta 1994.

[677] Due to the many restoration campaigns the painting underwent, its dating is highly ambiguous. The previous scholarship was able only to narrow it down to the period between the beginning of the 3rd and the early 4th century: Engemann 1997, p. 17; Jensen 2000, pp. 20-21; Osiek *et al.* 2006, p. 182; Zimmermann 2010, p. 1128; Borg 2013, pp. 252-257; Kunder 2017, p. 1337; Schenk 2017, p. 121.

fish displayed on the plate in front of the gathered participants of the commemoration.[678] Seven figures gathered behind the sigma-shaped table and engaged in conversation sparked even more controversy than the dating and the identification of the subject of the fresco. Used as a weapon in the heated debate about the female involvement in the liturgical rites, especially in the Eucharist, the gathering was interpreted variously as predominantly male or female and the figure sitting in the far left corner of the table as respectively a male priest or a female officiant, a confusing dichotomy which only serves to confirm the poor state of preservation of the fresco, allowing the wishful eye of the beholder to see exactly what it desires to see.[679]

Only one of the figures is marked as distinctly feminine by the veil that covers her head. This does not, however, mean that the other figures must necessarily be identified as male. The veiling was a conscious act marking one's status and thus on the same occasion some women may have chosen to veil while others may have not.[680] With the utmost caution it can even be suggested that the hair of all the figures, apart from the one on the far left, who lastly has been interpreted as a child putting its feet on the table in an unruly fashion (sic!), seems to be swept into what appears to be a feminine coiffure.[681] Would it be the case, the scene would have represented a female funerary symposium, not dissimilar to the one captured in the mid- to late 4th-century mosaic from the necropolis south of Antioch, currently housed in the Worcester Art Museum in Massachusetts, in which representants of an all-female funerary *collegium* are gathered around a sigma-shaped table to commemorate most probably another member of the *collegium* through an oration one of them is reading from a scroll (fig. 4.9).[682] But while the mosaic is focused on the representation of erudition, the fresco bears strong Eucharistic and eschatological undertones, expressed through the presence of seven baskets, seven participants of the banquet, fish, chalice with wine and bread on the table, ready to be broken by one of the women, alluding at least to some extent to the Last Supper.[683] The significance of the painting for the interpretation of the ritual roles women in Rome could fulfil, however, is strongly dependent on the interpretation of its protagonists as female, which is far from bulletproof.

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[678] Wilpert published his hypothesis in: Wilpert 1895, pp. 1-9. It was refuted e.g. by: Dölger 1943, pp. 503-527. The scholarly opposition against Wilpert's interpretation was summarized by: Kunder 2017, pp. 1337-1338. For the note about allusion to the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves see: Schenk 2017, p. 128.
[679] Especially heated exchange of opinions was sparked by Irvin 1980, pp. 81-83 and the rebuttal of her hypotheses by Irwin 1984, p. 37. The debate was summarized by Denzey 2007, pp. 94-95.
[680] Denzey 2007, p. 98. For more information see: Stafford 2024.
[681] Irvin 1980, p. 83 and Denzey 2007, p. 98. For the interpretation of the figure as child see: Schenk 2017, p. 129, note 27.
[682] Inv. n. 1936.26, published in: Dunbabin 2003, pp. 184-185; Becker and Kondoleon 2005, pp. 196-297; Stafford 2020a, pp. 88-89 with further bibliography.
[683] Denzey 2007, p. 100 and Corley 2010, pp. 18, 59, 90-91.

Conclusions

It seems that under specific circumstances women in Rome of the 3rd and 4th century were not unlike the virgin blessing bread for her family members in the mid-5th century Syriac manuscript we discussed in the previous chapter. It is true that while they operated within the rigorously scrutinised liturgical space, their agency was limited to baking of the bread to be consecrated during the Eucharist, stamping it with ritual stamps to distinguish it from other types of bread and exchanging it for prayers and honour during the *offertorium*, which in itself was a substantial achievement.[684] But in the ambivalent realm of individual commemoration, not completely untouched by the Christian rituals yet outside of the sphere of control of the official Church hierarchy, they may have gained competences far outreaching the mere role of a supplier and allowing them to perform ritual actions with Eucharistic/eschatological connotations in the name of protection and salvation of everybody present at the *refrigerium*. Unfortunately for the art historian, in the case of Rome the preserved visual sources capture this part of the religious life of women in Rome even more scarcely and ambiguously that the fragmentary written sources do.

What they are able to convey with more accuracy, however, are the non-Eucharistic roles women in Rome were able to officially fulfil within the liturgical space. Even though the prohibitions of the canons of several councils convoked in the 5th and 6th century and decrees of popes from the same period demonstrate that the sentiment against women operating in the proximity of the altar was more than negative, female presbyters did not disappear and were continuously commemorated in inscriptions. It is true that none of the available fragments attesting to their existence come from Rome. But even in the city under the strong control of the pope, where their opportunity to serve at the altar cannot be proven with certainty in the period of our interest, women continued to serve their congregations as suppliers of liturgical

[684] Romano 2016, pp. 56, 68, 100, who interprets the contribution of the bread to the Eucharist as a liturgical act. See also: Angenendt 1983, pp. 175-180, 195-202. For more information about the *offertory* during the Roman stational liturgy see: *Ordo Romanus* I 69-74, in: Andrieu 1971, pp. 91-92. For more information about the Eucharistic bread stamps see: Galavaris 1970. The preparation of the Eucharistic bread by women is attested by an early-8th-century biography of the pope Gregory the Great (590-604), written by an anonymous monk of the monastery in Whitby, which contains a story about a woman who smiled upon receiving the Eucharist, having recognised the bread she herself had baked: *Liber beatae Gregorii papae* 20: "*Nam antiquorum fertur esse narratio quia quaedam Romae aliquando matrona sibi oblations faciens, eas adtulisset, quas iam vir sanctus accipiens in sacrosancti corporis Christi sanctificavit agoniam. Cumque illa venisset eam communicare de manu Dei hominis atque illum audivit dicentem, "Corpus Domini nostri Iesu Christi conservet animam tuam," subrisit.*", in: Colgrave 1968, pp. 104-107.

textiles, deaconesses, most probably anointing women during the ritual of baptism, teachers of the Scriptures, and consecrated virgins and widows singing and praying for the salvation of their peers.

As the seat of papal authority, where ecclesiastical control was especially reinforced already since the second half of the 4th century, Rome represents a special historiographical challenge. Moreover, Roman Church maintained considerable oversight over the production and preservation of historical records for centuries afterward. This control of official historiography has undoubtedly shaped our understanding of women's roles in early Roman Christianity, potentially obscuring evidence that did not align with later teachings regarding gender roles within the Church.

The findings of this chapter reveal a far more complex picture of women's liturgical and quasi-liturgical roles than traditional ecclesiastical historiography has acknowledged. What emerges from the archaeological evidence, epigraphic sources, and careful re-examination of normative texts is a pattern of female agency that was systematically circumscribed and obscured over time rather than non-existent from the beginning. The process was neither uniform nor immediate, with significant regional variations and local resistances. Even as formal prohibitions increased, women continued to carve out spaces of religious authority and ritual significance, adapting to changing ecclesiastical landscapes while maintaining forms of spiritual agency.

The very persistence of prohibitive canons against women's proximity to the altar throughout the 5th and 6th centuries indicates that women were officially ordained in both Eastern and Western churches during the early Christian period. Particularly revealing is evidence suggesting women's access to and ritual functions within the altar area itself. Contrary to later prohibitions, women in various early Christian communities could enter what would later become strictly male liturgical space, offering prayers and performing ritual actions there. In some communities, women assisted with Eucharistic celebrations, and there are tantalizing indications that in certain circumstances − perhaps in domestic settings or female monastic communities − women may have broken bread in ritualized contexts with Eucharistic connotations.

5. Rhetoric shift of the 6th and 7th century: leaving the “real” women behind

The centralization of Rome’s care for the sick and poor, land management and (occasionally) food provisioning in the hands of the pope in the period of interest of this thesis found its pinnacle in the pontificate of Gregory the Great (590-604). Civil service, comprising of lay lawyers (*defensores*) and headed by a chancellor (*primicerius*), became operational alongside diplomatic, financial, administrative and welfare services staffed by clerics and headed by seven deacons.[685] The strong centralization of the (not only spiritual) management of the city in the hands of the papal administration at the expense of the Senate, which never recovered from the dispersion of its members during the Gothic wars, resulted in much needed improvement of the negotiating position of the pope, who had to delicately navigate the relationship with the Byzantine emperor, legally in possession of large parts of the peninsula since 552, represented in Rome by dispatched officials. Those, although sometimes incapacitated by the Longobard troops cutting them off from the imperial court in Constantinople and from the exarchate in Ravenna, were the formal judges, military leaders and supervisors of building and minting activities in the city and had to be collaborated with, in spite of the fact that the Church-centric contemporary sources make the reader believe otherwise. The other major power testing the diplomatic and administrative power of the papacy were the aforementioned Longobards, whose threat was more acute ever since they started energetically invading northern and central regions of the peninsula in 568, to be successfully deterred only after intervention from the pope, who achieved an annually renewed truce with them in 598, going to personal expense to bribe them not to sack Rome and to ransom victims of their raids.[686]

To describe the state of the city at the beginning of Gregory’s pontificate, his biographer, referencing an eye witness report and a sermon of the pope, paints a grim picture of Longobards looting and burning the countryside, Tiber flooding the city along with granaries on its banks and filling it with vermin, buildings falling, economy plummeting and the population decimated by epidemics and starvation, caused not only by the supposedly worst natural disaster to have

[685] Krautheimer 2000, p. 60. For more information about the structure of the papal administration see also: Saxer 2001a, pp. 496-552.
[686] Llewellyn 1996, p. 97; Krautheimer 2000, pp. 60-61, 64, 69; Rota 2000, pp. 154-158, 160-162; Martyn 2011, p. 2; Dey 2021, pp. 70-71, 73-74; Delogu 2022, pp. 39-42. On the end of the Senate see e.g.: Salzman 2021, pp. 300-336; Oppedisano 2024.

ever hit the city but also by breakdown of administration and welfare services as a result of a succession of wars and invasions over the course of the 6th century.[687]

It is true that the picture is somewhat distorted in order to glorify the involvement of Gregory in regulation and reconstruction of public services and spaces, which in fact were prevalently cared for by the Byzantine administration, while the occasional ecclesiastical involvement was an intentional concession from the imperial representatives to the pope.[688] Natural catastrophes struck the city before and the deterioration of the services and the physical fabric of the city itself was not a new phenomenon. Already by the year 500, the correspondence of the chancellor of king Theodoric (471-526), Cassiodorus (488-583), comments on the precarious state of many parts of the city, whose erosion he was unsuccessfully trying to halt. He describes sewers and aqueducts in need of repairs, their personnel having left for better pay in aristocratic households, granaries collapsing due to old age, bronze statues from public buildings being looted, along with marble revetments and objects made of brass and lead. The phenomenon was simply aggravated by the tumultuous political situation of the 6th century and the flood of monastic congregations, rural clergy and peasants who fled the Longobard invaders and found refuge in Rome, instantly swelling its population and further complicating the food provisioning, stalling ever since the grand estates in the Roman countryside were gradually abandoned due to their

[687] Krautheimer 2000, p. 62. For the biography of the pope see: John the Deacon, *Vita S. Gregorii Magni* 1.34-45, in: Migne 1862c, colls. 77-82. Its author found inspiration in: Gregory the Great, *Homiliae in Ezechielem* 1.9.9 and 2.6.22, in: Migne 1878, colls. 874, 1009-1010: "*Urbes erutas, eversa castra, depopulatos agros, suffossas Ecclesias videmus; et tamen adhuc parentes nostros ad iniquitates sequimur, ab eorum elatione quam vidimus non mutamur.*" "*Quid est jam, rogo, quod in hoc mundo libeat? Ubique luctns aspicimus, ondique gemitus andimus. Destructae urbes, eversa sunt castra, depopulati agri, in solitndinem terra redacta est. Nullus in agris incola, pene nullus in urbibus habitator remansit; et tamen ipsae parvae generis humani reliquiae adhuc quotidie et sinecessatione feriuntur.*" The situation in the late 6th-century Rome was described also by: Gregory of Tours, *Historia Francorum* 10.1, in: Krusch and Levison 1951, p. 477: "*Anno igitur quinto decimo Childeberthi regis diaconus noster ab urbe Roma sanctorum cum pigneribus veniens, sic retulit, quod anno superiore, mense nono, tanta inundatio Tiberis fluvius Romam urbem obtexerit, ut aedes antiquae deruerent m, horrea etiam eclesiae subversa sint, in quibus nonnulla milia modiorum tritici periere. Multitudo etiam serpentium cum magno dracone in modo trabis validae per huius fluvii alveum in mare discenditt; sed suffocatae bestiae inter salsos maris turbidi fluctus et litori eiectae sunt.*" The population dwindled from approximately 700 000 - 800 000 by the year 400 to 300 000 - 400 000 by the year 452 and finally collapsed to 50 000 - 60 000 by the year 500 in the aftereffects of the Vandals' pillaging and burning of substantial parts of Rome as well as the countryside, which made the food scarce, an irreparable situation given the general poverty of the Roman emperors at the time caused by loss of lands in Northern Africa, Sardinia and Sicily. Even though the number of inhabitants increased slightly during the reign of Theodoric (493-526), who brought a period of respite to the city's population and extensively invested in restoration of public buildings and renewal of state-subsidized food provisioning, after several sieges of the city by Byzantine and Gothic armies over the period spanning mere decade and a half (536-552), which brought increased mortality caused by famine and contagious diseases, the population plummeted. Its number finally increased, augmented by the copious refugees, during the pontificate of Gregory the Great, but only to the numbers from the beginning of the 6th century. See: Krautheimer 2000, p. 65; Christie 2006, pp. 250-251; Cascio 2013, pp. 416-418; Dey 2021, pp. 33-35, 42, 51-53, 65-67; Delogu 2022, pp. 14-15.

[688] Another ulterior motif behind such rhetoric was to depict the "heretic" Longobards in the worst possible way. See e.g. Gasparri 2016; Foletti 2018.

unprofitability, the no longer drained fields turned into swamps infesting the city with malaria by the year 500, and the overseas latifundia in Gaul, Spain and Northern Africa were taken over by Burgundians and Franks, Visigoths, and Vandals respectively, while the shipments of grain from Sicily and southern Italy were threatened by the Gothic wars, the Longobard invasion and Vandal pirates in the course of the 5th and 6th centuries. Yet despite all this, main *fora* and streets were kept in good order, just like the palaces on the Palatine, in which various imperial officers were recorded in Gregory's time, including *curator palatii*, last mentioned in the written sources as late as 687, in the now lost epitaph of the father of pope John VII (705-707), buried in the church of Sant'Anastasia, who held the office. The column set up on the Roman Forum in 608 in honour of emperor Phokas (602-610) rose from a 3rd-century pavement, which must have been maintained up to that point. Forum of Trajan remained operational in the course of the 7th century as well. The imperial administration took good care of those public buildings which were still in use, funds allowing. To not exclude the urbanistic activities of the Church, it has to be mentioned that several new places of worship were built in the span of the 6th century, too, among which stand out the churches of Santi Quirico e Giulitta (537), San Giovanni a Porta Latina (around 550), Santi Apostoli (around 560), and the church above the tomb of the martyr Lawrence (579-590).[689]

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[689] Krautheimer 2000, pp. 64-68; Dey 2021, pp. 53-56, 62-63, 67-68, 73-76; Delogu 2022, pp. 18-28. While Krautheimer 2000, pp. 64-65, 69-72 emphasizes the absolute executive power of the pope within the city at the expense of the imperial officials, Delogu 2000, pp. 198-199; Cooper and Hillner 2007, pp. 55-56; Dey 2021, pp. 69-75; Salzman 2021, pp. 289-291 and Delogu 2022, pp. 55-58, 62-64, among others, point out the importance of the Byzantine administration for rebuilding of the city and argue that in cases when the papal administration filled in for the imperial one it was done with the express permission of the emperor. For the situation during the reign of Theodoric see: Cassiodorus, ep. 3.29-30, 7.13, 10.30, in: Mommsen 1894b, pp. 94-95, 210, 317: "*Atque ideo viri illustris et magnifici patricii Paulini auctorum supplicatione suscepta, quae habetur in subditis, horrea longi temporis vetustate destructa, quibus illud atque illud vocabulum praefixit antiquitas, si nunc ussui publico minime necessaria esse monstrantur nec aliqua ibidem est species quae ad fiscum pertinent congregata, praefato viro cum omnibus ad se pertinentibus absiluta liberalitate concedimus, ut aedificandi et ad posteros transmittendi assumpta licentia suis utilitatibus profutura disponat, quia confert magis rei publicae munus quisquis diruta maluerit suscipere reparanda, in ea praesertim urbe, ubi cuncta dignum est constructa relucere, ne inter tot decora moenium deformis appareat ruina saxorum.*" "*Proinde illustris sublimitas tua spectabilem virum Iohannem nos direxisse cognoscat propter splendidas Romanae cloacas civitatis, quae tantum visentibus conferunt stuporem, ut aliarum civitatum possint miracula superare. Videas illic fluvios quasi montibus concavis clausos per ingentia signina decurrere: videas structis navibus per aquas rapidas non minima sollicitudine navigari, ne praecipitato torrenti marina possint naufragia sustinere. Hinc, Roma, singularis quanta in te sit potest colligi magnitudo. Quae enim urbium audeat tuis culminibus contendere, quando nec ima tua possunt similitudinem reperire?*" "*Quid dicamus marmora metallis et arte pretiosa? Quae si vacet eripere, rara manus est quae possit a talibus abstinere. Ubi sunt exposita, quae facere potuerunt divitiae generales et labor mundi, quem inter ista deceat esse neglegentem? Quis in causa tali patitur esse venalis, quando gravissimum damnum potest fieri in pulchritudine singulari? Qua de re per illam indictionem comitivae Romanae cum privilegiis et iustis commodis suis tibi concedimus dignitatem, ut fideli studio magnoque nisu quaeras improbas manus et insidiantes aut privatorum fortunis aut moenibus ad tuum facias venire iudicium et rei veritate discussa congruam subeant de legibus ultionem, quia iuste tales persequitur publicus dolor, qui decorem veterum foedant detruncatione membrorum faciuntque illa in monumentis publicis, quae debent pati.*" "*Relationis vestrae tenore comperimus in via sacra, quam multis superstitionibus dicavit antiquitas, elephantos aeneos vicina omnimodis ruina titubare, et qui solent*

However, the preserved functionality of the vestiges of the city's urban fabric and the imperial administration that remained relatively operational after Justinianic conquest do not detract from the monumentality of Gregory's centralization effort. The Church became increasingly daunting and efficient player in the domestic affairs, mainly due to the fact that in the course of the 4th and the 5th century through imperial and private donations and bequests it acquired huge estates all around the Mediterranean, and despite the general unrest caused by the wars managed to retain vast expanses of land in Sicily, Sardinia, and present day Lazio, Tuscia, Tuscany, Liguria and Romagna. With the status of the largest and most powerful landholders on the peninsula with significant resources owned mostly to the perfected system of land management and accounting, it was easy for the popes to ostentatiously take care of feeding and ministering for the needy at times when the state was less than ready to, even if the distribution of food by the imperial officials continued into the first decades of the 7th century. As semi-official members of the Byzantine state apparatus, popes were also able to fill in for absent or otherwise

in carnali substantia supra millenos annos vivere, occasum videantur proximum in simulacris aeris sustinere. His providentia vestra reddi faciat propriam longaevitatem uncis ferreis hiantia membra solidando: alvum quoque demissam subdito pariete corroboret, ne illa magnitudo mirabilis solvatur turpiter in ruinam." For Longobards looting the countryside and the need to secure the welfare of the refugees in Rome see e.g.: Gregory the Great, ep. 2.14, 3.20 and 7. 23, in: Migne 1862b, colls. 549-550, 619, 881: "*Temporis qualitas admonet episcoporum sedes antiquitus certis civitatibus constitutas, ad alia, quie securiora putamus,ejusdem diaeceseos loca transponere, quo et habitatores nunc degere, et barbaricum possint periculum facilius declinare*." "*Postquam hostilis impietas diversarum civitatum ita peccatis facientibus desolavit Ecclesias, ut reparandi eas spes nulla populo deficiente remanserit, majori valde cura constringimur ne, defunctis earum sacerdotibus, reliquie plebis, nullo pastoris moderamine gubernante, per invia fidei hostis callidi, quod absit, rapiantur insidiis.*" "*Moxautem medietatem pecunie quam transmisisiis, in eorum redemptionem transmisi. De medietate vero ancillis Dei, quas vos Greca lingua monastrias dicitis, lectisternia emere disposui, quia in lectis suís gravi nuditate in hujus hiemis vehementissimo frigore laborant, que in hac urbe multe sunt. Nam juxta notitiam qua dispensantur tria millia reperiuntor. Et quidem de sancti Petri apostolorum principie rebus octoginta annuas libras accipiunt.*" ("The nature of this time warns us to transfer the seas of bishops, established in certain cities long ago, to other places in the same diocese, which we think more secure, where the inhabitants might now be sent and the barbarian danger might be more easily avoided." "When impious enemies have desolated the churches of different cities, thanks to men's sins, to the extent that there is no hope of repairing them due to their lack of population, we are bound by far greater concern, that with the death of their priests, the remnants of the people, ruled by no priest's control, should not be dragged through paths of faithlessness, by the snares of our crafty enemy." "And from the other half, I have arranged to purchase some bed-coverings for the nuns, whom you call 'monastic women' in Greek, because they are suffering a terrible lack of bedclothes in the extremely bitter cold of this city. And there are many of them in this city. Indeed three thousand are listed in the census, and they receive eighty pounds a year from the goods of Saint Peter, prince of the apostles.", in: Martyn 2004, pp. 200, 248, 476). For more information on the Apennine regions occupied by Longobards see e.g.: Delogu 2022, p. 12. For more information on Gregory's image of and politics towards Longobards see: Martyn 2004, pp. 30-32; Delogu 2022, pp. 45-47; Cohen 2024. The last record about the *curator palatii* was published e.g. by Maskarinec 2018, p. 67 and discussed by Dey 2021, p. 74. For the column of emperor Phokas see e.g.: Coates-Stephens 2011, pp. 397-401; Taddei 2015. For the forum of Trajan see e.g.: Santangeli Valenzani 2007; Meneghini 2009, pp. 117-165, 193-252. For more information about the churches built during the 6th century see: Andaloro 2006, pp. 193-202; Diefenbach 2007, pp. 359-379; Guidobaldi 2007; Brandenburg 2013, pp. 233, 238-242, 253-254; Romano and Viscogliosi 2013; Delogu 2022, pp. 28, 33-39 with further bibliography.

occupied officials, kept increasingly busy by the skirmishes of the Longobard invasion.[690] The increased infiltration of the male-centred clergy into many aspects of the public life, including building patronage and care for the sick and poor, in which the female participation flourished in the 4th and the 5th century, may have significantly damaged chances of women, be it aristocratic or ascetic, to shape the life in the city and to represent themselves, relegating them to the role of those in need of financial and material support and suppressing the representation of their agency in favour of their portrayal as victims, especially in the context of the written sources, such as the reports on the effects of the Gothic war by both Procopius (c. 500-c.565) and Gregory the Great.[691]

The catacombs, offering a space less regulated by the Church, in which many of the images of powerful and erudite women discussed in the previous chapters came to exist, were being gradually abandoned even before the sack of Rome in 410, but more so in the second half of the 5th and in the 6th century.[692]

Except for a few persistent clans, among which we can count the illustrious Avienii and Symmachi, the patrician families, pulling the strings of the public life of the city in the 4th and 5th century fled to safety and career opportunities of the Constantinopolitan court and of the exarchate in Ravenna, or to Sicily because of its immunity from Longobard attacks, leaving behind the *nouveau riche* with military background, often of easter-Mediterranean or Longobard descent, settled in the city and its surroundings. And many of those who still resided in the city were wiped out by the virulent plague of 590, which decimated the Roman population

[690] Delogu 2000, pp. 198-199, Christie 2006, pp. 88-90; Cooper and Hillner 2007, pp. 55-56; Dey 2021, pp. 69-75; Salzman 2021, pp. 324-328 and Delogu 2022, pp. 55-58, 62-64. For more information about welfare institutions in Rome during the early Middle Ages see: Giuntella 2001; Dey 2008.

[691] Martyn 2011, pp. 2, 25 and La Rocca 2024, pp. 359-364. Gregory the Great offers an image of both higher and lower-born women in need of assistance, be it widows whose property was being usurped after the death of their husbands (ep. 1.13, 1.63, 3.5, 3.43, 6.37, 9.36, 9.48, 9.113, in: Martyn 2011, pp. 88-91, 169-171, 173-174), prisoners-of -war (ep. 2.38, in: Martyn 2011, p. 196) or nuns living in dilapidated convents, threatened by the invasion of the Longobards and suffering from acute lack of clothing and food (ep. 1.23, 5.30, 6.32, 7.23, 9.138, in: Martyn 2011, pp. 123-124, 133-136). While describing the wars led by Justinian (527-565), Procopius does not omit women, but he is interested only in their victim status and their marital connections to the male population and completely glosses over their beliefs, profession and identity. He treats them as dependents and stresses their feebleness (for example by making them weep and wail, contrary to the men): Procopius of Caesarea, *De bello gothico* 4.2.20, 32, 4.3.23-4, in: Dewing 1916a, pp. 222-227, 232-233. For more information about women's experiences as rhetoric devices in Procopius's work see: Fan Chiang 2018, esp. p. 233 and Whately 2024, pp. 303-304.

[692] See Fiocchi Nicolai 2012; Dey 2021, pp. 94-96, and part of chapter 1 dedicated to the visual representation of widow Turtura.

and cut short lives of more than one third of the inhabitants, its spreading possibly facilitated by the recent flood that would have destroyed much of the sewage.[693]

Abandoned mansions were turned into monasteries and several public buildings, such as the audience hall of the city prefect on Via Sacra, the guard room at the foot of the Palatine, the Senate building on the Roman Forum and the *secretarium senatus* were restructured as churches of Santi Cosma e Damiano, Sant'Adriano, Santa Maria Antiqua, and Santa Martina, the first two through papal initiative, the others most probably as commissions of the local aristocracy tied to the imperial court, favouring dedications to *Theotokos* and eastern saints. The cooperation between the most exalted representatives of the Church and the wealthy members of the imperial administration, which shaped the city in the last decades of the 6th and during the 7th century, is hardly surprising, given the fact that despite Gregory the Great's attempt to staff the papal administration prevalently with monks, after his pontificate most of the offices were held by laymen or members of the minor orders with ties to the city's nobility. In the climate of strengthening executive power of the Church, especially towards the end of the 7th century, the offices of the *primicerius* and *defensores* became as desirable as the highest offices in the city's imperial administration and aristocratic families were keen to have their sons enter the ranks of the Lateran bureaucracy.[694]

As I would like to argue, both the dominance of the military court officials and popes in the public sphere and their cooperation ended up cutting back the possibilities for female euergetism, tied to the privileged position *feminae clarissimae* of the yesterday held in their families and as a result in the relationship with the Church, no longer available to women in a militarized society, in which they were perceived as infirm and in need of protection, total

[693] For the exodus of the traditional senatorial aristocracy from the city in the 5th and especially in the 6th century see: Brown 1984, pp. 21-30; Santangeli Valenzani 2012; Dey 2021, pp. 39-43, 53-54, 56; Salzman 2021, pp. 266-268, 287-289, 317-320; Delogu 2022, pp. 14-15. For the military background and Eastern/Germanic origin of substantial part of the new wealthy officials after the Byzantine conquest of the peninsula see e.g.: Brown 1984, pp. 61-80; Salzman 2021, pp. 282-284, 304, 329-331; Delogu 2022, p. 59. For the so-called plague during the pontificate of Gregory the Great see: Martyn 2011, p. 2. For the traces of the plague in the written sources and the reasons for the lack of archaeological ones see: Christie 2006, pp. 500-504. More generally for the discussion of the economic and religious effects of the Justinianic plague, an erroneous nickname for a wave of *Yersinia pestis* epidemics that swept over the Mediterranean, Gaul, the British Isles and even Scandinavia in the period between 541 and 750, see: Meier 2016. The overall number of victims, estimated by the previous scholarship to be more than 1/3 of the population of the Mediterranean, has been recently contested by: Mordechai *et al.* 2019.

[694] For more information about the church of Santi Cosma e Damiano, see: Brenk 2007; Osborne 2008b; Brandenburg 2013, pp. 242-251; Foletti 2017a with further bibliography. About the churches of Sant'Adriano and Santa Martina see: Coates-Stephens 2006, pp. 154-163; Bordi 2011; Brandenburg 2013, p. 254; Maskarinec 2018, pp. 27-52 with further bibliography. See Brown 1984, pp. 185-188 for a discussion about the members of the aristocratic families holding positions in the papal administration or even becoming high-ranking clergymen. For the discussion about the dynamics of patronage inside and outside of the city walls see: Dey 2021, pp. 81-87.

opposite to the masculine ideal and thus mostly not deserving of notice, an image best summarized in the statement of Gregory the Great:

"For 'a man' is the term for every strongminded and discreet person, but 'a woman' is understood of the weak or indiscreet mind."[695]

Exceptions, of course, must have existed, one of them being the daughter of imperial secretary Megistus, Flavia Xanthippi, whose early-7th-century donation of lands and sizeable agrarian complex near Segni to the basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore is recorded by a loose transcription of the original parchment, monumentalized in an epigraph, partially still present today in the basilica, during the pontificate of Gregory IV (827-844). But their public self-promotion would have been far more conspicuous than the donations of their 4th and 5th-century predecessors, more often than not celebrated through opulent inscriptions perpetuating their memory.[696] Likewise, the identity of those who have managed to leave visual trace through public sponsorship, such as the anonymous commissioners of the images of female saints in Santa

[695] For more information about the worsening of the status of women in relation to the Gothic wars see: La Rocca 2024, esp. p. 364, quoting Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Job* 11.49.65, in: Adriaen 1979, p. 623: "*Vir etenim fortis quilibet et discretus vocatur, mulier vero mens infirma uel indiscrete accipitur.*" About silencing of women in the regions controlled by Justinian see also: Brubaker 2005, pp. 442-444.

[696] For more information about the epigraph containing the record of the donation see: Tjäder 1955, pp. 325-333; Brown 1984, p. 185; De Rubeis 2024, pp. 422-423. The only plaque surviving from the multiple that transcribed the parchment describing the donation bears following Latin text: "*noto rogatarioq(ue) meo scribendam dictavi, cuiq(ue) subter manu propria litteris grecis subscripsi, et testib(us) a me rogitis optuli subscribendam. Allegandi etiam gestis, quib(us) placuerit, et tempore, quo volueritis, si necessum non spectata denuo mea professione ex more concedo licentiam, de qua re quibusq(ue) omnib(us) s(upra)s(crip)tis stipulatione et sponsionem sollemniter interposita. Act(um) Rom(a), imp(erio) die cons(ule) et indict(ione) s(upra)s(crip)ta. Fl(avia) Xantippia, filia q(uon)d(am) Megisti, imperialis a secretis, huic chartul(ae) usufructuarie donationis de s(upra)s(crip)ta massa, q(uae) a(ppellatur) Paganicense, in integro cum fundis et casalibus suis, id est f(undus) Arturianus, f(undus) Garganus, f(undus) Mattianus, f(undus) Viarus, f(undus) Criscianus, f(undus) Turita, f(undus) Solinianus, f(undus) Casa Porcinare, f(undus) Calvisianus, f(undus) Rubianu(s), f(undus) Sipicianus, f(undus) Bubianus unc(iae) sex, f(undus) Ucupia, f(undus) Casa Viti, f(undus) Eruttianus, f(undus) Ferratulas, f(undus) Casa Larie, f(undus) Calgianus unc(iae) quattuor, f(undus) Pistore, f(undus) Petrociana, f(undus) Casa Basili, f(undus) Optavianus, f(undus) Arbuscianus, f(undus) Gurgus, f(undus) Casa Gini, f(undus) Turanus, f(undus) Rubianus, f(undus) Felianus, f(undus) Manilius, f(undus) Oclata, f(undus) Cottianus unc(iae) sex, f(undus) Filipianus, f(undus) Orcianus, f(undus) Tris Casas et ortu vineatu(s) intro civit(ate) Signina, nec non et f(undus) Candicianu(s) in integro, et omnibus ad eis generaliter pertinentibus, fact(ae) a me in omnes mansionarios essentibus et introeuntibus perenniter basilicae s(an)c(t)ae D(e)i genetricis Mariae, q(uae) a(ppellatur) ad presepe(m), pro oblatione(m) animae nostrae, sicut superius legitur, ad omnia s(upra)s(crip)ta relegens consensi et subscripsi, et testes, qui subscriberent, rogavi. Fl(avius) Anastasius, trib(unus) b(asilicae) s(an)c(t)i petri Theodatus, adorator numeri Theodosiac(i). Ego Georgius, opt(io) num(eri) mil(itum) Sermisiani Fl(avius) Epiphanius aurifex Theodorus, acol(itus) s(an)c(t)ae Rom(anae) eccl(esiae), huic chartul(ae) usufructuarie donationis de s(upra)s(crip)ta massa, q(uae) a(ppellatur) paganicense(m), cum fundis et casalibus suis in integro, nec non et fund(i), q(ui) a(ppellatur) Candiiani, in integro omnibusq(ue) ad eis generaliter pertinentib(us), excepto mancipiis et mobilibus rebus seseq(ue) mobentib(us), la fact(ae) a Xantippi, gl(oriosissima) f(emina), in omnes mansionarios essentibus et introeuntibus perenniter basilicae s(an)c(t)ae D(e)i genetricis, q(uae) a(ppellatur) ad presepem, sicut superius legitur, rogiti a s(upra)s(crip)ta donatrice, q(uae) n(obis) p(raesentibus) subscripsit, ipsa presente testes subscripsimus, et hanc donationis chartulam in presenti traditam vidimus. Ego Theodorus, v(ir) h(onestus), tabell(io) urb(is) Rom(ae), scriptor huius chartul(ae) usufructuariae donationis, post testium subscriptiones et traditione facta complevi et absolvi.*"

Maria Antiqua and the oratory under the present-day baroque church of Santa Maria in Via Lata, were erased by the written sources, exhibiting strong ecclesiastical bias, undervaluing or hiding the deeds of the civic leaders in favour of the exaggerated image of the absolute triumph of the Church.[697]

This chapter will examine the fading representation of agency of "real" women within the Christian topography of Rome of the 6th and 7th century through contrasting rising prominence of female martyrs and saints whose representations were largely controlled by male clerics. In detailed case studies of contemporary visual embodiment of martyrs Agnes and Beatrix, it will demonstrate how female sacred figures were transformed from historical individuals into symbolic constructs. By analysing ideological concepts and hagiographic texts hiding behind those images, it will endeavour to reveal how they came to serve ecclesiastical political purposes, transforming women from active patrons and religious participants into passive objects of veneration whose images reinforced ideals of female submission, thus confirming the broader patterns of suppression of female agency in the name of the legitimization of the power of the male-centric Church hierarchy within society, which, under pressure of several wars, came to celebrate exclusively masculine virtues.

Leaving the "real" women behind in the Roman Christian topography

As we have just established in the introduction, despite the fact that the written sources describing the management of the city and sponsorship of building activity in it are murky when it comes to the range of involvement of laypeople, it is possible to conclude that during the 6th and the 7th century female inhabitants of Rome experienced some extent of shrinking of their agency in both instances, having been limited to anonymous commissions of votive images and occasional endowments to the benefit of the churches in the city. Their active role in the Church hierarchy in this timeframe escapes any certain definition as well. Even though the inscription from San Paolo fuori le mura, which we discussed in the previous chapter, suggests that there were women with the title of deaconess in the 6th century, we can neither stipulate what were

[697] Dey 2021, pp. 71-72, 81 and Delogu 2022, pp. 30-31. See also Coates-Stephens 2006 discussing the commissions of the members of the Greek elites in Rome during the 7th century, omitted by the clerical writers. For the discussion of the wall-paintings of female saints in Santa Maria Antiqua see chapter 3 in this thesis. For the paintings in the *diaconia* under present-day baroque church of Santa Maria in Via Lata see: Sanchioni 2026 with previous bibliography and cat. n. 2.37 in this thesis. I thank my friend Claudia Sanchioni for pointing out the parallels between the patronage of female representations in both churches to me.

their responsibilities within the religious rituals nor establish whether there were any women with official liturgical roles in the 7th century, as the written sources keep silent and the epigraphic sources only get us as far as the 6th century.

But was the visibility any better in the case of the saintly female figures, plucked from the far away, perilous and darkly fascinating infancy centuries of Christianity, whose life and deeds were much more malleable and less disruptive for the centralizing and inherently male-empowering efforts of the members of the official Church hierarchy than any uninhibited public actions of their red-blooded female contemporaries could ever be?

As I will try to demonstrate in the following pages, it is possible to answer in affirmative only if the comparison is made between "real" women and the chimeric saintly figures, whose image was shaped both visually and literally mostly by male clerics, motivations and strategies of which will be discussed in detail later on. But as soon as we compare the absolute numbers of female and male martyrs and saints, whose veneration in the city between the years 500 and 700 is confirmed by dedications of titular churches, monasteries, basilicas and the first *diaconiae*, by the preserved list of relics sent by pope Vitalianus (657-672) to Oswiu, king of Northumbria (642-670), and the oils collected by the monk John of Monza for the Longobard queen Theodelinda (589-616) from the lamps burning at the graves of the Roman martyrs, as well as by the 7th-century itineraries luring pilgrims, flooding the city, to the martyr's graves outside of the walls, women are decidedly outnumbered. They account only for roughly 24% of the total of 267 martyrs and saints, listed in Appendix I of this thesis, and even then, 75% of them lack any discernible identity with which the contemporary believer could identify, being commemorated only as part of a larger group of martyrs of mixed sex who were reported to have been killed due to their association with each other. Even though the group commemoration can be observed in the case of around 60% of male martyrs and saints as well, if we completely disregard it and look only at those figures whose fame can be judged by repeated appearances in the sources and by the mark they left on the topography of the city in the form of dedications of churches, gates, monasteries, *diaconiae*, oratories, altars, votive images etc., we still get to 97 male saints strongly overpowering the 21 female ones that reached the same level of veneration.[698]

[698] It should be noted that the Virgin is excluded from the final count of the venerated female figures as her cult, rivalling in complexity the one of her Son, sets her apart from all the other saintly women (for the cult of the Virgin in Rome see e.g.: Osborne 2003; Osborne 2008a). For the list of Roman titular churches see e.g.: Saxer 2001a, pp. 554-555 or the map published in Pani Ermini 2001, pl. II. For the early medieval monasteries in Rome see: Ferrari 1957. For the *diaconiae* appearing in the city in the late 7th and the 8th century see e.g.: Cecchelli 2005. For the

We can thus conclude that just like the "real" female inhabitants of Rome, the female martyrs were commemorated significantly less than their male counterparts between the years 500 and 700, notwithstanding whether they could be identified as native or foreign to the city, according to the definition of Maya Maskarinec, where foreign saints are those the martyrdom and liturgical commemoration of which was regarded by contemporaries as primarily associated with locations outside of Rome. Once again female saints accounted only for roughly 20% of the 87 foreign saints and martyrs venerated in the city and for approximately 25% of those primarily regarded as purely Roman.[699]

Even though the Byzantine administrators of the city, who made their presence known by intense building activity especially in the quarters surrounding the hub of the ancient imperial establishment on the Palatine, spreading across the Forum Romanum to the Capitoline and from there to the river through an area known in the Middle Ages as the *Ripa Graeca* (Greek riverbank) at the site of the antique cattle and produce markets Forum Boarium and Forum Holitorium, introduced several new martyrs to the city to demonstrate their role as the local envoys of the emperor residing in Constantinople but at the same time an heirs and direct legal descendants of the Roman emperors, only a handful of them were female. First among them was Anastasia, martyred in Sirmium, whose basilica, positioned next to the Circus Maximus, transformed by the first half of the 7th century from an old, relatively obscure 4th-century *titulus* to a key point of the liturgical topography of the new graecisized Rome. The appendix of *De locis sanctis martyrum*, compiled around 635-645, notices the special role it played in the liturgical life of the city as a keeping place of the seven ceremonial crosses, representing each of Rome's ecclesiastical districts, which were carried in all the major processions throughout the liturgical year. By then the basilica seems to have functioned as kind of a palace church, frequented by the officials stationed at and around the Palatine, some of whom decided to be buried in it, as attested by the funerary plaque of *curator palatii* Plato, father of pope John VII,

churches in Rome between the 5th and the 8th century see either the detailed series of Richard Krautheimer (Krautheimer 1953; Krautheimer 1959; Krautheimer 1967; Krautheimer 1970) or the much more concise work of Hugo Brandenburg (Brandenburg 2013). For the abovementioned list of relics collected for Theodelinda and Oswiu see: *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* database, evidence ID E06788 and E06042, available online at: http://csla.history.ox.ac.uk/record.php?recid=E06788 and http://csla.history.ox.ac.uk/record.php?recid=E06042 (last viewed on 06. 04. 2025). See also: Filipová 2015. For the 7th-century pilgrim itineraries see: Lapidge 2018, pp. 659-666. The itineraries in question are *Notitia Ecclesiarum Urbis Romae*, compiled most probably during the pontificate of Honorius (625-638); *De Locis Sanctis Martyrum*, known also as *Itinerarium Salisburgense* and composed at some time between 635 and 645; *Notitia Portarum, Viarum, Ecclesiarum circa Urbem Romam*, known also as *Itinerarium Malmesburiense* and judging from the churches and cemeteries which it describes compiled sometime between 648 and 682.

[699] Maskarinec 2023, p. 37. For the foreign martyrs and saints venerated in Rome between the years 500 and 700 see also: Maskarinec 2018 and Appendix I of this thesis.

discussed in the introduction to this chapter. Other, previously unknown female martyrs Barbara and Solomone were introduced to the Roman visual culture by the elite lay commissioners in the church of Santa Maria Antiqua, erected among the remains of the Domitianic palace at the foot of the Palatine.[700]

To be precise, what appears to be a preference for male sanctity is in fact only a preference for recording of male sanctity, since we cannot estimate whether there was more widespread veneration of female martyrs and saints that went (intentionally) unrecorded by the surviving sources. The business of recording of the lives of saints and popularizing their relics and shrines was dominated by male clerics, who were able to create this monopoly especially due to their education, which became exponentially rarer in all early medieval European societies. Thus, the predominance of male over female saints and martyrs in the sources is by no means specific only for early medieval Rome.[701]

In the case of the foreign martyrs this preference can be explained to some extent by the motivation behind the promotion of the new cults, which were intended as a reinforcement of the authority of the imperial administration. As already mentioned, traces of the imported saints can be found especially in neighbourhoods close to the administrative centre of the city on the Palatine, such as Forum Romanum, which, historically, was an almost exclusively male space, both in terms of its intended users and of its visual iconography. Even though during the late imperial period Vestal Virgins and female members of the imperial family reached greater prominence within this space, they went mainly unrecorded, a phenomenon testified by the lack of female representations among the statues known to have been erected there between the late 3rd and the early 6th century. After the conquest of the Apennine Peninsula under Justinian (527-565) in the middle of the 6th century, the new administrators of the city established churches throughout the Forum, dedicated to saints with strong links to the imperial court in Constantinople, who could at the same time embody the idea of the imperial capital as the new Rome and of the Christian triumph over the non-Christian past. Surrounding Santa Maria

[700] For more information about the building activity in the heart of the ancient Rome initiated by the Byzantine administrators see: Coates-Stephens 2006; Maskarinec 2018, pp. 27-99; Dey 2021, pp. 79-85. For more information about the church of Sant'Anastasia and the cult of the martyr in Rome see: Krautheimer 1953, pp. 43-63; Brandenburg 2013, pp. 140-142; Dey 2021, pp. 79-80 and Cerrito 2023. For the note in *De locis sanctis martyrum* see: *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* database, evidence ID E07001, available online at: http://csla.history.ox.ac.uk/record.php?recid=E07001 (last viewed on 07. 04. 2025): "*Basilica quae appellatur sancta Anastasia, ubi cruces seruantur quae portantur per stationes.*" For discussion about the meaning and functions of early medieval Roman processional crosses see: Baldovin 1987, pp. 143-166 and De Blaauw 2001. For the female saints and martyrs in the church of Santa Maria Antiqua see chapter 3 of this thesis.
[701] Tibbets Schulenburg 1978, p. 117; Rubin 2013, p. 480; Maskarinec 2023, pp. 37-38.

Antiqua, the church dedicated to the Virgin, one of the two saintly women that made it to the final cut due to her special status of Constantinople's guardian, were sacred spaces dedicated to martyred soldiers, forming an otherworldly army protecting the Empire. Theodore, whose church was built alongside the slope of the Palatine, was a saint venerated by emperor Justinian himself and as a soldier he found instant popularity among the members of the Byzantine army. His resolve to refute the sacrifices to pagan gods also harmonised with the placement of the building dedicated to him amidst the crumbling temples of the Forum. Forty martyrs of Sebaste, depicted on the fresco in the oratory directly adjacent to the church of Santa Maria Antiqua, were soldiers opposing pagan sacrifice, venerated in Constantinople as well. And, not surprisingly, the same can be said about the pair of Sergius and Bacchus, whose church in Constantinople was directly sponsored by Justinian and who found their Roman shrine at the foot of the Capitoline Hill, in the western corner of the Forum Romanum. The only church with a patron without military background to grace the Forum with his presence was Sant'Adriano, dedicated to an administrator-turned-saint, who, however, was also venerated in Constantinople and thus perfect for expressing of the allegiance to the emperor, in this case demonstrated not by the members of the city's administration, but by pope Honorius (625-638). Even Martina, a noble Roman martyr used by the Byzantine administration as a companion saint to Adrian, whose church inside the former Senate House was neighboured by her sanctuary built inside its annex hall, is described as fierce warrior for the Christian faith whose prayers can cause pagan temples to topple and demons to roll in the dust in her *passio*. Despite being an exception to the generally male inhabited sacred topography of the Forum, she was mostly chosen by the commissioners because of her namesake, the niece of emperor Heraclius (610-641), whom he married in 613-614, and thus for her ability to embody the allegiance of the members of the local administration to the reigning emperor and the idea of the victorious Mediterranean Christian Empire, just like her male counterparts did. It certainly did not hurt that she could be perceived as an honorary male by anybody who was familiar with her *passio*.[702] And on the close-by Palatine the only martyr whose veneration can be securely established was again male, Caesarius of Terracina, who, despite not being a soldier, was well suited for the oratory of the imperial palace, which was dedicated to him in the aftermath of the Justinianic conquest in the

[702] Maskarinec 2023, pp. 38-41, quoting Boatwright 2011 and Coates-Stephens 2011. For more information about the churches dedicated to the martyrs discussed above and further bibliography see: Maskarinec 2018, pp. 41-50. For the *passio* of Martina, see: Gasti 2014.

later 6th century, as his *passio* emphasized Christianity as the key to good health and prosperity of the Empire.[703]

The visual commemoration of other female martyrs, such as those depicted on the panels of the lateral nave in Santa Maria Antiqua, was linked to the private devotion of the female members of the Roman élite. The saintly figures who responded to the fears of women in their more private roles of wives and mothers were automatically excluded from the privileged group of martyrs who received much more prominent position in Rome's religious topography, as they did not add to the narrative of the victorious military oriented Empire and thus their veneration was less recorded, even though they may have been equally or even more important for the day-to-day religiosity of the city's inhabitants than their more visible counterparts.

Contrary to the main Roman basilicas, whose dedications were guided by the early medieval Christian hierarchy of sanctity and thus disregarded all women apart from the Virgin Mary, and the *diaconiae,* founded prevalently by the Byzantine administrators and responding to the preoccupation with the demonstration of the military triumph of the Empire and Christianity, the *tituli*, established mostly in the 4th and the 5th century, were much more likely to commemorate women. From the 23 titular churches, listed in Appendix II of this thesis, 11 (*titulus Aemilianae*, *titulus Anastasiae*, *titulus Caeciliae*, *titulus Crescentianae*, *titulus Fasciolae*, *titulus Lucinae*, *titulus Praxedis*, *titulus Priscae*, *titulus Sabinae*, *titulus Tigridae*, *titulus Vestinae*) originally bore names most probably referring to women who had donated property or otherwise helped establish the new church, as was the case with the rest of the *tituli*, bearing male names.[704] Despite the fact that most complete list of the *tituli*, preserved within the Latin decrees of a synod held in 499 in St. Peter's Basilica by pope Symmachus (498-514), where they are linked to the names of the presbyters who witnessed the document, does not provide any context as to the origin of the names and background of their almost mythical bearers, and other rare written sources documenting their existence, such as inscriptions and passages from *Liber Pontificalis*, seldom offer any further clarifications, we can assume that contrary to the men, who may or may not have been clerics, the women whom the titular

[703] Maskarinec 2023, pp. 41-42. For more information about the oratory see: Spera 2017 and Maskarinec 2018, pp. 53-73. For the *passio* of Caesarius see: De Schmedt *et al.* 1887, pp. 347-349.
[704] Maskarinec 2023, p. 47. For more information about the number, location and time of foundation of the late antique Roman *tituli* see e.g.: Guidobaldi 2001.

churches were named after were powerful lay members of the Christian community in Rome, whose memory the *tituli* perpetuated.[705]

By 595, when another synod was held at St. Peter's Basilica by pope Gregory the Great (590-604), whose decrees were once again witnessed by the presbyters of the city's *tituli*, identities of the founders morphed into those of saints venerated beyond the community formed around the *titulus* or their names were substituted completely by those of martyrs.[706] In some cases (*titulus Marci*, turned into the church *sancti Marci*; *titulus Fasciolae*, turned into the church *sanctorum Nerei et Achillei*; *titulus Crescentianae*, turned into the church *sancti Sixti*; *titulus Tigridae*, turned into the church *sanctae Balbinae*) the linking of the titular church with the figure of the newly introduced martyr was accompanied by the translation of their relics from the extra urban cemeteries in the course of the 6th century. Or, as in the case of the *titulus Vestinae*, turned into the church *sancti Vitalis*, *titulus Eudoxiae*, turned into the church *beati Petri apostoli ad vincula*, and the *titulus Aemilianae*, turned into the church *sanctorum Quattuor Coronatorum*, the ability of martyr cults and shrines to attract pilgrims and visitors motivated the preference of the names of the martyrs whose relics were deposited in the *titulus* since its foundation or who were previously venerated in the *titulus* even without the presence of a relic over the name of the founder, whose memory was slowly fading.[707] Even though two *tituli* who previously bore names of male founders came to be identified by names of two female martyrs (*titulus Gai* turned into the *titulus sanctae Susannae* and *titulus Pudentis*, which over the 7th century came to be called *titulus sanctae Pudentianae*), they were outweighed by the 8 titular churches where the process was exactly opposite. Suddenly, from the 11 *tituli* named after women in the 5th century, only 8 remained.

The female names perpetuated by them were no longer associated with the once living figures of women who were able to fully develop their potential through sponsorship, but with the

[705] Cooper and Hillner 2007, pp. 225-260. For the hypothesis that the men who lent their names to the *tituli* were clerics see: Guidobaldi 2004, p. 10. For the hypothesis that most of the names linked with the *tituli* refer either to the names of saints or to objects associated with them (e.g. *fasciolae* as a reference to the leg-bandage of Paul, lost during his flight from Rome, an episode noted in the *passio* of Processus and Martinianus, written between ca. 500-550, published by: Lapidge 2018, pp. 381-389) since their foundation see: Bonfiglio 2010, esp. pp. 195-208. For the decrees of the synod held in 499 see: *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* database, evidence ID E02744, available online at: http://csla.history.ox.ac.uk/record.php?recid=E02744 (last viewed on 08. 04. 2025). Guidobaldi 2001, p. 124 proposes the idea that the names of the sponsors of the *tituli* were commemorated by inscriptions positioned within the sacred space.

[706] Cerrito 2023, p. 124 and Maskarinec 2023, p. 47. For the decrees of the synod held in 595 see: *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* database, evidence ID E06362, available online at: http://csla.history.ox.ac.uk/record.php?recid=E06362 (last viewed on 09. 04. 2025).

[707] Brandenburg 2013, pp. 118, 145, 162-163, 177, 208-211, 234. For the link between commemoration of the martyrs in *tituli* and their relics see also: Bonfiglio 2010, pp. 208-224.

newly minted saintly mirages, whose identity was formed by the clerical authors of the mostly fictional *passia*, written *en masse* between the second half of the 5th and the end of the 7th century to explain the link between the "new" martyrs and the churches re-dedicated to them, to integrate some of the foreign martyrs, such as Anastasia and Sabina, into the Roman pantheon by giving them the identity of Roman noblewomen, who were martyred elsewhere only because they were on their mission to spread the Christian faith, and to serve as a sort of PR pitches, attracting the masses of pilgrims and local faithful to the *tituli* and the catacombs by offering them titillating and gruesome tales of unwavering devotion, brutal torture and spiritual resilience worthy of emulation.[708] In the legends, the chaste women appear, above all, in their homes, converting their family members and households to Christianity and supporting the church by donating their wealth and property, but they remain firmly subordinated to the male Church hierarchy.[709]

Female martyr as a rhetoric tool: case studies of Agnes and Beatrix

As we have established in the previous pages, while the commemoration of "real" women slowly faded away, the immaterial women, virgin martyrs, whose representation was almost wholly in the hands of the clergy and thus easier to control, were on the rise. The martyr acts and itineraries for pilgrims who wanted to visit the graves of the personages featured in them flourished in the 7th century, featuring more than 50 figures of female martyrs. While the 4th-century martyr calendar *Depositio Martyrum* recorded only four women, Agnes, Memmia, Juliana and Bassilla among the 46 martyrs and bishops celebrated in Rome, in the 7th-century Roman liturgical books the number rises to 11 (Agnes, Martha, Felicula, Beatrix, Felicitas, Cecily, Daria, Sabina, Anastasia, Pudentiana, and Praxede).[710]

[708] Maskarinec 2023, p. 48. For the *passia* of the martyrs see: Lapidge 2018.
[709] Maskarinec 2023, p. 48. For more information about the models of female sanctity in the *passia* see: Consolino 1984.
[710] Denzey 2007, p. 211. For the complete list of female martyrs featured in the martyr acts and itineraries see Appendix I of this thesis. For the *Depositio Martyrum* see: Lapidge 2018, pp. 633-636. The 7th-century liturgical books mentioned above are *Sacramentarium Gelasianum*, preserved in a manuscript written around 750 in the convent of Chelles near Paris, whose Roman ancestor was most probably compiled in the later 7th century and certainly before 715 and contained traces of pre-Gelasian and pre-Gregorian presbyterial liturgy; *Sacramentarium Gregorianum*, assembled in the papal scriptorium during the pontificate of Honorius I (625-638); *Capitulare evangeliorum* of Würzburg, a gospel lectionary possibly written in England around the year 700, but preserving a list of gospel readings for the liturgical year, compiled in Rome between 642-672. Published in: Lapidge 2018, pp. 669-674.

Even though visitors flocked to Rome to view the *loca sancta* already in the late 4th century, by the late 6th century the growing difficulty of travelling to the Holy Land, culminating in the Arabic conquest of Jerusalem in 640, made the city increasingly attractive alternative destination, especially when the Longobard threat subsided following the peace treaty of 605, and the Christianisation of the Frankish Kingdom, Frisia, Ireland and Britain swelled the numbers of those eager to visit the graves of the martyrs and experience the salvific powers associated with their relics.[711]

Upon arrival, pilgrims and visitors found a city with well-established identity of *caput urbium*. Guided by meticulously compiled itineraries, they could keep in contact with the martyrs, the superstars of the early medieval spiritual tourism, both outside of the city walls, where most of the burials were located either by the newly composed *passia* or by older local tradition, or inside the walls where secondary relics (grill of martyr Lawrence, kept most probably in the church of San Lorenzo in Lucina; chains of Apostle Peter, kept in the church of San Pietro in Vincoli; crib of Christ, kept in the basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore) and corporeal remains, transferred to the city from abroad (e.g. Dalmatian and Istrian martyrs in the oratory of San Venanzio) or from the environs of Rome (e.g. Primus and Felicianus or martyrs from the cemetery of Generosa) awaited them. The most attractive sites were handpicked by the papal administration and generously sponsored, their adaptation and embellishment a perfect tool for self-promotion of the papacy.[712]

All the large extramural basilicas, which initially derived their prestige from the link with their imperial patrons, became centres of the cult of martyrs and relics promoted by the popes and oriented towards the growing number of pilgrims in the city, becoming focal points of clusters of monasteries, other smaller churches and in the case of the most frequented ones, such as St. Peter's Basilica, San Paolo fuori le mura or San Lorenzo fuori le mura, of other buildings accommodating the needs of the visitors.[713] Already by the early 6th century, the martyrial basilicas aboveground and directly in the cemeteries, which were strung along every great road emerging from Rome, were subjected to such interest of the local population and pilgrims alike

[711] Osborne 1985, p. 284; Krautheimer 2000, pp. 79-82; Thacker 2014, pp. 118-119; Delogu 2022, p. 112. On the peace treaty between Longobard king Agilulf (590-616) and the Byzantine emperor Phokas (602-610) see: Wickham 2009, pp. 140-141 and Trout 2021, p. 151.

[712] Thacker 2014, pp. 110-118 quoting the primary sources which note the presence of secondary relics and transfers of the martyrs' remains from the extramural cemeteries to the churches within the city. See also: Thacker 2007. For relics of martyrs imported to the city see especially: Bremenkamp *et al.* 2023.

[713] Krautheimer 2000, pp. 80-81; Thacker 2014, pp. 98-106; Dey 2021, pp. 86-87. For the accommodation of pilgrims see also e.g.: Dey 2008; Santangeli Valenzani 2014.

that they had to be served by priests of the near-by *tituli* in order to ensure the regular performance of the offices, an emergency rectified during the 7th century by emergence of monasteries annexed to said sacred buildings, providing more effective ways to cover the demand for regular masses *ad limina sanctorum*. Both the major basilicas and most cemeteries acquired their own guardians (*praepositi*), who kept them well-maintained, and lesser officials (*mansionarii*), taking care of the lights burning in front of the venerated tombs, whose role became especially important since despite losing the burial function after the Gothic wars the catacombs were reinvented by the popes as places of martyrial cult.[714]

Pope Honorius I was particularly active in and around the catacombs. Among many other building endeavours recorded by *Liber Pontificalis* the renewal of the cemetery of Santi Pietro e Marcellino on Via Labicana, centred around the conversion of the crypt of the two martyrs into an underground basilica *ad corpus*, and complete rebuilding of the basilica of San Pancrazio on Via Aurelia stand out.[715] Honorius is the only pope whose building activity in relation to the martyrs' graves is mentioned in the pilgrims' itinerary *Notitia Ecclesiarum Urbis Romae*, which notes not only the restoration of the basilica of San Pancrazio, but also the enlargement of the basilica of San Valentino atop the martyr's tomb along Via Flaminia and new construction of the basilica of Sant'Agnese fuori le mura along Via Nomentana. The always laconic text even spares a few words to describe the latter, calling it "*beautiful*" and "*restored with wondrous workmanship*".[716] We can only conclude in agreement with Dennis Trout that the building campaigns, following a long period of political and economic struggle, which hindered any large urbanistic projects, constituted a stunning display of wealth and patronage, strategically directed at the important and lucrative pilgrimage destinations.[717]

The new type of pilgrim often demanded more direct contact with the martyr. The grave far down in the catacomb, reachable only through flights of stairs and maze of dark corridors was sometimes an inconvenience, increasingly incompatible with the needs of the throngs of

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[714] Thacker 2014, pp. 108-109.
[715] *Ibidem*, p. 109 and Trout 2021, p. 156. For the primary source see: *Liber Pontificalis* I (pontificate of Honorius, 625-638), in: Duchesne 1862, p. 324: "*Renovavit et cymiterium beatorum martyrum Marcellini et Petri, via Lavicana…Eodem tempore fecit basilicam beato Pancratio martyri via Aurelia, miliario secondo, a solo, et ornavit sepulchrum eius ex argento…*". Generally about the sponsorship of the martyrial basilicas at the time of Honorius see: Taddei 2016, pp. 149-158.
[716] Trout 2021, pp. 152, 156. For the primary source in English translation see: Lapidge 2018, pp. 660-662. For the Latin version see: *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* database, evidence ID E00676, available online at: http://csla.history.ox.ac.uk/record.php?recid=E00676 (last viewed on 10. 04. 2025): "*Deinde via Numentana ad ecclesiam sanctae Agnae, quae formosa est, in qua sola pausat - et ipsam episcopus Honorius miro opere reparavit.*"
[717] Trout 2021, p. 156.

pilgrims flooding the city. A solution was first found when Pelagius II (579-590) built a new basilica within the hill alongside the underground cemetery and basilica in *Ager Veranus* to enclose the grave of martyr Lawrence, with its floor at the same level as his tomb, a feature achievable due to the destruction of the surrounding corridors of the underground cemetery in the process of the hollowing of the hill intended to accommodate the basilica. Encased in the ground which contained the holy remains but also with galleries rising above it, the sacred building offered the desired intimate contact with the martyr while at the same time allowing for more comfortable pilgrim experience, making the grave easily visible and accessible and increasing the capacity of the naves.[718]

The same model was re-used by pope Honorius at Sant'Agnese fuori le mura around the year 630. The hill was scooped out, the main and lateral naves, reachable from the sides through a flight of stairs, were built at the level of the martyr's tomb, hidden underneath the basilica's altar, and only the galleries, accessible from behind the apse, rose above the level of the nearby Via Nomentana.[719]

The apse mosaic, featuring Agnes stepping over the instruments of her martyrdom (sword and fire), flanked by basilica's patron, pope Honorius, to the viewer's left, and an anonymous figure, possibly either pope Symmachus or Gregory the Great, to the right, a composition which represents a nod of Honorius to his predecessors' projects in Santi Cosma e Damiano and San Lorenzo fuori le mura, concedes the spotlight to the martyr venerated *in situ*, who substitutes Christ as the centrepiece of the scene (fig. 5.1-3).[720] In contrast with the naturalism and classicism identified in the mosaics which inspired it, the representation of Agnes, striking for its linearity, abstraction and almost aetheric presence, detached from time and space on the shimmering background of gold *tesserae*, formerly interpreted as the visual confirmation of the

[718] Krautheimer 2000, pp. 83-85; Delogu 2022, p. 111. For the Pelagian basilica of San Lorenzo fuori le mura see e.g.: Acconci 2002; Serra 2005; Romano and Viscogliosi 2013; Mondini 2016b; Serra 2016; Brandt 2017. Equally effective device for regulation and control of the access of pilgrims to a venerated tomb yet allowing for relatively close contact with the sacred and for linking of the tomb with the main altar, introduced by Gregory the Great, was the annular crypt installed in the St. Peter's Basilica (see e.g. De Blaauw 1994, pp. 530-534, 632-633; Cecchelli 2007; Klein 2023).

[719] Krautheimer 2000, p. 85; Trout 2021, pp. 157-158; Foletti and Lešák 2023, p. 79.

[720] Trout 2021, pp. 158-159. The mosaic is discussed in detail in cat. n. 2.38 of this thesis. Apart from the study of Trout about the Honorian renovation of Rome it has been lately researched by: Ballardini 2018; Trout 2019; Croci and Gianandrea 2022; Foletti and Lešák 2023. The figure on the right has been interpreted as pope Symmachus by: Gianandrea 2012 and as Gregory the Great by: Wollasch 2002, pp. 163-167. For more information about the apse mosaic in Santi Cosma e Damiano, commissioned by pope Felix IV (526-530), depicting Christ surrounded by the Apostles Peter and Paul, who introduce to him martyrs Cosmas and Damian in the presence of the pope and martyr Theodore, see e.g.: Foletti 2017a. For more information about the apsidal arch mosaic of the Pelagian basilica of San Lorenzo, featuring Christ, flanked by Paul, Stephen and Hippolytus on the viewer's right and Peter, Lawrence, and pope Pelagius on the left see e.g.: Thunø 2015, pp. 55-56.

so-called “colonialist influence of the Byzantine aesthetic”, taps right into the major imperative of the Honorius’s age: the promotion of the tombs of martyrs as special places where the *virtus* of the saints disrupted the rhythm and order of the everyday existence, utilizing a visual language which prioritizes the expression of ideas over mimetic form.[721] In “his” apse, the white, dematerialized face of the martyr reminded the viewer of the ephemerality of the material world and the physical body. By distancing itself from the antique *mimesis*, the mosaic presented a conceptual shining image of the immaterial yet eternal celestial body of the virgin, no longer male or female, free from pain, sin and suffering. Establishing an associative link between the outer material representation and the inner glorious presence, it constructed a new experience of the closeness to the sacred.[722]

The emotional effect that the enormous effigy of Agnes had on the faithful who circulated in the U-shaped gallery, conceived for the individual interaction with the virgin martyr, was without doubt strengthened by the heart-wrenching *passio*, re-enacting the dramatic episodes of the life of the young Roman girl, who heroically refused both marriage and pagan sacrifice, one of the most popular and widely read compositions flooding the city in an attempt to allow the pilgrims, be it foreign or local, to feel closer to the miracle-working members of the Christian pantheon, and to promote the martyrs as relatable role models, human enough to be accessible for the laymen yet heroic beyond imagination and with the bonus ability to intercede with God (fig. 5.4). The mosaic gave face and form to the powerful heroine of the *passio*, for the brilliance of the apse’s golden *tesserae* and the bejewelled imperial attire of its main protagonist, shimmering in the soft light of the lamps and chandeliers, reflected in the marble which, according to the surviving material evidence and reports of early modern observers, covered the apse and the naves, creating a captivating, almost theatrical effect given the scantness of natural light filtering into the nave, mirror the primary elements of the *passio*’s narrative, in which Agnes repeatedly appears bathed in stunning light or boasting of the (metaphorical) jewels bestowed upon her by her heavenly lover (Christ) (fig. 5.5). It is without doubt that in case of many of the early medieval visitors of the Honorian basilica the image rising above the dark nave mixed in their minds with the image of the martyr offered by the *passio*, triggering a strong emotional response.[723]

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[721] For the discussion of the role of the implicit colonial bias against Constantinopolitan art as a factor in the research of the mosaic see: Trout 2019, pp. 9-10; Croci and Gianandrea 2022, p. 129; Foletti and Lešák 2021, pp. 38-41; Foletti and Lešák 2023, p. 75 with further bibliography.

[722] Foletti and Lešák 2021, pp. 42-44; Foletti 2022b; Foletti and Okáčová 2024, esp. pp. 189-192, 208-209.

[723] Trout 2019, p. 9; Trout 2021, pp. 159-161; Croci and Gianandrea 2022, pp. 143-144. For the linearity and abstraction of the martyr’s face, completely white apart from two red spots representing the cheeks, see also:

The *passio*, anonymous and composed in Rome around the year 500, was immensely popular in both private and communal devotional settings, its appeal signalled by its preservation in 438 manuscripts dating from the 8th to the 15th century.[724] Unlike many of the other lives of Roman martyrs, which saw the light of day between the late 5th and the early 8th century, heavily influenced by their authors' imagination and introduced to the faithful public for the first time, there was a long oral and written tradition behind the legend of the virgin martyr inherited by the compiler of the early 6th-century piece. The commemoration of the burial of Agnes on the 21st of January is recorded by the *Depositio Martyrum* in the first half of the 4th century. In the late 360s or 370s pope Damasus (366-384) had a metrical *elogium* installed at Agnes's tomb, offering details, which, however scarce, will be important for our discussion of the tropes underlying the early medieval representations of female martyrs. Young Agnes, who willingly left her parents' home and "the bosom of her nurse", underwent trial and was condemned to be burned alive. In her modesty, she covered her naked body with her loosened hair, "so that a gaze of mortals could not see the temple of God". Some years later Ambrose (374-397) offered Agnes as an example of virginity to his sister in the treatise *De virginibus*, written around 377, and composed a hymn in her honour, in which he created a picture of a 12-year-old devout girl, who, when forced to marry, replied that virgins do not marry, because the fire of carnal relationships extinguishes faith, and without fear asked her executioner to strike her so that she may put out the fire with her blood, falling modestly to the ground, covering her body so no one would see her naked. By the very beginning of the 5th century, new embellishments were added to the story by poet Prudentius (348-c.413). In a poem dedicated to Agnes in *Liber Peristephanon*, he painted a vivid picture of a young devout Christian who refused to sacrifice when brought before a judge, thus being sentenced to suffering the humiliation of being placed in a public brothel. When she was exhibited naked in a square, however, her purity was miraculously spared as the only person who dared to defile her with his gaze was blinded by a lightning bolt. Afterwards, the inevitable corporal punishment by sword is described by

Andaloro 2002, pp. 23-24. For the early modern descriptions of the basilica see: Krautheimer 1953, pp. 17-18. On the Honorian basilica covered in marble and porphyry see: Ballardini 2018, pp. 260-261; Foletti and Lešák 2023, p. 79, pointing out that slabs of marble and porphyry can still be found in the apse and four porphyry columns in the ciborium may be original. For the discussion of the upper gallery, intended for individual, non-ritualized interactions with Agnes and ideal for the activating of the "spiritual eye", separated from the rest of the sacred space so that the visitors would not disturb the liturgy, see: Ballardini 2018, pp. 259-260; Foletti and Lešák 2023, pp. 81-83. For the lighting of the basilica of Sant'Agnese during the early Middle Ages see: Ballardini 2018, pp. 265-266; Foletti and Lešák 2023, pp. 83-84 with further bibliography.

[724] Lapidge 2018, p. 348 and Trout 2019, p. 12. All the surviving manuscripts were listed by Lanéry 2008, pp. 347-349. Philippard and Trigalet 2008, p. 121 are the ones to suggest that although the *passiones* may have not been part of the Roman liturgy before the 8th century, they may have been read in specific churches. For the English translation of the *passio* of Agnes see: Lapidge 2018, pp. 348-362.

Prudentius as a sensual penetration of the body by the (phallic) weapon, defied by the heroic soul of the young woman, rushing to meet her lover, Christ, in heaven.[725]

The anonymous author of the early 6th-century *passio*, probably a cleric from the basilica of Sant'Agnese fuori le mura, composing at the time when it was being extensively refurbished by pope Symmachus, attempted to combine the circulating legends into a coherent narrative. From Damasus he borrowed the age of the virgin and the description of the young supple body covered by the girl's long hair to be protected from the lustful gaze of the onlookers. Ambrose supplied the reason for her execution, that is the refusal of the virgin to marry, and the way in which her body was violated, that is by sword. Prudentius offered the details of her punishment in the brothel and of the blinding of the man who dared to look at her naked form. More than before Agnes was established as object of rivalry between the prefect's son and Christ, made ambiguously sexual by the speech through which the virgin describes her relationship with the latter, inviting the viewer to perceive her as an object of desire:

"At one time I received milk and honey from His mouth, at another I was gathered up in His chaste embraces. Indeed His body was united with my body and His blood adorned my cheeks…When I love Him, I am chaste; when I touch Him, I am clean; when I receive Him, I am still a virgin."[726]

Despite the playfulness of the language and affinity to calculated literary gestures and tropes of the antique romances, the *passio* preserved the episodes revolving around the frailty and violation of innocence of the female martyr, using the voyeuristic fascination with imperilled

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[725] Lapidge 2018, pp. 348-349 and Trout 2019, p. 12. For the record of the *dies natalis* of Agnes in the *Depositio Martyrum* see: Lapidge 2018, p. 634. For the Damasian epigram see: Ferrua 1942, pp. 175-178: "*Fama refert sanctos dudumretulisse parentes/ Agnen, cum lugubres cantus tuba concrepuisset,/ nutricis gremium subito liquisse puellam,/ sponte trucis calcasse minas rabimeque tyranni./ urere cum flammis volvisset nobile corpus,/ viribus inmensum parvis superasse timorem,/ nudaque profusum crinem per membra dedisse,/ ne domini templum facies peritura videret./ o veneranda mihi, sanctum decus, alma, pudoris,/ ut Damasi precibus faveas precor, inclyta martyr.*" ("The story relates that her holy parent once said that/ Agnes, when the trumpet had sounded a mournful note,/ had suddenly left the bosom of her nurse/ willingly to trample underfoot the threats and rage of the savage tyrant -/ because she wished for her noble body to burn in the flames,/ (thus) to overcome mighty fear with her modest strength/ and to cover her naked body with her flowing hair/ so that the gaze of mortals could not see the temple of God./ O venerable saint, (who are) for me the sacred glory of chastity:/ I ask, great martyr, that you look favourably on the prayers of Damasus.", in: Trout 2015, pp. 150-151). For Ambrose, *De virginibus* 1.2, see: Migne 1845b, colls. 200-202. For Ambrose, *Agnes beatae virginis*, see: Simonetti 1988, pp. 50-53. For Prudentius, *Liber Peristephanon* 14, see: Krisak 2021, pp. 161-164. On the erotic undertones of the Agnes's execution and the phallic connotations of the sword when used to kill virgins in hagiography see: Burrus 1995, pp. 37, 44-46; Coyne Kelly 2000, p. 56; Burnett McInerey 2003, p. 75; Grig 2004a, p. 82.

[726] Cooper and Hillner 2007, p. 127; Lapidge 2018, p. 351; Trout 2019, p. 13. For the quoted passage from the *passio* see: Lapidge 2018, p. 354. For the Latin version of the text see: Mombritius 1910, p. 41: "*Iam mel et lac ex eius ore suscepi. Iam amplexibus eius castis astricta sum. Iam corpus eius corpori meo sociatum est: lo et sanguis eius ornavit genus meum...Quem cum amavero casta sum: cum tetigero munda sum: cum accepero virgo sum…*".

virginity as a rhetorical strategy to lure the reader into its narrative, urging him/her to transform desire into devotion, just like the prefect's son, who tried to violate Agnes in the brothel, was killed by the light enveloping her praying figure and was revived by her prayers, suddenly faithful and praising God. Not only is the narration underlaid with patriarchal discourse aimed at control of women and their bodies, but it ultimately hints on the virgin's agency being anomalous and domesticates it, reintegrating it safely into the stabilizing institution of family life. After all, her march to death is described as a bridal cortège and her martyrdom as mystical marriage. It's also Agnes's parents who rejoice at her martyrdom, bury her on their estate on Via Nomentana and receive a vision of the martyr at her tomb. In contrast with the prevailing hagiographic trope of familial opposition to the martyrs and the Damasian and Ambrosian legend of Agnes, in which the girl escapes the parental home, in the *passio* the household is the one given the primary role in dissemination of the cult of the martyr, a change trying to appeal to the privileged Roman families which perceived themselves as pivotal in the creation and protection of Christian Rome.[727]

As already suggested above, the Honorian apse mirrors several elements of the evolution of the young vulnerable girl into the heroine in the *passio* in a remarkably detailed way. When Agnes rejects the advances of the love-struck son of the urban prefect, she uses following words to describe her devotion to Christ and the reasons for her resolve to preserve her chastity:

"Get away from me, for I have already been claimed by a lover who has offered me ornaments far better than you and has bound me with the ring of his faith. Far nobler than you in birth and rank he has adorned me with a priceless pearl. He has encircled my right hand and my neck with priceless stones. He has bestowed upon my ears priceless pearls and surrounded me with lively and glittering jewels. He has set his sign upon my face so that I may accept no lover but him. He has clothed me with a robe woven with gold and adorned me with immeasurable jewels."[728]

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[727] Burrus 1995, p. 31; Grig 2004a, pp. 82-83; Lanéry 2008, pp. 360-371; Lapidge 2018, p. 351; Trout 2019, p. 13. For the literary predecessors of the tale of the heroine defending her chastity against all manner of fantastic obstacles see: Burrus 1995, pp. 39-42; Coyne Kelly 2000, pp. 50-51, 54; Cooper and Hillner 2007, pp. 127-128. For the idea of domesticated virginity of Agnes in the *passio* see: Cooper and Hillner 2007, pp. 132-139. For the idea of the violation of innocence, voyeurism and frailty of the body of the virgin in the legends of Agnes see also: Burrus 1995, pp. 34-39; Burnett McInerey 2003, pp. 67-68, 70, 74-75; Cooper and Hillner 2007, pp. 123-131.

[728] Lapidge 2018, p. 354. For the Latin version of the text see: Mombritius 1910, pp. 40-41: "*Discede a me quoniam iam ab eo amatore praeventa sum qui mihi satis meliora te obtulit ornamenta et annulo fidei suae subarravit me. Longe te nobilior et genere et dignitate ornavit me inaestimabili margarita. Dextram meam et collum meum cinxit lapidibus pretiosis. Tradidit auribus meis inaestimabiles margaritas et circumdedit me vernantibus atque corruscantibus gemmis. Posuit signum suum in faciem meam ut nullum praeter ipsum amatorem admittam. Induit me cyclade auro texta et immensis monilibus ornavit me.*"

The striking image of the virgin, clothed in metaphorical jewels and precious textiles repeats itself one more time at the end of the *passio*, when she appears to her praying parents, accompanied by another element linking the textual image to the visual representation in the apse: the all-consuming light, which first makes appearance in the scene taking place at the brothel, where it protects the purity of the young virgin:

"Having entered that foul place, she found there an angel of the lord ready to surround her with a light so vast that no one could look upon her due to its splendor."

"And so while the parents of holy Agnes were spending constant nightlong vigils at her tomb, in the midnight silence they saw a band of maidens, who passed by in a vast light, all clothed in robes woven of gold."[729]

The parallel between this verbal representation of regal finery and jewels and the stunning light surrounding the virgin and the Agnes's image in the apse, featuring imperial-like jewellery and gold mantel and rising from the shimmering background of the golden *tesserae*, must have been so obvious that the pilgrims who visited the basilica viewed the text and the mosaic as permanently intertwined and mutually authenticating. As Dennis Trout points out, the act of "reading" the mosaic must have been a spiritual and mental exercise, during which the vivid image was activated by the memory of the construct of virginity and femininity transmitted by the *passio*.[730]

As I would like to argue, the verbal image the apse triggered was inevitably tinged with the motivations of the authors of the legends, intent on directing the reader's and/or listener's attention to various social meanings of the martyrdom of Agnes, such as submission of women to episcopal authority or the role of the martyr as symbol of civic unity, expressed on the occasion of her *dies natalis* in the early medieval *passio*. Being appropriated and reinvented at different points in history, first as the face of the imperial campaign confirming the hegemony of Constantine and his heirs in Rome, then as the erotically charged icon of docile female submission to (male) ecclesiastical authority, and finally as a driving force behind *concordia* across the social spectrum and motivator of lay piety and patronage, Agnes in the apse of the basilica dedicated to her was no longer a "real" young woman, whose achievements, whatever

[729] Lapidge 2018, pp. 357, 360. For the Latin version of the text see: Mombritius 1910, pp. 42-43: "*Ingressa autem turpitudinis locum, angelum illic domini ita praeparatum invenit ut circondaret eam immenso lumine ita ut nullus eam posset prae splendore respicere." "Igitur dum parentes sanctae Agnetis assiduis pernoctationibus vigilarent ad tumulum eius, vident in medio noctis silentio exercitum virginum quae omnes auro textis cycladibus indutae cum ingenti lumine praeteribant.*"
[730] Trout 2019, pp. 13-14.

they may have been, were worthy of respect and emulation, but a symbol, abstract, untouchable, distant, heavily laden with meaning but denied any voice of her own. Not a person anymore, she turned into a sacrificial victim, an object of veneration, inspiration and interpretation.[731] Instead of bringing to mind female agency and capability she somehow distracted from the achievements and struggles of the women in 7th-century Rome and instead served to reinforce the ideas of women as sexually charged receptacles of masculine desires, inevitably exploited and/or violated, unless their sexuality was forcibly restricted by the power of faith and renunciation, which, after the necessary submission to the authority of the male Church representatives could lead to glory in the afterlife.[732]

The apse mosaics to be admired within the city walls were not the only occasion in which the female martyrs served as the face of the papal politics, be it in relation to the Roman congregations or to the foreign pilgrims. As already hinted on in the previous paragraphs, the intricate web of catacomb galleries was saved from the total abandonment and destruction in the sectors adjacent to the venerated sepulchres, which were patched up, decorated, widened and illuminated to simultaneously attract and be able to accommodate the masses of faithful. In the spaces highlighted by the pilgrim itineraries the martyrs, whose relics were often accessible only for the precious few "chosen" ones, were represented through votive panels, which facilitated the exchange of the blessing between the venerated martyr and the devoted visitors.[733]

The commissioning of the wall-painting in the catacombs of Generosa, discovered in 1867 by an archaeologist Wilhelm Henzen (1816-1887) during excavations on a hill coinciding with the position of the ancient Roman sacred forest of the priestly college of Fratres Arvales, and identified soon after as the site of burial of martyrs Simplicius, Faustinianus, and Beatrix, siblings allegedly martyred during Diocletian's reign (284-305), is completely in sync with this strand of cultural politics of the Church hierarchy in the city (fig. 5.6).[734]

On the west wall of the cubiculum hosting their tomb the excavations of the 19th century uncovered a monumental painting capturing Christ accompanied by Beatrix, Simplicius, Faustinianus and Rufinianus, buried, according to *Martyrologium Hieronymianum*, in the same

[731] Burnett McInerey 2003, pp. 68-69; Cooper and Hillner 2007, pp. 115-116, 126.
[732] See Clark 1994, pp. 166-178 for more information about verbal images of women used as symbols and manipulated by the Church Fathers.
[733] Bisconti 1995, pp. 286-287.
[734] De Rossi 1869a and De Rossi 1877, pp. 567-597.

cemetery as the siblings and celebrated similarly to them on the 29th of July.[735] Christ, dressed in a tunic and *pallium* of purple-red colour with gold touches, was depicted seated in the centre of the composition, performing a gesture of blessing with his right hand and holding a bejewelled codex. To his immediate left and right Simplicius and Faustinianus were standing dressed in white tunics with purple-red lines outlining the sleeves and yellow *pallia* embroidered with purplish motifs, holding crowns of their martyrdom. To the far right Rufinianus was portrayed dressed as a member of the palace guard in white tunic decorated by embroidered purplish *segmenta,* covered by a chlamys fastened with fibula on the right shoulder. On the opposite side of the fresco, Beatrix was represented with her hair and ears adorned by jewellery. Her dress, consisting of soft white tunic and golden silk *dalmatica*, was richly decorated at the neckline, the hem, and the cuffs by large porphyry-coloured stripes embroidered with pearls and rubies. Ornamental *segmenta* were applied to the shoulders. She was holding a gold bejewelled crown in her left hand, covered, according to Joseph Wilpert, by a soft *mappula* in gesture of humility.[736]

The fresco's dating relies on *Liber Pontificalis*, which notes that pope Leo II (682-683) transferred the relics of Beatrix, Faustinianus, and Simplicius *intra muros* to the church of Santa Bibiana.[737] Since damage to the fresco's lower part likely resulted from reopening of the burial chamber, this transfer forms *terminus ante quem* for the artwork. The refined facial features, vivid colours, and modelling of the figures through blots of colour and light evident in Joseph Wilpert's 1903 aquarelles resemble depictions of the martyr Barbara and the Maccabees in the church of Santa Maria Antiqua, supporting a date around the mid-7th century.[738]

That it was a member of the clergy who sponsored the decoration of the sepulchral space dedicated to the martyrs can be assumed from the general poverty and reduced dimensions of the surrounding galleries, pointing towards a small and little affluent community lacking commissioners capable of sponsoring an artist of the highest order, familiar at the same time with the antique local tradition and the current Hellenistic trends in the Byzantine painting,

[735] The wall-painting was published e.g. in: Santa Maria 1984; Minasi 2005; Piazza 2013, pp. 100-101. For more bibliography see cat. n. 2.41 in this thesis. For the figure of Rufinianus see: Minasi 2005, pp. 57-58.
[736] Wilpert 1903a, p. 458. The different restoration stages of the painting from the second half of the 19th century until the 1980s, the damage it sustained due to them and subsequent rescue works in 1998 have been extensively commented on by Minasi, 2005, pp. 65-71.
[737] *Liber Pontificalis* I (pontificate of Leo II, 682-683), in: Duchesne 1862, p. 360: "*Hic fecit ecclesiam in urbe Roma iuxta sancta Viviana, ubi et corpora sanctorum Simplici, Faustini, Beatricis atque aliorum martyrum recondidit, et ad nomen beati Pauli apostoli dedicavit sub die XXII mens. VI februar., ubi et dona obtuiit.*"
[738] Piazza 2013, pp. 102-103. For the aquarelles see: Wilpert 1903b, pl. 261-264.

whose skilful treatment of the volumes of faces and draperies remains traceable despite the less than ideal state of conservation of the fresco.[739]

The adornment of Beatrix, swatted in coloured silks, precious stones and pearls, is certainly opulent and distinguishes her from her companions. In its bejewelled finery the image of the martyr shimmered in the darkness of the catacomb, punctuated only by the lights of the pilgrims, offering them a vision of almost ethereal nobility of the virgin residing in the otherworld and giving them access to her intercessory and apotropaic power in a way inscriptions were unable to due to the progressive illiteracy of the population.[740]

Her attire, mirroring that of the empress's court, aligns with depictions of virgins in the church of Sant'Apolinare Nuovo in Ravenna (second half of the 5th century) and with the image of Agnes in the apse mosaic discussed above (fig. 5.7). In all the cases the sumptuous dress became visual expression of purity and of spiritual wealth. It also distinguished the virgin martyrs as brides of Christ, finding parallels in the depictions of Sephora and Rachel on their wedding day on the mosaics of Santa Maria Maggiore (fig. 5.8).[741]

But the visual message of the fresco goes far beyond the virginal nobility and purity. Similarly to the mosaic depicting Agnes, the wall-painting's rhetoric is closely related to the attempts of the prominent members of the Church to leave the "real" women and expressions of their agency behind through promotion of the idealized female representation in the *passiones* of the Roman martyrs.

Beatrix plays pivotal role in the wholly legendary *passio* of Simplicius and Faustinus. She is the one collecting their lifeless bodies, thrown into the Tiber, and transporting them by herself to the lands of a certain Roman matron Generosa for burial, only to be martyred herself by suffocation seven months later and buried next to her brothers by matron Lucina.[742]

In the mind of the authors of *passiones*, the recovery and the burial of martyrs was the most important element of the narrative, as it was the burial site that attracted the visitors in the first place. It is therefore noteworthy that the pious Roman matrons and virgins such as Beatrix are overwhelmingly credited for the discovery of the bodies of the martyred heroes. Yet female

[739] Minasi 2005, pp. 61, 82.
[740] Minasi 2005, pp. 64-65, 82-83.
[741] Vanderheyde 2020, pp. 21-24. For more information about the development of the image of the virgin as *sponsa Christi* and parallels between the 4th-century wedding ritual and the ritual of the consecration of the virgins see e.g.: d'Izarny 1953; Metz 1954, pp. 117-123, 135-136; Cooper 1996, pp. 45-67 and chapter 2 in this thesis.
[742] Minasi 2005, p. 57.

figures populating the narratives are far from living and breathing women of Rome. The fact that their names are repeated in martyr stories that span centuries, as is the case of Lucina, who was credited for the burial of Processus and Martinianus, killed supposedly on orders from emperor Nero (54-68), of pope Cornelius in the middle of the 3rd century, of Sebastian during the tetrarchy of Diocletian and Maximian (286-305) and finally of pope Marcellus at the beginning of the 4th century, points out towards them being mere figments of imagination and tools for obscuring their less fictional and equally admirable fellows whose ambitions were seen as undesirable.[743]

At the same time when pope Gelasius (492-496) wrote to the bishops in southern Italy complaining of women serving at sacred altars and prohibited such transgression against the Church order, the first *passiones*, littered with fictional women such as Lucina, whose ideological follower can be found in the figure of the young martyr Beatrix, were composed in the search for "historical" support for the self-assertion of the authority of Roman bishops.[744]

The *passio* of Simplicius and Faustinianus was composed with the intent to create tangible characters whose tombs could be visited by pilgrims in the suburban cemetery.[745] Shaped as much by the pre-existing oral tradition as by the imagination of the anonymous cleric who composed it, it crafted a symbolic image of the virgin turned martyr, far removed from the real Roman women's struggles for public agency yet so admirable for her moral qualities as to be acceptable role model for both the Church and the general public, women included.

Conclusions

Despite the tendency of the contemporary chroniclers to exaggerate the effect of the wars, epidemies, floods and famine which befell Rome during the 6th and the 7th century in order to make the deeds of the kings and popes who tried to salvage the situation in the city look more heroic, it can be concluded that the urban fabric and the social networks sustained transformations which changed them for good. Catacombs were almost abandoned, save for the underground sanctuaries dedicated to the city's exalted martyrs. Burials were moved to the intramural churches and the swats of land in between the inhabited quarters, vacant because in

[743] Lapidge 2018, pp. 33-34.
[744] Cooper 1999, pp. 301-305. For Gelasius, ep. 14.26, see chapter 4 in this thesis.
[745] Lapidge 2018, pp. 2-7.

the space of two centuries the population of the city dropped from around 700 000 to around 60 000. The pre-Christian temple districts were systematically dismantled with the blessing of the emperor in Constantinople, in control of the city after 552. Roman Forum was transformed into a jewel of Christianity, showcasing martyrs dear to the Constantinopolitan court. Old senatorial aristocracy was either wiped out by the outbursts of the epidemic caused by Y*ersinia pestis* or moved, to the estates in Sicily, where they were safe from the constant Longobard raids of the northern and central parts of the Apennine Peninsula, environs of Rome included, or to Ravenna/Constantinople, where they could pursue lucrative careers at the court of the emperor and the exarch, who controlled the peninsula in emperor's name. The void in the Rome's administration and welfare services this exodus left was soon filled by the new type of aristocracy, which based its elevated status on the participation in the imperial administration and military achievements of their members and often traced its roots either to the eastern dioceses of the empire or to the Romanised Longobard families.

The focus on military prowess and individual characteristics to go with it, such as physical power, decisiveness, endurance, lack of emotional displays and heroism in the face of death are only a few signals that the society, putting women, especially the lower-born ones, at disadvantage even before the 6th century, was turning decidedly masculine and allotting its female members the position of the weaker sex, pitiful creatures to be saved and taken care of, the antitheses of the masculine heroes. The fact that papal administration was gaining momentum ever since its centralization during the pontificate of Gregory the Great (590-604), slowly taking the building sponsorship and care for the poor, areas in which the female euergetism flourished in the 4th and 5th century, in its own hands, didn't improve the visibility of women in the public space either. The monopoly of clerics on the written sources certainly did not help. The few public commissions which can be tentatively linked to women, such as the votive images of female saints in Santa Maria Antiqua remain anonymous.

The preference of men over women extended to the veneration of the martyrs as well, at least to the written records capturing it. While many of the female martyrs, represented in the votive images decorating the walls of churches and *diaconiae* in the city, must have had powerful presence in the everyday religiousness of at least the female part of the Roman congregation, as they responded to the fears of wives and mothers, they were seen as less attractive by both papal and imperial administration, having nothing to offer to their policy of promotion of the military triumph of Christianity and demonstration of allegiance to the emperors, themselves favouring military saints.

The only exception was made by the members of the Church hierarchy in the case of martyrs buried in the environs of Rome, whose tombs became object of the pilgrimage boom of the 7th century. The next best thing to the Holy Land, in the hands of Arabs ever since the year 640, and finally free of the Longobard raids, Rome became flooded by newly Christianised Anglo-Saxons, Frisians, Franks etc. Popes, aware of the magnetic pull of the martyrs' relics, facilitated the tourist trade by displaying objects linked to the martyrdom of such figures as Lawrence or Peter in the churches of the city, re-building of basilicas outside of the walls in such a way as to allow the closest possible contact with the underlying martyrial graves, and restructuring the underground cemeteries, prioritizing easy access to the most venerated tombs. Female martyrs became part of the papal campaign aimed at attracting the attention of the pious tourists. Their effigies tempted them, offered them tangible proof of the salvific saintly presence at the sides selected and embellished by the members of the papal administration, and reminded them of the heroines of the *passia*, widely circulating mostly fictional stories offering the general public titillating and often highly eroticised background stories of the female members of the papal menagerie of saints. Despite being female by their sex, they were unrelated to the struggles of the "real" women in the city, conjured by the anonymous clerical authors purely as symbols confirming papal authority and sexualized baits, luring the faithful to Rome.

It is not to say that women in Rome completely vanished and became inactive in the public sphere during the 7th century. But sadly, we know next to nothing about the scope of their public activity, strategies of overcoming the societal restrictions placed upon them, or their potential involvement with the Church hierarchy. Their identities remain hidden, the material evidence of their presence in the city reduced almost exclusively to objects of everyday life and their stories wiped out by the authors of the written sources.

Conclusions

This work presented an inclusive picture Rome as a city where women, although limited in their options when it came to their role in the hierarchy of the Christian Church, had several avenues for performing religious rituals, shaping Christian topography, and directing of the actions of some members of the Church from behind the scenes, a “soft” power never before considered relevant in discussions of women’s roles in the early Christian hierarchy in the Mediterranean in general and Rome in particular.

Archaeological and textual evidence revealed numerous instances of female sponsorship of martyrial shrines, churches, and religious communities. Women like Demetrias, who founded a church dedicated to martyr Stephen on Via Latina, and the *inlustris femina* Vestina, who bequeathed her jewellery to fund a *titulus* hosting the relics of martyrs Gervasius and Protasius, left permanent marks on Rome’s sacred topography. Such benefactions as these allowed women to transcend domestic confinement and secure both spiritual benefits and public recognition.

The evidence further revealed that women forged profound connections with martyrs as a means of accessing spiritual authority. The striking disparity in the extent of gendered representations − for example 73 women were depicted between apostles Peter and Paul on sarcophagi compared to merely 10 men − suggests that women deliberately employed this visual rhetoric to legitimize their religious standing in ways unnecessary for their male counterparts whose authority was less contested.

As chapter 2 of this thesis proved, some women, namely consecrated virgins and widows, created alternative avenues of religious agency through their commitment to chastity. The examination of aristocratic ascetic communities, particularly that formed around Marcella on the Aventine Hill, revealed how elite women transformed their domestic spaces into centres of intellectual and spiritual authority. These women did not merely withdraw from society but created innovative social structures within which they could pursue scholarly activities, including advanced study of the Scriptures, leading to the recognition of their authority by the members of the Church hierarchy in the city. The investigation further uncovered that “holy” widowhood represented a socially privileged status that could afford women unusual autonomy, yet one that required substantial wealth to maintain. Moreover, funerary inscriptions and visual representations, particularly the exceptional 6th-century funerary portrait of widow Turtura in the catacomb of Commodilla, demonstrated how widows actively cultivated public images of

piety and learning that secured them both religious prestige and elevated standing in the eyes of the Fathers of the Church.

One of the most significant conclusions the research presents is that women's sensory engagement with sacred spaces and objects constituted a prominent form of religious participation previously overlooked in scholarship. Gender-separated liturgical spaces created premeditated viewing experiences, with female imagery strategically positioned where women congregated. In churches like Santa Maria Maggiore and Santa Maria Antiqua, representations of biblical matriarchs, female martyrs, and especially the Virgin Mary served as powerful role models for female worshippers. Standing in pre-determined sections of the sacred space, they were not only interacting with the pictorial decoration, worshipping through the senses, but also, in the case of consecrated virgins, potentially visually interacted with the rest of the congregation, thus adding to the sensory stimuli of the Roman liturgy.

Physical evidence of women's interaction with sacred imagery in the form of votive offerings attached to paintings of female saints, revealed by nail holes, attachment points, and preserved metalwork, demonstrated that women actively engaged with these images through touch, offerings, and prayer, creating relationships with sacred figures that transcended institutional mediation. Not only did the sponsorship of the images by women themselves serve the purpose of public self-representation, but the collective ritual performances linked to devotion toward female saintly role models and intercessors had the potential to strengthen their homosocial relationships. These practices also made women visible to the members of the Church hierarchy and male members of the society as active players in the religious life to be reckoned with.

Despite extremely limited evidence for women holding official titles in the Roman Church hierarchy − with only one 6th-century inscription identifying a woman, Anna, as a deaconess − material, visual and written clues collected in this work demonstrated that women were able to secure their involvement in liturgical/ritual practices through alternative avenues. Analysis of prohibitions in papal decretals and canons of the Church councils revealed evidence of female liturgical activities. As this thesis reasoned, pope Boniface I's (418-422) ban on women touching altar cloths or replenishing incense, and pope Gelasius's (492-496) prohibition of women serving at the altar suggest that such activities occurred despite official opposition. Epistolary material, funerary plaques, mosaics and ivory caskets were utilized as a valuable source of information on their own. Their analysis led to the discovery that, despite the image created in the canonical sources suggesting otherwise, there may have been women in Rome

maintaining altar cloths, singing in worship, offering public prayers, and teaching the Scriptures.

Women's roles in funerary rituals with Eucharistic connotations represent another particularly significant finding. Reinterpretation of the catacomb paintings depicting funerary banquets revealed women holding chalices with wine, potentially breaking bread and performing ritual gestures. Coupled with the documented disinterest of the forming Church hierarchy in the 4th-century Rome towards participation in funerary rites and performing of Eucharistic liturgy, increasingly sought after by the newly Christianized population, and evidence suggesting that early Christians, including Romans, stored consecrated bread at home for private communion until at least the late 4th century, they formed the cornerstone of the hypothesis that in less controlled environment of the catacombs, women could serve as leaders of rituals with religious connotations, mediating between the living and the dead through practices that blended traditional Roman commemorative customs with emerging Christian eschatological beliefs.

As wars wrecked the Apennine Peninsula and papal bureaucracy expanded its control over building patronage, charity, and care for the sick and poor − areas where female aristocrats had previously exercised significant authority − women found themselves increasingly relegated to roles of recipients rather than providers of assistance. Female monasteries existed in Rome but were significantly outnumbered by male ones, forming only about 25% of identified monasteries in the 6th century and dropping to 20% by the 7th century. This decline is a symptom of increasing institutional resistance to formalized female religious communities as ecclesiastical control strengthened. Quantitative analysis also revealed that during the same centuries, male saints significantly outnumbered female saints in Rome's religious topography, with female saints accounting for only approximately 24% of the 267 martyrs and saints venerated in the city. More tellingly, 75% of these female saints lacked distinct identities, being commemorated only as part of larger groups of martyrs. These findings reinforced the argument that female figures were systematically marginalized in Rome's sacred landscape.

As the last chapter of this thesis demonstrated, churches established by Byzantine administrators predominantly featured male military saints, with female saints included primarily because of connections to imperial women rather than recognition of female religious agency. Similarly, contemporary hagiographical literature transformed female martyrs into passive, sexualized victims rather than active religious agents. Close reading of the 7th-century mosaic in the apse of Sant'Agnese fuori le mura and the 7th-century representation of virgin Beatrix in the catacomb of Generosa through the lens of the *passia* revealed narratives

emphasizing women's vulnerability, purity, and submission to male authority, the interpretation of which led to understanding of the fact that such written and visual images used female figures as rhetorical tools to advance ecclesiastical agendas rather than to commemorate female achievement. These patterns, recognised as a natural consequence of the broader militarization of Roman society that privileged masculine virtues and relegated women to positions of weakness requiring protection, are the most important of the fragments of knowledge used to reconstruct the challenging mosaic of female marginalization in the last two centuries of what can be defined as “Roman Late Antiquity”.

Achievements and potential paths forward

It is thus possible to affirm that the findings of this work fundamentally challenge traditional narratives that have marginalized women’s contributions to early Christian religious rituals in the city of Rome by focusing narrowly on institutional hierarchies. Instead, the research presented here revealed a complex landscape where women exercised religious agency through multiple avenues: patronage of sacred spaces, commissioning of religious art, formation of intellectual communities, sensory interaction with sacred imagery, and leading of commemorative rituals with Eucharistic overtones.

Moreover, the thesis demonstrated the crucial importance of material culture and visual evidence for recovering women's religious experiences often obscured in male-authored texts. Successful extending of this methodological approach, applied previously in studies focusing primarily on everyday life of women in Late Antiquity, offers a powerful model for future research seeking to recover voices of other marginalized groups in contexts extending beyond the dailiness.

The chronological scope of the study was able to further illuminate how women's religious opportunities evolved (and ultimately diminished), as society became militarized and ecclesiastical control strengthened. By tracing these changes over four centuries, the research contributes to broader understandings of how gender bias and shifts in power and authority intersected during Christianity's formative period in Rome.

While traditional scholarship has often concluded that women in Rome had minimal religious influence due to the absence of evidence for female deacons or presbyters, this research led to the discovery of a rich tapestry of alternative religious participation. By recovering these

neglected dimensions of female religious experience, this work endeavours to fill a critical gap in our understanding of Christianity's development in one of its most important, if not the most important, centre.

The discoveries made on the previous pages open several promising avenues for future research. First, a proposal shall be made on undertaking a comparative study examining female religious agency across different urban centres of the late antique Mediterranean, with a prospect to illuminate regional variations in women's religious opportunities. Such research could contextualize Rome’s seemingly restrictive environment within broader patterns, potentially revealing distinctive features of Roman practice.

Second, there is a strong potential in a deeper investigation of sensory religious experiences, which may lead to understanding of the mechanism through which not only women, but also groups distinctive for their gender, social standing or race, created meaningful outlets of spiritual agency beyond verbal and textual expressions of authority.

Third, more focused analysis of the relationship between domestic religion and public worship could illuminate how women navigated boundaries between these spheres and potentially transferred religious authority from one context to another. Examination of household religious objects, private devotional spaces, and family religious practices could reveal additional avenues through which women shaped religious life.

Finally, expanded investigation of funerary sites as spaces of female religious agency holds particular promise. As this thesis has demonstrated, death-related rituals provided platforms within which women maintained traditional religious roles even as their participation in other religious contexts became increasingly restricted. Further examination of commemorative rituals could reveal additional dimensions of female religious authority that persisted beyond the 4th century.

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Figures

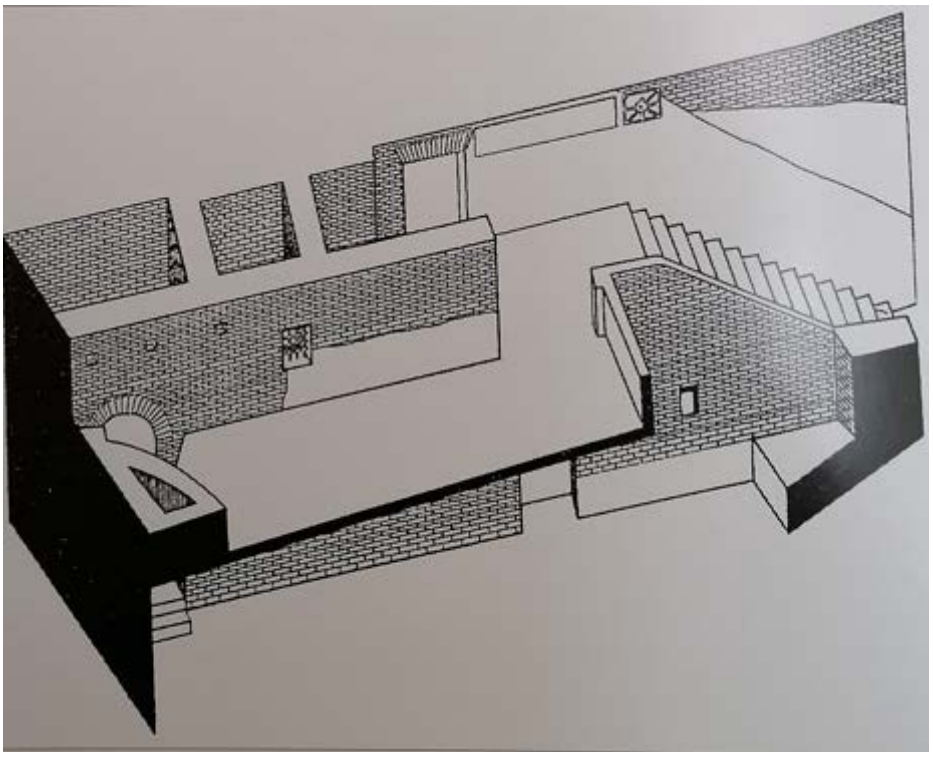


Fig 1.1 *Domus* under the church of Santi Giovanni e Paolo, Rome, axonometric view of the stairs and the house chapel (Brenk 2003, fig. 168).



Fig. 1.2 House chapel under the church of Santi Giovanni e Paolo, wall-painting depicting martyrdom of one female and two male martyrs (Author).



Fig. 1.3 House chapel under the church of Santi Giovanni e Paolo, wall-painting with male orant and a pair kneeling in *proskynesis* at his feet (Author).

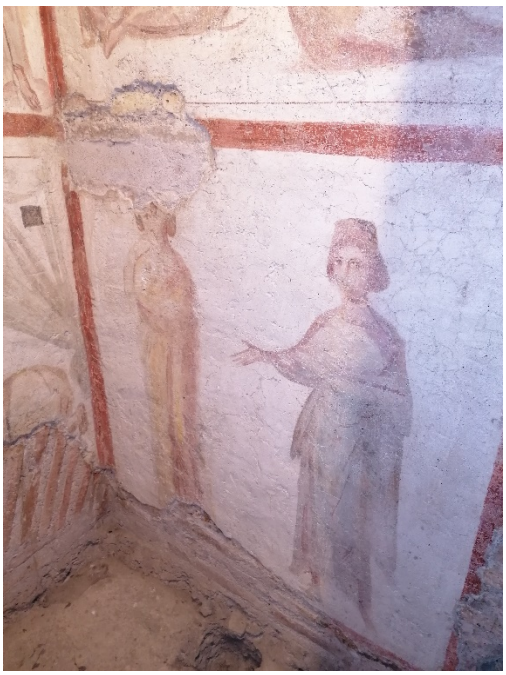


Fig. 1.4 House chapel under the church of Santi Giovanni e Paolo, wall-painting with two *matronae*, one of which points towards the male orant under the relic shrine (Author).

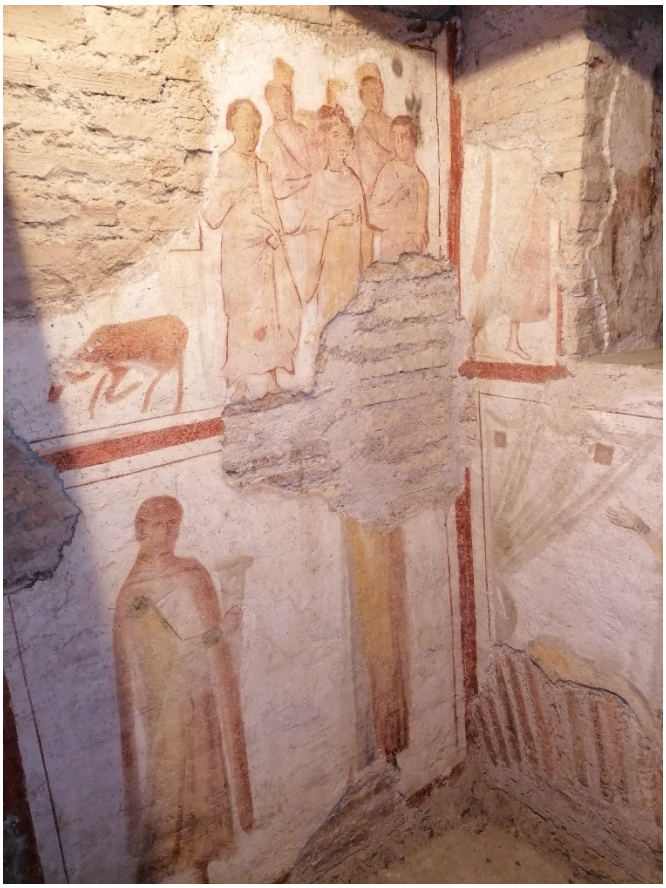


Fig. 1.5 House chapel under the church of Santi Giovanni e Paolo, wall-painting with a man holding a glass chalice (Author).



Fig. 1.6 Gold glass bottom of a plate with Peregrina between Peter and Paul, New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, public domain).



Fig. 1.7 Gold-glass bottom of a drinking vessel with Hercules and a married couple, identified by the inscription as Orfitus and Constantia, possibly the prefect of Rome Memmius Vitrasius Orfitus and his wife, London, The British Museum (The Trustees of the British Museum).



Fig. 1.8 Limestone relief with learned woman between Apostles, Oxford, Ashmolean Museum (Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford).



Fig. 1.9 Sarcophagus lid frieze with representation of Crispina among biblical scenes, Vatican City, Musei Vaticani (Musei Vaticani).



Fig. 1.10 Sarcophagus representing learned woman between Apostles and the motif of the Good Shepherd, Musei Vaticani (Musei Vaticani).



Fig. 1.11 Wall-painting of a deceased woman in an orant position, flanked by Apostles Peter and Paul, Rome, Catacomba di Domitilla (Braconi 2017, p. 37).



Fig. 1.12 *Arcosolium* with a portrait of a deceased noblewoman with a daughter, flanked by Peter and Paul, Rome, Catacomba di Santa Tecla (PCAS).



Fig. 2.1 Hypothetical reconstruction of the portrait of the mother of Gregory the Great, Silvia, after the description of the decoration of the Roman *domus*-turned-monastery the pope dedicated to martyr Andrew by John the Deacon (Wüscher-Becchi 1900, pl. VII).

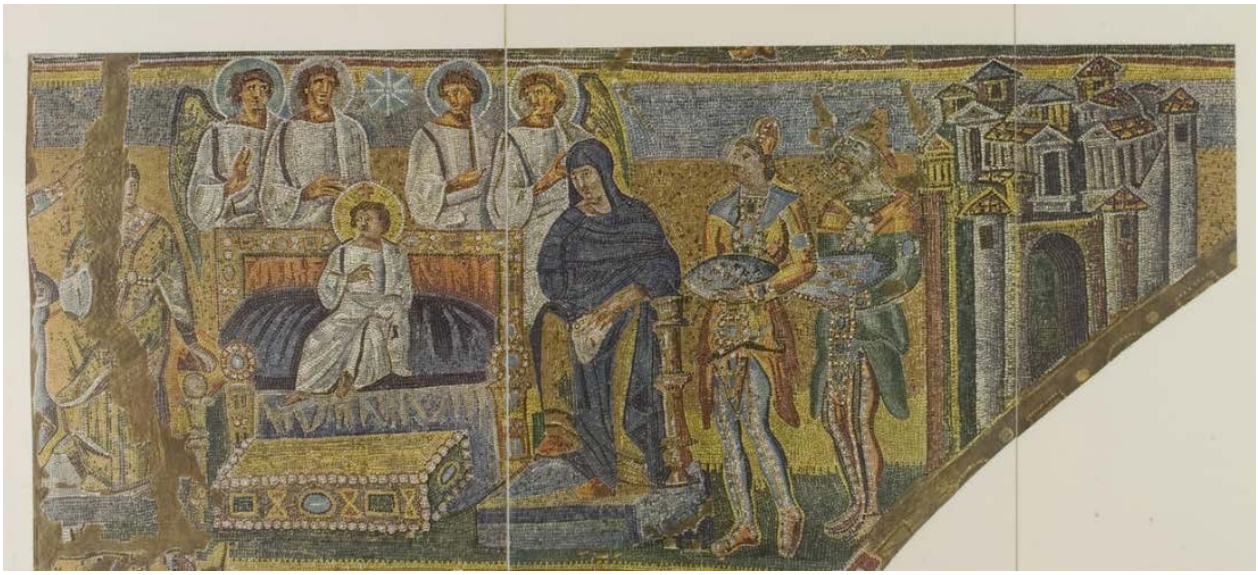


Fig. 2.2 Mosaic on the triumphal arch of the basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome, with enthroned Christ in the scene of Adoration of the Magi (Wilpert 1976, fig. 63-65).



Fig. 2.3 Apse mosaic of the church of Santa Pudenziana, Rome, featuring enthroned Christ teaching the Apostles (Author).



Fig. 2.4 *Arcosolium* painting representing deceased Veneranda with attributes of learning, accompanied by martyr Petronilla, Rome, Catacomba di Domitilla (PCAS).



Fig. 2.5 Funerary portrait of widow Turtura, introduced to the Virgin by martyrs Felix and Adauctus, Rome, Catacombe di Commodilla (Bisconti and Ferri 2018, p. 176).



Fig. 2.6 *Basilichetta* of martyrs Felix and Adauctus, view towards the apse, Rome, Catacombe di Commodilla (PCAS).

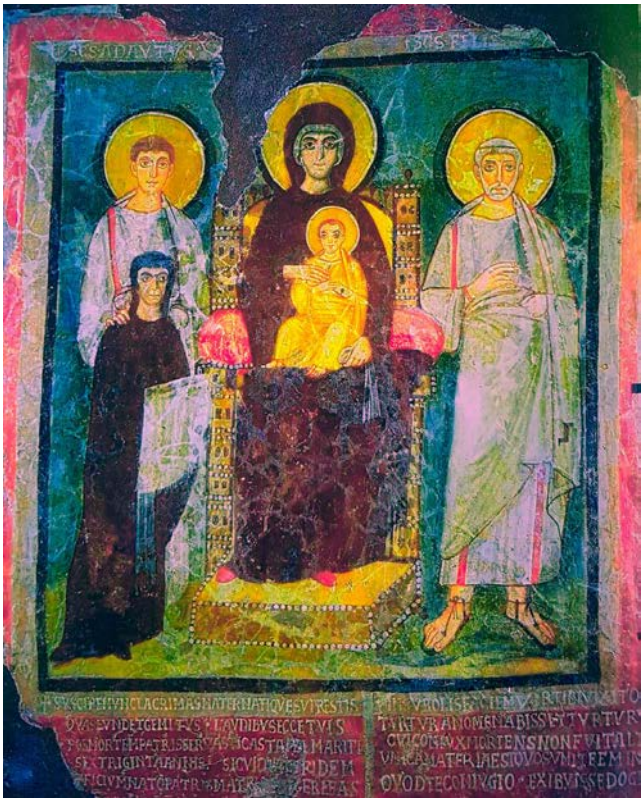


Fig. 2.7 Funerary portrait of Turtura enhanced through the image processing app DStretch (Claudia Cianfriglia).



Fig. 2.8 Watercolour painting of the now lost mosaics in the church of Hagios Demetrios in Thessaloniki, with little Maria introduced to the Virgin to the left (The British School of Athens).



Fig. 2.9 Dome painting of the Chapel of Exodus, El Bagawat Necropolis, Kharga Oasis, Egypt, detail with the procession of virgins (Kuvatova 2019, fig. 1).



Fig. 2.10 *Codex Rossanensis*, fol. 2v, detail with wise and foolish virgins, Museo Diocesano e del Codex, Rossano (Wikimedia Commons).



Fig. 2.11 Fragment of a glass bowl, depicting Apostle Peter and a female orant, London, The British Museum (The Trustees of the British Museum; Garrucci 1876, pl. 185).



Fig. 2.12 Sarcophagus front with scenes of capture of Apostles Peter and Paul, martyrdom of Paul and announcement of Peter's denial, with deceased most probably posing as Thecla in the second scene from the left, Marseilles, Abbaye Saint-Victor (Gaggadis-Robin 2009, p. 74).

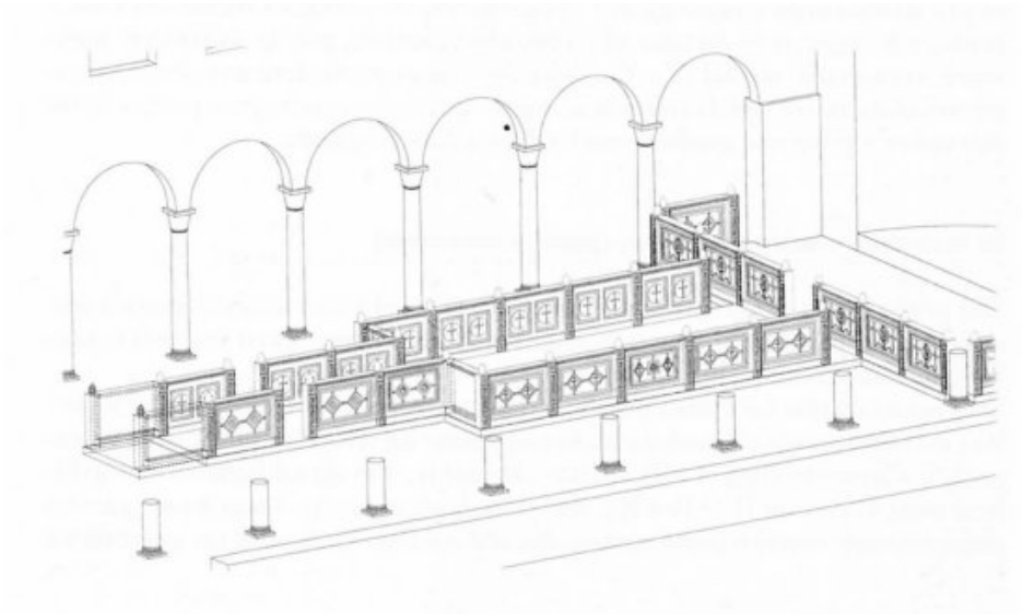


Fig. 3.1 Reconstruction of the 6th-century marble barrier in the basilica of San Clemente, Rome (Guidobaldi 2000, fig. 2).



Fig. 3.2 The 7th-century masonry *transenna* in the church of Santa Maria Antiqua, Rome (Hurst 2021, pl. 3).



Fig. 3.3 Acclamation scene from the doors of the Basilica of Santa Sabina, Rome, with detail of the curtains hanging at the entrance of the sacred building (Everingham Sheckler and Winn Leith 2016, fig. 1).



Fig. 3.4 Front panel of the Samagher casket with curtains hanging from a *pergula* in front of the presbytery, Venice, Museo Archeologico Nazionale (Adrien Palladino).



Fig. 3.5 Interior of the basilica of Santa Sabina, Rome, detail with holes visible above the column shafts (Wikimedia Commons).



Fig. 3.6 Doorframe above the entrance of the basilica of Santa Sabina, Rome, with series of holes (Foletti 2014, fig. 3).



Fig. 3.7 Representation of a stratified sacred space with hanging curtains**,** Ashburnham Pentateuch, fol. 127v, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France (Gallica, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b53019392c/f264.item)



Fig. 3.8 Gender-separated mosaic panels in the basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome, with female matriarchs on the left (Basilica Papale di Santa Maria Maggiore).

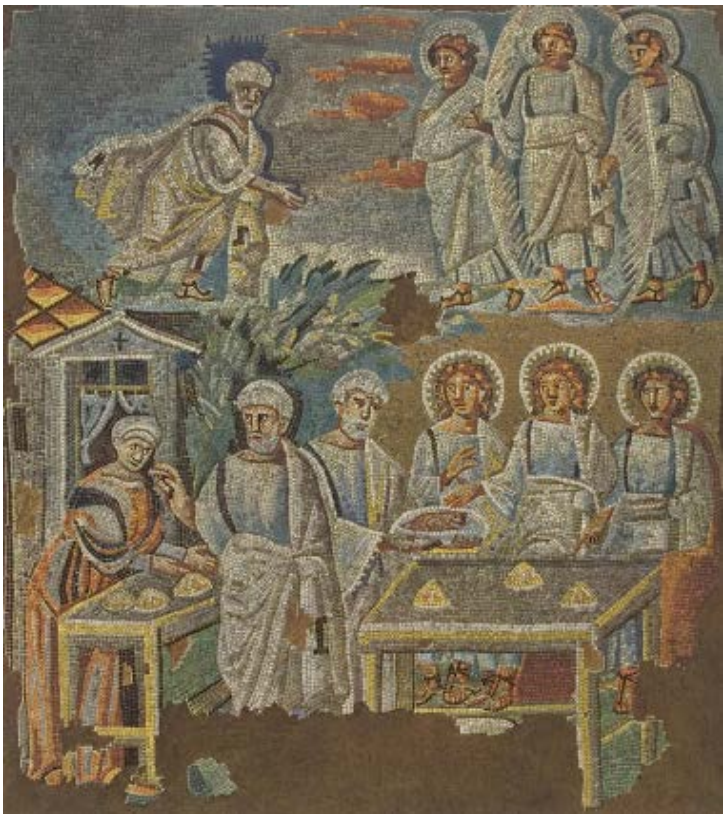


Fig. 3.9 Mosaic panel with the scene of Sarah and Abraham hosting three angels, Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome (Wilpert 1976, fig. 10).

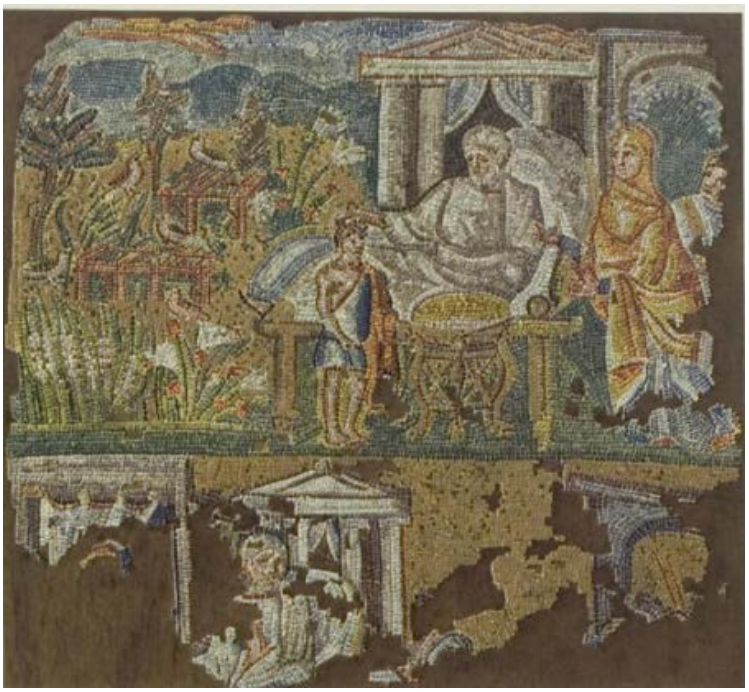


Fig. 3.10 Mosaic panel with the scene of blessing of Ezau, Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome (Wilpert 1976, fig. 11).

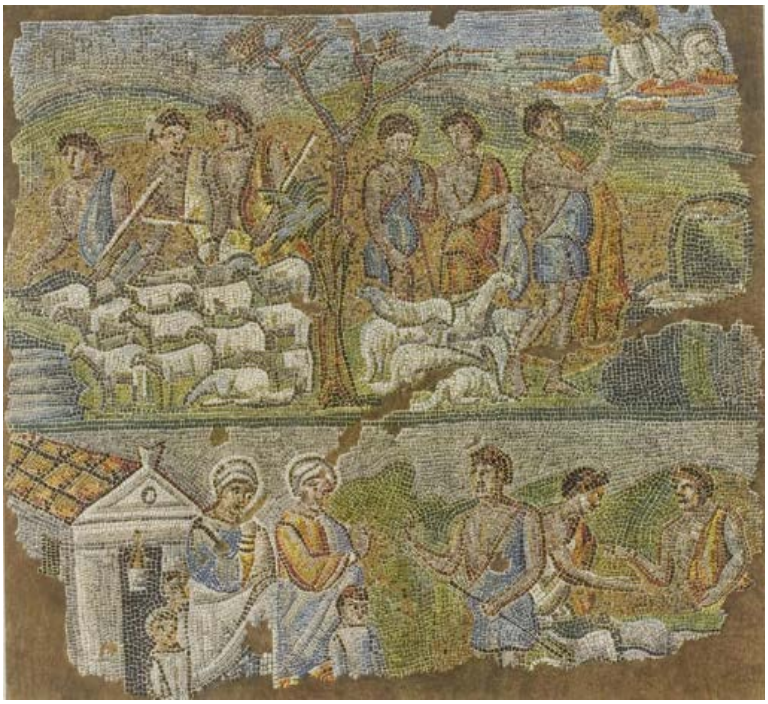


Fig. 3.11 Jacob recounts his meeting with God to Rachel and Leah, mosaic panel from Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome (Wilpert 1976, fig. 14).

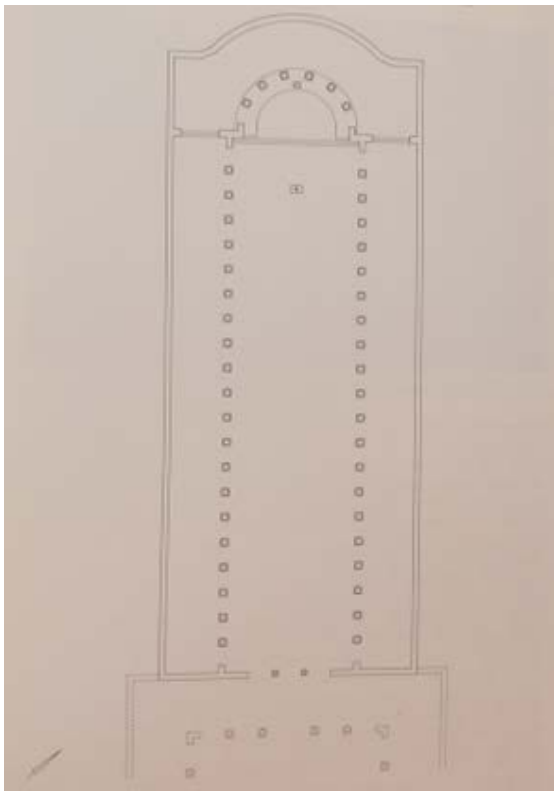


Fig. 3.12 Hypothetical ground plan of the 5th-century basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore with deambulatory (De Blaauw 1986, p. 100).



Fig. 3.13 Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome, reconstruction of the 5th-century view towards the apse (Foletti 2014, fig. 31).



Fig. 3.14 Fragment of a chancel screen from Groun, Henchir Tiffa, or Aïn Sfar, Tunisia, referring to virgins, housed in Musée du Louvre, Paris (Musée du Louvre/ Maurice et Pierre Chuzeville).



Fig. 3.15 Mosaic panel with the offering of Melchizedek, Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome (Wilpert 1976, fig. 8).



Fig. 3.16 Mosaic with the scene of Sarah and Abraham hosting angels, San Vitale, Ravenna (Wikimedia Commons).



Fig. 3.17 Church of Santa Maria Antiqua, Rome, detail of the floor mosaic in the sancturary (Wikimedia Commons).



Fig. 3.18 Fresco depicting St. Demetrius on the south-eastern pillar in front of the presbytery, Santa Maria Antiqua, Rome (Wikimedia Commons).



Fig. 3.19 Fresco depicting St. Barbara on the south-western pillar in front of the presbytery, Santa Maria Antiqua, Rome (Author).



Fig. 3.20 Fresco with Christ healing a blind man on the south-eastern column in the nave, Santa Maria Antiqua, Rome (Wikimedia Commons).



Fig. 3.21 Reconstruction of the outlines of the fresco of Virgin Eleousa on the south-western column in the nave, Santa Maria Antiqua, Rome (Nordhagen 1978, pl. LVI).



Fig. 3.22 Fresco depicting Deesis with the figure of the male commissioner, south-eastern pillar, Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome (Author).



Fig. 3.23 Fresco depicting Solomone, mother of the Maccabees, with her martyred sons and their teacher Eleazar, south-western pillar, Santa Maria Antiqua, Rome (Author).



Fig. 3.24 Fresco depicting enthroned Virgin flanked by angels, south-western pillar, Santa Maria Antiqua, Rome (Author).



Fig. 3.25 Niche with votive image of Virgin and Child, Santa Maria Antiqua, Rome (Wikimedia Commons).

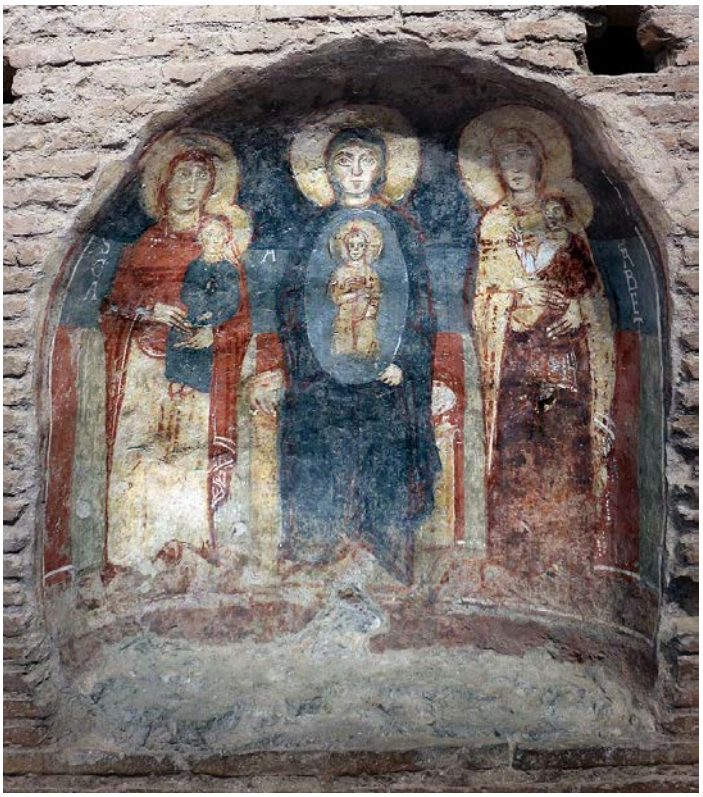


Fig. 3.26 Niche with the Holy Mothers in the western (female) nave, Santa Maria Antiqua, Rome (Wikimedia Commons).



Fig. 3.27 Votive image of St. Anne with Mary, Santa Maria Antiqua, Rome (Author).



Fig. 3.28 Reliquary pendant with scenes of Nativity and Adoration of the Magi, Constantinople, currently housed in the British Museum, London (The Trustees of the British Museum).



Fig. 3.29 Golden encolpion-fibula, found in a Visigothic tomb in Granja del Turuñuelo, asking Virgin for protection of a female owner, Museo Arqueológico Nacional, Madrid (Museo Arqueológico Nacional).



Fig. 3.30 Detail of an amuletic armband with medallion depicting the enthroned Virgin with Child and a Holy Rider, found in eastern Anatolia, currently housed in the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto (The Royal Ontario Museum).



Fig. 3.31 *Theotokos* with the Child on her lap, flanked by a court of onlookers and two male figures bringing precious vessels, *capsella* of San Nazaro, Museo Diocesano, Milan (Hess 2023, fig. 8.3).



Fig. 3.32 Votive medallion with martyrs Felicity and Silanus on the obverse and Christ between Peter and Paul on the reverse, Vatican City, Musei Vaticani (Musei Vaticani).



Fig. 3.33 Votive medallion with victorious Christ flanked by two angels on the obverse and Adoration of the Magi on the reverse, Vatican City, Musei Vaticani (Musei Vaticani).



Fig. 3.34 Votive medallion with two martyrs venerating the Cross and crowned by Christ on the obverse and Adoration of the Magi on the reverse, Vatican City, Musei Vaticani (Musei Vaticani)



Fig. 3.35 Reliquary cross decorated by intricate niello ornament, found in a grave under the pavement of the Constantinian basilica of San Lorenzo fuori le mura, Rome, currently house in the Vatican Museums (Musei Vaticani).



Fig. 3.36 Gold ring incorporating pre-Christian magic gem, probably found in the church Santa Maria dell'Orto in Rome, currently housed in Musée du Louvre, Paris (Musée du Louvre/ Tony Querrec).



Fig. 3.37 Necklace with gold medallion depicting a marriage scene, and amulet with Harpocrates, part of the treasure from Piazza della Consolazione, Rome, currently housed in The Metropolitan Museum, New York (The Metropolitan Museum, public domain).



Fig. 3.38 Floor mosaic depicting veiled female figure with a medallion or enkolpion, episcopal complex in Aquileia (Schumacher 1977, pl. 62).



Fig. 3.39 Apse mosaic from the church of San Michele in Africisco, Ravenna, with victorious Christ flanked by two angels, currently housed in the Bode Museum, Berlin (Wikimedia Commons)

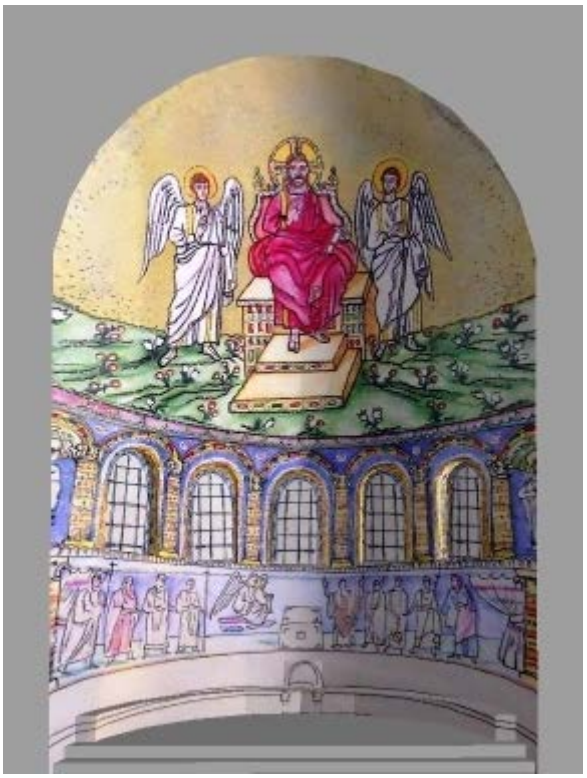


Fig. 3.40 Reconstruction of the apse decoration of the church of Sant'Agata Maggiore in Ravenna before 1668 (Wikimedia Commons).



Fig. 3.41 Pilgrim ampulla from the Holy Land depicting victorious cross and three Marys at the Tomb, Dumbarton Oaks Collection (Dumbarton Oaks).



Fig. 3.42 *Capsella Vaticana* with two angels venerating a cross on the lid, Vatican City, Musei Vaticani (Musei Vaticani).



Fig. 3.43 Detail from the Syriac Eucharistic chalice with male figure praying before a large bejewelled cross, Dumbarton Oaks Collection (Dumbarton Oaks).

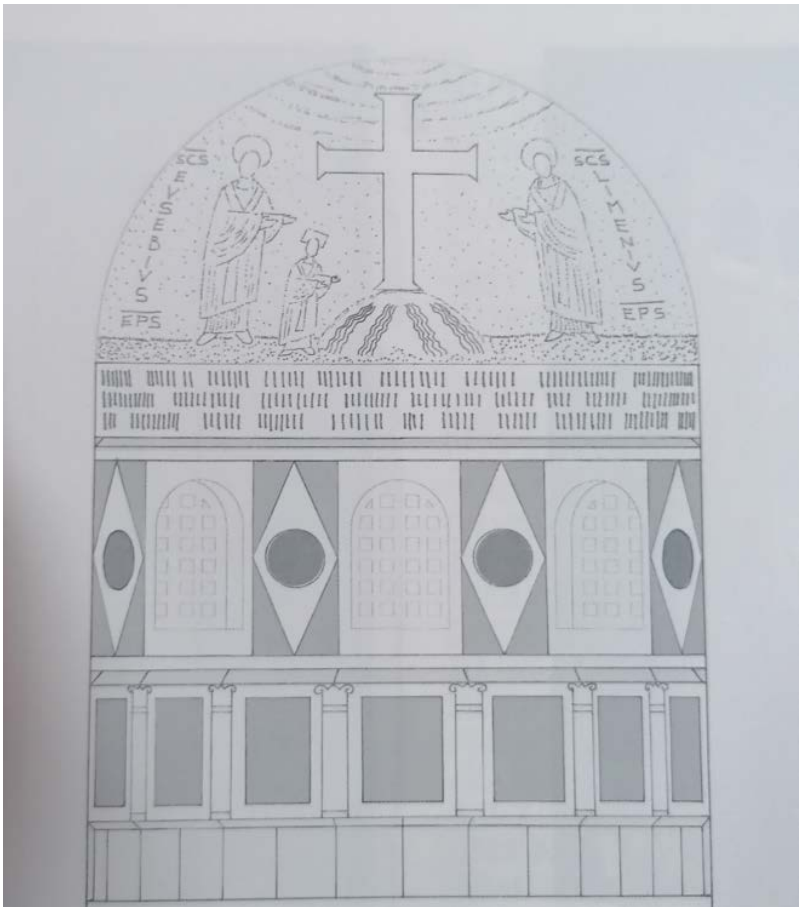


Fig. 3.44 Reconstruction of the lost apse decoration of the basilica of Sant'Eusebio in Vercelli (Aimone and Tossini 2022, fig. 63).

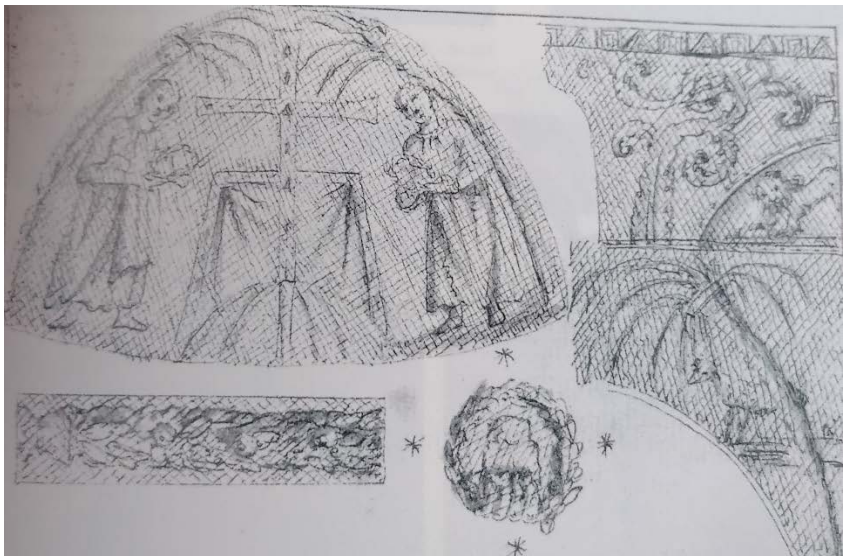


Fig. 3.45 Reconstruction of the lost apse mosaic of the church San Gregorio fuori le mura in Rimini (Aimone and Tossini 2022, fig. 64).



Fig. 3.46 Mosaic depicting martyrs Primis and Felicianus flanking *crux gemmata*, church Santo Stefano Rotondo, Rome (Wikimedia Commons).



Fig. 3.47 Wall-painting with martyrs Milix and Pymenius flanking *crux gemmate*, Catacomba di Ponziano, Rome (Minasi 2012, fig. 3).

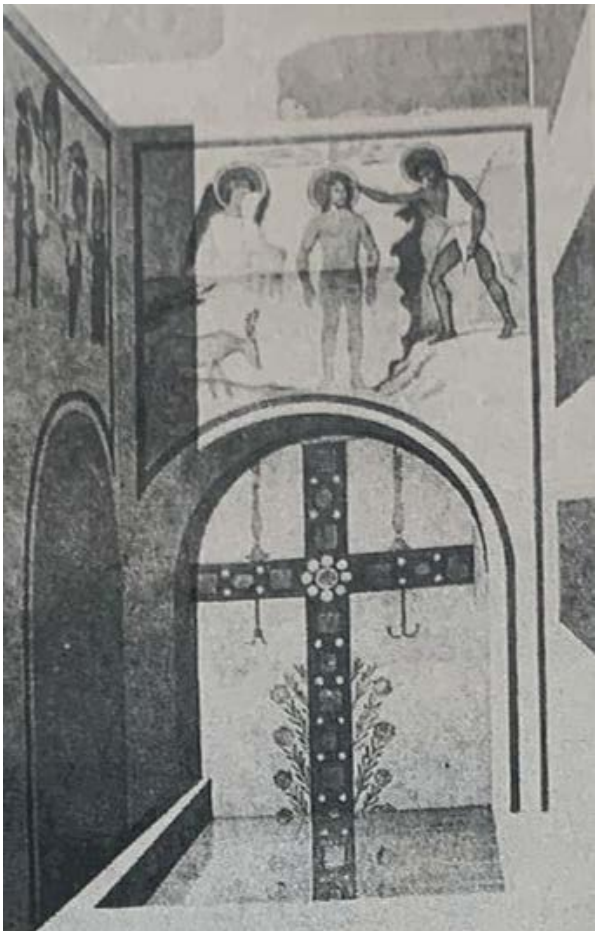


Fig. 3.48 Reconstruction of the *crux gemmata* rising from the purifying baptismal water, Catacomba di Ponziano, Rome (Minasi 2012, fig. 6).



Fig. 4.1 Funerary plaque of Rusticius with engraving of a *hydraulis*, basilica of San Paolo fuori le mura, Rome (Perrot 1971, pl. XV).



Fig. 4.2 Funerary plaque of musician Gentilla, unearthed in the Catacomba di Commodilla, currently housed in the museum inside the Catacomba di Domitilla, Rome (PCAS).



Fig. 4.3 Detail of the front panel of the Samagher casket with singing and praying men and women in front of the Petrine *confession*, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Venice (Kateusz and Badini Confalonieri 2021, fig. 12.4).



Fig. 4.4 Funerary plaque with a female orant in front of a sanctuary, Vatican City, Musei Vaticani (Musei Vaticani).



Fig. 4.5 Mosaic depicting both *Ecclesia ex Gentibus* and *Ecclesia ex Circumcisione* and two matrons well-versed in Scriptures, church of Santa Sabina, Rome (Andaloro and D'Angelo 2017, p. 24).



Fig. 4.6 Reconstruction of the decoration of the counter-façade of the church of Santa Sabina by Giovanni Ciampini (Ciampini 1690, pl. 48).



Fig. 4.7 Scene of a funerary banquet, Rome, Catacombe dei SS. Pietro e Marcellino, Cubiculo del Tricliniarca (PCAS).



Fig. 4.8 Detail from a fresco most probably capturing a funerary meal with Eucharistic overtones, Catacomba di Priscilla, Cappella Greca (Wikimedia Commons).



Fig. 4.9 Mosaic with female funerary symposium, necropolis south of Antioch, currently housed in the Worcester Art Museum, Massachusetts (Worcester Art Museum).



Fig. 5.1 Apse mosaic depicting martyr Agnes flanked by pope Honorius and his predecessor (possibly Symmachus/Gregory the Great), basilica of Sant'Agnese fuori le mura, Rome (Author).



Fig. 5.2 Apse mosaic of the church of Santi Cosma e Damiano, Rome, with Peter and Paul introducing Cosmas and Damian to Christ in the presence of pope Felix IV (the commissioner) and St. Theodore (Thunø 2015, pl. V).



Fig. 5.3 Apsidal arch mosaic depicting Christ flanked by apostle Peter, martyr Lawrence, and pope Pelagius on the left and by apostle Paul and martyrs Stephen and Hippolytus on the right, San Lorenzo fuori le mura, Rome (Thunø 2015, pl. XIV).

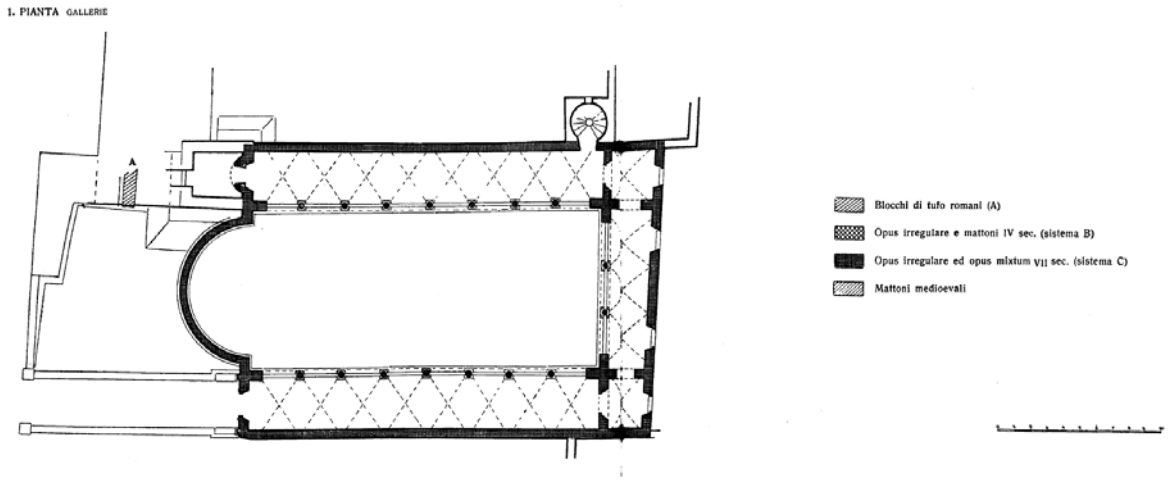


Fig. 5.4 The ground plan of the galleries, basilica of Sant'Agnese fuori le mura, Rome (Krautheimer 1953, pl. VI).



Fig. 5.5 Sant'Agnese fuori le mura, Rome, present-day view from the gallery (Wikimedia Commons).



Fig. 5.6 Fresco depicting Christ flanked on the left by martyrs Simplicius and Beatrix and on the right by martyrs Faustinianus and Rufinianus, Catacomba di Generosa, Rome (PCAS).



Fig. 5.7 Procession of virgin martyrs in the basilica of Sant'Apolinare Nuovo in Ravenna (Wikimedia Commons).



Fig. 5.8 Mosaic panel depicting the wedding of Moses and Sephora, Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome (Wilpert 1976, fig. 17).

Appendix I: Native and foreign saints in Rome (500-700 C.E.)

Name	Commemorated where	Recorded when	Site of martyrdom/life if not martyred	Celebrated with	Sex	Source
	Passio of Felicitas and her seven sons	around 420				Lapidge 2018, pp. 45-53
	Liber ad Gregoriam	400-620				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E02264
	basilica dedicated to the martyr restored	498-514				Davis 1989, p. 46
	painting in the oratory of Santa Felicita	510-530				Salvatori 2018, pp. 114-119
	Monza papyrus	590-604				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06788
	Notitia ecclesiarum urbis Romae	625-630				Lapidge 2018, p. 660
	Sacramentarium Gregorianum	625-638				Lapidge 2018, p. 672
	De locis sanctis	642-683				Lapidge 2018, p. 664
	Malmesbury Itinerary	648-682				Lapidge 2018, p. 665
Felicitas	fresco in Cimitero di Massimo	before 772	Rome	Sons	Female	Ferri 2023, pp. 73-94
	Passio of Felicitas and her seven sons	around 420				Lapidge 2018, pp. 45-53
	painting in the oratory of Santa Felicita	510-530				Salvatori 2018, pp. 114-119
	Monza papyrus	590-604				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06788
	Notitia ecclesiarum urbis Romae	625-630				Lapidge 2018, p. 661
	Sacramentarium Gregorianum	625-638				Lapidge 2018, p. 672
	De locis sanctis	642-683				Lapidge 2018, p. 663
	Malmesbury Itinerary	648-682				Lapidge 2018, p. 666
Ianuarius	fresco in Cimitero di Massimo	before 772	Rome	Felicitas and brothers	Male	Ferri 2023, pp. 73-94
	Passio of Felicitas and her seven sons	around 420				Lapidge 2018, pp. 45-53
	painting in the oratory of Santa Felicita	510-530				Salvatori 2018, pp. 114-119
	Monza papyrus	590-604				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06788
	Sacramentarium Gregorianum	625-638				Lapidge 2018, p. 672
	Malmesbury Itinerary	648-682				Lapidge 2018, p. 665
Felix	fresco in Cimitero di Massimo	before 772	Rome	Felicitas and brothers	Male	Ferri 2023, pp. 73-94
	Passio of Felicitas and her seven sons	around 420				Lapidge 2018, pp. 45-53
	painting in the oratory of Santa Felicita	510-530				Salvatori 2018, pp. 114-119
	Monza papyrus	590-604				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06788
	Sacramentarium Gregorianum	625-638				Lapidge 2018, p. 672
	Malmesbury Itinerary	648-682				Lapidge 2018, p. 665
Philippus	fresco in Cimitero di Massimo	before 772	Rome	Felicitas and brothers	Male	Ferri 2023, pp. 73-94
	Passio of Felicitas and her seven sons	around 420				Lapidge 2018, pp. 45-53
	painting in the oratory of Santa Felicita	510-530				Salvatori 2018, pp. 114-119
	Notitia ecclesiarum urbis Romae	625-630				Lapidge 2018, p. 660
	Sacramentarium Gregorianum	625-638				Lapidge 2018, p. 672
	De locis sanctis	642-683				Lapidge 2018, p. 664
	Malmesbury Itinerary	648-682				Lapidge 2018, p. 665
Silanus	fresco in the Cimitero di Massimo	before 772	Rome	Felicitas and brothers	Male	Ferri 2023, pp. 73-94
	Passio of Felicitas and her seven sons	around 420				Lapidge 2018, pp. 45-53
	painting in the oratory of Santa Felicita	510-530				Salvatori 2018, pp. 114-119
	Notitia ecclesiarum urbis Romae	625-630				Lapidge 2018, p. 660
	Sacramentarium Gregorianum	625-638				Lapidge 2018, p. 672
	De locis sanctis	642-683				Lapidge 2018, p. 664
	Malmesbury Itinerary	648-682				Lapidge 2018, p. 665
Alexander	fresco in the Cimitero di Massimo	before 772	Rome	Felicitas and brothers	Male	Ferri 2023, pp. 73-94
	Passio of Felicitas and her seven sons	around 420				Lapidge 2018, pp. 45-53
	painting in the oratory of Santa Felicita	510-530				Salvatori 2018, pp. 114-119
	Notitia ecclesiarum urbis Romae	625-630				Lapidge 2018, p. 660
	Sacramentarium Gregorianum	625-638				Lapidge 2018, p. 672
	De locis sanctis	642-683				Lapidge 2018, p. 664
	Malmesbury Itinerary	648-682				Lapidge 2018, p. 665
Vitalis	fresco in the Cimitero di Massimo	before 772	Rome	Felicitas and brothers	Male	Ferri 2023, pp. 73-94
	Passio of Felicitas and her seven sons	around 420				Lapidge 2018, pp. 45-53
	painting in the oratory of Santa Felicita	510-530				Salvatori 2018, pp. 114-119
	Notitia ecclesiarum urbis Romae	625-630				Lapidge 2018, p. 660
	Sacramentarium Gregorianum	625-638				Lapidge 2018, p. 672
	De locis sanctis	642-683				Lapidge 2018, p. 664
	Malmesbury Itinerary	648-682				Lapidge 2018, p. 665
Martialis	fresco in the Cimitero di Massimo	before 772	Rome	Felicitas and brothers	Male	Ferri 2023, pp. 73-94
	Passio of Anastasia, Chrysogonus and companions	around 425				Lapidge 2018, pp. 54-87
	titulus Anastasiae	before 457				Brandenburg 2013, pp. 140-142
	titulus mentioned in the decree of a synod	499				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E02744
	Liber ad Gregoriam	400-620				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E02264
	stational mass in Sant'Anastasia *(Sacramentarium Gregorianum)*	625-638				Lapidge 2018, p. 671
Anastasia	*De locis sanctis* takes note of the church dedicated to the martyr	642-683	Sirmium or Palmaria	Chrysogonus, Agape, Chionia, Irene, Theodota	Female	Lapidge 2018, p. 664

	Passio of Anastasia, Chrysogonus and companions	around 425				Lapidge 2018, pp. 54-87
	titulus mentioned in the decree of a synod	499				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E02744
	presbyter of the *titulus* present at the synod in the basilica of San Pietro	595				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06362
Chrysogonus	*Sacramentarium Gregorianum*	625-638	Aquileia	Anastasia, Agape, Chionia, Irene, Theodota	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 672
Agape	*Passio* of Anastasia, Chrysogonus and companions	around 425	Thessalonica	Chrysogonus, Anastasia, Chionia, Irene, Theodota	Female	Lapidge 2018, pp. 54-87
Chionia	*Passio* of Anastasia, Chrysogonus and companions	around 425	Thessalonica	Chrysogonus, Anastasia, Agape, Irene, Theodota	Female	Lapidge 2018, pp. 54-87
Irene	*Passio* of Anastasia, Chrysogonus and companions	around 425	Thessalonica	Chrysogonus, Anastasia, Agape, Chionia, Theodota	Female	Lapidge 2018, pp. 54-87
Theodota	*Passio* of Anastasia, Chrysogonus and companions	around 425	Nicaea	Chrysogonus, Anastasia, Agape, Chionia, Irene	Female	Lapidge 2018, pp. 54-87
	basilica along via Aurelia	498-514				Davis 1989, p. 45
	church of Sant'Agata dei Goti	462-471, 593				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E04501
Agatha	fresco depicting the martyr from a private collection	late 7th- 8th century	Catania	N/A	Female	Bertelli 2016, pp. 197-198
	church dedicated to the martyr on via Appia	676-678				Davis 1989, p. 73
Euphemia	mosaic in the church dedicated to the martyr	687-701	Chalcedon	N/A	Female	Davis 1989, p. 86
	relics transferred to San Pietro in Vincoli	556-561 or 579-590				Maskarinec 2018, p. 175
Maccabees	fresco in Santa Maria Antiqua	mid-7th c.	Antioch	Solomone	Male	Romano 2025
Solomone	fresco in Santa Maria Antiqua	mid- 7th c.	Antioch	Maccabees	Female	Romano 2025
	oratory dedicated to the martyr in the *domus* of Gregory the Great	590-604				Ferrari 1957, p. 143
Barbara	fresco in Santa Maria Antiqua	mid-7th c.	Nicomedia	N/A	Female	Belting 1994, p. 116
	Passio of Agnes	498-514				Lapidge 2018, pp. 348-362
	basilica dedicated to the martyr restored	498-514				Davis 1989, p. 46
	Monza papyrus	590-604				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06788
	Notitia ecclesiarum urbis Romae	625-630				Lapidge 2018, p. 660
	mosaic in the basilica of Sant'Agnese, basilica restructured	625-638				Foletti and Lešák 2023
	Sacramentarium Gregorianum	625-638				Lapidge 2018, p. 671
	De locis sanctis	642-683				Lapidge 2018, p. 664
Agnes	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	Emerentiana	Female	Lapidge 2018, p. 665
	Passio of Agnes	498-514				Lapidge 2018, pp. 348-362
Emerentiana	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	Agnes	Female	Lapidge 2018, p. 665
Merita	frescoes in the Catacomba di Commodilla	early 6th c.	Rome	Felix, Adauctus	Female	Bisconti and Ferri 2018, pp. 181-193
	restoration of the *basilichetta* of Felix and Adauctus	523-526				Davis 1989, p. 50
	frescoes in the Catacomba di Commodilla	early 6th c.				Bisconti and Ferri 2018, pp. 181-193
	Passio of Felix and Adauctus	600-625				Lapidge 2018, pp. 593-597
	Sacramentarium Gregorianum	625-638				Lapidge 2018, p. 672
Felix	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	Adauctus, Merita	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 666
	restoration of the *basilichetta* of Felix and Adauctus	523-526				Davis 1989, p. 50
	frescoes in the Catacomba di Commodilla	early 6th c.				Bisconti and Ferri 2018, pp. 181-193
	Passio of Felix and Adauctus	600-625				Lapidge 2018, pp. 593-597
	Sacramentarium Gregorianum	625-638				Lapidge 2018, p. 672
Adauctus	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	Felix, Merita	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 666
	Passio of Simplicius, Faustinus and Beatrix	600-700				Lapidge 2018, pp. 598-602
	Sacramentarium Gregorianum	625-638				Lapidge 2018, p. 627
	fresco in the Catacomba di Generosa	before 682				Piazza 2006, pp. 100-103
Beatrix	translation of the relics to the church of Santa Bibiana	682-683	Rome	Simplicius, Faustinus	Female	Davis 1989, p. 79
	Passio of Simplicius, Faustinus and Beatrix	600-700				Lapidge 2018, pp. 598-602
	Sacramentarium Gregorianum	625-638				Lapidge 2018, p. 627
	fresco in the Catacomba di Generosa	before 682				Piazza 2006, pp. 100-103
Simplicius	translation of the relics to the church of Santa Bibiana	682-683	Rome	Beatrix, Faustinus	Male	Davis 1989, p. 79
	Passio of Simplicius, Faustinus and Beatrix	600-700				Lapidge 2018, pp. 598-602
	Sacramentarium Gregorianum	625-638				Lapidge 2018, p. 627
	fresco in the Catacomba di Generosa	before 682				Piazza 2006, pp. 100-103
Faustinus	translation of the relics to the church of Santa Bibiana	682-683	Rome	Beatrix, Simplicius	Male	Davis 1989, p. 79
	feast of the martyr recorded in epistles of pope Gregory the Great	592				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06336
	Sacramentarium Gregorianum	625-638				Lapidge 2018, p. 672
Cyprian	*De locis sanctis*	642-683	Carthage	Cornelius (pope)	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 663
	Passio of Cornelius	450-500				Lapidge 2018, pp. 195-200
	Monza papyrus	590-604				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06788
	Sacramentarium Gregorianum	625-638				Lapidge 2018, p. 672
Cornelius (pope)	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Civitavecchia	Cyprian	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 666
	Passio of Nereus, Achilleus, and companions	450-500				Lapidge 2018, pp. 201-227
	restoration of the cemetery of Nereus and Achilleus	523-526				Davis 1989, p. 50
	Monza papyrus	590-604				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06788
	presbyter of the *titulus* present at the synod in the basilica of San Pietro	595				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquit* y, E06362
	presbyter of the *titulus* witnessing a will	600				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06417
	stational mass in Santi Nereo e Achilleo (*Capitularium* of Würzburg)	642-672				Lapidge 2018, p. 673
Nereus	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Terracina	Achilleus	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 666

	Passio of Nereus, Achilleus, and companions	450-500				Lapidge 2018, pp. 201-227
	restoration of the cemetery of Nereus and Achilleus	523-526				Davis 1989, p. 50
	Monza papyrus	590-604				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06788
	presbyter of the *titulus* present at the synod in the basilica of San Pietro	595				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquit* y, E06362
	presbyter of the *titulus* witnessing a will	600				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06417
	stational mass in Santi Nereo e Achilleo (*Capitularium* of Würzburg)	642-672				Lapidge 2018, p. 673
Achilleus	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Terracina	Nereus	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 666
Domitilla	*Passio* of Nereus, Achilleus, and companions	450-500	Terracina	Nereus, Achilleus	Female	Lapidge 2018, pp. 201-227
Felicula	*Passio* of Nereus, Achilleus, and companions	450-500	Rome	N/A	Female	Lapidge 2018, pp. 201-227
	Passio of Nereus, Achilleus, and companions	450-500				Lapidge 2018, pp. 201-227
	presbyter of the *titulus* mentioned in the decrees of a synod	499				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E02744
	renovation of the cemetery dedicated to the martyr on via Nomentana	619-625				Davis 1989, p. 63
	Sacramentarium Gregorianum	625-638				Lapidge 2018, p. 672
Nicomedes	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	Felicula	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 665
	Passio of Nereus, Achilleus, and companions	450-500				Lapidge 2018, pp. 201-227
Servillianus	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Terracina	Sulpicius	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 666
	Passio of Nereus, Achilleus, and companions	450-500				Lapidge 2018, pp. 201-227
Sulpicius	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Terracina	Servillianus	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 666
	epitaph of Gordian, priest of the church of Santi Giovanni e Paolo	498-500				Davis 1989, p. 44
	steps behind the apse of the church of Santi Giovanni e Paolo	498-514				Davis 1989, p. 46
	Passio of Gallicanus, John, and Paul	514-550				Lapidge 2018, pp. 363-380
	epitaph of a cleric from the *titulus* dedicated to John and Paul	535				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E05090
	epitaph of a *lector* from the *titulus* dedicated to John and Paul	567				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E05100
	monastery dedicated to martyrs mentioned in epistle of Pelagius II	585-586				Ferrari 1957, p. 166
	Monza papyrus	590-604				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06788
	presbyter of the *titulus* of John and Paul witnessing a will	600				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06417
	supplicatory procession beginning at the church	603				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06449
	Sacramentarium Gregorianum	625-638				Lapidge 2018, p. 672
	Malmesbury Itinerary	648-682				Lapidge 2018, p. 666
John	relic sent to the king of Northumbrians	666-668	Rome	Paul	Male	*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06042
	epitaph of Gordian, priest of the church of Santi Giovanni e Paolo	498-500				Davis 1989, p. 44
	steps behind the apse of the church of Santi Giovanni e Paolo	498-514				Davis 1989, p. 46
	Passio of Gallicanus, John, and Paul	514-550				Lapidge 2018, pp. 363-380
	epitaph of a cleric from the *titulus* dedicated to John and Paul	535				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E05090
	epitaph of a *lector* from the *titulus* dedicated to John and Paul	567				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E05100
	monastery dedicated to martyrs mentioned in epistle of Pelagius II	585-586				Ferrari 1957, p. 166
	Monza papyrus	590-604				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06788
	presbyter of the *titulus* of John and Paul witnessing a will	600				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06417
	supplicatory procession beginning at the church	603				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06449
	Sacramentarium Gregorianum	625-638				Lapidge 2018, p. 672
	Malmesbury Itinerary	648-682				Lapidge 2018, p. 666
Paul	relic sent to the king of Northumbrians	666-668	Rome	John	Male	*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06042
	record of Dignissimus, priest at the church of San Pietro in Vincoli	498-500				Davis 1989, p. 44
	fresco in the *titulus* Silvestri e Martini	6th c.				Croci 2022a, p. 22
	fresco in the Catacomba di Commodilla	early 6th c.				Bisconti and Ferri 2018, pp. 181-193
	decoration of the basilica of San Pietro, accomodation for the poor	498-514				Davis 1989, pp. 45-46
	silver candlestics gifted to the basilica of San Pietro by Theodoric	514-523				Davis 1989, p. 48
	apse mosaic in Santi Cosma e Damiano	526-530				Foletti 2017a
	precious chalices and *pallia* gifted to the basilica of San Pietro	533-535				Davis 1989, p. 52
	gold bejewelled cross and silver candlestics gifted to the basilica	537-555				Davis 1989, p. 56
	basilica of San Pietro as the end of the procession of pope Pelagius	556				Davis 1989, p. 59
	the tomb of the Apostle covered by silver-gilt panels	556-561				Davis 1989, p. 61
	canopy above the altar in the basilica of San Pietro	579-590				Davis 1989, p. 61
	apse mosaic of San Lorenzo fuori le mura	579-590				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquit* y, E05292
	apse mosaic in San Teodoro	late 6th - early 7th c.				Cecchelli 2005, pp. 70-71
	lights gifted to the basilica of San Pietro	590-604				Davis 1989, p. 62
	Monza papyrus	590-604				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06788
	bronze tiles from a pagan temple, silver cover for the *confessio of* Peter	604-606				Davis 1989, p. 64
	pearl encrusted gospel books gifted to the basilica of San Pietro	625-638				Davis 1989, p. 71
	mosaic in the oraotry of San Venanzio	642-648				Giesser 2014
	upper atrium of the basilica of San Pietro paved with marble slabs	666-668				Davis 1989, p. 73
	relics sent to king of the Northumbrians	676-678				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06042
Peter	restoration of the mosaic in the atrium of the basilica, St. Peter's gate	687-701	Rome	N/A	Male	Davis 1989, pp. 85-86
	Monza papyrus	590-604				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06788
Petronilla	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	Peter	Female	Lapidge 2018, p. 666

	fresco in the *titulus* of Santi Silvestro e Martino	6th c.				Croci 2022a, p. 22
	fresco in the Catacomba di Commodilla	first half of the 6th c.				Bisconti and Ferri 2018, pp. 181-193
	apse mosaic and accomodation for the poor in the basilica of San Paolo	498-514				Davis 1989, pp. 45-46
	silver chandeliers and arches gifted to the basilica of San Paolo fuori le mura	514-523				Davis 1989, p. 48
	apse mosaic of Santi Cosma e Damiano	526-530				Foletti 2017a
	apse mosaic of San Lorenzo fuori le mura	579-590				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E05292
	canopy above the altar at the basilica of San Paolo fuori le mura	590-604				Davis 1989, p. 61
	Monza papyrus	590-604				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06788
	record of the gate of St. Paul	642-648				Davis 1989, p. 68
	mosaic in the oratory of San Venanzio	642-648				Giesser 2014
	basilica mentioned in the *Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682				Lapidge 2018, p. 666
	relic sent to the king of Northumbrians	666-668				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06042
	church dedicated to the martyr built close the Santa Bibiana	682-683				Davis 1989, p. 79
Paul	oratory dedicated to the martyr *ad Aquas Salvias* restored	687-701	Rome	N/A	Male	Ferrari 1957, p. 46
Thecla	*Malmesbury Itinerary* takes note of the cemetery church dedicated to the martyr	648-682	Iconium	Paul	Female	Lapidge 2018, p. 666
	church of Sant'Andrea *cata Barbara* built (operational beyond the 7th c.)	468-483				Krautheimer 1953, p. 65
	basilica of Sant'Andrea built in the Vatican	498-514				Davis 1989, p. 45
	monastery dedicated to the martyr built in *domus* of Gregory the Great	before 587				Ferrari 1957, p. 138
	monastery of Sant'Andrea *cata Barbara* built	around 600				Ferrari 1957, p. 53
	abbot of the monastery of Andrew and Lucy granted permission to make a will	600				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06417
	gift of a silver panel for the *confessio* of the basilica of Sant'Andrea	625-638				Davis 1989, p. 64
	monastery of Andrew and Bartholomew built in the *domus* of pope Honorius	625-638				Davis 1989, p. 65
Andrew	oratory dedicated to Andrew rebuilt	687-701	Patras	N/A	Male	Davis 1989, p. 86
Thomas	oratory dedicated to the martyr in the basilica of Sant'Andrea	498-514	Edessa	N/A	Male	Davis 1989, p. 45
	altar dedicated to the martyr in the basilica of Sant'Andrea	498-514				Davis 1989, p. 45
Cassian	female convent dedicated to the martyr	before 713-714	Imola	N/A	Male	Ferrri 1957, p. 182
	Passio of Eugenia, Protus, and Hyacinth	475-500				Lapidge 2018, pp. 228-249
	altar dedicated to the martyr in the basilica of Sant'Andrea	498-514				Davis 1989, p. 45
	Monza papyrus	590-604				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06788
	Sacramentarium Gregorianum	625-638				Lapidge 2018, p. 672
Protus	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	Hyacinth	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 665
	altar dedicated to the martyr in the basilica of Sant'Andrea	498-514				Davis 1989, p. 45
Hyacinth	Monza papyrus	590-604	Rome	Protus	Male	*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06788
	oratory dedicated to the martyr in the basilica of Sant'Andrea	498-514				Davis 1989, p. 45
Apollinaris	basilica of Sant'Apollinare *ad Palmata*	625-638	Ravenna	N/A	Male	Davis 1989, p. 64
Sossius	oratory dedicated to the martyr in the basilica of Sant'Andrea	498-514	Misenum	N/A	Male	Davis 1989, p. 45
	oratory dedicated to the saint in the basilica of San Pietro	498-514				Davis 1989, p. 45
John the Evangelist	mosaic in the oratory of San Venanzio	642-648	Ephesus	N/A	Male	Giesser 2014
	oratory dedicated to the saint in the basilica of San Pietro	498-514				Davis 1989, p. 45
	supplicatory procession beginning at the church	603				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06449
	gate named after the saint	606				Davis 1989, p. 62
	mosaic in the oratory of San Venanzio	642-648				Giesser 2014
	Deesis fresco in Santa Maria Antiqua	mid- 7th c.				Andaloro 2016a
John the Baptist	altar dedicated to the saint in Santo Stefano Rotondo	before 700	Palestine	N/A	Male	Krautheimer 1970, p. 202
	titulus Equitii rededicated to Silvester and Martin	498-514				Davis 1989, p. 46
	Monza papyrus	590-604				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06788
	presbyter of the *titulus* present at the synod in the basilica of San Pietro	595				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06362
	the gate of St. Silvester and his basilica mentioned in *Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682				Lapidge 2018, p. 265
Silvester	oratory of San Silvestro in the Lateran occupied by pretendent Paschal	687	Rome	N/A	Male	Davis 1989, p. 83
	titulus Equitii rededicated to Silvester and Martin	498-514				Davis 1989, p. 46
Martin	abbot of a monastery dedicated to the martyr sent to England	680	Tours	N/A	Male	Ferrari 1957, p. 230
	oratory dedicated to Cosmas and Damian	498-514				Davis 1989, p. 46
	basilica of Santi Cosma e Damiano and its apse mosaic	526-530				Davis 1989, p. 51; Foletti 2017a
	supplicatory procession beginning at the church	603				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06449
Cosmas	ambo in the basilica of Santi Cosma e Damiano	687-701	Aegeae	Damian	Male	Davis 1989, p. 86
	oratory dedicated to Cosmas and Damian	498-514				Davis 1989, p. 46
	basilica of Santi Cosma e Damiano and its apse mosaic	526-530				Davis 1989, p. 51; Foletti 2017a
	supplicatory procession beginning at the church	603				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06449
Damian	ambo in the basilica of Santi Cosma e Damiano	687-701	Aegeae	Cosmas	Male	Davis 1989, p. 86

	Passio of Sixtus, Hippolytus, and Lawrence	450-500				Lapidge 2018, pp. 180-194
	accomodation for the poor built near the basilica of San Lorenzo fuori le mura	498-514				Davis 1989, p. 46
	presbyter of the *titulus Laurenti* mentioned in the decrees of a synod	499				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E02744
	precious chalices, patens and *pallia* gifted to the basilica	523-526				Davis 1989, p. 50
	apse mosaic in the present church of Santi Quiricco e Giulitta	537-555				Andaloro 2006, p. 316
	church build over the grave of the martyr	579-590				Davis 1989, p. 61
	apse mosaic of San Lorenzo fuori le mura	579-590				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E05292
	Monza papyrus	590-604				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06788
	stational mass in San Lorenzo fuori le mura (*Sacramentarium Gregorianum*)	625-638				Lapidge 2018, p. 671
	stational mass in San Lorenzo in Lucina (*Sacramentarium Gregorianum*)	625-638				Lapidge 2018, p. 671
	gate and basilica of San Lorenzo mentioned in *Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682				Lapidge 2018, p. 665
	renovation of the *titulus* of San Lorenzo in Lucina	684-685				Davis 1989, p. 79
Lawrence	silver arches gifted to the *titulus* of San Lorenzo in Lucina	687-701	Rome	Sixtus, Hippolytus	Male	Davis 1989, p. 87
	Passio of Sixtus, Lawrence, and Hippolytus	450-500				Lapidge 2018, pp. 180-194
	church dedicated to Sixtus mentioned in the *Dialogies* of Gregory the Great	around 593				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E04591
	presbyter of the *titulus* present at the synod in the basilica of San Pietro	595				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06362
	presbyter of the *titulus* witnessing a will	600				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity*, E06417
	Monza papyrus	590-604				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06788
	Sacramentarium Gregorianum	625-638				Lapidge 2018, p. 672
Sixtus (pope)	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	Lawrence, Hippolytus	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 666
	Passio of Sixtus, Hippolytus, and Lawrence	450-500				Lapidge 2018, pp. 180-194
	apse mosaic of San Lorenzo fuori le mura	579-590				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E05292
	Monza papyrus	590-604				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06788
	visitor graffiti invoking the martyr in the cemetery dedicated to him	late 6th - early 7th c.				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E05348
	Sacramentarium Gregorianum	625-638				Lapidge 2018, p. 672
Hippolytus	basilica of Hippolytus is mentioned in *Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	Tryphonia, Cyrilla, Concordia, Sixtus, Lawrence	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 665
Tryphonia	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	Hippolytus, Cyrilla, Concordia	Female	Lapidge 2018, p. 265
	Passio of Polychronius, Parmenius, Abdon, and Senen	506-514				Lapidge 2018, pp. 337-349
Cyrilla	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	Hippolytus, Tryphonia, Concordia	Female	Lapidge 2018, p. 265
Concordia	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	Hippolytus, Tryphonia, Cyrilla	Female	Lapidge 2018, p. 265
Romanus	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	Abundius, Sixtus, Lawrence, Hippolytus	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 665
	Passio of Polychronius, Parmenius, Abdon, and Senen	506-514				Lapidge 2018, pp. 316-347
Abundius	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	Romanus, Sixtus, Lawrence, Hippolytus, Ireneus	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 665
Ireneus	*Passio* of Polychronius, Parmenius, Abdon, and Senen	506-514	Rome	Abundius	Male	Lapidge 2018, pp. 316-347
	Cimitero dei Giordani restored on the account of the grave of the martyr	498-514				Davis 1989, p. 46
Alexander	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	Felix	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 665
Felix	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	Alexander	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 665
	Passio of Marcellus and companions	500-550				Lapidge 2018, pp. 390-410
	the basilica dedicated to the martyr on via Salaria restored	526-530				Davis 1989, p. 51
	Monza papyrus	590-604				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06788
Saturninus	*Sacramentarium Gregorianum*	625-638	Rome	Sisinnius	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 672
Sisinnius	*Passio* of Marcellus and companions	500-550	Rome	Saturninus	Male	Lapidge 2018, pp. 390-410
Crescentianus	*Passio* of Marcellus and companions	500-550	Rome	N/A	Male	Lapidge 2018, pp. 390-410
	Passio of Cecilia and her companions	around 450				Lapidge 2018, pp. 138-164
	presbyter of the *titulus* mentioned in the decrees of a synod	499				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E02744
	church dedicated to the martyr mentioned in *Liber Pontificalis*	537-555				Davis 1989, p. 57
	Monza papyrus	590-604				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06788
	presbyter of the *titulus* present at the synod in the basilica of San Pietro	595				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06362
	supplicatory procession beginning at the church	603				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06449
	Sacramentarium Gregorianum	625-638				Lapidge 2018, p. 672
Cecilia	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	N/A	Female	Lapidge 2018, p. 666
	Passio of Cecilia and her companions	around 450				Lapidge 2018, pp. 138-164
	Monza papyrus	590-604				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06788
	Sacramentarium Gregorianum	625-638				Lapidge 2018, p. 671
	Capitularium of Würzburg	642-672				Lapidge 2018, p. 674
Valerianus	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	Tiburtius, Maximus, Cecilia, Urbanus	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 666
	Passio of Cecilia and her companions	around 450				Lapidge 2018, pp. 138-164
	Monza papyrus	590-604				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06788
	Sacramentarium Gregorianum	625-638				Lapidge 2018, p. 671
	Capitularium of Würzburg	642-672				Lapidge 2018, p. 674
Tiburtius	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	Valerianus, Maximus, Cecilia, Urbanus	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 666

	Passio of Cecilia and her companions					Lapidge 2018, pp. 138-164
	Monza papyrus	590-604				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06788
	Capitularium of Würzburg	642-672				Lapidge 2018, p. 674
Maximus	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	Tiburtius, Valerianus, Cecilia, Urbanus	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 666
	Passio of Cecilia and her companions	around 450				Lapidge 2018, pp. 138-164
	Monza papyrus	590-604				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06788
	Sacramentarium Gregorianum	625-638				Lapidge 2018, p. 672
	Malmesbury Itinerary	648-682				Lapidge 2018, p. 666
Urbanus (pope)	*Passio* of Urbanus	650-700	Rome	Tiburtius, Valerianus, Maximus, Cecilia	Male	Lapidge 2018, pp. 526-550
	Monza papyrus	590-604				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06788
	Notitia ecclesiarum urbis Romae	625-638				Lapidge 2018, p. 662
	Malmesbury Itinerary	648-682				Lapidge 2018, p. 666
Lucina	*Passio* of Urbanus	650-700	Rome	Urbanus (pope)	Female	Lapidge 2018, pp. 525-550
Marmenia	*Passio* of Urbanus	650-700	Rome	Urbanus (pope)	Female	Lapidge 2018, pp. 526-550
Anolinus	*Passio* of Urbanus	650-700	Rome	Urbanus (pope)	Male	Lapidge 2018, pp. 526-550
Savinus	*Passio* of Urbanus	650-700	Rome	Urbanus (pope)	Male	Lapidge 2018, pp. 526-550
	presbyter of the *titulus* mentioned in the decrees of a synod	499				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E02744
	Passio of Marcellus and companions	500-550				Lapidge 2018, pp. 390-410
	pope Vigilius buried near the grave of the martyr	555				Davis 1989, p. 59
	Monza papyrus	590-604				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06788
	presbyter of the *titulus* present at the synod in the basilica of San Pietro	595				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06362
	presbyter from the *titulus* of Marcellus witnessing a will	600				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06417
	supplicatory procession beginning at the church	603				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06449
	Sacramentarium Gregorianum	625-638				Lapidge 2018, p. 671
	De locis sanctis takes note of the church dedicated to the saint	642-683				Lapidge 2018, p. 664
Marcellus (pope)	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	N/A	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 666
Apronianus	*Passio* of Marcellus and companions	500-550	Rome	Marcellus (pope)	Male	Lapidge 2018, pp. 390-410
	basilica dedicated to the martyr	498-514				Davis 1989, p. 45
	basilica of San Pancrazio as one of the points of procession of pope Pelagius	556				Davis 1989, p. 59
	monastery built next to the basilica of San Pancrazio outside of Porta Aurelia	594				Ferrari 1957, pp. 341-342
	Monza papyrus	590-604				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06788
	Passio of Pancrace	around 600				Lapidge 2018, pp. 468-476
	basilica built over the grave of the martyr, grave covered with silver	625-638				Davis 1989, p. 64
	Sacramentarium Gregorianum	625-638				Lapidge 2018, p. 672
	Malmesbury Itinerary mentions gate and church dedicated to the martyr	648-682				Lapidge 2018, p. 666
Pancrace	relic sent to the king of Northumbrians	666-668	Taormina	N/A	Male	*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06042
James	church dedicated to apostles Philip and James	556-574	Jerusalem	N/A	Male	Davis 1989, pp. 59-60
Philip	church dedicated to apostles Philip and James	556-574	Hierapolis	N/A	Male	Davis 1989, pp. 59-60
	reconstruction of cemeterial basilica at the site of the martyr's burial	579-590				Davis 1989, p. 61
	Monza papyrus	590-604				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06788
	Sacramentarium Gregorianum	625-638				Lapidge 2018, p. 672
	Passio of Alexander, Eventius, and Theodolus	600-650				Lapidge 2018, pp. 557-572
Hermes	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	N/A	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 665
	presbyter of the *titulus* is mentioned in the decrees of a synod	499				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E02744
	Passio of Marcellus and companions	500-550				Lapidge 2018, pp. 390-410
	presbyter of the *titulus* present at the synod in the basilica of San Pietro	595				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06362
	presbyter of the *titulus* witnessing a will	600				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06417
Cyriacus	constructon of the church dedicated to the martyr	625-638	Rome	N/A	Male	Davis 1989, p. 64
Smaragdus	*Passio* of Marcellus and companions	500-550	Rome	Cyriacus, Largus, Memmia, Juliana	Male	Lapidge 2018, pp. 390-410
Memmia	*Passio* of Marcellus and companions	500-550	Rome	Cyriacus, Largus, Smaragdus, Juliana	Female	Lapidge 2018, pp. 390-410
Juliana	*Passio* of Marcellus and companions	500-550	Rome	Cyriacus, Largus, Memmia, Smaragdus	Female	Lapidge 2018, pp. 390-410
Largus	*Passio* of Marcellus and companions	500-550	Rome	Cyriacus, Smaragdus, Memmia, Juliana	Male	Lapidge 2018, pp. 390-410
	Passio of Stephen and his companions	430-450				Lapidge 2018, pp. 88-137
	presbyter of the *titulus* present at the synod in the basilica of San Pietro	595				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06362
	Passio of Quattro Coronati	around 600				Lapidge 2018, pp. 448-467
	construction of a church dedicated to the martyrs	625-638				Davis 1989, p. 64
	Sacramentarium Gregorianum	625-638				Lapidge 2018, p. 672
Quattro Coronati	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Sirmium	N/A	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 665

	repair of the damaged catacombal basilica on via Labicana	536-555				Krautheimer 1959, p. 193
	Passio of Marcellinus and Petrus	560-600				Lapidge 2018, pp. 436-447
	presbyter of the *titulus* present at the synod in the basilica of San Pietro	595				Davis 1989, p. 64
	renovation of the catacombal basilica dedicated to the martyrs	625-638				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06362
	Sacramentarium Gregorianum	648-682				Lapidge 2018, p. 672
Petrus	fresco in the Catacomba di Ponziano	7th c.	Silva Candida	Marcellinus	Male	Piazza 2006, pp. 103-105
	repair of the damaged catacombal basilica on via Labicana	536-555				Krautheimer 1959, p. 193
	Passio of Marcellinus and Petrus	560-600				Lapidge 2018, pp. 436-447
	presbyter of the *titulus* present at the synod in the basilica of San Pietro	595				Davis 1989, p. 64
	renovation of the catacombal basilica dedicated to the martyrs	625-638				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06362
	Sacramentarium Gregorianum	648-682				Lapidge 2018, p. 672
Marcellinus	fresco in the Catacomba di Ponziano	7th c.	Silva Candida	Petrus	Male	Piazza 2006, pp. 103-105
	abbot of the monastery of Andrew and Lucy granted permission to make a will	600				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06417
Lucy	construction of the church dedicated to the martyr	625-638	Syracuse	N/A	Female	Davis 1989, p. 65
	construction of the church dedicated to the martyr on the Forum Romanum	625-638				Davis 1989, p. 65
Adrian	church as a starting point of processions during the feasts of the Virgin	687-701	Nicomedia	N/A	Male	Davis 1989, p. 87
Bartholomew	monastery dedicated to Andrew and Bartholomew built in the domus of pope Honorius	625-638	Albanopolis	N/A	Male	Davis 1989, p. 65
	oratory dedicated to Dalmatian and Istrian martyrs	640-642				Davis 1989, p. 66
Venantius	mosaic in the oratory of San Venanzio	642-648	Dalmatia	other Dalmatian and Istrian martyrs	Male	Giesser 2014
	oratory dedicated to Dalmatian and Istrian martyrs	640-642				Davis 1989, p. 66
Domnius	mosaic in the oratory of San Venanzio	642-648	Dalmatia	other Dalmatian and Istrian martyrs	Male	Giesser 2014
	oratory dedicated to Dalmatian and Istrian martyrs	640-642				Davis 1989, p. 66
Maurus	mosaic in the oratory of San Venanzio	642-648	Dalmatia	other Dalmatian and Istrian martyrs	Male	Giesser 2014
	oratory dedicated to Dalmatian and Istrian martyrs	640-642				Davis 1989, p. 66
Anastasius	mosaic in the oratory of San Venanzio	642-648	Dalmatia	other Dalmatian and Istrian martyrs	Male	Giesser 2014
	oratory dedicated to Dalmatian and Istrian martyrs	640-642				Davis 1989, p. 66
Septimius	mosaic in the oratory of San Venanzio	642-648	Istria	other Dalmatian and Istrian martyrs	Male	Giesser 2014
	oratory dedicated to Dalmatian and Istrian martyrs	640-642				Davis 1989, p. 66
Asterius	mosaic in the oratory of San Venanzio	642-648	Istria	other Dalmatian and Istrian martyrs	Male	Giesser 2014
	oratory dedicated to Dalmatian and Istrian martyrs	640-642				Davis 1989, p. 66
Antiochianus	mosaic in the oratory of San Venanzio	642-648	Istria	other Dalmatian and Istrian martyrs	Male	Giesser 2014
	oratory dedicated to Dalmatian and Istrian martyrs	640-642				Davis 1989, p. 66
Gaianus	mosaic in the oratory of San Venanzio	642-648	Dalmatia	other Dalmatian and Istrian martyrs	Male	Giesser 2014
	oratory dedicated to Dalmatian and Istrian martyrs	640-642				Davis 1989, p. 66
Paulinianus	mosaic in the oratory of San Venanzio	642-648	Dalmatia	other Dalmatian and Istrian martyrs	Male	Giesser 2014
	oratory dedicated to Dalmatian and Istrian martyrs	640-642				Davis 1989, p. 66
Tellius	mosaic in the oratory of San Venanzio	642-648	Dalmatia	other Dalmatian and Istrian martyrs	Male	Giesser 2014
	oratory dedicated to Dalmatian and Istrian martyrs	640-642				Davis 1989, p. 66
Vincent	mosaic in the oratory of San Venanzio	642-648	Dalmatia	other Dalmatian and Istrian martyrs	Male	Giesser 2014
	basilica of Santo Stefano build on via Latina (existing beyond the 7th c.)	440-461				Krautheimer 1970, p. 241
	fresco in the Catacomba di Commodilla	first half of the 6th century				Bisconti and Ferri 2018, pp. 181-193
	church of Santo Stefano Rotondo decorated with marble revetments and mosaics	523-530				Krautheimer 1970, p. 201
	apse mosaic in the present church of Santi Quiricco e Giulitta	537-555				Andaloro 2006, p. 316
	apse mosaic of San Lorenzo fuori le mura	575-590				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E05292
	supplicatory procession beginning at the church	603				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06449
	female convent dedicated to the martyr mentioned in epistle of pope Gregory the Great	604				Ferrari 1957, p. 254
	relics of martyrs Primus and Felicianus transferred to the church of the martyr	642-649				Davis 1989, p. 68
	Malmesbury Itinerary	648-682				Lapidge 2018, p. 666
Stephen	army gathered at the church of Santo Stefano Rotondo	686	Jerusalem	N/A	Male	Davis 1989, p. 81
	Passio of Primus and Felicianus	550-600				Lapidge 2018, pp. 411-419
	relics of martyrs Primus and Felicianus transferred to Santo Stefano Rotondo	642-649				Davis 1989, p. 68
	mosaic of the chapel dedicated to the martyrs in Santo Stefano Rotondo	642-649				Taddei 2022
	Capitularium of Würzburg	642-672				Lapidge 2018, p. 674
Primus	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Numentum	Felicianus	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 666
	Passio of Primus and Felicianus	550-600				Lapidge 2018, pp. 411-419
	relics of martyrs Primus and Felicianus transferred to Santo Stefano Rotondo	642-649				Davis 1989, p. 68
	mosaic of the chapel dedicated to the martyrs in Santo Stefano Rotondo	642-649				Taddei 2022
	Capitularium of Würzburg	642-672				Lapidge 2018, p. 674
Felicianus	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Numentum	Primus	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 666
	Sacramentarium Gregorianum	625-638				Lapidge 2018, p. 671
	church dedicated to the martyr	642-649				Davis 1989, p. 68
	fresco in the catacomb dedicated to the martyr	642-649				Piazza 2006, pp. 114-119
	gate of St. Valentinus and his church mentioned in *Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682				Lapidge 2018, p. 665
Valentinus	precious altarcloth dedicated to San Valentino	684-685	Rome	N/A	Male	Davis 1989, p. 79

	Passio of Sebastian and companions	430-450				Lapidge 2018, pp. 88-137
	Monza papyrus	590-604				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06788
	Sacramentarium Gregorianum	625-638				Lapidge 2018, p. 671
	oratory dedicated to the martyr in the Lateran Basilica	642-649				Davis 1989, p. 68
	Malmesbury Itinerary	648-682				Lapidge 2018, p. 666
	panel in San Pietro in Vincoli	around 680				Croci 2022a, p. 27
Sebastian	construction of a *diaconia* dedicated to Sebastian and George	682-683	Rome	N/A	Male	Davis 1989, p. 79
Tranquillinus	*Passio* of Sebastian and his companions	430-450	Rome	Sebastian, Zoe, Tiburtius	Male	Lapidge 2018, pp. 88-137
Tiburtius	*Passio* of Sebastian and his companions	430-450	Rome	Sebastian, Zoe, Tranquillinus	Male	Lapidge 2018, pp. 88-137
Zoe	*Passio* of Sebastian and his companions	430-450	Rome	Sebastian, Tranquillinus, Tiburtius	Female	Lapidge 2018, pp. 88-137
	inscription on Porta Appia	6th c.				Maskarinec 2018, pp. 79-80
George	construction of a *diaconia* dedicated to Stephen and George	682-683	Lydda or Diospolis	N/A	Male	Davis 1989, p. 79
Euplus	oratory dedicated to the martyr	642-649	Catania	N/A	Male	Davis 1989, p. 68
Erasmus	monastery dedicated to the martyr enlarged	672-676	Formia	N/A	Male	Davis 1989, p. 73
	church dedicated to the martyr recorded in passing	682-683				Davis 1989, p. 79
Bibiana	*Passio* of Pymenius	600-700	Rome	Dafrosa, Demetria	Female	Lapidge 2018, pp. 608-616
Dafrosa	*Passio* of Pymenius	600-700	Rome	Faustus, Demetria, Bibiana	Female	Lapidge 2018, pp. 608-616
Demetria	*Passio* of Pymenius	600-700	Rome	Dafrosa, Bibiana	Female	Lapidge 2018, pp. 608-616
Faustus	*Passio* of Pymenius	600-700	Rome	Dafrosa	Male	Lapidge 2018, pp. 608-616
	Passio of Susanna	450-500				Lapidge 2018, pp. 270-286
	presbyter of the *titulus* witnessing a will	600				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06417
	stational mass in Santa Susanna (*Sacramentarium Gregorianum*)	625-638				Lapidge 2018, p. 671
	pope Sergius serving as a priest of the *titulus Susannae* before being elected	before 687				Davis 1989, p. 83
Susanna	marble canopy for the *titulus*	687-701	Rome	N/A	Female	Davis 1989, p. 86
	Capitularium of Würzburg	642-672				Lapidge 2018, p. 674
Caesarius	oratory dedicated to the martyr recorded as part of the imperial palace	687	Terracina	N/A	Male	Davis 1989, p. 83
Simeon	feast of the martyr	687-701	Jerusalem	N/A	Male	Davis 1989, p. 87
Anastasius	monastery where the head of the martyr was venerated recorded by *De locis sanctis*	642-683	Persia	N/A	Male	*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity,* E06989
Aristus (Hedistus)	monastery dedicated to the martyr mentioned in epistle of pope Gregory the Great	604	Laurentum	N/A	Male	Ferrari 1957, p. 58
	monastery dedicated to the martyr mentioned in epistle of pope Gregory the Great	599				Ferrari 1957, p. 96
Symmetrius (Demetrius)	fresco in Santa Maria Antiqua	mid- 7th c.	Thessaloniki	N/A	Male	Andaloro 2016a
	Passio of Eugenia, Protus, and Hyacinthus	475-500				Lapidge 2018, pp. 228-249
Eugenia	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	Claudia	Female	Lapidge 2018, p. 666
Claudia	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	Eugenia	Female	Lapidge 2018, p. 666
	Passio of Eugenia, Protus, and Hyacinth	475-500				Lapidge 2018, pp. 228-249
	Monza papyrus	590-604				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06788
Basilla	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	Eugenia	Female	Lapidge 2018, p. 665
Leucius	monastery dedicated to the martyr mentioned in epistle of pope Gregory the Great	601	Brindisi	N/A	Male	*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity,* E06425
	monastery dedicated to the martyr mentioned in conclusions of the Lateran Council	649				Ferrari 1957, p. 281
Sabas	Gregory of Agrigento reported to have stayed in the monastery after his arrival to Rome	before 688	Palestine	N/A	Male	Krautheimer 1970, p. 52
	Passio of Clement	around 450				Lapidge 2018, pp. 165-179
	presbyter of the *titulus* mentioned in a decree of a synod	499				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E02744
	Latin inscription mentioning the *titulus* of Clement	533				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E08080
	church dedicated to the martyr mentioned in *Dialogues* of Gregory the Great	around 593				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E04582
	presbyter of the *titulus* present at the synod in basilica of San Pietro	595				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06362
Clement	*Sacramentarium Gregorianum*	625-638	Crimea	N/A	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 672
	presbyter of the *titulus* present at the synod in basilica of San Pietro	595				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06362
Vitalis	supplicatory procession beginning at the church	603	Ravenna	N/A	Male	*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06449
	presbyter of the *titulus* mentioned in the decrees of a synod	499				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E02744
	Passio of Pudentiana and Praxedis	498-514				Lapidge 2018, pp. 307-315
	presbyter of the *titulus* present at the synod in basilica of San Pietro	595				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06362
	stational mass in Santa Prassede (*Sacramentarium Gregorianum*)	625-638				Lapidge 2018, p. 671
Praxedis	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	Pudentiana	Female	Lapidge 2018, p. 665
	Passio of Pudentiana and Praxedis	498-514				Lapidge 2018, pp. 307-315
	inscription mentioning *titulus* Pudentianae	probably 5th or 6th c.				Krautheimer 1967, p. 280
	stational mass in Santa Pudenziana (*Sacramentarium Gregorianum*)	625-638				Lapidge 2018, p. 671
Pudentiana	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	Praxedis	Female	Lapidge 2018, p. 665
Gervasius	presbyter of the *titulus* of Gervasius and Protasius witnessing a will	600	Milan	Protasius	Male	*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity,* E06417
Protasius	presbyter of the *titulus* of Gervasius and Protasius witnessing a will	600	Milan	Gervasius	Male	*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity,* E06417
Eudoxia	presbyter of the *titulus* witnessing a will	600	Heliopolis	N/A	Female	*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* database, E06417

	presbyter of the *titulus* mentioned in the decrees of a synod	499				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E02744
	steps *sanctae Sabinae* are mentioned in correspondence of Gregory the Great	593				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06335
	presbyter of the *titulus* present at the synod in the basilica of San Pietro	595				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06362
	presbyter of the *titulus* witnessing a will	600				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity*, E06417
	Sacramentarium Gregorianum	625-638				Lapidge 2018, p. 672
Sabina	*Passio* of Serapia and Sabina	600-700	Terni	Serapia	Female	Lapidge 2018, pp. 582-592
Serapia	*Passio* of Serapia and Sabina	600-700	Terni	Sabina	Female	Lapidge 2018, pp. 582-592
	Passio of Marcellinus and Petrus	560-600				Lapidge 2018, pp. 436-447
Arthemius	Monza papyrus	590-604	Rome	Paulina, Candida, Petrus, Marcellinus	Male	*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06788
	Passio of Marcellinus and Petrus	560-600				Lapidge 2018, pp. 436-447
Paulina	Monza papyrus	590-604	Rome	Artemius, Candida, Petrus, Marcellinus	Female	*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06788
Candida	*Passio* of Marcellinus and Petrus	560-600	Rome	Artemius, Paulina, Petrus, Marcellinus	Female	Lapidge 2018, pp. 436-447
	Monza papyrus	590-604				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06788
Sophia	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	Spes, Fides, Caritas	Female	Lapidge 2018, p. 666
Spes	Monza papyrus	590-604	Rome	Sophia, Fides, Caritas	Female	*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06788
Fides	Monza papyrus	590-604	Rome	Sophia, Spes, Caritas	Female	*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06788
Caritas	Monza papyrus	590-604	Rome	Sophia, Spes, Fides	Female	*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06788
	Passio of Processus and Martinianus	500-550				Lapidge 2018, pp. 381-389
	Monza papyrus	590-604				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06788
	Sacramentarium Gregorianum	625-638				Lapidge 2018, p. 672
Processus	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	Martinianus	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 666
	Passio of Processus and Martinianus	500-550				Lapidge 2018, pp. 381-389
	Monza papyrus	590-604				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06788
	Sacramentarium Gregorianum	625-638				Lapidge 2018, p. 672
Martinianus	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	Processus	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 666
	Passio of Chrysanthus and Daria	475-500				Lapidge 2018, pp. 250-269
	Monza papyrus	590-604				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06788
Chrysanthus	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	Daria	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 665
	Passio of Chrysanthus and Daria	475-500				Lapidge 2018, pp. 250-269
	Monza papyrus	590-604				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06788
Daria	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	Chrysanthus	Female	Lapidge 2018, p. 665
Claudius and his sons	*Passio* of Chrysanthus and Daria	475-500	Rome	Daria, Chrysanthus	Male	Lapidge 2018, pp. 250-269
	Passio of Chrysanthus and Daria	475-500				Lapidge 2018, pp. 250-269
Hilaria	*Notitia ecclesiarum urbis Romae*	625-638	Rome	Chrysanthus, Daria, Claudius and his sons	Female	Lapidge 2018, p. 660
Maurus	Monza papyrus	590-604	Rome	Iason	Male	*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06788
Iason	Monza papyrus	590-604	Rome	Maurus	Male	*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06788
	Monza papyrus	590-604				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06788
	Passio of Pancrace	around 600				Lapidge 2018, pp. 468-476
	De locis sanctis	642-683				Lapidge 2018, p. 663
Sotheris	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	N/A	Female	Lapidge 2018, p. 666
	Monza papyrus	590-604				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06788
	Passio of Stephen	600-650				Lapidge 2018, pp. 477-493
Tarsicius	Malmesbury Itinerary	648-682	Rome	N/A	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 666
	Notitia ecclesiarum urbis Romae takes note of the church dedicated to the martyr	625-638				Lapidge 2018, p. 660
John	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	N/A	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 265
Festus	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	N/A	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 265
Liberalis (Liberatus)	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	N/A	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 265
Diogenes	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	N/A	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 265
	Monza papyrus	590-604				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06788
Boniface (pope)	*Notitia ecclesiarum urbis Romae*	625-638	Rome	N/A	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 660
Crispus	Monza papyrus	590-604	Rome	N/A	Male	*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity*, E06788
Herculanus	Monza papyrus	590-604	Rome	N/A	Male	*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06788
Bauso	Monza papyrus	590-604	Rome	N/A	Male	*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06788
Eutychius	Monza papyrus	590-604	Rome	N/A	Male	*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06788
Quirinus	Monza papyrus	590-604	Rome	N/A	Male	*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06788
	Passio of Calixtus	480-500				Lapidge 2018, pp. 287-296
	presbyter of the *titulus* present at the synod in the basilica of San Pietro	595				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06362
	Sacramentarium Gregorianum	625-638				Lapidge 2018, p. 672
Calixtus (pope)	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	N/A	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 666
Blanda	*Passio* of Calixtus	480-500	Rome	Calixtus, Felix	Female	Lapidge 2018, pp. 287-296
Felix	*Passio* of Calixtus	480-500	Rome	Calixtus, Blanda	Male	Lapidge 2018, pp. 287-296
Asterius	*Passio* of Calixtus	480-500	Rome	Calixtus	Male	Lapidge 2018, pp. 287-296

Privatus	*Passio* of Calixtus	480-500	Rome	Calixtus	Male	Lapidge 2018, pp. 287-296
Simplicius	*Passio* of Calixtus	480-500	Rome	Calixtus	Male	Lapidge 2018, pp. 287-296
	Passio of Calixtus	480-500				Lapidge 2018, pp. 287-296
	De locis sanctis	642-683				Lapidge 2018, p. 662
Calepodius	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	Calixtus	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 666
	presbyter of the *titulus* mentioned in the decrees of a synod	499				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E02744
	presbyter of the *titulus* present at the synod in the basilica of San Pietro	595				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06362
Marcus (pope)	*Sacramentarium Gregorianum*	625-638	Rome	N/A	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 672
	Monza papyrus	590-604				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06788
	Sacramentarium Gregorianum	625-638				Lapidge 2018, p. 672
Marcus	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	Marcellianus	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 666
	Monza papyrus	590-604				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06788
	Sacramentarium Gregorianum	625-638				Lapidge 2018, p. 672
Marcellianus	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	Marcus	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 666
Balbina	presbyter of the *titulus* present at the synod in the basilica of San Pietro	595	Rome	N/A	Female	*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06362
	presbyter of the *titulus* mentioned by the decrees of a synod	499				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E02744
Prisca	presbyter of the *titulus* present at the synod in the basilica of San Pietro	595	Rome	N/A	Female	*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06362
	presbyter of the *titulus* mentioned in the decrees of a synod	499				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E02744
	Passio of Eusebius	498-506				Lapidge 2018, pp. 297-302
	presbyter of the *titulus* present at the synod in the basilica of San Pietro	595				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06362
	Passio of Eusebius and Pontianus	600-700				Lapidge 2018, pp. 517-525
	Sacramentarium Gregorianum	625-638				Lapidge 2018, p. 672
Eusebius	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	Pontianus, Gregory, Vincent, Peregrinus, Julius, Antonius	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 666
Vincent	*Passio* of Eusebius and Pontianus	600-700	Rome	Eusebius, Pontianus, Peregrinus, Julius, Antonius	Male	Lapidge 2018, pp. 517-525
Peregrinus	*Passio* of Eusebius and Pontianus	600-700	Rome	Pontianus, Eusebius, Vincent, Julius, Antonius	Male	Lapidge 2018, pp. 517-525
Antonius	*Passio* of Eusebius and Pontianus	600-700	Rome	Pontianus, Vincent, Peregrinus, Julius, Eusebius	Male	Lapidge 2018, pp. 517-525
Julius	*Passio* of Eusebius and Pontianus	600-700	Rome	Eusebius, Pontianus, Peregrinus, Vincent, Antonius	Male	Lapidge 2018, pp. 517-525
	Passio of Eusebius and Pontianus	600-700				Lapidge 2018, pp. 517-525
Pontianus	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	Eusebius, Vincent, Peregrinus, Julius, Antonius	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 666
Gregory	*Passio* of Eusebius	498-506	Rome	Eusebius	Male	Lapidge 2018, pp. 297-302
	apse mosaic in the church of Santi Cosma e Damiano	526-530				Foletti 2017a
Theodore	church of San Teodoro build and decorated with apse mosaic depicting the martyr	late 6th - early 7th c.	Euchaita	N/A	Male	Cecchelli 2005, pp. 69-71
Conon	inscription on Porta Appia	6th c.	Pamphylia or Cyprus	N/A	Male	Maskarinec 2018, pp. 79-80
Menas	church dedicated to the saint	before 590	Phrygia	N/A	Male	Maskarinec 2018, p. 175
Januarius	oratory dedicated to the martyr	before 590	Benevento	N/A	Male	Maskarinec 2018, p. 175
Severinus	church dedicated to the martyr, relics translated	590-604	Noricum	N/A	Male	Maskarinec 2018, p. 175
John Chrysostom	fresco in Santa Maria Antiqua	657-672	Pontus	N/A	Male	Price 2021
Luke	fresco in the Catacomba di Commodilla	668-685	Thebes	N/A	Male	Bisconti and Ferri 2018, pp. 181-193
Rufinianus	fresco in the Catacomba di Generosa	before 682	Rome	N/A	Male	Piazza 2006, pp. 100-103
Milix	fresco in the Catacomba di Ponziano	7th c.	Rome	Pymenius	Male	Piazza 2006, pp. 103-105
	fresco in the Catacomba di Ponziano	7th c.				Piazza 2006, pp. 103-105
Pymenius	*Passio* of Pymenius	600-700	Rome	Milix	Male	Lapidge 2018, pp. 608-616
Polion	fresco in the Catacomba di Ponziano	7th c.	Pannonia	N/A	Male	Piazza 2006, pp. 103-105
	Passio of Sixtus, Lawrence, and Hippolytus	450-500				Lapidge 2018, pp. 180-194
	fresco in the Catacomba di Ponziano	7th c.				Piazza 2006, pp. 103-105
	Sacramentarium Gregorianum	625-638				Lapidge 2018, p. 672
Abdon	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	Senen	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 666
	Passio of Sixtus, Lawrence, and Hippolytus	450-500				Lapidge 2018, pp. 180-194
	fresco in the Catacomba di Ponziano	7th c.				Piazza 2006, pp. 103-105
	Sacramentarium Gregorianum	625-638				Lapidge 2018, p. 672
Senen	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	Abdon	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 666
Matthew	presbyter of the *titulus* mentioned in the decrees of a synod	499	Ethiopia or Persia	N/A	Male	*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E02744
Basil	fresco in Santa Maria Antiqua	657-672	Caesarea	N/A	Male	Price 2021
Anne	fresco in Santa Maria Antiqua	mid- 7th c.	Judea	N/A	Female	Andaloro 2016a
Gregory	fresco in Santa Maria Antiqua	657-672	Nazianzus	N/A	Male	Price 2021
Leo (pope)	fresco in Santa Maria Antiqua	657-672	Rome	N/A	Male	Price 2021
Martina	church dedicated to the martyr	around 625-638	Rome	N/A	Male	Krautheimer 1967, p. 83
Fabian (pope)	*Sacramentarium Gregorianum*	625-638	Rome	N/A	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 671
	Sacramentarium Gregorianum	625-638				Lapidge 2018, p. 671
	Passio of Alexander, Eventius, and Theodolus	600-650				Lapidge 2018, pp. 557-572
Alexander (pope)	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	Eventius, Theodolus	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 665
	Sacramentarium Gregorianum	625-638				Lapidge 2018, p. 671
	Passio of Alexander, Eventius, and Theodolus	600-650				Lapidge 2018, pp. 557-572
Eventius	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	Alexander, Theodolus	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 665

	Sacramentarium Gregorianum	625-638				Lapidge 2018, p. 671
	Passio of Alexander, Eventius, and Theodolus	600-650				Lapidge 2018, pp. 557-572
Theodolus	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	Alexander, Eventius	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 665
	Sacramentarium Gregorianum	625-638				Lapidge 2018, p. 671
	Passio of Gordianus and Epimachus	600-650				Lapidge 2018, pp. 494-499
Gordianus	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	Epimachus	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 666
	Sacramentarium Gregorianum	625-638				Lapidge 2018, p. 671
	Passio of Gordianus and Epimachus	600-650				Lapidge 2018, pp. 494-499
Epimachus	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	Gordianus	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 666
	Passio of Felix	498-506				Lapidge 2018, pp. 303-306
	Sacramentarium Gregorianum	625-638				Lapidge 2018, p. 672
Felix (pope)	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	N/A	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 666
	Passio of Stephen	600-650				Lapidge 2018, pp. 477-493
	Sacramentarium Gregorianum	625-638				Lapidge 2018, p. 672
Stephen (pope)	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	N/A	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 666
	Passio of Stephen	600-650				Lapidge 2018, pp. 477-493
Nemesius	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	Stephen (pope)	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 666
Lucilla	*Passio* of Stephen	600-650	Rome	Stephen (pope), Nemesius	Female	Lapidge 2018, pp. 477-493
Symphronius	*Passio* of Stephen	600-650	Rome	Stephen (pope), Olympius, Exuperia, Theodulus	Male	Lapidge 2018, pp. 477-493
Olympius	*Passio* of Stephen	600-650	Rome	Stephen (pope), Symphronius, Exuperia, Theodulus	Male	Lapidge 2018, pp. 477-493
Exuperia	*Passio* of Stephen	600-650	Rome	Stephen (pope), Symphronius, Olympius, Theodulus	Female	Lapidge 2018, pp. 477-493
Theodulus	*Passio* of Stephen	600-650	Rome	Stephen (pope), Symphronius, Olympius, Exuperia	Male	Lapidge 2018, pp. 477-493
	Passio of Stephen	600-650				Lapidge 2018, pp. 477-493
Tertullinus	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	Stephen (pope), Lucilla	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 666
	Malmesbury Itinerary	648-682				Lapidge 2018, p. 665
Rufina	*Passio* of Rufina and Secunda	600-680	Silva Candida	Secunda	Female	Lapidge 2018, pp. 551-556
	Malmesbury Itinerary	648-682				Lapidge 2018, p. 665
Secunda	*Passio* of Rufina and Secunda	600-680	Silva Candida	Rufina	Female	Lapidge 2018, pp. 551-556
	Passio of Marius, Martha, Audifax, and Abacuc	550-600				Lapidge 2018, pp. 420-435
Marius	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	Martha, Audifax, Abacuc	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 665
	Passio of Marius, Martha, Audifax, and Abacuc	550-600				Lapidge 2018, pp. 420-435
Martha	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	Marius, Audifax, Abacuc	Female	Lapidge 2018, p. 665
	Passio of Marius, Martha, Audifax, and Abacuc	550-600				Lapidge 2018, pp. 420-435
Audifax	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	Marius, Martha, Abacuc	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 665
	Passio of Marius, Martha, Audifax, and Abacuc	550-600				Lapidge 2018, pp. 420-435
Abacuc	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	Marius, Martha, Audifax	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 665
	Passio of Marius, Martha, Audifax, and Abacuc	550-600				Lapidge 2018, pp. 420-435
	Monza papyrus	590-604				*The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* , E06788
Blastus	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	Marius, Martha, Audifax, Abacuc	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 265
	Passio of Marius, Martha, Audifax, and Abacuc	550-600				Lapidge 2018, pp. 420-435
Cyrinus	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Sesica	Marius, Martha, Audifax, Abacuc	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 666
	Passio of Marcellus and companions	500-550				Lapidge 2018, pp. 390-410
Papias	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	Maurus	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 665
Maurus	*Passio* of Marcellus and companions	500-550	Rome	Papias	Male	Lapidge 2018, pp. 390-410
Cyriaca	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	N/A	Female	Lapidge 2018, p. 665
Justinus	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	Crescentius	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 665
Crescentius	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	Justinus	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 665
	Passio of Polychronius, Parmenian, Abdon, and Senen	506-514				Lapidge 2018, pp. 316-349
Agapitus	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	Felicissimus	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 665
	Passio of Polychronius, Parmenian, Abdon, and Senen	506-514				Lapidge 2018, pp. 316-349
Felicissimus	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	Agapitus	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 665
Genuinus	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	N/A	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 665
Gorgonius	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	N/A	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 665
	Passio of Polychromius, Parmenius, Abdon, and Senen	506-514				Lapidge 2018, pp. 317-349
Forty Soldiers	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	N/A	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 665
Semetrius	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	N/A	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 665
Quintus	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	Quartus	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 666
Quartus	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	Quintus	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 666
Trophimus	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	N/A	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 666
Zenon	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	N/A	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 666
Anteros	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	N/A	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 666
Optatus	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	N/A	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 666
Julianus	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	N/A	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 666
	Passio of Calocerus and Parthenius	600-650				Lapidge 2018, pp. 573-581
	De locis sanctis	642-683				Lapidge 2018, p. 663
Calocerus	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	Parthenius	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 666

	Passio of Calocerus and Parthenius	600-650				Lapidge 2018, pp. 573-581
	De locis sanctis	642-683				Lapidge 2018, p. 663
Parthenius	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	Calocerus	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 666
Policamus	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	N/A	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 666
	Passio of the Greek martyrs	600-650				Lapidge 2018, pp. 500-516
Hippolytus	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	Hadrias, Maria, Paulina, Neon, Eusebius, Marcellus	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 666
	Passio of the Greek martyrs	600-650				Lapidge 2018, pp. 500-516
Hadrias	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	Paulina, Maria, Neon, Eusebius, Marcellus, Hippolytus	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 666
	Passio of the Greek martyrs	600-650				Lapidge 2018, pp. 500-516
Eusebius	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	Hadrias, Paulina, Maria, Neon, Marcellus, Hippolytus	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 666
	Passio of the Greek martyrs	600-650				Lapidge 2018, pp. 500-516
Maria	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	Hadrias, Paulina, Neon, Eusebius, Marcellus, Hippolytus	Female	Lapidge 2018, p. 666
	Passio of the Greek martyrs	600-650				Lapidge 2018, pp. 500-516
Paulina	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	Hadrias, Maria, Neon, Eusebius, Marcellus, Hippolytus	Female	Lapidge 2018, p. 666
Neon	*Passio* of the Greek martyrs	600-650	Rome	Hadrias, Maria, Paulina, Eusebius, Marcellus, Hippolytus	Male	Lapidge 2018, pp. 500-516
	Passio of the Greek martyrs					Lapidge 2018, pp. 500-516
Marcellus	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	Hadrias, Maria, Paulina, Neon, Eusebius, Hippolytus	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 666
Martana	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	Valeria	Female	Lapidge 2018, p. 666
Valeria	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	Martana	Female	Lapidge 2018, p. 666
Timotheus	*Malmesbury Itinerary*	648-682	Rome	N/A	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 666
Victor	*Notitia ecclesiarum urbis Romae*	625-638	Rome	N/A	Male	Lapidge 2018, p. 660
Martina	*Secretarium Senatus* converted to a church	first half of the 7th c.	Rome	N/A	Female	Maskarinec 2018, pp. 49-50
Sergius	church of Santi Segio e Bacco al Foro Romano	later 6th c.	Resafa	Bacchus	Male	Maskarinec 2018, pp. 42-46
Bacchus	church of Santi Segio e Bacco al Foro Romano	later 6th c.	Resafa	Sergius	Male	Maskarinec 2018, pp. 42-46
Nicolas	*diaconia* of San Nicola in Carcere	probably 7th c.	Myra	N/A	Male	Dey 2021, p. 82
Forty martyrs of Sebaste	fresco in the apse of the oratory *next to* Santa Maria Antiqua	649-655	Sebaste	Other martyrs of Sebaste	Male	Maskarinec 2018, pp. 40-41

Appendix II: Changes in the names of Roman *tituli*

Direction of the change:

Female patron – male martyr(s)	Female patron – female martyr of the same name
Female patron – female martyr of different name	Male patron – female martyr
Male patron – male martyr of the same name	Male patron – male martyr(s) of different name

Titulus Aemilianae – Titulus sanctorum Quattuor Coronatorum	(before 595)
Titulus Anastasiae – Basilica sanctae Anastasiae	(before 457)
Titulus Tigridae – Titulus sanctae Balbinae	(before 595)
Titulus Byzantis/Pammachii – Titulus sanctorum Iohannis et Pauli	(before 595)
Titulus Caeciliae – Titulus sanctae Caeciliae	(before 595)
Titulus Clementis – Titulus sancti Clementis	(before 595)
Titulus Chrysogoni – Titulus sancti Crysogoni	(before 521)
Titulus Crescentianae – Titulus sancti Sixti	(before 595)
Titulus Cyriaci – Titulus sancti Quiriaci	(before 595)
Titulus Damasi – ecclesia sancti Laurentii in Damaso	(4th-6th century both used, before 772 change in favour of Lawrence)
Titulus Equitii – basilica sanctorum Silvestri et Martini	(498-514)
Titulus Eudoxiae/Apostolorum – ecclesia beati Petri apostoli ad vincula	(5th-8th century both used, after 816 change in favour of Peter)
Titulus Eusebii – Titulus sancti Eusebii	(before 595)
Titulus Fasciolae – Titulus sanctorum Nerei et Achillei	(before 595)
Titulus Gai – Titulus sanctae Susannae	(before 595)
Titulus Lucinae – Titulus sancti Laurentii	(before 687-701)
Titulus Marcelli – Titulus sancti Marcelli	(before 595)
Titulus Marci – Titulus sancti Marci	(before 595)
Titulus Praxidae – Titulus sanctae Praxedis	(before 595)
Titulus Priscae – Titulus sanctae Priscae	(before 595)
Titulus Pudentis – Titulus sanctae Pudentianae	(5th-6th century both used, before 745 change in favour of Pudentiana)
Titulus Sabinae – Titulus sanctae Sabinae	(before 499)
Titulus Vestinae – Titulus sancti Vitalis	(before 595)

Sources: Krautheimer 1953; Krautheimer 1959; Krautheimer 1967; Krautheimer 1970; Pani Ermini 2001, pl. II; Brandenburg 2013.

Appendix III: Goddesses, saints, martyrs and ordinary women of Rome (350-700 C.E.). Catalogue

1 GODDESSES AND MYTHOLOGICAL FIGURES

1.1 DIANA

Middle of the 4th century

Rome, Ipogeo di Via Livenza

Pavla Tichá, In the underground of the eternal city: the hypogeum of Via Livenza, *Iconographica* 20, 2021, pp. 9-17; Stefano Tortorella, L'ipogeo di via Livenza a Roma. Il contesto, gli affreschi, il mosaico, in: *Context and meaning: proceedings of the twelfth international conference of the Association Internationale pour la Peinture Murale Antique, Athens, September 16-20, 2013*, Leuven 2017, pp. 375-380; Pavla Tichá, *Hypogeum na Via Livenza* (bachelor thesis), Seminář dějin umění, FF MU, Brno 2016, p. 21-22; Jérôme Croisier, Pitture e mosaici dell'Ipogeo di Via Livenza, in: Maria Andaloro (ed.), *L'orrizonte tardoantico e le nuove immagini 312-468,* Milano 2006, pp. 253-258; Ivana della Portella, *Roma sotteranea,* Venezia 1999, pp. 206-211; Carlo Pavia, *Guida di Roma sotterranea. Gli ambienti più suggestivi del sottosuolo romano*, Roma 1998, pp. 62-63; Harald Mielsch, Zur stadtrömischen Malerei des 4. Jahrhunderts nach Chr., *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts. Römische Abteilung* 85, 1978, pp. 179-191; Filippo Coarelli, *Guida Archeologica di Roma*, Roma 1974, pp. 250-251; Luisanna Usai, L'ipogeo di Via Livenza in Roma, *Dialoghi di archeologia* 6, 1972, pp. 363-412; Wladimiro Dorigo, *Pittura tardoromana,* Milano 1966, pp. 210-212; Johannes Kollwitz, *Die Malerei der konstantinischen Zeit*, Berlin 1965, p. 29; Maurizio Borda, *La pittura romana*, Milano 1958, p. 353; Andreas Rumpf, *Stilphasen der spätantiken Kunst: ein Versuch*, Köln 1957, pp. 23-24; Doro Levi, *Antioch mosaic pavements* I, Princeton 1947, p. 565; Carlo Cecchelli, *Monumenti cristiano-eretici di Roma*, Roma 1944, pp. 201-208; Pericle Ducati, *L'arte in Roma dalle origini al sec. VIII*, Bologna 1938, p. 366; Giuseppe Lugli, *I monumenti antichi di Roma e suburbio* III, Roma 1938, pp. 342-345; Roberto Paribeni, Un'edificio sotterraneo di tarda età imperiale presso la Via Salaria, *Atti della Pontifica Accademia Romana di Archeologia. Rendiconti* 2, 1923-1924, pp. 45-52; Joseph Wilpert, Un battistero 'Ad Nymphas B. Petri', *Atti della Pontifica Accademia Romana di Archeologia. Rendiconti* 2, 1923-1924, pp. 57-82; Roberto Paribeni, Via Salaria. Scoperta di un edificio sotterraneo con pitture e mosaici, *Notizie degli scavi di antichità* 20, 1923, pp. 380-396.

The frescoes were discovered in 1923 during archaeological excavations in an underground edifice near Via Salaria, prompted by a building campaign in the vicinity. An uncovered seal with Constantinian monogram and the building technique date the structure to the middle of the 4th century.

The space originally had a simple rectangular form with an apse oriented to the south. Only the northern wall remains, with a water basin positioned under the central arch and a niche in the middle, under which water surges and flows to the basin. As testified by the preserved frescoes and mosaics, the building must have been luxuriously decorated.

The surviving wall is decorated with two representations of Diana. In the left part, she is depicted as a young woman in *chiton* and hunter boots, her head crowned with a diadem and laurel wreath. She is leaning forward, as if stopped in the middle of a movement, trying to draw an arrow out of her spathe with her right hand, while holding a bow in her left, with male and female deer running around her. The scene unfolds in the middle of a forest, enlivened by shadows. The goddess of the hunt shares features with the Artemis from Versailles, one of the many Roman copies and variations of a famous Hellenistic prototype attributed to Leochares (died 328 BC). On the right, a young woman is shown gently touching the snout of a baby deer. As she is also captured wearing the same *chiton* and hunter boots as her counterpart on the left, it can be assumed that the second image is also one of Diana, this

time in a state of peaceful harmony with nature. It is not necessary to search for a symbolic explanation of the iconography. Hunting was a favourite pastime of the Roman elites and as such was frequently used as decoration of public buildings, villas, and baths, often incorporated in them as part of the scene representing a god or a goddess.

The plastic rendering of the human figure and the employment of the play of shadows and light (created by strokes of white paint) are comparable to the paintings in the rooms B and C of the *hypogeum* on the Via Dino Compagni, in the *arcosolium* of Vibia, and in the *cubiculum* "of the sheep" in the catacomb of Calixtus, all from the 4th century.

The function of the *hypogeum* is debatable to this day. At first the scholars interpreted the presence of depictions of Diana as allusion to its use as a place of worship of the Thracian goddess Kotys, often associated with Artemis. Because of the existence of a fountain and marine scenes, the building was also sometimes viewed as a *nymphaeum*, where the cult of aquatic gods was being celebrated, later to be taken over by a syncretic cult, confirmed by the presence of the mosaic with St. Peter miraculously drawing water from a rock, or a private *nymphaeum* inside of a villa. The newer research suggests that the building was used by Christians. Even though the water basin alludes to a baptistry, the space would have been unsuitable for such use because of its height and lack of entry point. The structure may have instead served as a basilica or an oratory of sorts. Comparison is being made with the oratory from Monte della Giustizia, dated to the same period and decorated similarly with a mixture of Christian and marine scenes. It is plausible that a pre-Christian *nymphaeum* was incorporated in the second half of the 4th century in a minor Christian cultic building, not at all unusual phenomenon in Rome at the time. The combination of Christian and mythological motives is not exceptional in the period of development of Christian "pictorial language", which usurped pre-Christian Roman aesthetic. Another, less plausible possibility, is the inclusion of a water element with purifying and reviving function and mythological motives in a burial chamber of sorts, serving needs of presumably Christian aristocratic family. This hypothesis is based on the long-term presence of a cemetery in the area, whose use in the 4th century, however, is not attested by sources.



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1.2 MUSE CASKET

Second half of the 4th century

Height 26.7 cm, diameter 32.7 cm

London, The British Museum, inv. n. 1866, 1229.2

Grace Stafford, *Women, Gender, and Society in Late Antiquity: A Study in Visual Culture* (dissertation thesis), Department of Archaeology, University of Oxford, Oxford 2020, cat. n. S2; Jaś Elsner, A Roman Vessel for Cosmetics. Form, Decoration, and Subjectivity in the Muse Casket, in: Claudia Brittenham (ed.), *Vessels. The Object as Container*, Oxford 2019, pp. 50-80; Kenneth Painter, Cofanetto da toletta, in: Serena Ensoli, Eugenio La Rocca (eds.), *Aurea Roma. Dalla città pagana alla città cristiana*, Roma 2000, n. 116, pp. 495-496; Lucia Pirzio Biroli Stefanelli, *L'argento dei Romani. Vasellame da tavola e d'apparto*, Roma 1991, p. 303; Averil Cameron, The date and the owners of the Esquiline Treasure, *American Journal of Archeology* 89, 1985, pp. 135-145; Kathleen J. Shelton, The Esquiline treasure: the nature of the evidence, *American Journal of Archeology* 89, 1985, pp. 147-155; Lambert Schneider, *Die Domäne als Weltbild: Wirkungsstrukturen der spätantiken Bildersprache*, Wiesbaden 1983, pp. 172-174; Kathleen J. Shelton, *The Esquiline Treasure,* London 1981, pp. 75-77; Kathleen J. Shelton, Muse casket, in: Kurt Weitzmann (ed.), *Age of Spirituality. Late Antique and Early Christian Art, Third to Seventh Century*, New York 1979, n. 309, pp. 329-330; John P. C. Kent, Kenneth Painter, *Wealth of the Roman World AD 300-700*, London 1977, p. 45; Helmut Buschhausen, *Die spätrömischen Metallscrinia und frühchristlichen Reliquiare* (= Wiener Byzantinische Studien 9), Vienna 1971, n. B8, pp. 214-217; Donald E. Strong, *Greek and Roman Gold and Silver Plate*, London 1966, p. 207; Edmond Barbier, La Signification du cortège réprésenté sur le couvercle du coffret de ‚Projecta', *Cahiers Archéologiques* 12, 1962, pp. 16-22; Stefan Poglayen-Neuwall, Über die ursprünglichen Besitzer des spätantiken Silberfunds vom Esquilin und seine Datierung, *Mitteilungen des deutschen archäologischen Instituts, Römische Abteilung* 45, 1930, pp. 125, 131; Ormonde M. Dalton, *Catalogue of Early Christian Antiquities and Objects from the Christian East in the Department of British and Medieval Antiquities and Etnography of the British Museum,* London 1901, n. 305, p. 65.

The casket was found in 1793 as part of the Esquiline treasure, together with the so-called Proiecta casket (cat. entry n. 6.7). The treatment of the figures' draperies, facial features and postures is very similar to the execution of figures in the procession on the Proiecta casket, suggesting contemporary production. One of the female attendants in the procession is even showed carrying a circular casket suspended by chains from a ring, very much like the Muse casket. The similarities extend to the dimensions, typology, and construction technique of the two caskets. Iconographically, there are parallels with a pitcher decorated by depictions of all the Muses, found in 1917 near the Sudzha river in the Kursk region, now in the Kremlin collections, which is currently dated between the years 402 and 450 and traced to a Constantinopolitan workshop.

The casket, which can be suspended from three chains attached to a large ring, contains five small vessels for perfumes and unguents fitted into openings in a horizontal bronze plate. It is made of sheet silver, shaped and decorated with repoussé and engraving. In its form it adopts features of a hanging bowl or lamp, a form known from Roman times but particularly popular in late antiquity. The surfaces of both body and dome have been divided into sixteen panels, alternating flat and concave surfaces. The flat surfaces are decorated with vases, vines, and birds. The eight niches of the body of the casket contain female figures under arches. At the top of the dome is depicted another female figure in landscape setting inside of a medallion. The eight figures of the body of the casket can be interpreted as eight of the nine Muses, identified by their attributes as Urania, Muse of astronomy, Melpomene, Muse of tragedy, Clio, Muse of history, Polyhymnia, Muse of mime, Terpsichore, Muse of lyric poetry and dance, Euterpe, Muse of music, Thalia, Muse of comedy, and Calliope, Muse of epic poetry.

Although distinguished from one another by attributes and costume, the figures are represented as variations of a single type. The female figure on the dome, seated in a landscape setting and stringing roses onto a garland, a motif known from the mosaics at Piazza Armerina, is dressed in a simple tunic and does not have an attribute as the rest. She also misses the feather headdress, which alludes to the victory of the Muses over the Sirens.

Representations in the mosaics and wall paintings have shown objects that closely resemble the casket in the context of the Roman bath. Images of serving women carrying caskets on chains appear both in the 4th-century procession mosaic from the vestibule of the baths in the late Roman villa on Piazza Armerina and in the 4th-century paintings in a tomb in Silistra, Bulgaria.

Admittedly, it is not abnormal for a selection of Muses to be used in Roman art, but selection of all except one seems like a deliberate exclusion. The female figure on the dome can hypothetically be identified as the owner of the casket (possibly Proiecta), similarly as deceased women were associated with the Muses on their sarcophagi. Without inscriptions, the Muses on the casket were not definitely identifiable to the viewer and the only prominent fact was the omission of one of them, not her specific identity. In this way the female owner of the casket could have been associated with the ninth Muse, homage to her education, the so-called *paideia*, central for the elite culture of the Roman world.





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1.3 PATERA WITH THE TOILETTE OF VENUS

Second half of the 4th century

Length with a handle 37 cm, diameter 24.2 cm

Paris, Musée du Petit Palais, inv. n. ADUT 171

Kenneth Painter, Patera con la toletta di Venere, in: Serena Ensoli, Eugenio La Rocca (eds.), *Aurea Roma. Dalla città pagana alla città cristiana*, Roma 2000, n. 118, pp. 497-498; Kathleen J. Shelton, *The Esquiline Treasure,* London 1981, p. 78; John P. C. Kent, Kenneth Painter, *Wealth of the Roman World AD 300-700*, London 1977, pp. 46-49; Donald E. Strong, *Greek and Roman Gold and Silver Plate*, London 1966, pp. 192-193; Wolfgang Volbach, *Early Christian Art*, London 1961, p. 333; EnnioVisconti, *Lettera di Ennio Quirinio Visconti intorno ad una antica suppelletile d'argento scoperta in Roma nell'anno 1793,* Roma 1827, pp. 21-22.

The silver patera was found in Rome as part of the Esquiline treasure in 1793, was part of a private collection of a Parisian aristocratic family de Blacas from 1807, and finally it was bequeathed to the Petit Palais in 1902 together with many other objects from the rich collection of the brothers Eugène (1807-1886) and Auguste Dutuit (1812-1902).

The object has flat base, curved sides, profound rim, and a horizontal handle attached to the cornice. The rim is decorated by little shells. The shallow bowl of the patera imitates a large shell. The underside is covered by lacquer, now brown with age. The handle is occupied by a beardless, short-haired, nude male figure (Adonis) holding a lance, with a dog under his feet. Above the beak of the shell a partially draped Venus is depicted, surrounded by two flying Cupids. She is tying a ribbon in her hair and turning her head to the right where a mirror is being held by one of the Cupids. The Cupid to the left carries a cloth and offers a flower to the goddess.

The figures are modelled in prominently high relief. They are all shown in three-quarter pose. Incised line is used for surface articulation and embellishment. It marks the hair of the figures and the dog, the wings of the Cupids, and the borders of the draperies.

The depiction of the toilette of Venus suggests a domestic use of the object. The scene at the back of the Proiecta casket (cat. entry n. 6.7) shows one of the servants holding a jug and a patera as part of the group headed towards to the baths. It is possible that the patera with Venus was used in this context. As most of the objects from the Esquiline treasure were to be used at the dining table, the patera could have also served for hand washing during meals.



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1.4 FOUR STATUETTES OF TYCHES

Second half of the 4th century

Height 17.9 cm, width 6.4 cm (Constantinople)

Height 19.5 cm, width 9.3 cm (Antioch)

Height 18.5 cm, width 6.9 cm (Rome)

Height 18.8 cm, width 5.3 cm (Alexandria)

London, The British Museum, inv. n. 1866, 1229.21-24

Elisabeth R. O'Connell, Möbelschläge mit Darstellungen von Stadt-Personifikationen, in: Cäcilia Fluck *et al.* (eds.), *Ein Gott: Abrahams Erben am Nil. Juden, Christen und Muslime in Ägypten von der Antike bis zum Mittelalter*, Berlin 2015, p. 50; Sonja Marzinzik, *Masterpieces: Early Medieval Art*, London 2013, n. 4, p. 16; Marlia Mundell Mango, Three chair ornaments personifying Rome, Constantinople and Alexandra, in: Robin Cormack, Maria Vasillaki (eds.), *Byzantium 330-1453*, London 2008, n. 10, p. 380; Christian Entwistle, Statuette (*Tychai*) di Roma e Costantinopoli, in: Angela Donati, Giovanni Gentili (eds.), *Costantino il Grande: la civiltà antica al bivio tra Occidente e Oriente*, Milano 2005, pp. 251-252; Kenneth Painter, Quattro applicazioni per mobilio: personificazioni delle città di Roma, Antiochia, Costantinopoli e Alessandria, in: Serena Ensoli, Eugenio La Rocca (eds.), *Aurea Roma. Dalla città pagana alla città cristiana*, Roma 2000, n. 114, pp. 491-493; David Buckton (ed.), *Byzantium. Treasures of Byzantine Art and Culture from British Collections*, London 1994, n. 13-14, pp. 35-36; Angelo Salvioni (ed.), *Milano capitale dell'impero romano 286-402 d. c.*, Milano 1990, pp. 349-350; Alan Cameron, The Date and the Owners of the Esquiline Treasure, *American Journal of Archeology* 89, 1985, pp. 135-155; *Trier: Kaiserresidenz und Bischofssitz. Die Stadt in spätantiker und frühchristlicher Zeit,* Mainz am Rhein 1984, pp. 120-124; Herbert Beck, Peter C. Bol (eds.), *Spätantike und frühes Christentum. Ausstellung im Liebighaus Museum alter Plastik, Frankfurt am Main (16. Dezember 1983 bis 11. März 1984)*, Frankfurt am Main 1983, n. 84, pp. 481-483; Kathleen J. Shelton, *The Esquiline Treasure,* London 1981, pp. 86-88; Kathleen J. Shelton, Four statuettes of Tyches, in: Kurt Weitzmann (ed.), *Age of Spirituality. Late Antique and Early Christian Art, Third to Seventh Century*, New York 1979, n. 155, pp. 176-177; John Kent, Kenneth Painter, *Wealth of the Roman World. Gold and Silver AD 300-700,* London 1977, n. 97, p. 49; Tobias Dohrn, *Die Tyche von Antiochia,* Berlin 1960, n. 12; Jocelyn M. C. Toynbee, Roma and Constantinopolis in Late Antique-Art, *Journal of Roman Studies* 37, 1947, pp. 135-144; Ormonde M. Dalton, *Catalogue of Early Christian Antiquities and Objects from the Christian East in the Department of British and Medieval Antiquities and Etnography of the British Museum,* London 1901, n. 332-335, pp. 74-75.

Partially gilded silver statuettes were discovered in Rome in 1793 near the church of Santi Silvestro e Martino ai Monti along with many other silver objects known collectively as the Esquiline treasure. Owners of the Esquiline treasure, Turcius Secundus and Proiecta Turcii, married between 379 and 383, belonged to a family whose members held various high positions in Roman imperial administration. Mere three decades after their discovery, the statuettes passed from the dean of the College of the Cardinals Guilio Maria della Somaglia (1820-1830) through the hands of the collector Baron von Schellersheim (1752-1836) to the collection of Louis, Duc de Blacas d'Aulps (1815-1866). Born in London as the eldest son of Pierre Louis Jean Casimir, Duc de Blacas d'Aulps (1771-1839), he greatly increased the size and scope of the collection begun by his ambassador father and in November 1866. Following a special Treasury Grant of £48,000, it was acquired in its entirety by the British Museum.

Being variations of the same type of seated female figure, dressed in tunic and cloak, the four statuettes form two pairs of right- and left-hand figures, respectively. The precious material and detailed workmanship of the clothing and ornaments suggest that they were made for a person of standing.

The statuettes represent major cities of the late Roman empire: Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, and Antioch. Rome and Constantinople wear crested helmets, while the other two wear mural crowns. Each of them holds an attribute: Rome an upright staff in one hand, while the other rests on a shield; Constantinople a patera and a cornucopia; Alexandria bundles of grain, while resting her foot on a ship's prow; and Antioch, based on a famous work by Greek sculptor Eutychides (died 296 BC), fruits and bundles of grain, while a personification of the river Orontes emerges from beneath her. The cities are referenced for their defences as well as for harbours and export of grain that were of great importance to the Empire.

The grouping of tyches was associated with the emperor and late antique bureaucracy, and these objects may have been insignia of a civil or military office. It has been suggested that the statuettes served as elaborate furniture ornaments attached to a *sedes gestatoria*, a ceremonial throne on which the highest officials and the richest citizens of the empire were carried. They would have been secured by means of a pin which passed through aligned holes in a socket and original fitting of the chair, although only one piece preserves the original pin and its attached chain. The hinged openwork leaves below the feet of each figure would have swung when the chair was being carried.



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1.5 FRAGMENT OF A BOWL WITH ISIS

Second half of the 4th century

Height 6.44 cm, length 9.26 cm, width 0.26 cm - 0.31 cm

Venice, Museo di Vetro di Murano, inv. n. Classe VI 1859

Stefanie Nagel, *Die figürlich gravierten Gläser der Spätantike. Achäometrische und archäologische Untersuchungen*, Regensburg 2020, p. 193; Fabrizio Paolucci, *L'arte del vetro inciso a Roma nel IV secolo d.C.*, Firenze 2002, pp. 60-61; Andrea Rottloff, Spätantike Repräsentationskunst in Süddeutschland. Einige Überlegungen zu den Glasschliffschalen von Augsburg, Obernburg und Pfaffenhofen, in: Michaela Hermann, Lothar Bakker (eds.), *Sammelband 2000. Augsburger Beiträge zur Achäologie* 3, Augsburg 2001, p. 151; Rosa Barovier, Due vetri incisi tardo-romani al Museo Vetrario di Murano, *Bolletino dei Musei Civici Veneziani* 18, 1973, pp. 39-41.

This fragment of a flat glass bowl was donated to the Museo di Vetro di Murano in 1893 by archaeologist Cesare Augusto Levi (1856-1927). According to the museum's entry list it was found in 1889 at the foot of the Esquiline hill in Rome.

The figurative scene was cut into the outer wall of the vessel by copper wheel engraver. Due to the poor state of preservation of the vessel and relatively small dimensions of the fragment the scene cannot be fully reconstructed.

The haloed head of a female figure can still be seen. She can be identified as Isis based on the crown. Her original headdress consisting of cow horns and a sun disc is reproduced on the glass in the modified Graeco-Roman form with two feathers and lotus flowers. Next to the goddess appears a small, bearded figure with horns, looking towards her. Due to its body, which can be interpreted as that of a serpent, it is possible to identify it as Serapis-*Agathodaimon*. On the other side of the goddess the spectator can see an arm and part of a body of another figure, also depicted smaller than her.

The cult of Isis was significantly revived under the rule of Emperor Julian the Apostate (361-363) among the non-Christian aristocrats, but its symbolism continued to disseminate through objects of everyday use also in the following decades.

The presence of Serapis-*Agathodaimon*, god of fertility and abundance, quite rare in the area of the Apennine Peninsula, contrary to Alexandria, where he was celebrated as protector of households, speaks for a learned élite commissioner, well aware of and probably invested in the Isiac cult, who was actively involved in the creation of the vessel.



© Nagel 2020, p. 193

1.6 *DEA ROMA* AND OFFERING FEMALE FIGURES

Second half of the 4th century

Height 63 cm, length 93 cm (head of the goddess)

Height 260 cm, length 220 cm (wall decoration with the offering figures)

Rome, Antiquarium Comunale, inv. n. 32395

Francesca Consoli, La Dea Roma e le provincie offerenti nell'edificio del Vicus Iugarius, in: Maria Andaloro (ed.), *L'orrizonte tardoantico e le nuove immagini 312-468,* Milano 2006, pp. 272-275; Carmelo Calci, Ninfeo di piazza della Consolazione, in: *Il libro di Roma archeologica,* Roma 2000, pp. 20-21; Maria Paola del Moro, Il Ninfeo presso il Vicus Iugarius, in: Serena Ensoli, Eugenio La Rocca (eds.), *Aurea Roma. Dalla città pagana alla città cristiana*, Roma 2000, n. 4-11, pp. 429-432; Antonio Maria Colini, Un tardo ninfeo dipinto scoperto sul 'Vicus Iugarius', *Atti della Pontifica Accademia Romana di Archeologia. Rendiconti* 53-54, 1980-1982, pp. 3-26; Harald Mielsch, Zur stadtrömischen Malerei des 4. Jahrhunderts n. Chr., *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archaeologischen Instituts, Röm* 85, 1978, pp. 197-199; Michelangelo Cagiano de Azevedo, La dea Barberini, *Rivista dell'Istituto Nazionale d'Archeologia e Storia dell'Arte* 3, 1954, pp. 108-141; Giovanni Becatti, Case Ostiensi del Tardo Impero II, *Bollettino d'arte* 34, 1953, pp. 197-224; Henri Stern, *Le Calendrier de 354: étude sur son texte et ses illustrations*, Paris 1953, pp. 129, 345; Antonio Maria Colini, Riflessioni, *Atti della Pontifica Accademia Romana di Archeologia. Rendiconti* 21, 1945-1946, p. 22.

The remains of a building adjacent to *vicus Iugarius* have been discovered in 1943 near the church of S. Maria della Consolazione when old houses were torn down to create space for new street axis between Piazza and Via della Consolazione. What was left from the late antique *domus* were 3 walls, one of them with an apse, and large water basin, originally paved with marble. The room has played a role of a *nymphaeum.* In the last phase of its existence, it was transformed into a simple rectangular hall. It was this phase that gave the structure its painted decoration, which was dated to the 4th century with the help of stylistic analysis.

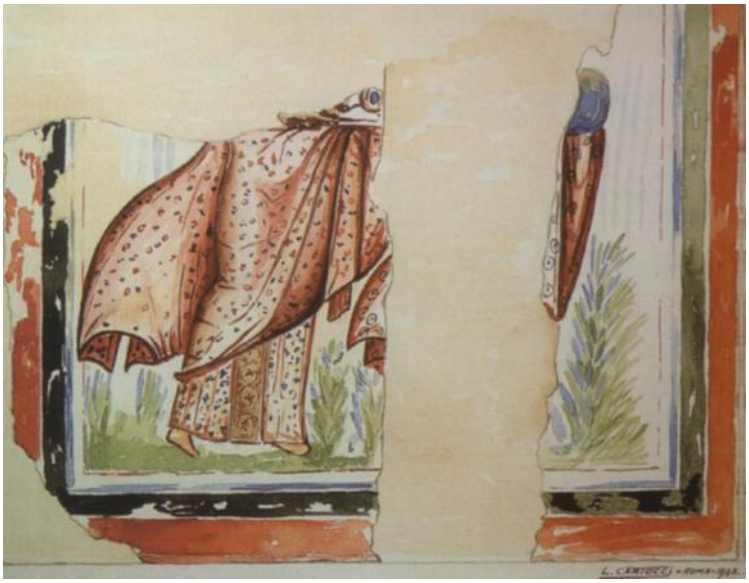
The arches and pilasters were covered with frescoes combining geometrical and floral motifs. The only preserved decoration on the central wall with an apse is a fragment with the head of *Dea Roma* wearing a helmet and surrounded by a blue *nimbus.* From drawings, made after the discovery of the fresco by Lucio Cartocci, we know that the monumental figure was originally placed in the upper part of the niche. On the lower right side of the wall another, smaller head, crowned by leaf crown with gems, was depicted, turned towards the goddess. The goddess was probably holding a statuette of Victory (her symbol) secured to a rod, parts of which survived until the 20th century, and was accompanied by an enthroned emperor. The placement of the female head relatively high on the wall suggests that the goddess was either standing or seated on an elevated throne. On the left wall remains of two female figures, identified as personifications of *urbes nobiles* bringing offerings to the goddess, have been found. They are now preserved only in watercolour paintings, shown wearing a courtly dress and holding in their hands, covered by *pallium*, laurel wreath and globe respectively. The detail of the covered hands can be connected to the late imperial court ceremonial, where the gesture was used as a sign of respect and submission to the authority of the monarch. Previous research has hypothesized that offering figures were depicted also on the wall on the right, privy of any decoration at the moment of discovery.

The iconographic scheme is attested in the late antique Mediterranean in the monumental art, but also in burial objects, such as the Pécs casket, decorated by personifications of cities offering crowns to representation of Rome. The decoration leads to the assumption that the

hall has been dedicated to the worship of *Dea Roma* and the imperial cult. The cult of *Dea Roma* was started in the city by Hadrian (117-138), who sponsored the construction of the temple of Venus and Roma with the statue of *Roma Aeterna*. New iconographic scheme, connecting seated personification of Rome with other imperial cities or divinities paying their respects to it was introduced by Emperor Maxentius (306-312), who turned the temple into *Templum Urbis*.

The frescoes were probably created during the period of uprising of non-Christian aristocracy in Rome, led by Nicomachus Flavianus (before 382-after 432), in a public hall inside a *domus* below the slopes of Capitoline Hill, a zone famous until the 5th century for gathering groups with anti-Christian sentiment. A short time after the creation of the frescoes, probably during the reign of Emperor Theodosius (394), the scene was covered by a layer of mortar, as it was found during the excavations, to hide an expression of a non-Christian cult, no longer officially accepted, and the building was abandoned.





© Consoli 2006, pp. 273, 275

1.7 FRESCO WITH PERSEUS AND ANDROMEDA

Second half of the 4th century

Height 132 cm, length 221 cm

Rome, Antiquarium Comunale, inv. n. 4478

Francesca Consoli, La decorazione degli edifici di via del Mare sotto la chiesa di Sant'Andrea in Vincis, in: Maria Andaloro (ed.), *L'orrizonte tardoantico e le nuove immagini 312-468,* Milano 2006, pp. 264-267; Carmelo Calci, Casa Cristiana, *Balneum*, in: *Il libro di Roma archeologica,* Roma 2000, pp. 17-19; Carla Salvetti, Affresco con Perseo e Andromeda, in: Serena Ensoli, Eugenio La Rocca (eds.), *Aurea Roma. Dalla città pagana alla città cristiana*, Roma 2000, n. 134, p. 510; Carla Salvetti, Perseo e Andromeda, in: Angela Donati (ed.), *Romana Pictura*: *la pittura romana dalle origini all'età bizantina*, Milano 1998, n. 70, pp. 292-293; Rossana Martorelli, S. Andrea in Vincis (Roma): *domus ecclesiae* o oratorio privato? in: *Domum tuam dilexi: miscellanea in onore di Aldo Nestori,* Città del Vaticano 1998, pp. 571-586; Lucia Ottaviani, La casa cristiana, in: Umberto Broccoli (ed.), *Storie di Roma: tra Campidoglio e Tevere*, Roma 1993, pp. 49-51; Roger Ling, *Roman Painting,* Cambridge 1991, pp. 196-197; Harald Mielsch, Zur stadrömischen Malerei des 4. Jahrhunderts n. Chr*., Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts. Römische Abteilung* 85, 1978, p. 193; Harald Mielsch, Perseo e Andromeda, in: *Affreschi romani dell'Antiquarium Comunale*, Roma 1976, pp. 53-57; Maurizio Borda, *La pittura romana*, Milano 1958, p. 365; Gabriela Bordenacche Battaglia, Perseo e Andromeda: pittura romana del sec. IV d.C., *Capitolivm* 9, 1933, pp. 456-463; Antonio Maria Colini, Case scoperte presso s. Andrea in Vincis, in: Antonio Muñoz (ed.), *Campidoglio*, Roma 1930, pp. 64-67.

The scene in a lunette depicts Andromeda, ascending from the rock to which she was secured, with Perseus offering her a helping hand. It takes place after the killing of a sea monster which plagued the princess after her father, king of Ethiopia Cepheus, angered Poseidon and sacrificed her to please him, chaining her to a rock amidst the sea. The half-naked body of Andromeda is richly decorated with wide pearl necklace and several bracelets, similar in their appearance to the chains still attached to the rock. A basket is depicted to her left, while to her right severely damaged head of the monster can be seen. Perseus is dressed in a long cloak and a tunic, covering lower part of his body, and he dons a Phrygian cap, alluding to his oriental origin in the city of Argo. In his left hand he holds a sickle, gift from Hermes, and head of Medusa, barely visible due to the damages sustained by the painting. It seems that the painter utilized for his depiction the iconography of Orpheus, much more accepted and spread in the late antique world for its connection to the underworld. He can be seen seated and donning a Phrygian cap for example in the catacombs of martyrs Marcellinus and Petrus.

The room near Teatro di Marcello, in which the fresco was found during excavations caused by the creation of Via del Mare in 1929, has been identified as *nymphaeum*. Its function prompted the addition of a water basin and niches surrounded by columns in the lower section of the back wall, under the lunette with the fresco, to the original structure. The room was adjacent to a complex of other rooms, whose state of preservation and architectural diversity allow only for a vague description of their function: public building or part of a noble house. They were constructed during the reign of Hadrian (117-138) and rebuild in the 3rd and the 4th century. One of the first hypotheses after their discovery associated them with *balneum*, based on the presence of several water basins and cisterns.

The fresco is the last of the three phases of the pictorial decoration of the structure, to be dated to the last decades of the 4th century. The formal aspects of the painting, such as the black lines underlining the figures, appear also on the fresco from *vicus Iugarius* with similar

dating. The scene confirms persistence of antique mythological motifs in public space of Rome in the second half of the 4th century.



© Donati 1998, p. 182

1.8 TELUS

Middle of the 4th century

Height 60 cm, length 133 cm

CERES

Height 75 cm, length 65 cm

DEVOTEE OF CERES

Height 67 cm, length 60 cm

BUST OF A DECEASED GIRL

Diameter 50 cm

Around 350-370

HERCULES AND ALCESTIS RETURNING FROM THE UNDERWORLD

Height 116 cm, length 39.5 cm

HERCULES AND MINERVA PERFORMING *DEXTRARUM IUNCTIO*

Height 90 cm, length 85 cm

Second half of the 4th century

Rome, Ipogeo di Via Dino Compagni, rooms E, N and O

György Heidl, Spousal Love Beyond the Grave: the „Christian" Alcestis in via Latina Hypogeum, in: *Masculum et feminam creavis eos (Gen. 1,27). Paradigmi del maschile e femminile nel cristianesimo antico*, Firenze 2020, pp. 69-75; Nicola Denzey, *The Bone Gatherers. The Lost Worlds of Early Christian Women*, Boston 2007, pp. 25-88; Harlow Gregory Snyder, Pictures in Dialogue: A Viewer-Centred Approach to the Hypogeum on Via Dino Compagni, *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 13, n. 3, 2005, pp. 349-386; Norbert Zimmermann, *Werkstattgruppen römischer Katakombenmalerei*, Münster 2002, pp. 92-99; Jaś Elsner, *Art and the Roman Viewer. The Transformation of Art from the Pagan World to Christianity*, Cambridge 1995, pp. 271-280; Beverly Berg, Alcestis and Hercules in the Catacomb of Via Latina, *Vigiliae Christianae* 48, 1994, pp. 219-234; Idoia Camiruaga, *La arquitectura del hipogeo de Via Latina en Roma*, Burgos 1994; Frederick P. Bargebuhr, *The Paintings of the 'New' Catacomb of the Via Latina and the Struggle of Christianity against Paganism*, Heidelberg 1991; Antonio Ferrua, *Catacombe sconosciute: una pinacoteca del IV secolo sotto la Via Latina*, Firenze 1990; Josef Engemann, Altes und Neues zum Beispielen heidnischer und christlicher Katakombenbilder im spätantiken Rom, *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 26, 1983, pp. 128-151; William Tronzo, *The Via Latina Catacomb: Imitation and Discontinuity in Fourth Century Roman Painting*, University Park 1986;

Johannes Fink, Herakles als Christusbild an der Via Latina, *Rivista di archeologia cristiana* 56, 1980, pp. 133-146; Johannes Fink, *Bildfrommigkeit und Bekenntnis. Das Alte Testament, Herakles und die Herrlichkeit Christian der Via Latina in Rom*, Köln 1978, pp. 19-27; Lieselotte Kötzsche-Breitenbruch, *Die neue Katakombe und der Via Latina in Rom: Untersuchungen zur Ikonographie der Alttestamentlichen Wandmalereien*, Münster 1976, p. 11; Walter Nikolaus Schumacher, Reparatio Vitae. Zum Programm der neuen Katakombe an der Via Latina zu Rom, *Römische Quartalschrift* 66, 1971, pp. 125-153; Margherita Guarducci, La „morte di Cleopatra" nella catacomba della via Latina, *Rendiconti Pontificia Accademia Romana di Archeologia* 37, 1964/1965, pp. 259-281; Marc Simon, *Remarques sur la Catacombe de la Via Latina*, Münster 1964, pp. 327-335; Erwin Ramsdell Goodenough, Catacomb Art, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 81, 1962, pp. 113-142; Antonio Ferrua, *Le pitture della nuova catacomba di via Latina*, Città del Vaticano 1960.

A number of non-scriptural subjects are depicted alongside biblical scenes in the *hypogeum* on Via Latina, discovered in 1955 during the construction of a house on the crossroads with Via Dino Compagni in Rome. Philosophers mix with images such as a medical lesson or the representation of Telus, personification of the fruitful earth, depicted in an *arcosolium* of *cubiculum* E as a woman lying in a field of roses and ears of grain, slightly leaning on a basket full of flowers, with her bottom half covered by a dark brown-red decorative *palla,* hair tucked underneath a red cap, and adorned by a gold necklace and two gold bracelets on her right arm. Around her left arm a snake is coiled, vibrating its open mouth towards her right breast. Surrounding her are a Gorgon head, peacocks, and *Victoriae*. In the final two chambers of the *hypogeum*, N and O, cult figures of the pre-Christian world indubitably appear, too.

Room O, separated from room N by a large arch (1,58 m wide and 2,20 m high), is of square disposition and is covered by a vaulted ceiling. Two lateral niches seem to have been intended as purely decorative, but sometime during the 5th century one *loculus* was excavated on the left and three on the right, damaging the plaster and the pictorial decoration. The room was originally designed for a single burial, visible in the *arcosolium* in the back wall. Its decoration is a curious mix of Christian scenes and pre-Christian beliefs. While the right and left wall bear depictions of the Passing through the Red Sea, Daniel in the lions' den, Moses receiving the Divine Laws and Raising of Lazarus, heads of *putti* and personifications of abundance gaze from the ceiling. The right side of the arch connecting the *cubiculum* with room N shows a woman dressed in white sleeveless tunic and *palla*, with her head covered by a diaphanous veil, secured by a ray crown. In her right hand she holds a sheaf of wheat, while in her right burning torch can be seen. She is flanked by amphoras and a basket full of wheat and can be identified as the goddess Ceres, linked to fertility and abundance. On the left side of the arch, another woman is represented, dressed similarly, apart from the fact that her tunic is of purplish hue and has wide sleeves and her head is not covered. In her open arms she holds bundles of wheat, creating a parallel between herself and Ceres, and alluding to her position as the devotee of the goddess. The *arcosolium* follows the same pattern, in which winged *putti* and small birds artfully intertwine with scenes of the Multiplication of the bread and Three youths in the fiery furnace. Its sole inhabitant, a young girl, is commemorated in a tondo, formed by flowers, in the centre of the *arcosolium*'s arch, dressed in a simple white tunic with red-brown collar and *clavi*, her hair waved on the forehead and gathered in a bun at the nape, decorated by a braid running around her head.

As the room contains Biblical scenes, it was generally assumed that it had a Christian commissioner, possibly a recently baptised member of the Roman nobility. Recently, however, Nicola Denzey suggested that the young girl buried in the *arcosolium* might have been Christian, but the commissioner, most probably her close kin, maybe a mother who may have had herself represented nearby in the figure of the devotee of Ceres, overseer of the women's rites of passage, most certainly was not, even if they chose to honour the religion of

the deceased by displaying some of the most notorious Biblical scenes dealing with resurrection and miraculous survival through faith on the walls.

Chamber N is richly decorated by red corner pillars, false marbles, paintings of goats, peacocks, and cupids. It has two *arcosolia*, suitable for double burials. Each *arcosolium* contains three figurative scenes. The decoration consists of pivotal moments from the story of Alcestis and labours of Hercules. On the left those are Admetus on his sickbed, Hercules and Minerva performing *dextrarum iunctio* and Hercules with an opponent (possibly Death). On the right Alcestis returning from the underworld to Admetus and Hercules battling the dragon of the Hesperides and the Hydra are shown.

Two hypotheses regarding the identity of the commissioners were formed. They were either supposed to belong to a large wealthy family, whose members were both Christian and not, or to be noble Christians, well-educated and using traditional antique iconography with updated message. In 4th-century Rome it was not unusual for some families to attend official Christian services, but at the same time to play role in the mysteries of the cult of Isis and to listen to neo-Platonic lectures during the week. Presence of Hercules in Christian context is not discordant. He was perceived as pre-Christian, and therefore rather obscure, predecessor of Christ. According to 2nd-century writer Justin, he, like Christ, after his demise ascended into heaven and was able to overcome death.

In choosing the act of resurrecting Alcestis, the patron made a statement about the reunion of man and his wife beyond death. The decoration celebrated spousal love and devotion. Apart from documentation of conjugal love the spectator could observe the tangible victory over death, the ultimate wish of the person commissioning the painting. Based on the unusual appearance of dying Admetus instead of Alcestis in the deathbed scene, as was customary on the sarcophagi (coffin from St. Aignan, sarcophagus from Ostia), it can be assumed that it portrays the last moments of the man buried in the *arcosolium* and was commissioned by his mourning widow. She indicates her willingness to die in the place of her husband in the fresco in the opposite lunette, depicting Alcestis returning from the underworld. Hercules and Minerva clasping their hands allude to the loyalty between husband and wife in the face of the death, going as far back as their marriage vows. Even though Minerva plays no role in Euripides' *Alcestis*, she takes part of the helper of Hercules in his labours, which also convey the idea of the triumph over death.

The paintings were executed in a period of controversies between Christians and supporters of the pre-Christian cults in the Senate and the imperial court, but they attest that in the hopes of surpassing the death and passing to hereafter different traditions could open into each other.









Ferrua 1990, pp. 80, 120, 129





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1.9 MOSAIC WITH PERSONIFICATIONS OF THE SEASONS

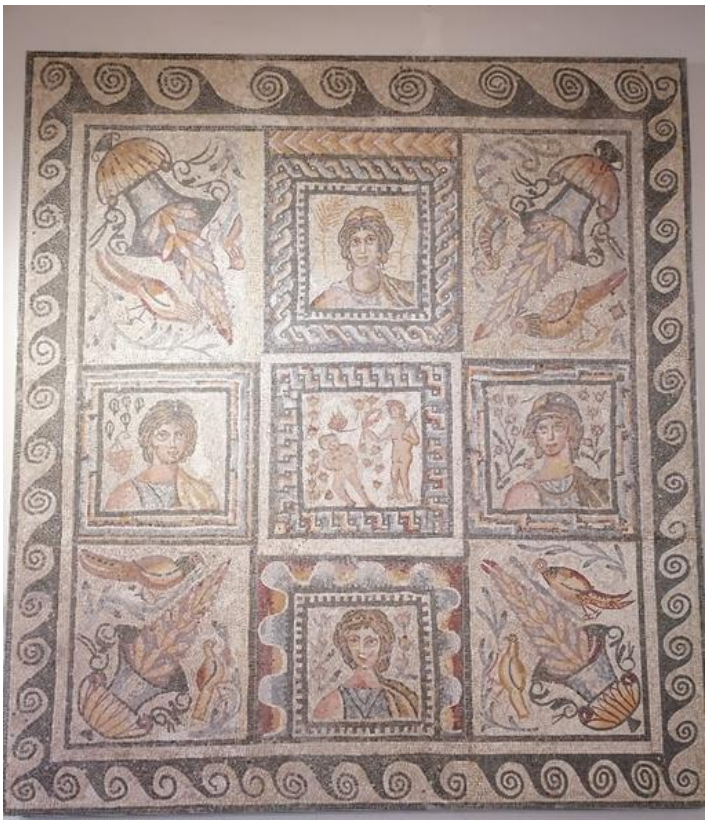
Late 4th-early 5th century

Height 349 cm, length 312 cm

Rome, Museo Nazionale Romano, Palazzo Massimo alle Terme, inv. n. 59585

Antonella Rotondi, Mosaico con stagioni, in: Carlo Gasparri, Rita Paris (eds.), *Palazzo Massimo alle Terme: le collezioni*, Milano 2013, pp. 462-463; Rita Paris, Maria Teresa Di Sarcina (eds.), *Museo Nazionale Romano, Palazzo Massimo alle Terme: i mosaici*, Milano 2012, pp. 181-183; Gabriele Canuti, I mosaici con raffigurazioni delle stagioni in Italia, *Corso di cultura sull'arte Ravennate e Bizantina* 40, 1993, pp. 97-98; George Hanfmann, *The Season Sarcophagus in Dumbarton Oaks*, Cambridge 1951, n. 255; Salvatore Aurigemma, *Le Terme di Diocleziano e il Museo Nazionale Romano*, 2nd ed., Roma 1950, p. 199; Marion Elisabeth Blake, Mosaics of the late empire in Rome and vicinity, *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 17, 1940, p. 101.

The mosaic, created from marble, pavonazzetto, and limestone *tesserae*, was acquired in 1912 from antiquities' market with the note about its provenance in the area called Le Capannelle on Via Appia Nuova. Five squares with figurative scenes are accompanied by four ornamental rectangles, each depicting a *kantharos*, decorative plants, and birds. Everything is framed by *tesserae* organized in a black and white wave-like design. Four of the five squares are filled with one female figure each, dressed in a light-coloured tunic, with a cloak on her right shoulder. The accompanying attributes – ears of grain, grapes and wine leaves, wild rose flowers, and shrub branches with three leaves and six lotus buds – identify them as personifications of Summer, Autumn, Spring, and Winter (identified with the help of a frame around her square, resembling icicles). The hair of the personifications is pulled up and dressed with a cap in the case of Spring and Summer. The central square is occupied by two nude male figures, one leaning away from the other, the latter holding a band and a crown in his raised right arm and a frond in his left. They may be interpreted as Apollo and Marsyas, who, defeated and with tied hands, is about to be skinned. The mosaic could have decorated a pavement in an unknown residential building of great dimensions. The presence of palm trees in vases and birds pecking their fruits may also allude to the Christian rendering of the Tree of Life, present in funerary structures. The same can be said about personifications of the Seasons, reminders of the passing of time, often part of the funerary decoration. Although we are in presence of a notable example of floor mosaic, the decorated surface is divided rather coarsely and imprecisely. The filling of the resulting corners reveals a certain *horror vacui*. It is possible to hypothesize that predefined templates were used for the figures of the Seasons, the central scene, the *kantharoi*, and some of the frames. The dating of the mosaic was specified through stylistic analysis and set between the late 4th and the 5th century.



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1.10 BOWL WITH VENUS, VULCAN, AND ADONIS

Late 4th-early 5th century

Diameter 24 cm

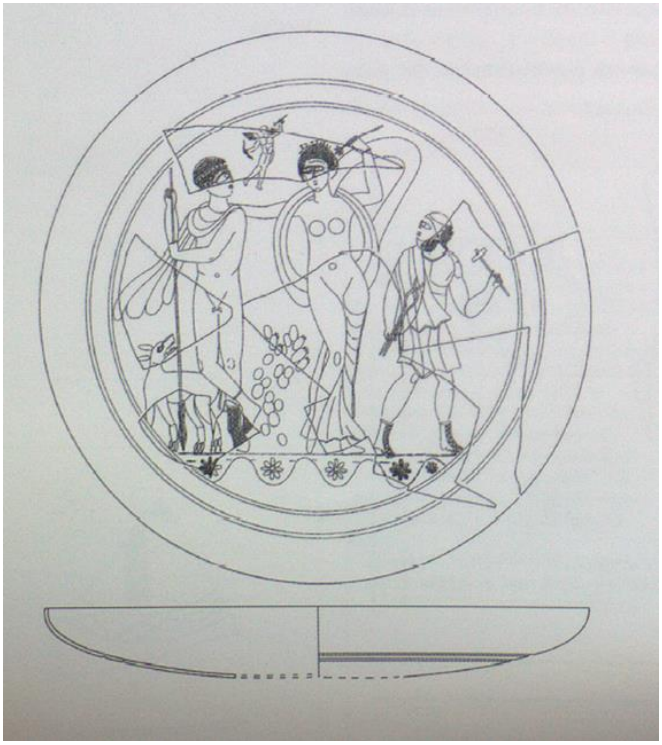
Rome, Museo Nazionale Romano, Terme di Diocleziano, inv. n. 518145

Stefanie Nagel, *Die figürlich gravierten Gläser der Spätantike. Achäometrische und archäologische Untersuchungen*, Regensburg 2020, p. 154; Maddalena Cima, Maria Antonietta Tomei, *Vetri a Roma*, Milano 2012, p. 132; Lucia Saguì, Ateliers de verre gravé à Rome au 4e siécle après J.-C. Nouvelles données sur le verre gravé „à relief négatif", in: *Annales du 17e Congrès de l'Association Internationale pour l'Histoire du Verre*, Antwerpen 2009, pp. 209-210; Lucia Saguì, Il vetro inciso, in: Maria Antonietta Tomei (ed.), *Roma. Memorie dal sottosuolo: ritrovamenti archeologici 1980/2006*, Milano 2007, p. 80.

A total of 12 fragments of a flat bowl were discovered in 2003 during excavations on the north-eastern slope of the Palatine Hill in Rome in the rubble filling two ground floor rooms of a Roman *domus*, constructed during the reign of emperor Nero and subsequently abandoned. The filling layer constitutes of objects discarded in the 5th century by inhabitants of the Palatine area and is a vivid example of domestic life in the period between the 4th and the beginning of the 5th century.

The figural decoration was cut into the outer wall of the vessel with the help of various copper wheels. The workshop that produced it is known for the use negative relief, obtained by cutting out of large portions of the outer layer of the glass in varying depths. The objects assigned to it are of high artistic quality and were destined for the use by the members of the imperial court and senators, the most notable example being the plate created for the *vicenalia* of the emperor and uncovered in the Roman Forum. Characteristically for the religious beliefs of the ruling class at the precipice of the 5th century synthesis of Christian and non-Christian motifs can be observed.

About a third of the original vessel has been preserved. The bowl is decorated with a scene from the myth about Venus and Adonis. A naked Venus stands in the centre of the bowl in a classic pose with her right leg slightly bent. The supporting leg is wrapped in a richly folded drapery, which loosely encircles her hips and shoulders. She holds a twig in her left hand, raised above her head. Venus directs her gaze to the right at Adonis, who returns it. He is also depicted naked except for a cloak and shoes. The long spear, which he holds in both hands, and the dog at his feet characterize him as a hunter. Between the heads of the two figures appears little winged cupid with a bow and an arrow. To the left of the goddess of love, her husband Vulcanus strides in the opposite direction, but turns his bearded head backwards. In his hands the god of blacksmiths holds a hammer and pliers. The characters are presented in order of importance. Adonis and Venus as lovers are emphasized, while the jealous husband appears smaller. The bi-dimensional refined rendering of the relief can be compared with the representation of figures on contemporary silver plates, the closest comparison being the scene with Venus and Adonis on the Meleager plate from the Seuso Treasure, currently housed in the National Museum in Budapest.



© Saguì 2006, p. 80.

1.11 PENATES APPEAR TO SLEEPING AENEAS

AENEAS AND ACHATES MEET WITH SIBYL FROM THE TEMPLE OF APOLLO

Around 400

Vergilius Vaticanus

Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, *Vat. Lat.* 3225, fol. 24, 28

Umberto Utro, I Penati appaiono a Enea in sogno, in: Angela Donati (ed.), *Romana Pictura*: *la pittura romana dalle origini all'età bizantina*, Milano 1998, n. 167, p. 321; Giovanni Morello (ed.), *Miniature. Le splendide illustrazioni dei codici dal IV al XV secolo*, Roma 1996, pp. 56-57; David H. Wright, Virgilio, Opere, in: Marco Buonocore (ed.), *Vedere i Classici. L'illustrazione libraria dei testi antichi dall'età romana al tardo medioevo*, Roma 1996, pp. 141-149; David H. Wright, *The Vatican Vergil: a masterpiece of late antique art*, Berkeley 1993; David H. Wright, From copy to facsimile: a millenium of studying the Vatican Vergil, *The British Library Journal* 17, 1991, pp. 12-35; Angelika Geyer, *Die genese narrativer Buchillustration: der Miniaturenzyklus zur Aeneis im Vergilius Vaticanus*, Frankfurt am Main 1989; Thomas Bruce Stevenson, *Miniature decoration in the Vatican Virgil: a study in late antique iconography*, Tübingen 1983; José Ruysschaert, *Lectures des illustrations du "Virgile Vatican" et du "Virgile Romain"*, Paris 1980; Malcolm Bell, The Vergilius Vaticanus: *Aenead*, in: Kurt Weitzmann (ed.), *Age of Spirituality. Late Antique and Early Christian Art, Third to Seventh Century*, New York 1979, n. 203, p. 227; Paolo d'Ancona, Erhard Aeschlimann, *The art of illumination. An anthology of manuscripts from the sixth to the sixteenth century*, London 1969, p. 202; Hugo Buchthal, A Note on the Miniatures of the Vatican Vergil Manuscript, *Mélanges Eugène Tisserant* 6, 1964, pp. 167-171; Johannes de Wit, *Die Miniaturen des Vergilius Vaticanus*, Amsterdam 1959; Kurt Weitzmann, *Ancient Book Illumination*, Cambridge 1959, pp. 59-60; Ranuccio Bianchi Bandinelli, Virgilio Vaticanus 3225 e Iliade Ambrosiana, *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 5, 1954, pp. 225-240; *Fragmenta et picturae Vergiliana, cod. Vat. Lat. 3225*, Roma 1945.

Vergilius Vaticanus, older from the two illustrated manuscripts of Vergil that have survived from late antiquity, contains the *Eclogues*, the *Georgics*, and the *Aeneid*. It was commissioned probably by a wealthy and educated aristocrat who sought to preserve ancient traditions. Less than a fifth of the original manuscript is preserved, including 50 illuminations. They make it the most important illustrated classical text known by scholars.

The illustrations consist of framed pictures, usually inserted into the text, but occasionally taking up a full page. It is supposed that the majority of them follows an earlier Vergilian cycle of an unknown date. Parallels with mosaics in Santa Maria Maggiore (cat. entry n. 2.23) suggest that the manuscript was created in the first quarter of the 5th century, but the much more convincing rendering of space in the codex testifies for its creation closer to the beginning of the century. Traditionally its origin is tied to Rome and hands of three artists are identified, succeeding each other during the process of writing of the manuscript, the first and third being far more skilled than the second one. Despite the differences the illuminations in general were executed with fine brush strokes, careful modelling through shadow and light and with attention to detail. In the forms applied in the manuscript we can observe the flowering of the revived classical culture in Rome in the era around the year 400.

In the 9th century the manuscript was located in Tours. It was subsequently moved to Rome, where it was admired later by Raffaello Santi (1483-1520), who took inspiration from it. During the Renaissance the codex moved between collections of various erudites, such as Pietro Bembo (1470-1547) and Fulvio Orsini (1529-1600). The latter bequeathed it to the Vatican Library in 1600.

The first illumination picked here shows female and male *Penates*, Roman household deities, whose sacred images Aeneas rescued from burning Troy, appearing to him in a dream to persuade him to settle in Italy. Naked hero, wrapped in a bedsheet, reclines on a richly carved bed. The gods are dressed in long flowing purplish-blue cloaks. The scene plays itself in front of an architectural background with a tiled vault supported by two white columns with Corinthian capitals, through which the night sky with the moon and the stars can be seen. The setting of the illustration is rather theatrical, which appears to be a choice of the artist without support in the original text.

After landing in Italy, Aeneas is determined to visit his father in the land of Hades, and he enlists the help of the Sibyl. In the second illumination Aeneas and Achates approach the temple of Apollo, meeting the Sibyl in front of it. She raises her right hand in a gesture of speech, while both men extend their open right hands to demonstrate that they are receiving her words. The artist is not following the text to create the setting, as there is neither a wide cave nor gates of the temple heavily decorated with mythological scenes. He shows his superior skills in the use of gradations of colour in the transition from the ground level to the distant sky, and the clear placement of the figures on the ground level by means of small shadows.





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1.12 DIPTYCH WITH ASKLEPIOS AND HYGIEIA

Around 400-430

Height 31.4 cm, length 13.9 cm, width 0.6 cm

Liverpool, National Museums Liverpool, World Museum, inv. n. M10044

Adam Bollók *et al., From Hédervár and Eperjes to Liverpool: two late Roman ivory diptychs*, Budapest 2020, pp. 10-11; Robin Cormack, Maria Vasillaki (eds.), *Byzantium 330-1453*, London 2008, p. 382; Audrey Cruse, *Roman Medicine*, Cheltenham 2004, p. 111; Simon C. Bean, Dittico di Asclepio e Igea, in: Serena Ensoli, Eugenio La Rocca (eds.), *Aurea Roma. Dalla città pagana alla città cristiana*, Roma 2000, n. 133, pp. 509-510; Carolyn L. Connor, *The Color of the Ivory. Polychromy on Byzantine Ivories*, Princeton 1998, pp. 15, 44; Margaret Gibson, *The Liverpool Ivories. Late Antique and Medieval Ivory and Bone Carving in Liverpool Museum and the Walker Art Gallery,* London 1994, pp. 10-15; Bente Kiilerich, *Late Fourth-Century Classicism in the Plastic Arts. Studies in the So-Called Theodosian Renaissance*, Odense 1993, pp. 149-150; Alan Cameron, A New Late Antique Ivory: the Fauvel Panel, *American Journal of Archeology* 88, 1984, pp. 397-402; Herbert Beck, Peter C. Bol (eds.), *Spätantike und frühes Christentum.Ausstellung im Liebighaus Museum alter Plastik, Frankfurt am Main (16. Dezember 1983 bis 11. März 1984)*, Frankfurt am Main 1983, n. 167, pp. 563-565; Kathleen Shelton, The diptych of the young office holder, *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 25, 1982, pp. 132-171; William A. P. Childs, Diptych of Asklepios and Hygieia, in: Kurt Weitzmann (ed.), *Age of Spirituality. Late Antique and Early Christian Art, Third to Seventh Century*, New York 1979, n. 133, pp. 155-158; Danielle Gaborit-Chopin, *Ivoires du Moyen Age*, Fribourg 1978, p. 21; Wolfgang Volbach, *Elfenbeinarbeiten der Spätantike und des frühen Mittelalters*, 3rd ed., Mainz am Rhein 1976, p. 57; Alfred Maskell, *Ivories*, Clarendon 1966, pp. 104-106; Giuseppe Bovini, Luisa B. Ottolenghi, *Catalogo della mostra degli avori dell'alto medio evo*, 1st ed., Ravenna 1956, n. 19; Rupert Bruce-Mitford, *Liverpool Ivories: Special Exhibition*, London 1954, p. 11; Richard Delbrueck, *Die Consulardiptychen und verwandte Denkmäler*, Berlin 1929, n. 55, pp. 215-218; *Catalogue of an Exhibition of Carvings in Ivory*, London 1923, p. 24; Hans Graeven, Heidnische Diptychen, *Mitteilungen des deutschen archäologischen Instituts, Römische Abteilung*, 22, 1913, n. 1, pp. 220-243; William Maskell, *A Description of the Ivories, Ancient and Medieval, in the South Kensington Museum*, London 1872, pp. 165-167; Ferenc Pulszky, *Catalogue of the Fejéváry Ivories in the Museum of Joseph Meyer*, Liverpool 1856, pp. 25-26; Antonio Francesco Gori, *Thesaurus veterum diptychorum consularium et ecclesiasticorum*, Firenze 1759, pp. 62-64.

The ivory panels depict the god of medicine, Asklepios, and his daughter, the goddess of health Hygieia. They were the greatest healing figures of antiquity, who according to the legend were granted immortality by Zeus because of their skills. Their cult spread from Epidauros in Greece to Rome in 291 BC, when a temple at the Isola Tiberina was built for them. Asklepios is shown leaning on a staff entwined with a snake, with an ox skull beneath it. He is accompanied by his son Telesphoros, a symbol of recovery from illness, represented in his customary attire, a hooded mantle covering his head, reading from an open scroll in his hand. Hygieia, accompanied by Eros, leans on a tripod (attribute of Apollo), entwined with another snake, whom she offers an egg. The snakes indicate the abandoning of the weakness (shedding of the skin) and recovering of the vitality. Symbols of fertility and healing, such as a wine jug for libation with a snake coiled around it, a shallow votive bowl (*phiale*), a lidded basket (*cista mystica*) with a child letting a snake out of it, decorate the capitals of the pillars that frame the figures of the gods.

The craftsman/craftsmen who carved the reliefs placed the gods on plinths, as statues, moulded in a way customary during the Roman imperial period. The elaborate treatment of the well-proportioned figures, paired with the finely crafted details of the background point towards a wealthy commissioner and experienced workshop endowed with highly skilled workers.

The diptych can be viewed in the context of Macrobius' *Saturnalia*, a philosophical symposium written around 430, which explains the foundations of the cult of Asklepios and Hygieia as visible correlates of the Neo-Platonism of the day. Previous research has proposed that the models for the plaques may have been the cult statues in the temple in Rome, in operation from the 3rd century BC until the imperial prohibition banned the public offerings to non-Christian cults in 392 (monumentality of the figures, hint of perspective, accentuated plinths). The hypothesis that the object was directly linked to the sanctuary and the attempt to reassert the power of a cult, reserved for the inner circle of the Roman intelligentsia, and the appeal for the maintenance of the cult statues, which after 392 had to be paid for by private instead of public funds, remains dubious. The symbolism of healing and fertility may instead point to the fact that the diptych was commissioned on the occasion of an event significant in the life of a prominent family strongly tied to pre-Christian Roman tradition but was not (at least not ostensibly) tied to the public roles of its members.

The name of the commissioner of the object, painted in the *tabula ansata* at the top of the relief has long faded, forever obscuring their identity. Wax found in the interior of the plaques was also inscribed. Traces of red, green, orange, and gold pigments have been detected under microscope. We can imagine the two figures with red hair, draped in green, seen against a gold background.

The leaves appear on an Italian ink drawing dated to the period around 1500, showing sketches of about 20 statues, kept together in a further unidentified collection. For the first time the object was presented to the erudite public in the appendix of the fourth volume of the comprehensive catalogue of ivory carvings, compiled by Roman antiquary and painter Giovanni Battista Passeri (1694-1780) on the basis of notes by his recently deceased Florentine colleague Antonio Francesco Gori (1691-1757), who suggested that it once belonged to the Gaddi collection in Florence, unfortunately without providing any concrete evidence. It was bought in 1806 by Felice Caronni (1747-1815), an antiquary and engraver, for Count Mihály Wiczay of Hédervár (1756-1831). In his correspondence with the count Caronni unfortunately mentions neither the former owner of the diptych, nor how he acquired the piece. From the count's collection the diptych passed it to the valuable ivory collection of his friend Gábor Fejérváry (1780-1851) in Eperjes (Prešov), in 1834. The collection was inherited by nephew of Fejérváry, Ferenc Pulszky (1814-1897), who emigrated to London and sold it in 1855 in an auction in Liverpool. The new owner, Joseph Mayer (1803-1886), subsequently donated it to the city of Liverpool in 1867.



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1.13 BRACELET WITH BUST OF *DEA ROMA*

400-450

Diameter 6.3 cm

New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. n. 17.190.2053

Ioli Kalavrezou, *Byzantine Women and their World*, Cambridge 2003, pp. 251-252; Anne McClanan, *Representations of Early Byzantine Empresses: Image and Empire*, New York 2002, pp. 52, 57; Katharine Reynolds Brown et al. (ed.), *From Attila to Charlemagne: Arts of the Early Medieval Period in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, New York-New Haven 2000, pp. 63-64, 343; Katharine Reynolds Brown, *Migration Art, A.D. 300-800*, New York 1995, pp. 24-25; Katharine Reynolds Brown, Bracelet with Athena, in: Kurt Weitzmann (ed.), *Age of Spirituality. Late Antique and Early Christian Art, Third to Seventh Century*, New York 1979, n. 282, pp. 308-309.

The bracelet, formed by a hoop and a separate, movable tondo, was part of a hoard found around 1910 during restoration works at the base of the Capitoline Hill, in Piazza della Consolazione. It was the centre of commercial activity in Rome even after the transfer of the imperial capital to Constantinople. A Roman origin has been proposed for the entire treasure. It was probably buried during the sack of Rome by the Visigoths in 410, or by the Vandals in 455.

The decoration of the central tondo with the head of *Dea Roma* demonstrates the perseverance of the ancient deities in the Roman secular culture of the 5th century. In the case of domestic objects and jewellery, female personifications and goddesses offered many feminine ideals to which Roman women could aspire. The goddess wears earrings and a necklace, formed from teardrop pendants. Over her long, wavy hair she dons a four-cornered helmet with protrusions. Her eyes are directed towards the viewer. The plain surface of the projecting elements of the helmet and cheeks of the goddess contrast with the textured surface of the background, adding to the expressiveness of the figure. The only identifier of the figure is the crested helmet. In the older literature it was considered to be Athena, reflecting the wearer's virtues of wisdom and purity. However, due to the absence of Athena's main attribute, the shield, it can be reinterpreted as the personification of the city of Rome or *Dea Roma*, often assuming the visual representation of Athena. The female head is close to the imperial fibula from the treasure of Ténès in North Africa, with the refined representation of an empress uncertainly identified as Galla Placidia (392/393-450), who received the title of *augusta* in Rome in 421. Stylistic differences, however, are very strong. Some facial features of the goddess can be found on the circular pendant with Galla Placidia from the Getty group, but the expression of the former is much livelier.



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1.14 AN OIL LAMP WITH VENUS

Second half of the 5th century

Length 8.6 cm, width 6.3 cm, height 5.3 cm

Rome, Catacombe di Commodilla

Maria Stella Arena *et al.* (eds.), *Roma dall'antichità al medioevo. Archeologia e storia,* Roma 2001, n. I.4.50, pp. 188-189; Rita Marconi Cosentino, Laura Ricciardi, *Catacomba di Commodilla. Lucerne ed altri materiali dalle gallerie 1, 8, 13*, Roma 1993, pp. 80-82; Maria Teresa Paleani, *Le lucerne paleocristiane*, Roma 1993, p. 33.

The upper side of the oil lamp is decorated with concentric circles near the rim. In the centre, between two openings for wicks, image of *Venus Pudica* can be found, covering her nudity with one hand, and playing with her hair with the other. The relief is faded probably because of the wear of the matrix used for its creation. Marks at the bottom of the lamp depict stylized lyre and palm branch.

This type of iconography was especially wide-spread among red-clay pieces made in Roman Africa (lamps from Museo Nazionale Romano, Crypta Balbi and Antiquarium Romanum) but occasionally appeared in urban production of Rome. It was common among both Christians and their non-Christian neighbours. Most of the lamps have been discovered in the catacombs. Because of the parallels in iconography and in the marks between the pieces from the catacomb of Commodilla and from Crypta Balbi the same dating can be assumed: the second half of the 5th century.



© Marconi Cosentino and Ricciardi 1993, p. 81

1.15 THE STORM AT SEA

DIDO'S BANQUET

DIDO AND ENEAS TAKE REFUGE IN THE CAVE

COUNCIL OF THE GODS

Last quarter of the 5th century

Vergilius Romanus

Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, *Vat. Lat.* 3867, fol. 77r, 100v, 106r, 234v, 235r

Anthony Eastmond, *The Glory of Byzantium and Early Christendom*, London 2013, p. 64; David H. Wright, *The Roman Vergil and the origins of medieval book design*, London 2001; Umberto Utro, Il concilio degli dei, in: Angela Donati (ed.), *Romana Pictura*: *la pittura romana dalle origini all'età bizantina*, Milano 1998, n. 170, p. 322; Giovanni Morello (ed.), *Miniature. Le splendide illustrazioni dei codici dal IV al XV secolo*, Roma 1996, pp. 56-57; Katharine Bierbauer, Virgilio, Opere. "Vergilius Romanus", in: *I Goti*, Milano 1994, p. 269; Italo Lana, Carlo Bertelli (eds.), *Vergilius Romanus: codice vaticano latino 3867, conservato nella Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana*, Milano 1986; José Ruysschaert, *Lectures des illustrations du "Virgile Vatican" et du "Virgile Romain"*, Paris 1980; Malcolm Bell, The Vergilius Vaticanus: *Aeneid*, in: Kurt Weitzmann (ed.), *Age of Spirituality. Late Antique and Early Christian Art, Third to Seventh Century*, New York 1979, n. 204, pp. 227-228; Christoph Eggenberger, Die Miniaturen des Vergilius Romanus, Codex Vat. Lat. 3867, *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* LXX, 1977, pp. 58-90; Kurt Weitzmann, *Spätantike und frühchristliche Buchmalerei*, München 1977, pp. 52-59; Christoph Eggenberger, *Eine spätantike Vergil-Handschrift: die Miniaturen des Vergilius Romanus; Cod. Vat. Lat. 3867*, Basel 1973; Cornelia D. Oliver, *The illustrations of the Roman Vergil* (dissertation thesis), Catholic University of America, Washington, D. C. 1972; Erwin Rosenthal, *The Illuminations of the Vergilius Romanus (Cod. Vat. Lat. 3867). A Stylistic and Iconographical Analysis*, Zürich 1972; Andrea Carlini, Per riprendere lo studio del Codex Romanus di Virgilio (Vat. lat. 3867), in: *Atti del Convegno Internazionale sul Tema: Tardo Antico e Alto Medioevo, Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, Roma*, Roma 1968, pp. 329-348; Kurt Weitzmann, *Ancient Book Illumination*, Cambridge 1959, pp. 60-61.

The *Roman Vergil* attests to the continued importance of Virgil's work in the late 5th century Rome. The manuscript with its 410 folios is one of the largest to survive from that period. The parchment from which it was done was prepared with extraordinary skill and care, which starkly contrasts with the crude and ill-executed paintings. The faces of the figures are expressionless, their proportions distorted, their robes failing to copy the curves of the human figure, their gestures exaggerated. This is the reason why the work has been often dismissed as provincial (with Ravenna or Gaul as areas of origin), or as a study material with simplified illustrations. However, the size of the book and the expenses involved in its making must lead to the conclusion that it was created for display. Parchment and calligraphy are of extremely high quality and Rome is the only centre likely to have had possibilities to produce them at the time. We know very little about the wealthiest class in Rome in the second half of the 5th century and their art patronage. We can suppose, however, that the large land-owning families whose lands had not suffered plundering of invaders preserved their fortunes and were capable of commissioning such manuscript.

It is possible to conclude that the workshop that produced the *Roman Vergil* had high standards of manufacture and of calligraphy but did not employ a painter of comparable quality. In Rome at the end of the 5th century we cannot find trace of high-skilled painting.

The patron must have insisted on illuminations and a painter, who probably worked successfully on large panels and walls, was found. He was skilled in mixing pigments but had to improve his technique when working on miniatures. The latest research hypothesizes that its grand dimensions and emphasis on blocks of colour and clear composition, rather than details, signify that the manuscript was made to be viewed from afar.

The *Roman Vergil* may have been taken by Charlemagne (768-814) during his stay in Italy at the time of his coronation in year 800 and moved to his court in Aachen. Upon dispersion of his library after his death in 814 it seems to have gone to the royal abbey of Saint-Denis, where it remained until the 15th century. It was transported under unspecified circumstances to Vatican around year 1475, as attested by Vatican inventory.

In the first of the represented illuminations Aeneas is depicted during a storm on the sea, raising both hands towards the sky in desperation, while the wind gods in the upper part blow and the winged female personification of storm holds torches to allude to lightning. The stiff rows of Troyans in the ships may be clumsy rendering of an iconographically correct miniature model. The same can be said about the out-of-scale sea monsters and fish, which are part of usual decorative vocabulary and were probably added by the artist to fill out the bottom part of the composition.

In folio 100v, where Dido and Aeneas are shown banqueting, the artist has created a strictly symmetrical image. Aeneas raises his hand to speak, leaning on his left arm, where both drapery and anatomy are distorted. Reclining figures are accompanied by two attendants, one on each side of the miniature. Ribboned cushion and extraordinarily large table with fish are painted in front of the C-shaped couch. The unidentified Troyan to the right does not appear in the text and was added for compositional purposes. Two aspects common for the late 5th century can be found: differences in size of figures according to rank, and a spatial construction in layers that have no clear relation to each other.

In folio 106r, Dido and Aeneas have taken shelter in a cave during a thunderstorm, send by Juno to bring them together. The cave in which they hide has no depth and perspective. The figures of horses and guards, together with the trees around the cave, are positioned in such a way that they uniformly fill the picture field. Only different sizes of objects try to create an illusion of a landscape. This is a reminder of the decorative system of scattering elements on a neutral ground, common in late Roman mosaic pavements.

Folios 234v and 235r represent council of Olympian gods, sitting on *sellae* and richly dressed. Minerva, Mercury, Jupiter, Vulcan and Juno on the left illumination and Diana, Apollo, Neptun, Venus, and Mars on the right one are all identified by their attributes. The pyramidal composition is accentuated by the vault of the sky with symmetrically placed images of sun and moon. It is possible to assume that the model showed all gods in one group, a traditional composition for a council. This rearrangement had one expressive effect: all gods on the right page look directly at the viewer and their gaze makes the illumination a kind of devotional image. It is interesting to note that at the end of the 5th century Christian art was beginning to develop expressive devotional images. To treat images of pre-Christian gods this way must have been deliberate. It can be evidence that the patron belonged to the group of supporters of non-Christian cults in Rome.











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2 BIBLICAL WOMEN, SAINTS AND MARY

2.1 GOLD-GLASS FRAGMENT WITH ST. AGNES

4th century

Diameter 7.7 cm

Rome, Catacombe di Panfilo

Chiara Croci, Reused from Banquet to Grave: Gold Glass, a „Popular" Medium in Late Antiquity?, *Eikón Imago* 11, 2022, p. 52; Agnese Pergola, Riflessi del martirio femminile nell'icongorafia cristiana della tarda antichità, in: Andrea Bruciati, Massimo Osanna, Daniela Porro (eds.), *Eva vs Eva. La duplice valenza del femminile nell'immaginario occidentale*, Roma 2019, pp. 72-74; Eileen Rubery, From catacomb to sanctuary: the orant figure and the cults of the Mother of God and S. Agnes in Early Christian Rome, with special reference to gold glass, *Studia Patristica* 73, 2014, pp. 159-162; Chiara Croci, Portraiture on Early Christian Gold-Glass: Some Observations, in: Ivan Foletti, Alžbeta Filipová (eds.), *The Face of the Dead and the Early Christian World*, Roma-Brno 2013, p. 51; Fabrizio Bisconti, Vetri dorati ed darte monumentale, *Atti della Pontifica Accademia Romana di Archeologia. Rendiconti* 74, 2001-2002, pp. 185-188; Vincenzo Fiocchi Nicolai, Fabrizio Bisconti, Danilo Mazzoleni (eds.), *Le catacombe cristiane di Roma: origini, sviluppo, appariti decorativi, documentazione epigrafica*, Regensburg 1998, pp. 80-81; Charles R. Morey, *The Gold-Glass Collection of the Vatican Library, with Additional Catalogues of Other Gold-Glass Collections,* Città del Vaticano 1959, n. 221, p. 39.

Bottom of a gold-glass plate is currently still embedded in the plaster closing a *loculus* in the catacombs of martyr Pamphilius in Rome.

The picture field inside two concentric circles, separated by geometric design depicts highly venerated Roman martyr Agnes, standing frontally in a position of an orant, with her hands raised and her palms turned upwards. Her head is surrounded by a *nimbus*. Her hair is parted, waved around her face and gathered in two plaits on top of her head. She is dressed in a long embroidered girdled tunic and a mantle or veil falling in soft folds from her shoulders. The figure is flanked by two pillars, on which two doves are perched. On both sides of the saint's head a star and a *rotulus* appear. The woman is identified as Agnes by an inscription at the top of the picture field.

She, along with the Virgin and the disputable examples of Peregrina and one of the virginal students of Peter (cat. entries n. 4.5 and 4.8), is the only female saint figure to be depicted on Roman gold-glass. Recent research suggests that the visual analogy between the saint and the Mother of God on this media was intended to establish Agnes as her "double". She served as an example for the pious women, especially virgins, as she kept her faith and virginity even at the price of death. She is also the only saint on the gold-glasses to be represented with a *nimbus*, apart from Mary and Christ. The youthfulness of the saint in the example alludes to the story of her martyrdom and makes the glass bottom almost a portrait-like depiction.



© Bisconti 2001, p. 187

2.2 MEDALLION WITH MARTYRS FELICITY AND SILANUS

4th century

Diameter 3.7 cm

Vatican City, Musei Vaticani, inv. n. MV.60536.0.0

Umberto Utro, Medaglia devozionale di Felicita con raffigurazione di cinque oranti, in: Paolo Pasini (ed.), *387 d.c. Ambrogio e Agostino: le sorgenti dell'Europa*, Milano 2003, p. 389; Umberto Utro, Médaille de dévotion de Félicité, in: Giovanni Morello (ed.), *Pierre et Rome: vingt siècles d'élan créateur*, Milano 1997, pp. 111-112; Raffaele Garrucci, *Storia dell'arte cristiana nei primi otto secoli della chiesa* VI, Prato 1880, p. 125, pl. 480; Giovanni Battista de Rossi, Le medaglie di devozione dei primi sei o sette secoli della chiesa, *Bullettino di archeologia cristiana* 7, 1869, pp. 33-34, 37-45, 56-64.

The bronze devotional medallion, designed for wearing around the neck (see the perforation in the upper section, which was part of the object since its production according to previous scholarship) features two figures inside what appears as martyrial wreath on the obverse side: female orant, dressed in tunic and *palla* covering her hair, and to her right a bearded male figure dressed in tunic and *pallium* and performing a gesture of speech with his right hand. Among their heads, Christogram is visible. On the reverse side three male figures, dressed similarly to the one on the obverse are depicted, all performing speech gestures. The figure in the middle is youthful and beardless, while the other two, turning towards him, sport a beard. The medallion was discovered in the Roman catacomb dedicated to martyrs Felicity and Silanus. While all scholars agree that the figures on the obverse most probably represent the main martyrs of the catacomb, the figures on the reverse, traditionally interpreted as three of the remaining six sons of Felicity, based on the assessment of Giovanni Battista de Rossi, have been re-identified by Umberto Utro as young Christ flanked by apostles Peter and Paul. The object is generally dated to the 4th century, characterized by the flourishing of the cult of the depicted martyrs, cultivated by pope Damasus (366-384).



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2.3 GOLD-GLASS WITH ST. AGNES BETWEEN STS. PETER AND PAUL

Middle of the 4th century

Diameter 8.8 cm

Vatican City, Musei Vaticani, inv. n. MV.60757.0.0

Chiara Croci, Reused from Banquet to Grave: Gold Glass, a „Popular" Medium in Late Antiquity?, *Eikón Imago* 11, 2022, p. 52; Eileen Rubery, From catacomb to sanctuary: the orant figure and the cults of the Mother of God and S. Agnes in Early Christian Rome, with special reference to gold glass, *Studia Patristica* 73, 2014, pp. 159-162; Claudia Lega, Gold Glass with St. Agnes between Sts. Peter and Paul, in: Martina Bagnoli *et al.* (eds.), *Treasures of Heaven: Saints, Relics, and Devotion in Medieval Europe*, Cleveland-Baltimore-London 2010, n. 8, pp. 34-35; Angela Donati (ed.), *Pietro e Paolo. La storia, il culto, la memoria nei primi secoli*, Milano 2000, pp. 223-224; Lucia Faedo, Per una classificazione preliminare dei vetri dorati tardoromani, *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa*, Serie III, 8, 1978, pp. 1031, 1059-1060, 1063; Charles R. Morey, *The Gold-Glass Collection of the Vatican Library, with Additional Catalogues of Other Gold-Glass Collections*, Città del Vaticano 1959, n. 75, p. 18.

The bottom of a gold-glass glass plate or a drinking vessel has been cut evenly to a disc, with a rim-foot intact. Inside a square border, three saints are engraved into a gold leaf. They are identified by inscriptions outside of the border. Agnes stands in the middle in an orant posture. She wears a tunic with a collar and a row of buttons or gems in front, and *palla* fixed by a circular fibula. Her head is covered by a veil, made of thin material softly falling on her shoulders. On either side of her head there is an eight-petalled rosette. St. Peter and St. Paul flank the young martyr and turn towards her. They are beardless and dressed in tunic and *pallium*. The left hand of each is wrapped in the folds of his robe, while Peter's right hand gestures towards Agnes and Paul's holds a scroll. The square frame and the rosettes are similar to the ones on the glass bottom from the Metropolitan Museum depicting Peregrina between Peter and Paul, created possibly by the same workshop.

The image on this glass, in which the young martyr in central position is associated with the two patron saints of the Roman Church, confirms importance of her cult in Rome in the 4th century. According to the latest research the word ZESES (to live), directly relates to St. Agnes above it, and is possibly connected to her feast day, 21st of January. The gold-glass might have therefore been offered as a gift on this occasion.

The origin of the object is unclear, but it is supposed that it was created by a Roman workshop. Although the find spot is unknown, the distinctive breakage suggests that it comes from the catacombs, probably used to decorate the plaster sealing a grave site. It was passed to Musei Vaticani in 1999 from Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana. Based on the beardless appearance of Peter and Paul a date around the middle of the 4th century has been set.



© Musei Vaticani

2.4 LUNETTE WITH SUSANNA

Middle of the 4th century

Length 70 cm, height 57 cm

Rome, Catacomba di Santa Tecla, inv. n. 01

Fabrizio Bisconti, Giovanna Ferri, *La strada di Paolo: la via Ostiense dalle origini alla cristianizzazione*, Padova 2018, pp. 208-210; Giovanni Gentili, Frammento di lunetta di arcosolio con scena di martirio?, in: Gemma Sena Chiesa (ed.), *Costantino 313 d.C. L'editto di Milano e il tempo della tollleranza*, Milano 2012, p. 183; Lorenza de Maria, Lunetta di arcosolio con presunta scena di martirio, in: Serena Ensoli, Eugenio La Rocca (eds.), *Aurea Roma: dalla città pagana alla città cristiana*, Roma 2000, n. 298, pp. 600-601; Lorenza de Maria, Lunetta di arcosolio, in: Angela Donati (ed.), *Romana pictura: La pittura romana dalle origini all'età bizantina,* Milano 1998, p. 294; Fabrizio Bisconti, Dentro e intorno all'iconografia martiriale romana. Dall "vuoto figurativo" all'"immaginario devozionale", in: Mathijs Lambergits *et al.* (eds.), *Martyrium in multidisciplinary perspective. Memorial Louis Reekmans* (= Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Loveniensium 117), Leuven 1995, pp. 271-272; Fabrizio Bisconti, L'iconografia cristiana del IV secolo tra catechesi ed esegesi, in: *Esegesi e catechesi dei Padri (sec. IV-VII),* Roma 1994, pp. 271-272; Gabriella Santagata, Su due discusse figurazioni conservate nel cimitero di S. Tecla, *Esercizi* 3, 1980, pp. 7-14; Umberto Maria Fasola, La basilica sotterranea di S. Tecla e le regioni cimiteriali vicine*, Revue de l'Art Chrétien* 46, 1970, pp. 269-270; Antonio Ferrua, Recenti ritrovamenti di antichità paleocristiane in Roma e nei dintorni, in: *Atti del I Congresso nazionale di archeologia cristiana, Siracusa, 19-24. settembre 1950*, Roma 1952, pp. 149-150; Luciano de Bruyne, Adunanza del 10 gennaio 1946, *Revue de l'Art Chrétien* 22, 1946, pp. 260-261.

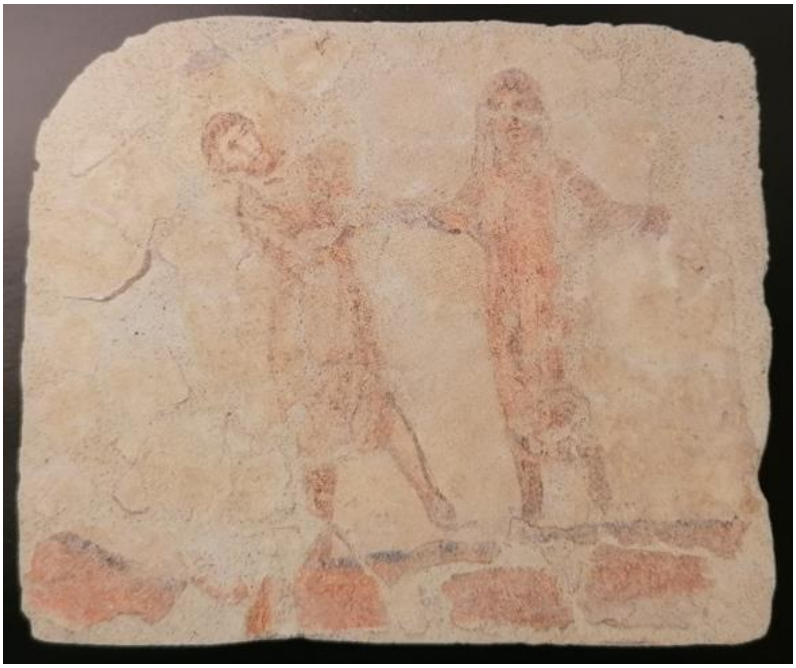
The fresco does not belong to the small hypogeal basilica in the catacombs of St. Thecla, where it is displayed. It has been originally discovered near Via Cristoforo Colombo in the 1940s during street development work in the area. The funerary context the artwork was part of can no longer be reconstructed. The only known information is that it decorated a lunette of an *arcosolium*, which did not survive the urban development of the city.

The scene represents a matron-orant in sumptuous attire, decorated by jewels, with her head covered by a veil, depicted on a neutral background. Man wearing a shorter tunic pulls her by her hand towards him. His actions seem to be violent, as his body movements express tension and he is pulling the female with both hands. The woman appears to be static and almost indifferent to his violence.

Since 1946 the scene has been interpreted as martyry of St. Thecla of Seleucia, follower of St. Paul, recorded in the apocryphal Acts of St. Paul. This interpretation does not stem from the location of the fresco in the catacombs of the saint, which is far from the original one, but from the closeness of the Basilica of San Paolo, which could have inspired a depiction of St. Thecla in the vicinity. More probable current interpretation speaks for identification of the woman as Susanna, lured by the elders. This hypothesis is supported by traces of plants around both figures, which could have formed a garden, and existence of a fragment of the right part or the same painting, where traces of another person can be detected. The other supporting argument is the fact that the fresco lacks any signs that would enable identification in the case that the depicted was indeed a martyr saint.

The attention of the artist has been turned mostly towards the woman, as evidenced by the careful rendering of the facial features and details of her attire, such as the jewels or the visibly transparent veil. This makes her the centre of the scene, attracting the eye of the beholder, despite her posture being static in comparison with the dynamic movements of the man. Her gaze, focused seemingly on something outside of the scene, may allude to her

connection with God. The attention given to the facial expressions of the figures and diversion from the anatomical accuracy of the bodies, as well as the relief-like character of the scene are the main arguments for dating of the fresco towards the middle of the 4th century.



© Donati 1998, p. 189

2.5 SUSANNA AND THE TWO OLD MEN

Middle of the 4th century

Dimensions unknown to author

Rome, Mausoleo di Santa Costanza (lost)

Jürgen J. Rasch, *Das Mausoleum der Constantina in Rom*, Mainz am Rhein 2007, pp. 239-250, 267-270, 273-280; Simone Piazza, I mosaici esistenti e perduti di *Santa Costanza*, in: Maria Andaloro (ed.), *L'orrizonte tardoantico e le nuove immagini 312-468,* Milano 2006, pp. 72-78; Simone Piazza, Santa Costanza, in: Maria Andaloro (ed.), *La pittura medievale a Roma 312-1431. Atlante: percorsi visivi* 1, Turnhout 2006, pp. 61-63; Fabrizio Bisconti, Monumenta picta: l'arte dei Costantinidi tra pittura e mosaico, in: Angela Donati, Giovanni Gentili (eds.), *Costantino il Grande. La civiltà antica al bivio tra Ociidente e Oriente,* Milano 2005, p. 178; David J. Stanley, Santa Costanza: history, archaeology, function, patronage and dating, *Arte medievale* 3, 2004, p. 135; Marco Parenti, Storie di scavi, dei restauri e delle modificazioni nel mausoleo di Costantina e nell'area, in: Carlo Pavolini, Marina Magnani Cianetti (eds.), *La basilica costantiniana di Sant'Agnese,* Milano 2004, pp. 64-73; Adele Anna Amadio, *I mosaici di S. Costanza: disegni, incisioni e documenti dal XV al XIX secolo,* Roma 1986, pp. 19-59, 67-72, 76, 81-83; Henri Stern, Les Mosaïques de l'Église de Sainte-Costance à Rome, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 12, 1958, p. 170; Karl Lehmann, The dome of heaven, *The Art Bulletin* 27, 1945, pp. 12-13; Elias Tormo y Monzó, *Os desenbos das antigualhas que vio Francisco d'Ollanda, pintor portugués (1539-1540)*, Madrid 1940, pp. 124-131; Hermann Egger (ed.), *Codex Escurialensis: ein Skizzenbuch aus der Werkstatt Domenico Ghirlandaios*, Wien 1906, p. 11; August Schmarsow, *Der Kuppelraum von Santa Costanza in Rom und der Lichtgaden altchristlicher Basiliken*, Leipzig 1904, pp. 2-7.

The lost mosaics in the dome of the mausoleum depicted 24 Biblical scenes, reconstructed with the help of comparison between contemporary sketches, which captured them. The scenes from the Old Testament were positioned in the lower register, with the scenes from the New Testament in the upper one. Many of them are not easy to identify, with the exception of the Moses drawing water from a rock, the sacrifice of Elijah, Susanna and the old men, Tobias with the fish, Rahab receiving the spies of Joshua, the offer to God made by Cain and Abel, Abraham making a sacrifice, and expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden from the Old Testament and several miraculous healing scenes from the New Testament. The depictions were separated vertically by an acanthus ornament stemming from large caryatid figures. The lower part of the dome was decorated with aquatic scenes with *putti* and animals. The drum below was encrusted with polychrome marbles with geometric and vegetal motifs. Based on the scarce mentions of marine motifs in the apsidal space of San Giovanni in Laterano and Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome in the 5th century (cat. entry n. 2.24), it is possible to assume that the marine scenes together with the Old and New Testament stories in the mausoleum alluded to the movement of the humanity towards eternal salvation. This message would be in sync with the funerary function of the building.

The scene of Susanna and the two old men has been captured by Francisco de Hollanda (1517-1585) between 1538 and 1540 (MBE, 28-I-20, fol. 27v) and by Pompeo Ugonio (1550-1614) at the end of the 16th century (BCAF, Ms. 161, fol. 1107). In line with the iconographic tradition that finds comparison in sarcophagi and catacomb paintings of the 3d and the 4th century, the young woman, veiled and dressed in gold-coloured tunic with two brownish *clavi*, is depicted standing, with open book. On the right, the old men are turning their back on her and leaving in haste and in the background, young Daniel, dressed in tunic and *pallium*, is sitting on a throne with high, rectangular backrest and condemning them. He is framed by architecture and raises his right hand in a gesture of speech. The dating of the scene is based on the open codex in the hands of Susanna, which appeared in this iconographic motif only

for a short period of time around the middle of the 4th century. This is also a confirmation of the fact that the dome mosaics belonged to the oldest decoration of the mausoleum.

The mosaics of the dome, already damaged by trickling water, were destroyed in 1620 during the Counter-Reformation, when they were substituted by paintings of the Life of St. Constantia from the initiative of the cardinal Fabrizio Verallo (1560-1624). The aim was to wipe out any memory and reminder of what were considered to be the pre-Christian origins of the sacred space, connected with the cult of Bacchus.



© Rasch and Arbeiter 2007, p. 242

2.6 DECEASED WOMAN AS ORANT

ADORATION OF THE MAGI

SUSANNA AND THE ELDERS IN FRONT OF DANIEL?

Second half of the 4th century

Dimensions unknown to author

Rome, Catacombe di Priscilla

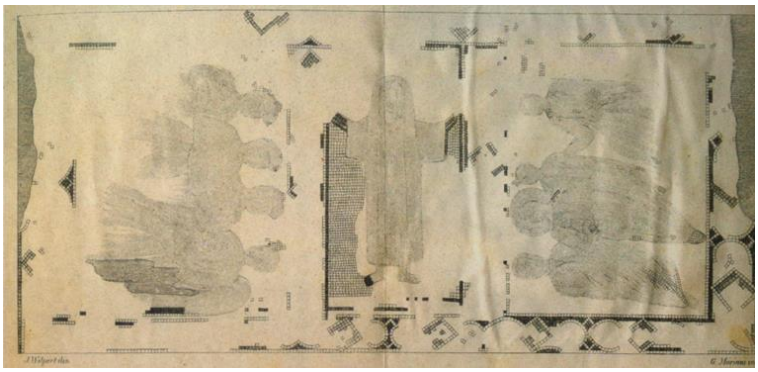
Raffaella Giuliani, I mosaici dell'arcosolio nel secondo piano del Cimitero di Priscilla, in: Maria Andaloro (ed.), *L'orrizonte tardoantico e le nuove immagini 312-468,* Milano 2006, pp. 184-187; Raffaella Giuliani, Un arcosolio mosaicato nel secondo piano del cimitero di Priscilla: il contributo delle analisi di fluorescenza da ultravioletti e da raggi X per la conoscenza di una decorazione musiva in avanzato stato di degrado, in: Rosa Maria Carra Bonacasa, Federico Guidobaldi (eds.), *Atti del IV colloquio dell'Associazione Italiana per lo Studio e la Conservazione del Mosaico AISCOM*, Ravenna 1997, pp. 791-806; Joseph Wilpert, Beiträge zur christlichen Archäologie IV, *Römische Quartalschrift für christliche Altertumskunde und Kirchengeschichte* 20, 1906, p. 23; Rodolfo Kanzler, Osservazioni sula tecnica dei musaici nei cimiteri cristiani, *Nuovo Bulletino di Archeologia Cristiana* 4, 1898, pp. 209-211; Joseph Wilpert, *Die gottgeweihten Jungfrauen in den ersten Jahrhunderten den Kirche. Nach den patristischen Quellen und den Grabdenkmälern dargestellt*, Freiburg 1892, pp. 91-92; Giovanni Battista de Rossi, Nuove scoperte nel cimitero di Priscilla per le escavazioni fatte nell'a. 1887, *Bulletino di Archeologia Cristiana* 4, n. 6, 1887, pp. 7-35.

The mosaics were discovered in an *arcosolium* in the western part of the main gallery on the second floor of the Priscilla catacombs in Rome during excavations, conducted by Giovanni Battista de Rossi in 1887. The decoration, covering the lunette, the vault, and the external part of the *arcosolium*, was heavily damaged at the time of its uncovering. Many of the tesserae (both those made of glass and of stone) were lost to the blows of a pickaxe of an unknown perpetrator. The mosaics on the vault were rather liberally reinterpreted in a drawing of Joseph Wilpert, created in 1887.

The burial must have belonged to a woman, who is depicted at the top part of the vault in an orant pose. Upon discovery de Rossi hypothesized that the deceased may have been a consecrated virgin. The details of the mosaic were further brought to light with the help of X-rays and UV-light in 1996, which uncovered polychrome preparatory sketches under the tesserae. They reflect the natural and graceful lines of the figure, with raised hands and head inclined to the right, the body captured in dynamic movement.

Apart from the female figure the only other mosaic, remaining legible despite the destruction, is the scene of Epiphany in the left part of the vault. The Virgin is depicted seated on a throne, holding on her knees nimbed Jesus. Magi, dressed in an oriental manner with short, flared robes and Phrygian caps, are approaching her, bringing gifts. The scene in the right part of the vault has been interpreted with caution in 1996 as a scene *pro tribunal* capturing Susanna, accused of indecency by two elders and brought in front of young Daniel to be judged, common motif in the late antique art of the catacombs. In the context of a female burial the scene could have pointed to an ideal of feminine virtue, further reinforced by the Marian motif on the other side of the vault.

An inscription, executed in the fresh mortar of the *mensa* of the *arcosolium*, confirms the gender of the deceased, specifying the day and the month of her burial, but giving no indication regarding the year. The dating to the send half of the 4th century is based on the choice of iconography and the unusual use of the mosaic technique in the environment of the catacombs, comparable only to some of the crypts in the catacombs of San Callisto and Domitilla from this period.









© Giuliani 2006, pp. 185-187

2.7 GOLD-GLASS WITH MARY BETWEEN ST. PETER AND ST. PAUL

Second half of the 4th century

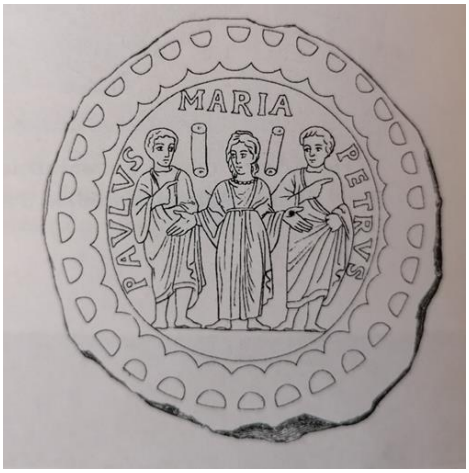
Dimensions unknown to author

Rome, Catacombe di Sant'Agnese (lost)

Nikodim Pavlovič Kondakov, *Iconografia della Madre di Dio* I., Roma 2014, p. 109; Umberto Utro, Raffigurazioni agiografiche sui vetri dorati paleocristiani, *Atti della Pontifica Accademia Romana di Archeologia. Rendiconti* 74, 2001-2002, p. 201; Raffaele Garrucci, *Vetri ornati di figure in oro, trovati nei cimiteri dei cristiani primitivi di Roma*, 2nd ed., Roma 1864, pp. 6-7.

Between the glass vessels, used by early Christian fraternities for drinking during communal dinners, a small number commemorates Mary as orant. Lower number of the exemplars is attributed to the period, in which most of the glasses were probably produced: the 4th century, when the cult of the Mother of God was at its beginning and only starting to spread.

On the bottom of the glass vessel, discovered in the catacombs of St. Agnes in Rome, now lost and documented only by a drawing of Raffaele Garrucci from the second half of the 19th century, Mary is depicted standing with open arms and with palms turned upwards in a gesture of prayer. Her identity is clarified by an inscription above her. On the sides of her head two *rotuli* with the Sacred Scripture can be seen. She is accompanied by young Apostles Peter and Paul, an iconographic motif not prior to the middle of the 4th century, when the depiction of the two main disciples of Christ became widespread in all artistic media in response to the acknowledgement of Christianity as the main religion of the Roman Empire and as a tool in the war against non-Christian cults. The Apostles, dressed in a toga, point out with their right hands to the left and above, indicating the heaven. This group was probably inspired by pendants and cameos depicting the Ascension of Christ. Mary, with her hair loosely gathered in a coiffure, is dressed in long tunic and *palla*, gathered at the waist by a belt. The garments are made from a luxurious fabric, as attested by the soft folds following curves of the body. The young woman is adorned by a necklace and her whole attire resembles that of a virgin from a noble family.



© Utro 2001, p. 204

2.8 GOLD-GLASS WITH ST. AGNES

Second half of the 4th century

Diameter 8.8 cm

Vatican City, Musei Vaticani, inv. n. MV.60774.0.0

Chiara Croci, Reused from Banquet to Grave: Gold Glass, a „Popular" Medium in Late Antiquity?, *Eikón Imago* 11, 2022, p. 52; Eileen Rubery, From catacomb to sanctuary: the orant figure and the cults of the Mother of God and S. Agnes in Early Christian Rome, with special reference to gold glass, *Studia Patristica* 73, 2014, pp. 159-162; Claudia Lega, Gold Glass with St. Agnes in Orans Posture, in: Martina Bagnoli *et al.* (eds.), *Treasures of Heaven: Saints, Relics, and Devotion in Medieval Europe*, Cleveland-Baltimore-London 2010, n. 9, p. 35; Umberto Utro, Vetro dorato con Agnese orante, in: Angela Donati, Giovanni Gentili (eds.), *Deomene. L'immagine dell'orante fra Oriente e Occidente*, Milano 2001, p. 214; Lucia Faedo, Per una classificazione preliminare dei vetri dorati tardoromani, *Annali della Scuola normale superiore di Pisa* 8, 1978, pp. 1032-1039; Franca Zanchi Roppo, *Vetri paleocristiani e figure d'oro conservati in Italia*, Bologna 1969, pp. 191-192; Charles R. Morey, *The Gold-Glass Collection of the Vatican Library, with Additional Catalogues of Other Gold-Glass Collections,* Città del Vaticano 1959, n. 82, p. 20; Hermann Vopel, *Die altchristlichen Goldgläser: ein Beitrag zur altchristlichen Kunst- und Kulturgeschichte* (= Archäologische Studien zum christlichen Altertum und Mittelalter 5), Freiburg 1899, pp. 9, 11, 57, 85; Raffaele Garrucci, *Vetri ornati di figure in oro, trovati nei cimiteri dei cristiani primitivi di Roma*, Roma 1858, p. 49.

The glass fragment came from the plaster closing a grave site in an unknown catacomb and was part of the collection of cardinal Gaspare Carpegna (1625-1714). It was bought by Pope Benedict XIV (1740-1758) in 1741 and later passed to Musei Vaticani by Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana in 1999.

The bottom of a cup or a bowl was cut evenly to a disc. The low rim foot remained intact. Like other works of this kind, the original object was probably a gift offered on the occasion of private or public celebration. The gold leaf, sandwiched between two layers of glass displays inside a double circle of triangles St. Agnes standing frontally in an orant pose, with her hair waved around her face and plated around the top of her head. She is represented as a noble woman, decorated by heavy necklace and earrings, wearing a veil fastened by circular brooch, which falls softly around her body. She is dressed in a tunic and a girdled mantle. Two trees are growing beside her, alluding to paradisiacal space or to the fate of the righteous believer, who, according to the Psalm 1.3: „*...is like a tree/ planted by streams of water/ that yields its fruit in its season,/ and its leaf does not wither.*" Inscription around the head of the figure (ACNE), is one of the incorrect versions of the name of St. Agnes.

The dating of the glass bottom to the second half of the 4th century is based on the rendering of the saint's figure and features and on the pattern of decoration.



© Musei Vaticani

2.9 RELIEF WITH ST. AGNES AS ORANT

357

Length 133 cm, height 94 cm, width 8 cm

Rome, Sant'Agnese fuori le mura

Agnese Pergola, Riflessi del martirio femminile nell'iconografia cristiana della tarda antichità, in: Andrea Bruciati, Massimo Osanna, Daniela Porro (eds.), *Eva vs Eva. La duplice valenza del femminile nell'immaginario occidentale*, Roma 2019, pp. 72-73; Chiara Croci, Portraiture on Early Christian Gold-Glass: Some Observations, in: Ivan Foletti, Alžbeta Filipová (eds.), *The Face of the Dead and the Early Christian World*, Roma-Brno 2013, pp. 51-53; Paola Porta, Arredo liturgico e culti martiriali in Italia tra IV e VI secolo: alcuni esempi, in: Adele Coscarella, Paola de Santis (eds.), *Martiri, santi, patroni: per una archeologia della devozione*. *Atti X Congresso Nazionale di Archeologia Cristiana (Università della Calabria, 15-18 settembre 2010)*, Arcavata di Rende 2012, pp. 119-126; Antonio di Tanna, Rilievo con S. Agnese orante, in: Serena Ensoli, Eugenio La Rocca (eds.), *Aurea Roma: dalla città pagana alla città cristiana*, Roma 2000, n. 299, p. 601; Amato Pietro Frutaz, *Il complesso monumentale di Sant'Agnese*, Roma 1976, p. 46; Carlo Cecchelli, *S. Agnese fuori le mura e S. Costanza,* Roma 1924, pp. 40-41.

The marble relief was created during the pontificate of Liberius I (352-366) around the year 357, on a barrier (*pluteus*) surrounding the place where martyr Agnes, killed during the persecutions of Diocletian (284-305), was buried. The most recent hypothesis suggests that it was part of the altar *mensa* above the grave of the young martyr. It is the first portrait of the saint known to us. Agnes is being depicted in low relief, in between fake chancel barriers. She is dressed in a luxurious long-sleeved tunic and a *dalmatica* with soft folds, her feet enclosed in *calceolli*. She is smiling and raising her hands in an act of prayer. The masterful execution emphasizes the youthfulness of the saint, her luscious hair, soft facial features, and expressive eyes.

The plaque was found during the excavations organized by cardinal Charles Lavigerie (1882-1892) in 1886 and is currently inserted into the wall next to the entrance staircase of the basilica Sant'Agnese fuori le mura in Rome.



© Author

2.10 ADAM AND EVE IN THE PARADISE FROM THE SARCOPHAGUS OF IUNIUS BASSUS

359

Length 243 cm, height 136 cm, width 142 cm (whole object)

Vatican City, Museo del Tesoro della Basilica di San Pietro, inv. n. CSPV 0226

Daniela Křižanová, *Sarkofág Junia Bassa* (bachelor thesis), Seminář dějin umění, FF MU, Brno 2016; Dario Rezza, *Un neofita va in paradiso: il sarcofago di Giunio Basso*, Città del Vaticano 2010; Sharon Marie Salvadori, *Per feminam mors, per feminam vita. Images of Women in the Early Christian Funerary Art of Rome* (dissertation thesis), Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, New York 2002, pp. 168-178; Antonio di Tanna, Sarcofago di Giunio Basso, in: Serena Ensoli, Eugenio La Rocca (eds.), *Aurea Roma. Dalla città pagana alla città cristiana*, Roma 2000, n. 307, pp. 605-606; Elizabeth Struthers-Malbon, *The Iconography of the Sarcophagus of Junius Bassus*, Princeton 1990; Arnaldo Venditti, Lettura stilistica di un monumento paleocristiano. Il sarcofago del prefetto Giunio Basso, *Bollettino di storia dell'arte* 82*,* 1989, pp. 35-42; Erich Dinkler, Sarcophagus of Junius Bassus, in: Kurt Weitzmann (ed.), *Age of Spirituality. Late Antique and Early Christian Art, Third to Seventh Century*, New York 1979, n. 386, pp. 427-429; Nikolaus Himmelmann, *Typologische Untersuchungen an römischen Sarkophagreliefs des 3. und 4. Jahrhunderts n. Chr.,* Mainz am Rhein 1973, pp. 13-28; Johannes A. Gaertner, Zur Deutung des Junius-Bassus-Sarkophages, *Jahrbuch des Deutchen Archäologischen Instituts* 83, 1968, pp. 240-264; Friedrich Wilhelm Deichmann, *Repertorium der christlich-antiken Sarkophage* I, Wiesbaden 1967, pp. 279-282; Karl Schefold, Altchristliche Bilderzyklen: Bassussarkophag und Santa Maria Maggiore*, Revue d'Archeologie Chrétienne* 16, 1939, pp. 221-298; Friedrich Gerke, *Der Sarkophag des Iunius Bassus,* Berlin 1936; Anton de Waal, *Der Sarkophag des Junius Bassus in den Grotten von St. Peter*, Roma 1900; Hartmann Grisar, Der Sarkofag des Junius Bassus, *Römische Quartalschrift für christliche Altertumskunde und Kirchengeschichte* 10, 1896, pp. 313-334.

The sarcophagus was found around the year 1597 under the so-called *confessio*, the most sacred part of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. Additional fragments with an inscription were unearthed in 1940-1943 during the excavations under the building. The inscription on the upper edge of the sarcophagus reads: "*Junius Bassus, vir clarissimus, forty-two years and two months old, performing the duties of city prefect, went newly baptized to God on the 25th of August during the consulate of Eusebius and Hypatius*" (= in the year A.D. 359).

The object is a masterpiece of the classicising Christian art of the 4th century and can be included into the group of early Christian sarcophagi depicting the Passion of Christ and the martyrium of the Apostles Peter and Paul. The general intention seems to be to manifest the belief in God and resurrection through baptism. The figures, sculpted in high relief, display very detailed rendering of the draperies. The intense pictorial effect is obtained due to the skilful use of round drill in carving of the pupils, hairstyles, beards, and architectural elements.

The depiction of Adam and Eve in the Paradise from the sarcophagus of Iunius Bassus constitutes one of the most famous images of the Fall to have survived from late antique Rome. Eve's hair is simultaneously left to fall on her shoulders and stylishly bound, resembling to a certain degree Capitoline Venus. This could have been interpreted by Christians in Rome in the more traditional way as a positive affirmation of female sexuality and fertility, connected to marriage, or in a Tertullian spirit as an ostentatious display of Eve's and by extension female carnal and sinful nature. The bodies of the two progenitors are shown as mirror images: equal in height, with the same leg stance, the same turn of the head, the same gesture of both hands over the genitals. As the covered genitals remain the main reference to sexuality, at least in this gesture Adam and Eve are equal and the sexuality is not represented as an entirely female attribute. The most common early Christian iconographic

layout of the scene of the Fall was chosen for the sarcophagus, with Adam and Eve covering their nudity and standing on both sides of the Tree of Knowledge, inhabited by a serpent curled around the trunk. One specific is the presence of a bundle of wheat and a sheep, representing the male and female labour and combining in a single scene the moment of temptation, the sin, and the punishment from God. The primordial sin, a sign of disobedience, was interpreted as the moment which linked humanity with death, an event that can be nullified only by a sign of obedience embodied by baptism, leading to salvation of the soul after death.





© Rezza 2010, p. 9, 12-13

2.11 SARCOPHAGUS SCENE WITH THE DECEASED POSING AS TABITHA

Last third of the 4th century

Height 78 cm, length 200 cm, width 105 cm

Saint-Maximin-la-Sainte-Baume, Sainte-Marie-Madeleine, west wall of the crypt

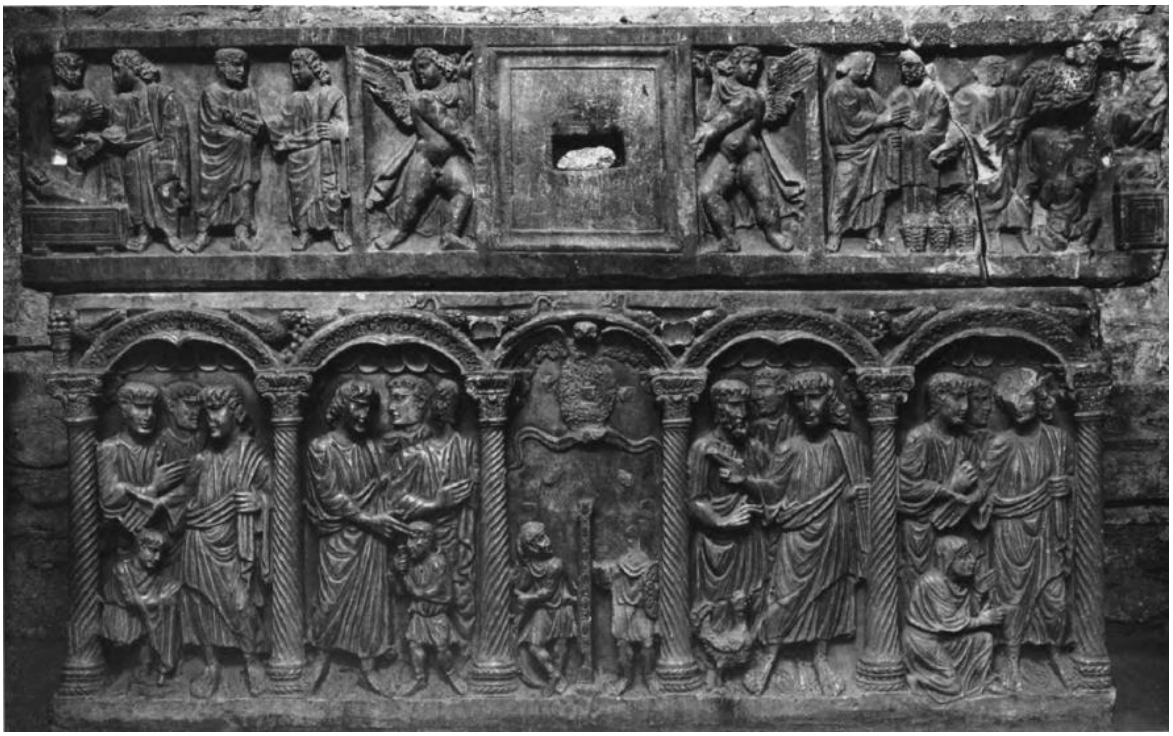
Christine Schenk, *Crispina and Her Sisters. Women and Authority in Early Christianity*, Minneapolis 2017, pp. 316, 319-320; Brigitte Christern-Briesenick, Giuseppe Bovini, Hugo Brandenburg, *Repertorium der christlich-antiken Sarkophage* III. Frankreich, Algerien, Tunesien, Mainz am Rhein 2003, pp. 233-235, pl. 119.1, 121.1-2; Rainer Warland, Spätantike Repräsentation im biblischen Paradigma. Beobachtungen zu Sarkophagen in Verona, Saint-Maximin, Barletta und Perugia, in: Guntram Koch (ed.), *Akten des Symposiums „Frühchristiliche Sarkophage": Marburg, 30.6. – 4.7.1999*, Mainz am Rhein 2002, pp. 247-253; Michel Fixot, *La crypte de Saint-Maximin-La-Sainte-Baume: Basilique Sainte-Marie-Madeleine*, Aix-En-Provence 2001, pp. 7-16; Françoise Monfrin, La guérison du serviteur (Jn 4, 43-54). Une nouvelle interprétation des sarcophages de Bethesda, *Mélanges de l'Ecole française de Rome. Antiquité* 97, n. 2, 1985, p. 985; Victor Saxer, La crypte et les sarcophages de Saint-Maximin dans la littérature latine du Moyen Âge, *Provence historique* 5, 1955, pp. 224-225; Friedrich Gerke, Das heilige Antlitz: Köpfe altchristlicher Plastik, Berlin 1940, p. 45; Catullo Mercurelli, I monumenti cristiani alla Mostra Augustea della romanità, *Rivista di archeologia cristiana* 15, 1938, p. 101-102; Robert Doré, Saint-Maximin, in: *Session. Congrès archéologique de France*, Paris 1932, pp. 215-217; Joseph Wilpert, *I sarcophagi cristiani antichi* I, Roma 1929, p. 145; Edmond Le Blant, Les sarcophages chrétiens de la Gaule, Paris 1886, pp. 152-155; Louis Rostan, *Monuments iconographiques de l'église de Saint-Maximin (Var). Monuments et sarcophages de la crypte*, Chalon-sur-Saône 1862, p. 19.

The crypt of the basilica houses four late antique sarcophagi with figural decoration, one of which was believed to have housed the remains of Mary Magdalene and the rest the remains of her companions. The object described below was traditionally linked with St. Sidonius, blind-born man healed by Christ, and companion of Mary Magdalene. Sources report the discovery of the relics in 1279 in a small underground structure, possibly a hypogeum. Two sarcophagi are mentioned, one made of marble, the other of alabaster. In 1295, the massive Gothic church of Sainte-Marie-Madeleine was built over the small structure, which was incorporated into it as a crypt. In 1993, an early Christian church with a baptistery was discovered south of the Gothic church. It is questionable whether the sarcophagi had been in the hypogeum-turned-crypt since late antiquity. They represent a striking selection of pieces of very high quality, which may be related to the construction of the church in the 13th century by Charles II of Anjou, Comte de Provence (1285-1309), and his energetic promotion of the cult of Mary Magdalene. All four sarcophagi are attested in the crypt since the 17th century.

The marble sarcophagus in question has a front divided into five fields by diagonally fluted columns and arcades supported by composite capitals. The arches are decorated by vegetal and zoomorphic motifs, such as dolphins flanking a shell and birds pecking at a basket of fruit. The scenes, executed in high-quality drilled relief, allowing for detailed and voluminous rendering of the faces, hair, draperies, and creation of illusion of space, centre mostly around Christ's healing miracles, namely healing of the paralytic (here represented on the far left by a scene preceding the healing itself, with the Roman *centurio* kneeling in front of youthful-looking Christ in the presence of an interceding Apostle, outstretching his hands towards him and begging for the healing of his servant); healing of the blind, again in the presence of an Apostle making an intercessory gesture with his outstretched right hand; Canaanite woman

kneeling in front of Christ and touching his *palla* with her right hand, begging him to heal her possessed daughter on the far right. Some researchers suggest that the juxtaposition of the *centurio* and the Canaanite woman, present in other sarcophagi in Gaul, can be explained by the fact that they are representations of a deceased couple, owners of the sarcophagus, posing as Biblical figures. In the central field two soldiers flank a victorious Cross, looking at it and raising hand in salute respectively. Above the Cross an eagle with stretched wings appears, partly obscured by a wreath it holds in its beak. The combination of the *crux invicta* iconography with the healing miracles of Christ is unusual. In the second field from the right the presence of Christ, one Apostle and a rooster alludes to the announcement of the denial of Peter.

On the left narrow side of the sarcophagus the scene of the raising of Tabitha unfolds. Woman dressed in tunic and *palla*, with her head covered by a cap, half-sits on a *kline* couch in a space separated by three curtains kept open by knots. The illusion of an interior setting is further reinforced by an arch entryway on the opposite side of the scene, resting on a fluted pillar. Next to it, a hydraulic organ, an ancient symbol of mourning, can be seen. Peter, standing at the foot of the *kline*, dressed in tunic, *pallium* and sandals, outstretches his right hand to grasp the hand of Tabitha in a gesture of healing. The ailing woman is assisted by two female members of her household, standing behind the couch and witnessing the miracle, dressed in tunics, with their heads covered by *palla*. One of them points at Tabitha in awe. Three small children, one of them a naked infant, kneel at the bed and Tabitha is depicted gently stroking the head of the tallest one. On the right narrow side of the sarcophagus a female orant can be seen between two trees, dressed in a long-sleeved tunic, wide-sleeved *dalmatica* and *palla*, covering her head, with a *capsa* for holding scrolls at her feet. It is possible that both Tabitha and the orant represent the woman buried in the sarcophagus, depicted in the Tabitha scene together with her children. Were she also represented as the Canaanite woman together with her husband, disguised as the *centurio*, both Biblical figures praised by Jesus for their faith and begging for the help of their dependents, the representation they chose on the sarcophagus may laud their devotion, but also serve as an intercessory tool for obtaining salvation for themselves and health for their children. The *crux invicta* in the centre of the front side of the sarcophagus, alluding to the victory of Christ over sin and death, would amplify the message. Moreover, the *capsa* at the feet of the orant would add erudition to the admirable qualities the woman from the pair displayed as wife and mother.







© Christern-Briesenick *et al.* 2003, pl. 119.1, 121.1-2

2.12 GOLD-GLASS FRAGMENT WITH ADAM AND EVE

Third quarter of the 4th century

Height 8.2 cm, length 5.7 cm

Vatican City, Musei Vaticani, inv. n. MV.60712.0.0

Franca Zanchi Roppo, *Vetri paleocristiani e figure d'oro conservati in Italia*, Bologna 1969, pp. 150-151; Charles R. Morey, *The Gold-Glass Collection of the Vatican Library, with Additional Catalogues of Other Gold-Glass Collections,* Città del Vaticano 1959, n. 47, p. 12; Hermann Vopel, *Die altchristlichen Goldgläser: ein Beitrag zur Altchristlichen Kunst- und Kulturgeschichte* (= Archäologische Studien zum christlichen Altertum und Mittelalter 5), Freiburg 1899, n. 169.

The small bit of a curved periphery indicates that the fragment was part of a bowl. The bottom of the glass vessel has been broken crudely from the rest of the object, which resulted in a highly uneven edge. Several fragments from the edge are now missing, including sections with inscription. The cover layer of glass is lost, exposing the incised gold leaf.

The decoration is inscribed in two concentric circles. In the inner circle Adam and Eve are shown naked and trying to cover their nudity with one hand, while raising the other towards each other. They are standing on the sides of the Tree of Knowledge, around whose trunk a serpent holding an apple in his jaws is wrapped. It is turned towards Eve, alluding to her as the origin of the sin. Eve is adorned by a necklace and bracelets. Her hair is waved around her face, with a plait encircling her head like a crown. Above the scene, inside the bigger circle, an inscription reading „*Worthy among your friends! Drink that you may live.*" can be seen.

The fragment has passed to the Musei Vaticani from Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana in 1999. It was found in an unidentified Roman catacomb. In the 17th century, it was part of the collection of cardinal Gaspare di Carpegna (1625-1714). It was acquired in 1741 by Pope Benedict XIV (1740-1758) and placed in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana. On the basis of similarity with the Adam and Eve scene from the catacombs of Domitilla, the glass base is dated to the third quarter of the 4th century.



© Musei Vaticani

2.13 JESUS AND SAMARITAN WOMAN AT THE WELL

Third quarter of the 4th century

Dimensions unknown to author

Rome, Ipogeo di Via Dino Compagni, Cubiculo di Sansone

Fabrizio Bisconti, Il cubiculo di Sansone nell'ipogeo di via Dino Compagni alla luce dei recenti interventi di restauro, in: *idem* (ed.), *Le pitture delle catacombe romane. Restauri e interpretazioni*, Todi 2011, pp. 189-208; Barbara Mazzaei, I dipinti del cubicolo F detto di Sansone nell'ipogeo di via Dino Compagni, in: Maria Andaloro (ed.), *L'orrizonte tardoantico e le nuove immagini 312-468,* Milano 2006, pp. 154-157; Fabrizio Bisconti, Barbara Mazzei, Il cubicolo di Sansone nell'ipogeo di via Dino Compagni alla luce dei recenti interventi di restauro, *Mitteilungen zur christlichen Archäologie* 5, 1999, pp. 45-73; Myla Perraymond, Il ciclo di Sansone (GD. 14, 15, 16): genesi e diffusione di un tema iconografico, in: Federico Guidobaldi, Aldo Nestori (eds.), *Domum tuam dilexi. Miscellanea in onore di Ado Nestori,* Città del Vaticano 1998, pp. 643-667; Daniela Goffredo, Le cosidette 'scene di ingresso' nell'arte funeraria cristiana, *Rivista di archeologia cristiana* 74, 1998, pp. 197-236; John F. Kenfield, The Alexandrian Samson: observations on the new catacomb on the via Latina, *Rivista di archeologia cristiana* 51, 1975, pp. 179-192; Antonio Ferrua, *Le pitture della nuova catacomba di via Latina*, Città del Vaticano 1960, pp. 65-66.

The elegant sepulchral chamber, discovered in 1956, is positioned next to the central vestibule of the hypogeum on Via Dino Compagni. According to most of the scholars, it was built to hold the remains of members of a rich family of freedmen, emulating the senatorial representation.

The elliptical room is separated into six sectors by semicolons with Corinthian capitals, imitating rare, coloured marbles, so that it resembles a family funerary chapel. Above the capitals runs a cornice whose role was to support the vaulted ceiling of the chamber, which was lost due to a landslide. The west wall is occupied by one of the three *arcosolia* present in the room. The upper outer part of the *arcosolium*, framed by two of the semicolons, is decorated on the left side by a garland of red flowers and a bird, pecking three red apples, and on the right side by a flying bird between two schematic spirals. Below them, separated by red lines, just above the opening of the *arcosolium*, a nude putto is depicted pulling a bird with a cord of flowers, accompanied by another bird and a flower basket. The lower part of the wall shows two oxen drinking from a fountain. The vault is divided into squares with inserted highly stylized flowers. In the centre inside a crown of flaming flowers a female bust can be seen, from which vegetal scrolls flourish.

In the lunette a female figure is captured. It is dressed in a rather short tunic with dark *clavi*, cinched below the breasts, with wide sleeves lined by black stripes. The hairstyle of the woman is simple, with the hair gathered at the nape in what appears to be a loose bun. However, she is adorned lavishly with earrings and a necklace. The woman is holding in her left hand a rope to which an amphora is attached, and she is pointing at the water well at the centre of the scene with her right hand. On the other side of the well, above which the mechanism for drawing of the water is depicted in great detail, a young male figure is standing. It is dressed in tunic with dark *clavi* and *pallium* and is captured performing a gesture of speech. The scene has been identified as the meeting of Jesus with the Samaritan woman at the well of Jacob, hinting on the salvation through faith.

The painting was carried out in the fresco technique, with the use of natural pigments such as terre verte, hematite, red ochre, and carbon black without a binding agent. The floral and

zoomorphic motifs refer to the Hellenistic funerary monuments and Vergilian bucolic tradition, but at the same time display paradisiac overtones, while the selected biblical scenes are rare in the art of the catacombs and are clearly inspired by the decoration of the contemporary Roman churches, with elements spreading through illuminated *codices*. Features, typical for the late antique Roman painting are the expressive, perfectly oval faces of the figures, large dark eyes, fixated pupils, and short hair of the men, perfectly framing their head. They lead to the dating of the frescoes to the last decade of the use of the hypogeum around the year 370. The standing Christ in the scene with Samaritan woman is well attested on the funerary reliefs of the second half of the 4th century, where he replaces the sitting Christ represented as philosopher or teacher.



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2.14 FRAGMENT OF A SARCOPHAGUS LID WITH NATIVITY AND ADORATION OF THE MAGI

370-400

Length 70 cm, height 21 cm (whole lid)

Vatican City, Musei Vaticani, Museo Pio Cristiano, inv. n. MV.31486.3.1

Agneta Ahlqvist, Maria, madre di Cristo, e altre madri presenti nell'arte funeraria paleocristiana, *Acta ad archaeologiam et artium historiam pertinentia* 21, 2008, pp. 11-12, 15; Friedrich Wilhelm Deichmann, *Repertorium der christlich-antiken Sarkophage* I, Wiesbaden 1967, n. 28, pp. 24-26; Gerhardus Albertus Wellen, *Theotokos: eine ikonographische Abhandlung über das Gottesmutterbild in frühchristlicher Zeit*, Utrecht 1961, pp. 23-24; Gilberte Vezin, *L'adoration et le cycle des Mages dans l'art chrétien primitif: étude des influences orientales et grecques sur l'art chrétien*, Paris 1950, pp. 41, 45, 60, 85; Lucien de Bruyne, Frammento di sarcofago con resti di una "Tradito Legis" scoperto a S. Sebastiano sulla Via Appia, *Rivista di archeologia cristiana* 16, 1939, p. 340; Marion Lawrence, Columnar sarcophagi in the Latin west : ateliers, chronology, style, *The art bulletin* 14, 1932, pp. 111, 131, 144, 158, 175; Joseph Wilpert, *I sarcophagi cristiani antichi* I/2, Roma 1929, pp. 263, 283, 285; Orazio Marucchi, *I monumenti del Museo Cristiano Pio Lateranense*, Milano 1910, p. 26; Raffaele Garrucci, *Storia dell'arte cristiana nei primi otto secoli della chiesa* V, Prato 1878, pp. 5, 58.

The marble sarcophagus, from which only six fragments from the front wall and a fragment from the lid were preserved, displays scenes of Christ's entry into Jerusalem, *Traditio legis,* and Christ in front of Pilate, with a scene of Nativity of Christ on the lid fragment. In this scene the three shepherds are substituted with the Magi, not at all a rare occurrence in the case of funerary objects. The scene is an abbreviation of the motives of Nativity and Adoration of the Magi, in which Mary is given a position of a spectator, sitting on a rock between two trees on the far right of the composition, typical for the 4th century. Next to her and what appears to be a young shepherd dressed in short tunic and holding a staff, is depicted infant Christ, swaddled in a wicker basket under a tiled roof, supervised according to the tradition by ox and donkey. On the left, three Magi, dressed in Phrygian caps and short tunics approach him, bringing gifts. According to Antonio Bosio (c. 1576-1629), whose testimony from the 16th century survived, the lid was also decorated by scenes related to the story of three youths in the fiery furnace. The scenes are rendered in high relief, with soft modelling of the draperies and slender figures.

The depiction of the scenes of Nativity and Adoration of the Magi is one of the oldest representations of the Virgin with Child in the early Christian iconographic repertoire. The stories of the infancy of Jesus, appearing from the 4th century in the catacombs and on sarcophagi, followed suit of the representations of the deceased women by scenes focusing on their motherhood, fairly common in the antique Roman, as well as early Christian communities. The representation of the Virgin was not yet codified and varied, but in this case, she is dressed in a tunic with *palla*, positioned in such a way that it covers also her head. The image of Mary therefore closely follows those of all the women in the late Roman world. In sync with scenes demonstrating the strength of faith (Three youths in a fiery furnace) and alluding to the salvation of the soul of the believers (Passion of Christ the Saviour), Adoration of the Magi and the Nativity, combined here to create an inseparable whole, refer possibly to the maternity of the person buried within the sarcophagus.

The sarcophagus was found in the basilica of St. Peter in Rome. During the life of Antonio Bosio it was placed in the garden of the church of Santa Marta. At the time it was still almost

intact and was missing only the lid. At the end of the 19th century, it was embedded in the wall of the Tempietto dei leoni of Villa Borghese, already in four fragments, which were moved to the Lateran in 1921. One additional fragment was discovered in Vigna Santambrogio near Via delle Sette Chiese in 1924 and transferred to the Lateran two years later. The fragment of the lid was kept in the basilica of St. Peter until the year 1854, when it was moved to the Lateran as well.



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2.15 SARCOPHAGUS FRAGMENT WITH THE RESURRECTION OF TABITHA

Last quarter of the 4th century

Height 58 cm, length 52 cm

Arles, Musée départemental Arles antique, inv. n. FAN.1992.2502

Christine Schenk, *Crispina and Her Sisters. Women and Authority in Early Christianity*, Minneapolis 2017, pp. 315, 318-319; Brigitte Christern-Briesenick, Giuseppe Bovini, Hugo Brandenburg, *Repertorium der christlich-antiken Sarkophage* III. Frankreich, Algerien, Tunesien, Mainz am Rhein 2003, p. 52, pl. 25.2; Françoise Monfrin, La guérison du serviteur (Jn 4, 43-54). Une nouvelle interprétation des sarcophages de Bethesda, *Mélanges de l'Ecole française de Rome. Antiquité* 97, n. 2, 1985, p. 985; Fernand Benoit, *Sarcophages paléochrétiens d'Arles et de Marseille*, Paris 1954, n. 14; Marion Lawrence, Columnar sarcophagi in the Latin West: ateliers, chronology, style, *The Art Bulletin* 14, n. 2, 1932, p. 122; Joseph Wilpert, *I sarcophagi cristiani antichi* I, Roma 1929, p. 162; Edmond Le Blant, *Étude sur les sacrophages chrétiens antiques de la ville d' Arles*, Paris 1878, n. 4, pp. 4-5.

The right bottom corner fragment of a Carrara marble sarcophagus is decorated by a slightly weathered relief at the front. The sculptural decoration is divided by long narrow columns with composite capitals, supporting architraves with vegetal ornamental motif, into separate scenes. Only one of them survives intact. The relief is artfully executed by deep drilling, which allowed the craftsmen working of the sarcophagus to create an illusion of space and give the figures and objects in the scene prominence and illusion of softness and fullness of volumes by intricate play of light and shadows. Even though the folds of the garments are angular at the edges, they still adhere to the limbs of the figures and fall elegantly. The coiffures, beards and facial features of the slender figures are shaped by series of delicate drill holes and lines. The skill demonstrated in creation of the relief suggests that the craftsmen were part of a larger workshop experienced in supplying a high-end market for well-off customers. The use of Carrara marble points towards a metropolitan workshop, possibly Roman one.

The only preserved scene represents an episode from the *Acts of Apostles*, namely the Raising of Tabitha. Tabitha is shown half raised from her bed covered in cloth, dressed in tunic, *palla* and a cap that partially covers her wavy hair. Apostle Peter stands at the foot of the bed on the left, dressed in a tunic, *pallium* and sandals. He is grasping the right wrist of Tabitha with both hands, performing the healing miracle. The resurrected woman is surrounded by the members of her household. Behind her bed, the upper bodies of two women are visible, dressed in tunics and with their *pallas* drawn over their heads, both looking towards Peter. In front of the bed, two small female figures, dressed similarly to the other ones, are shown kneeling, their hands outstretched in a plea for help. According to the latest research, it was the owner of the sarcophagus who had herself represented as the resurrected Tabitha. By choosing this scene, she would have been able both to apply for intercession from the apostle after death and represent herself as a powerful member of her community, recognised for her faith and for her care of other women in need just like Tabitha was.

The fragment was drawn by the antiquarian Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc (1580-1637) in the late antique necropolis next to the St.-Honorat-des-Alyscamps in Arles at the beginning of

the 17th century. It must have been transferred in the museum sometime before the year 1878, when it was published by Edmond Le Blant.



© Musée départemental Arles antique, Rémi Bénali

2.16 SARCOPHAGUS SCENE WITH THE DECEASED POSING AS THECLA

End of the 4th century

Height 59 cm, length 213 cm, width 34 cm (whole object)

Marseilles, Abbaye Saint-Victor, crypt, west wall of the Chapelle Notre-Dame-de-Confession, inv. n. Borély 37

Christine Schenk, *Crispina and Her Sisters. Women and Authority in Early Christianity*, Minneapolis 2017, pp. 317-318; Vassiliki Gaggadis-Robin, La sculpture funéraire paléochrétienne à Marseille: les sarcophages, in: Michel Fixot, Jean-Pierre Pelletier (eds.), *Saint Victor de Marseille. Études archéologiques et historiques. Actes du colloque Saint-Victor Marseille, 18-20 novembre 2004*, Turnhout 2009, pp. 73-74; Brigitte Christern-Briesenick, Giuseppe Bovini, Hugo Brandenburg, *Repertorium der christlich-antiken Sarkophage* III. Frankreich, Algerien, Tunesien, Mainz am Rhein 2003, pp. 147-148, pl. 75.1-3; Henri Lavagne, Les deux sarcophages paléochrétiens de la chapelle de La Madeleine à Bédoin (Vaucluse), Cahiers Archéologiques 41, 1993, pp. 19-22; Geneviève Drocourt-Dubreuil, *Saint-Victor de Marseille: art funéraire et prière des morts aux temps paléochrétiens (IVe -Ve siècles)*, Marseilles 1989, pp. 26-34; Paola Borraccino, *I sarcofagi paleocristiani di Marsiglia,* Bologna 1973, pp. 45-50; Paolo Brezzi *et al., Studi Paolini*, Roma 1969, pp. 83-87; Annarosa Saggiorato, *I sarcofagi paleocristiani con scene di passione*, Bologna 1968, pp. 68-70; Raffaella Olivieri Farioli, Sarcofagi paleocristiani "ad alberi", *Corso di Cultura sull'Arte Ravennate e Bizantina* 13, 1966, pp. 374-376; Friedrich Gerke, La scultura paleocristiana in Occidente, *Corso di Cultura sull'Arte Ravennate e Bizantina* 6, n. 2, 1959, p. 70; Fernand Benoit, *Sarcophages paléochrétiens d'Arles et de Marseille*, Paris 1954, n. 110; Joseph Wilpert, *La fede della chiesa nascente secondo i monumenti dell'arte funeraria antica*, Città del Vaticano 1938, p. 306; Joseph Berenger, *Saint-Victor Secunda Roma*, Marseilles 1927, pp. 122-125; Edmond Le Blant, *Catalogue des monuments chrétiens du Musée de Marseille*, Paris 1894, pp. 73-75; Raffaele Garrucci, *Storia della arte cristiana nei primi otto secoli della chiesa* V, Prato 1879, p. 78; Louis Tuissant Dassy, Monuments chrétiens primitifs à Marseille, *Revue de l'art chrétien* 6, 1862, pp. 5-21.

The front side of the marble sarcophagus, the relief of which is damaged in several spots, is divided into seven panels by representations of trees, whose trunks rise from two strong roots and whose branches with delicate leaves merge into one another to form arcades, with birds pecking at them and snakes coiling around two of the trunks, influenced by pre-Christian repertoire favouring nature and bucolic scenes. The use of deep drilling has allowed for creation of fine openwork depicting birds' nests. Small, slender figures do not fill the height of the picture field. The heads and facial features, especially eyelids and pupils, of the figures are outlined by deep incisions in the marble. The typology and iconography are very similar to some sarcophagi from Arles and Rome and can easily be attributed to both the metropolitan and local production. The rather elaborate execution of the reliefs, which largely involved the use of a drill, serving to bring out the forms of the objects and figures from the background and to highlight certain details by creating a play of light and shadow, however, points to Roman workshop mass producing ready-made sarcophagi from high-quality marble for markets in different provinces of the Empire.

The scenes in the panels display from left to right the martyrdom of apostle Paul at *Aquas Salvias*, the capture of the apostle, two pairs of apostles flanking and adoring the victorious cross, under which two deer drink from the rivers of Paradise, announcement of the denial of apostle Peter and his capture by a Roman soldier (although the latter is lately interpreted as Peter teaching a soldier). The object is the only late antique sarcophagus known today to display simultaneously the scenes of capture of both apostles. In the scene of St. Paul's capture, where the apostle is depicted in profile on the left, in a slight stride, with rope around his neck, performing a speech gesture with his right hand, and his jailer, dressed in a long-sleeved tunic and *paenula*, is portrayed close in front of him, tying the rope around Paul's

neck with his right hand and holding it further down with the left, a young female figure, dressed in tunic and *dalmatica* and with hair partially covered by a cap, appears in the background peeking from behind a tree and performing a speech gesture. Several scholars reached the conclusion that the female figure may be Thecla, with Joseph Wilpert going a step further and identifying the scene itself as the only remaining example of the capturing of apostle Paul in Iconium at the behest of Thecla's jealous suitor, Thamyris, recounted in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*. The figure's frontality, the gaze turned towards the viewer and the rendering of the face similar to the late antique *clipei* portraits decorating numerous Roman sarcophagi led to the assumption that it may represent the deceased inhabitant of the sarcophagus, posing as Thecla.

The latest research dates the sarcophagus to the end of the 4th century, but the treatment of the facial features, such as beards, the use of the slightly angular, yet still soft and elegantly falling draperies, and the typology of the hairstyles, all similar to the relief decorating a sarcophagus discovered in 1925 in the catacomb of martyr Sebastian in Rome and dated to the third quarter of the 4th century (published in the Deichamann's *Repertorium* under n. 215), could push it a few decades earlier.

The object has been documented in the Chapelle Notre-Dame-de-Confession since the 17th century. According to the local tradition, it contained relics of Chrysanthus, son of a Christian aristocrat, and Daria, a young virgin whom he converted, martyred in Narbonne in 285. The object was restored before 1862, when its fragments were re-bound together.





© Gaggadis-Robin 2009, p. 74

© Christern-Briesenick *et al.* 2003, pl. 75.2

2.17 LEAF FROM A DIPTYCH WITH WOMEN AT THE TOMB

Around 400

Height 30 cm, length 13.4 cm

Milan, Castello Sforzesco, inv. n. Avori 9

Zuzana Frantová, Luxury for all? Ivory Diptychs and Their Use in the Baptismal Liturgy, in: Klára Doležalová *et al.* (eds.), *Means of Christian Conversion in Late Antiquity. Objects, Bodies, and Rituals*, Brno 2021, pp. 99-113; Marco Navoni, Memoria del Santo Sepolcro e la custodia eucaristica, in: *Giornate di Archeologia. Arte e storia del Vicino e Medio Oriente*. *Atti della VI edizione (Milano, 22-24 ottobre 2020)*, Milano 2021, pp. 165-179; Alessandra Squizzato, Francesca Tasso, *Gli avori Trivulzio: arte, studio e collezionismo antiquario a Milano fra XVIII e XX secolo*, Padova 2017, pp. 173-176; Blanka Španová, *Plačící ženy u hrobu a raně křesťanský svět* (bachelor thesis), Seminář dějin umění, FF MU, Brno 2015, pp. 28-35, 99-101; Marilena Abbatepaolo, *Parole d'avorio, fonti letterarie e testi per lo studio dei dittici eburnei*, Bari 2012, pp. 126-130; Beat Brenk, Das Trivulzio-Elfenbein und seine antiarianische Mission, in: Tobias Frese, Annette Hoffmann (eds.), *Habitus. Norm und Transgression in Bild und Text*, Berlin 2011, pp. 245-257; Beat Brenk, L'avorio Trivulzio e il suo significato, *Felix Ravenna* 157/160, 2010, pp. 57-73; Francesca Tasso, Valva di dittico con le Marie al sepolcro, in: Angela Donati, Giovanni Gentili (eds.), *Costantino il Grande. La civiltà antica al bivio tra Ocidente e Oriente,* Milano 2005, pp. 258-260; Danielle Gaborit-Chopin, *Ivoires médievaux Ve-XVe siècle*, Paris 2004, pp. 33-35; Carlo Bertelli, Gli avori tardoantichi, in: Paolo Pasini (ed.), *387 d.C. Ambrogio e Agostino. Le sorgenti dell'Europa*, Milano 2003, p. 176; Francesca Tasso, Avorio con Marie al sepolcro, in: Serena Ensoli, Eugenio La Rocca (eds.), *Aurea Roma: dalla città pagana alla città cristiana*, Roma 2000, n. 313, pp. 612-613; Martin Biddle, Dittico Trivulzio, in: Angela Donati (ed.), *Dalla terra alle genti: la diffussione del cristianesimo nei primi secoli,* Milano 1996, p. 330; Dale Kinney, A Late Antique Ivory Plaque and Modern Response, *American Journal of Archaeology* 98, 1994, pp. 465-466; Alessandra Melucco Vaccaro, "*Hierosolimam adiit...tabulas eburneas optimas secum deportavit*", *Arte medievale* 7, n. 2, 1993, pp. 1-18; Angelo Salvioni (ed.), *Milano capitale dell'impero romano 286-402 d.C.,* Milano 1990, pp. 342-343; Ernst Kitzinger, *L'arte bizantina,* Milano 1989, p. 47; Oleg Zastrow, *Gli ogetti d'avorio e di osso occidentali. Catalogo. Museo di arte applicata del Castello Sforzesco*, Milano 1978, pp. 19-20; Gary Vikan, Leaf from a diptych with the Women at the Tomb, in: Kurt Weitzmann (ed.), *Age of Spirituality. Late Antique and Early Christian Art, Third to Seventh Century*, New York 1979, n. 453, pp. 504-505; Wolfgang Volbach, *Elfenbeinarbeiten der Spätantike und des frühen Mittelalters,* 3rd ed., Mainz am Rhein 1976, n. 111, p. 80; Richard Delbrueck, *Die Consulardiptychen und verwandte Denkmäler*, Berlin 1929, n. 6, p. 274; Giovanni Seregni, *Don Carlos Trivulzio e la cultura milanese dell'età sua*, Milano 1927, pp. 198-199; Émile Molinier, *Histoire générale des arts apliqués à l'industrie du Ve à la fin du XVIIIe siècle* I: Ivoires, Paris 1896, p. 65; Georg Stuhlfauth, *Die altchristliche Elfenbeinplastik*, Freiburg 1896, pp. 159-161; Raffaele Garrucci, *Storia dell'arte cristiana nei primi otto secoli della chiesa* VI, Prato 1880, pp. 74, 449; John Westwood, *Fictile ivories. A descriptive catalogue of the South-Kensington Museum*, London 1876, p. 366.

The ivory tablet is separated into two vertical scenes. In the upper part two guards are sleeping in front of the Holy Sepulchre, identifiable by its central ground plan. Above the scene two symbols of evangelists, Luke and Mathew, can be seen. In the lower part two pious women, dressed in tunics and with heads covered by *pallas*, kneel in front of a nimbed figure, making a gesture of speech, holding a scroll, and sitting next to the open door of the Sepulchre, covered in reliefs, one of which captures the Resurrection of Lazarus. The scene has been most commonly identified as the annunciation of the resurrection of Christ to the two Marys. The sitting figure in front of the tomb was interpreted by most scholars as an angel, but Beat Brenk suggests that the nimbus and the scroll, as well as the *proskynensis* of the pious women are among the indicators to the representation of Christ at the beginning of the 5th century. His presence in front of the Holy Sepulchre and the worship of the women, reserved typically for the emperor, would confirm his divine nature and demonstrate that it was not affected by his passion and resurrection, in confirmation of the Nicaean doctrine.

The ivory plaque, generally well preserved, displays a long vertical fracture in its right part, whose presence is attested even by the oldest reproductions of the object. It was probably caused by an abrupt separation from the original hinges or support structure on which the plaque was fixed. The history of the piece and its original mounting is unknown. For the first time it is attested in the middle of the 18th century in Milan, in the collection of don Carlo Trivulzio (1715-1789), where it remained until its transfer to the collections of the city of Milan in 1935.

As the presence of just two symbols of evangelists would suggest, the plaque probably was part of a diptych. And, like other such early Christian diptychs, it was probably re-used in the celebration of the liturgy. Its use is testified by the names of the living and the dead for whom prayers were said during the service, written in ink on the obverse of the plaque and dated *ante quem* to the later 6th or the 7th century. As Zuzana Frantová recently demonstrated, the iconography of the Women at the Tomb, linked to death and resurrection, would be fully appropriate not only for this function of the object, acquired at the later date, but was repeatedly employed in baptismal context throughout the late 4th and the 5th century. It alludes to the plaque's role in the process of the spiritual transformation of the neophytes during the ritual of baptism, during which the images carved on it would correspond to what they were experiencing in that very moment.

Already at the end of the 19th century the object was linked to the plaque depicting Ascension from Monaco, based on the iconographic and stylistic closeness. The high-quality manufacture offers parallels with the diptych of Probianus from Berlin, where the same cornice motif is repeated, and with a diptych from five parts depicting the life of Christ, now in Paris, Berlin, and Nevers (cat. entry n. 2.21). The same soft rendering of human forms, faces, and draperies can be also found on the diptych of the powerful Roman families Nicommachi and Symmachi (cat. entry n. 3.6). Most of the scholars attribute the production of those exquisite ivory plaques for the aristocracy to a workshop situated in Rome.



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2.18 IVORY WITH THE SCENE OF ASCENSION

Around 400

Height 18.7 cm, length 11.6 cm

Munich, Bayerische Nationalmuseum, inv. n. MA 157

Blanka Španová, *Plačící ženy u hrobu a raně křesťanský svět* (bachelor thesis), Seminář dějin umění, FF MU, Brno 2015, pp. 96-98; Anthony Eastmond, *The Glory of Byzantium and Early Christendom*, London 2013, p. 47; Danielle Gaborit-Chopin, *Ivoires médievaux Ve-XVe siècle*, Paris 2004, pp. 33-35; Francesca Tasso, Avorio con scena di Ascensione, in: Serena Ensoli, Eugenio La Rocca (eds.), *Aurea Roma: dalla città pagana alla città cristiana*, Roma 2000, n. 311, p. 611; Reinhold Baumstark (ed.), *Rom und Byzanz. Schatzkammerstücke aus bayerischen Sammlungen,* München 1998, pp. 84-90; Ernst Kitzinger, *L'arte bizantina,* Milano 1989, pp. 46-47, 55; Danielle Gaborit-Chopin, *Ivoires du Moyen Age,* Freiburg 1978, pp. 22, 180; Wolfgang Volbach, *Elfenbeinarbeiten der Spätantike und des frühen Mittelalters,* 3rd ed., Mainz am Rhein 1976, n. 110, pp. 79-80; Gerhart Egger, Adele Kaindl *et al.* (eds.), *Frühchristliche und koptische Kunst*, Wien 1964, n. 215, pp. 78-79; Elizabeth De Loos-Dietz, *Vroeg christelijke ivoren,* Assen 1947, p. 106; André Grabar, *Martyrium. Recherches sur le culte des reliques et l'art chrétien antique* I, Paris 1943, p. 271; Charles Morey, *Early Christian Art: an Outline of the Evolution of Style and Iconography in Sculpture and Painting from Antiquity to the Eight Century*, 2nd ed., Princeton-New York 1942, p. 136; Louis Brehier, *La sculpture et les arts mineurs byzantins,* Paris 1936, p. 70; Heyford Peirce, Royall Tyler, *L'art byzantin* I., Paris 1932-1934, p. 68; Richard Delbrueck, *Die Konsulardiptychen und verwandte Denkmäler,* Berlin 1929, p. 30; Wolfgang Neuss, *Die Kunst der alten Christen*, Augsburg 1926, p. 109; Earl Baldwin Smith, A Source of Medieval Style in France, *Art Studies* 2, 1924, p. 85; Carl Maria Kaufmann, *Handbuch der christliche Archäologie*, Paderborn 1922, p. 349; Oskar Wulff, *Altchristliche und byzantinische Kunst*, Berlin 1914, p. 187; Ormonde M. Dalton, *Byzantine Art and Archaeology,* Oxford 1911, p. 191; William Maskell, La sculpture en ivoire au commencement de l'ére chrétienne et de l'époque byzantine, *Gazette des Beaux Arts* 51, n. 2, 1909, p. 320; Adolfo Venturi, *Storia dell'arte italiana* I, Milano 1901, p. 611; Émile Molinier, *Histoire générale des arts apliqués à l'industrie du Ve à la fin du XVIIIe siècle* I: Ivoires, Paris 1896, p. 65; Georg Stuhlfauth, *Die altchristliche Elfenbeinplastik*, Freiburg 1896, pp. 58-63.

The ivory demonstrates the resurrection of Christ and his ascension into heaven as God. It presents in its lower part the arrival of the three Marys, dressed in long tunics and mantles covering their heads, to the sepulchre and an angel greeting them with a gesture of speech. The tomb itself is an elegant structure suitable for a wealthy nobleman, with rectangular base, statue niche next to the entrance, and a dome articulated with pairs of columns and portrait busts. The upper part is dedicated to the ascension of Christ. Christ, nimbed, wearing a senatorial toga and holding a scroll, climbs what seems to be a rock to reach heaven, pulled upwards by the hand of God. By combining the two scenes in one pictorial space the artist created a captivating narrative of Christ's divinity and triumph over death. Everything in the image speaks of wealth, triumph, and status.

The plaque is first documented in the collection of a teacher at the Academy of Drawing in Bamberg and son of prominent Bavarian professor of law Joseph von Reider (1793-1862) and was sold in 1860 to the Bayerische Nationalmuseum together with the rest of the collection directly by the collector. It is associated with other three ivory plaques depicting the life of Christ, kept in Paris, Berlin, and Nevers (cat. entry n. 2.21), with which it could have formed a diptych of five parts. The graceful rendering of the forms shows closeness to the classical models such as the ones used in the creation of the diptych of Nicomachi and Symmachi (cat. entry n. 3.6). It is possible to hypothesize that the plaque is a product of one of the Roman workshops preserving the sculptural tradition of the early Roman empire and working indiscriminately for different religious groups.



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2.19 TWO MATRONS

TWO MEN AND A WOMAN LED TO EXECUTION

BEHEADING OF TWO MEN AND A WOMAN

A MAN AND A WOMAN IN PROSKYNESIS IN FRONT OF A MALE ORANT FIGURE

End of the 4th- beginning of the 5th century

Dimensions unknown to author

Rome, Oratory under San Giovanni e Paolo

Vincenzo Fiocchi Nicolai, A proposito di Caelius II: ancora sul santuario martiriale dei SS. Giovanni e Paolo al Celio, *Rivista di archeolgia cristiana* 95, 2019, pp. 281-326; Alia Engelen *et al*., *Caelius* II/1. *Pars inferior. Le case romane sotto la Basilica dei Santi Giovanni e Paolo*, Roma 2014, pp. 80-135, 280-295; Hugo Brandenburg, *Le prime chiese di Roma: IV-VII secolo*, Milano 2013, pp. 168-169; Ana Munk, Domestic piety in fourth century Rome: a relic shrine beneath the church of SS. Giovanni e Paolo, *Hortus artium medievalium* 15, 2009, pp. 7-19; Conrad Leyser, A church in the house of the saints: property and power in the Passion of John and Paul, in: Katherine Cooper, Julia Hillner (eds.), *Religion, Dynasty, and Patronage in Early Christian Rome, 300-900*, Cambridge 2007, pp. 140-162; Cristina Ranucci, Scene di martirio nell'oratorio sotto la chiesa dei santi Giovanni e Paolo, in: Maria Andaloro (ed.), *L'orrizonte tardoantico e le nuove immagini 312-468,* Milano 2006, pp. 108-110; *Case romane e Antiquarium sotto la basilica dei Ss. Giovanni e Paolo al Celio: guida breve*, Roma 2004, pp. 14-15; Beat Brenk, *Die Christianisierung der spätrömischen Welt. Stadt, Land, Haus, Kirche und Kloster in frühchristlicher Zeit*, Wiesbaden 2003, pp. 87-104; Alessandra Cerrito, Oratori ed edifici di culto minori di Roma tra il IV secolo ed i primi decenni del V, in: Federico Guidobaldi, Alessandra Guiglia Guidobaldi (eds.), *Ecclesiae Urbis. Atti del Congresso Internazionale di studi sulle chiese di Roma IV-X secolo,* I, Roma 2002, pp. 397-418; Maria Grazia Filetici, Le case romane del Celio: il restauro e l'antiquarium, *Forma Urbis* VII, n. 10, 2002, pp. 37-43; Cristina Ranucci, Le pitture della Confessio, *Forma Urbis* VII, n. 10, 2002, pp. 25-36; Rita Santolini, Gli affreschi, *Forma Urbis* VII, n. 10, 2002, pp. 15-24; Beat Brenk, Le costruzioni sotto la chiesa dei SS. Giovanni e Paolo, in: Serena Ensoli, Eugenio La Rocca (eds.), *Aurea Roma. Dalla città pagana alla città cristiana*, Roma 2000, pp. 156-158; Fabrizio Bisconti, Scene di martirio, in: *idem*, *Temi di iconografia paleocristiana,* Città del Vaticano 2000, pp. 278-279; Fabrizio Bisconti, La pittura paleocristiana, in: Angela Donati (ed.), *Romana pictura: La pittura romana dalle origini all'età bizantina,* Milano 1998, pp. 33-53; Arja Karivieri, SS. Giovanni e Paolo: la casa celimontana, in: Jacqueline Hamesse, Leonard Boyle (eds.), *Parvi flores*, Turnhout 1998, pp. 201-214; Fabrizio Bisconti, Dentro e intorno all'iconografia martiriale: dal 'vuoto figurativo' all'immaginario devozionale, in: Mathijs Lambergits *et al.* (eds.), *Martyrium in multidisciplinary perspective. Memorial Louis Reekmans* (= Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Loveniensium 117), Leuven 1995, pp. 279-280; Beat Brenk Microstoria sotto la chiesa dei SS. Giovanni e Paolo: la cristianizzazione di una casa privata, *Rivista dell'Istituto Nazionale di Archeologia e Storia dell'Arte* 18, 1995, pp. 169-205; Guglielmo Matthiae, *Pittura romana del Medioevo. Secoli IV-IX* I, Roma 1987, pp. 29, 69; Margherita Trinci Cechelli, Osservazioni sul complesso della "Domus" Celimontana dei SS. Giovanni e Paolo, in: *I monumenti cristiani precostantiniani*, Roma 1978, pp. 551-562; Jim Petersen, House-Churches in Rome, *Vigiliae Christiane* 23, n. 4, 1969, pp. 264-272; Licia Borrelli Vlad, Il restauro delle pitture nel sottosuolo della chiesa dei SS. Giovanni e Paolo, *Bollettino dell'Istituto Centrale per il Restauro* 25-26, 1956, pp. 58-71; Richard Krautheimer, *Corpus basilicarum christianum Romae* I, Città del Vaticano 1953, pp. 265-300; Antonio Maria Colini, *Storia e topografia del Celio nell'antichità,* Roma 1944, pp. 164-195; Vincenzo Eduardo Gasdia, *La casa pagano-cristiana del Celio*, Roma 1937; Joseph Wilpert, Le pitture della "confessio" sotto la basilica dei SS. Giovanni e Paolo, in: *Scritti in onore di Bartolomeo Nogara raccolti in occasione del suo LXX anno*, Città del Vaticano 1937, pp. 517-522; Pio Franchi de'Cavalieri, Note agiografiche X. Dove furono sepolti i ss. Cipriano, Giustina e Teoctisto?, *Studi e Testi* 65, 1935, pp. 335-354; Johan Peter Kirsch, Sull'origine dei motivi iconografici nella pittura cemeteriale di Roma, *Rivista di archeologia crisitana* 4, 1927, pp. 259-287; Serio Ortolani, *SS. Giovanni e Paolo,* Roma 1925, pp. 42-46; Johan Peter Kirsch, I santuari domestici di martiri nei titoli romani ed altri simili

santuari nelle chiese cristiane e nelle case private di fedeli, *Atti della Pontificia Accademia Romana di Archeologia. Rendiconti* 2, 1923-1924, pp. 27-43; Joseph Wilpert, *Die römischen Mosaiken und Malereien der kirchlichen Bauten vom IV. bis zum XIII. Jahrhundert* II, Freiburg 1916, pp. 637-642; Padre Germano di S. Stanislao, The House of the Martyrs John and Paul recently discovered on the Caelian Hill at Rome, *The American Journal of Archeology and of the History of Fine Arts* 6, n. 3, 1890, pp. 261-285.

Three panels of paintings decorate the walk-in space, created by the interruption of the staircase, connecting the ground floor with the rest of the building under the basilica of San Giovanni e Paolo. The link between the devotional space and the staircase guaranteed the accessibility and the visibility of the paintings and the space itself. Six scenes and groups of figures, separated by a combination of one thick and two thin red lines, are placed in two registers. The compositions and the subjects of the depictions on the lateral walls communicate with each other. On the lower portion of the left wall the viewer is confronted with two male figures. One is standing and the other, dressed in a tunic with embroidered shoulders and cuffs and in a mantle, according to the widespread fashion of the 4th century, is walking forward, holding an offering. On the right side, in the lower register, two matrons are depicted. The first one is captured with the palm of the right hand opened and pointing towards the inner space of the oratory and eyes turned in the direction of the viewer. The other one is more pensive, with her right hand bent and the palm close to her face. Hairstyles and dresses of both female figures, consisting of tunic and *palla*, form a rather unassuming but still current example of fashion of the Roman *matronae*. In the upper register, the two corresponding depictions are both narrative: they represent arrest and beheading of three persons. The depiction of the arrest of two men and one woman by soldiers, dressed in the typical conical hats and a military mantle (*chlamys*), is paired with a paradisiacal representation of a deer drinking from a spring. Panel directly in front of the viewer depicts a young standing male figure in a position of an orant, framed by open curtains, with male and female figure prostrated at his feet. Above them, at the sides of the niche, remains of the lower part of the bodies of two male figures dressed in tunic and *pallium* can be seen.

The pictorial cycle has been discovered by amateur archaeologist Germano di San Stanislao (1850-1909) in 1887 during an exploration of the area below the basilica of San Giovanni e Paolo on the Caelian Hill. The discovery of the early Christian *domus*, the ultimate phase of a late antique private house with a *nymphaeum*, preceded by an *insula* with shops and workshops from the late imperial era, seemed to confirm the traditional narrative about the death of the martyrs John and Paul and their burial inside their house, described in some versions of their *Passio* and perpetuated by medieval itineraries. The niche in the back wall of the oratory has been therefore interpreted as *fenestella confessionis*, through which believers could access the grave of the saints.

The initial perception of the function of the oratory shaped the interpretation of the depicted scenes. Three arrested persons represented on the upper portion of the left wall and beheaded on the opposite wall were recognised as martyrs Crispus, Crispinianus, and Benedicta, who according to the *Passio* from the middle of the 7th century were killed because they continued to visit the house of the two saints after their arrest and to spread the Christian faith. In agreement with this interpretation the orant male figure on the main wall has been identified as either St. John or St. Paul. Two figures in *proskynesis* were associated with senator Pammachius (died 410), schoolmate of Jerome (c. 342/345-420), and his wife Paulina, the aristocratic daughter of Jerome's famous follower and supporter Paula, the supposed owners of the house and commissioners of the basilica above, a fact testified by sources, and two standing male figures above with Apostles Peter and Paul. The problem with this interpretation lays in the date of the version of the *Passio*, in which all the above-mentioned

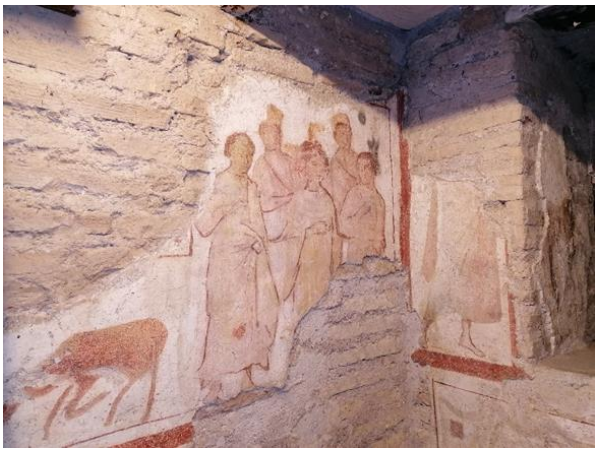
personages appear, which is much later than the end of the 4th or the beginning of the 5th century, the almost unanimous dating of the paintings on the basis of stylistic analysis.

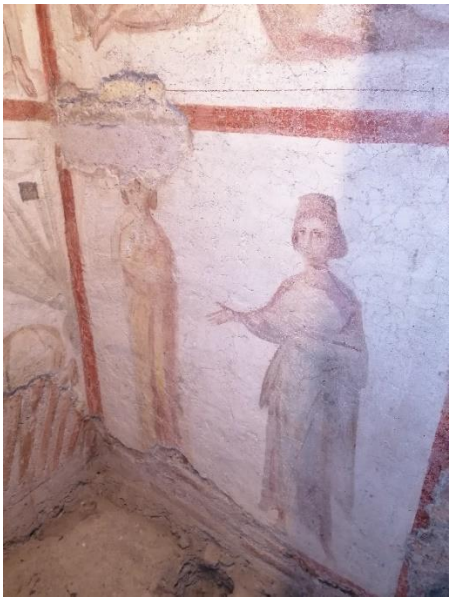
Another hypothesis suggests that the scenes of arrest and execution of three personages corresponds much closer with the narrative of the *Passio* of martyrs Ciprian, Justina, and Teoctistus from the first half of the 5th century. The martyrs were executed in Nicomedia, but their relics were brought to Rome to a matron Rufina, probably mother of Pammachius, and stored on Caelian Hill, somewhere near the Temple of Claudius and possibly correspondingly with the oratory. This hypothesis is partly supported by the existence of graffiti with the name of Rufina on the left wall of stair landing.

Due to insufficient legibility of the scenes, however, the current interpretation of the paintings is more general, recognising only the Christian, devotional, and pilgrim character of the space and the paintings as a work of cultured and classicising workshop, product of the so-called Theodosian renaissance. In this light the niche inside the oratory seems to be more probably a reliquary, used for storage of relics of at least three martyrs (one female and two male), captured by the frescoes, and possibly also John and Paul, and not their actual burial place.

Interesting for the scope of this work is also the hypothesis of Ana Munk, who suggests that the shrine with relics may have been a place of private devotion of the matron of the house, presumably Paulina, a part of what she calls “domestic monastery”, a place suitable for one of the prominent followers of Jerome. According to the author, it is an example of the short-lived household veneration of saints and their relics between the middle and the end of the 4th century, soon hindered by the efforts of the Church to institutionalize such worship.

The frescoes have been restored in 1955 and subsequently in 1999 by Istituto Centrale per il Restauro and Soprintedenza Archeologica di Roma in order to remove calcium deposits and moulds destroying the upper layer of the decoration, together with concrete and stuccoes, added probably in attempt to restore the paintings and to secure them to the plaster shortly after the discovery of the oratory.





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2.20 *ECCLESIA EX GENTIBUS* AND *ECCLESIA EX CIRCUMCISIONE*

410-417

Dimensions unknown to author

Rome, Santa Pudenziana

Mario Antonucci, *La sopraelevata basilica costantiniana di Santa Pudenziana*, Roma 2022, pp. 16, 44-46; Matteo Braconi, *Il mosaico del catino absidale di S. Pudenziana: la storia, i restauri, le interpretazioni*, Todi 2016, pp. 259-294; Claudia Angeleli, *La basilica titolare di S. Pudenziana. Nuove ricerche*, Città del Vaticano 2010, pp. 189-192; Maria Andaloro, Il mosaico absidale di Santa Pudenziana, in: *idem* (ed.), *L'orrizonte tardoantico e le nuove immagini 312-468,* Milano 2006, pp. 114-124; Stefania Pennesi, Santa Pudenziana, in: Maria Andaloro (ed.), *La pittura medievale a Roma 312-1431. Atlante: percorsi visivi* 1, Turnhout 2006, pp. 307-309; Vitaliano Tiberia, *Il mosaico di Santa Pudenziana a Roma: il restauro*, Todi 2003, pp. 22-86; Maria Andaloro, Serena Romano, Immagine nell'abside, in: *idem* (eds.), *Arte e iconografia a Roma. Dal tardoantico alla fine dei medioevo*, Milano 2002, pp. 76-78; Daniela Calcagnini, Le figure femminili nei mosaici paleocristiani degli edifici di culto romani, in: Federico Guidobaldi, Alessandra Guiglia Guidobaldi (eds.), *Ecclesiae Urbis. Atti del Congresso Internazionale di studi sulle chiese di Roma IV-X secolo* III, Roma 2002, pp. 1924-1928; Daniela Goffredo, Le personificazioni delle *Ecclesiae*: tipologia e significati dei mosaici di S. Pudenziana e S. Sabina, in: Federico Guidobaldi, Alessandra Guiglia Guidobaldi (eds.), *Ecclesiae Urbis. Atti del Congresso Internazionale di studi sulle chiese di Roma IV-X secolo* III, Roma 2002, pp. 1949-1962; Olaf Steen, The apse mosaic of S. Pudenziana and its relation to the fifth century mosaics of S. Sabina and S. Maria Maggiore, in: Federico Guidobaldi, Alessandra Guiglia Guidobaldi (eds.), *Ecclesiae Urbis. Atti del Congresso Internazionale di studi sulle chiese di Roma IV-X secolo,* III, Roma 2002, pp. 1939-1948; Martin Raspe, Apsismosaik von S. Pudenziana in Rom, in: Christoph Stiegemann, Matthias Wemhoff (eds.), *799. Kunst und Kultur der Karolingerzeit* 2, Mainz am Rhein 1999, pp. 632-634; Olaf Steen, The Proclamation of the Word: A Study of the Apse Mosaic in S. Pudenziana, Rome, *Acta ad archaeologiam et artium historiam pertinentia* 11, 1999, pp. 85-113; Frederic William Schlatter, The two women in the mosaic of Santa Pudenziana, *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 3, 1995, pp. 1-25; Thomas Mathews, *The clash of gods: a reinterpretation of early Christian art,* Princeton 1993, pp. 55-61; Otto Feld, *Das Apsismosaik in S. Pudenziana als Bild der Gemeinschaft mit Christus*, Fribourg-Basel-Wien 1992; Frederic William Schlatter, Interpreting the Mosaic of Santa Pudenziana, *Vigiliae Christianae* 46, 1992, pp. 276-295; Geir Hellemo, *Adventus Domini. Eschatological Thought in 4th-century Apses and Catecheses,* Leiden 1989, pp. 41-63; Guglielmo Matthiae, *Pittura romana del Medioevo. Secoli IV-IX* I, Roma 1987, pp. 38; Raffaello Morghen, Agiografia e iconografia nei mosaici e nei reperti archeologici di S. Pudenziana, *Atti della Pontifica Accademia Romana di Archeologia. Rendiconti* 32, 1977-1978, pp. 139-155; Peter Barr Atherton, *The apse mosaic of S. Pudenziana as an expression of the transitions between late antique and proto-medieval art in Rome* (master thesis), Department of Fine Arts, California State University, Long Beach 1974, pp. 34-37; Yves Christe, Gegenwärtige und enzeitliche Eschatologie in der frühchristlichen Kunst. Die Apsis von Santa Pudenziana, *Orbis scientiarum* 2*,* n. 1, 1972, pp. 247-260; Giuseppe Bovini, I mosaici della chiesa di S. Pudenziana a Roma, *Corso di cultura sull'arte ravennate e bizantina* 18, 1971, p. 98; Ernst Dassmann, Das Apsismosaik von S. Pudenziana in Rom. Philosophische, imperiale und theologische Aspekte in einen Christusbild am Beginn des 5. Jahrhunderts, *Römische Quartalschrift für christliche Altertumskunde und Kirschengeschichte* 65, 1970, pp. 67-81; Guglielmo Matthiae, *Mosaici medioevali delle chiese di Roma*, Roma 1967, pp. 57-64; Walter Oakeshott, *The Mosaics of Rome,* London 1967, pp. 48-50; Ormonde M. Dalton, *Byzantine Art and Archeology*, New York 1961, pp. 336-337; Christa Ihm, *Die Programme der christlichen Apsismalerei vom vierten Jahrhundert bis zur Mitte des achten Jahrhunderts,* Wiesbaden 1960, pp. 14, 131; Wilhelm Koehler, Das Apsismosaik von Sta. Pudenziana in Rom als Stildokument, in: *Forschungen zur Kirchengeschichte und christlichen Kunst*, Leiden 1931, pp. 167-179; Joseph Wilpert, *Die römischen Mosaiken und Malereien der kirchlichen Bauten vom IV. bis zum XIII. Jahrhundert* I-II*,* Freiburg 1916, pp. 234-236, 1066-1068; Giovanni Battista de Rossi, *Mosaici cristiani e saggi dei pavimenti delle chiese di Roma anteriori al secolo XV: tavole cromo-litografiche con cenni storici e critici*, Roma 1899, pp. 9-10; Hartmann Grisar, *Analecta Romana: dissertazioni, testi, monumenti dell'arte riguardanti principalmente la storia di Roma e dei papi nel Medio Evo*, Roma 1899, pp. 564-576; Pietro Crostarosa, Osservazioni sul musaico di S. Pudenziana, *Nuovo bullettino di archeologia cristiana* 1, 1895, pp. 58-67; Louis Lefort, Nouvelles observations sur une mosaïque de S. Pudentienne, *Revue Archéologique* 27, 1874, pp. 96-100.

The mosaic in the apse of the church of Santa Pudenziana depicts bearded Christ with long dark hair sitting on a gold bejewelled throne positioned over an exedra, dressed in golden senatorial tunic with dark blue *clavi*. The central figure of the celestial ruler is surrounded by sitting group of Apostles, captured in an animated discussion, accompanied by gestures of hands pointing mostly towards the teaching Christ. Only Apostles Peter and Paul, sitting to the left and to the right of Christ respectively, are looking towards him. Two female figures hold crowns above their heads. Only the one above Paul preserves her early 5th-century design, dressed in a green tunic and gold *palla*, softly draped around the body and covering her hair together with a white cap. Behind the exedra an ideal view of a city can be seen on a background of a sky with golden, red and blue clouds. It most probably represents heavenly Jerusalem with the vision of its temple as described by the commentary of Jerome (c. 342/345-420) to the Book of Ezekiel. In the centre a hill with a large cross decorated with gems can be seen. The sky is filled with four figures of the *tetramorph*. The apse mosaic is the oldest one in Rome. Its dimensions are relatively modest, given the fact that the apse of the early Christian church has been remodelled from a niche of thermal baths or a *nymphaeum* previously occupying the space. The mosaic must have been created or at least finished during the pontificate of Innocent I (401-417), as his name is mentioned in the now-lost inscription, preserved in a drawing of Onofrio Panvinio (1529-1568) from 1568, together with the name of presbyter Leopardus, stating that they were responsible for the decoration of the church with marbles and images. The year 410, connected with the Alaric's (395-410) sack of Rome, has been chosen as *terminus post quem* due to the inscription in the codex held by Christ, describing him as protector and saviour of the church. The traumatic experience of the sack may also be responsible for the apocalyptic overtones of the apse decoration.

The mosaic has been extensively remodelled, especially in its right part, during the restoration campaigns in the course of the 16th, 18th, and 19th century. At first, the two women crowning Peter and Paul were identified as idealized portraits of martyr sisters Praxede and Pudenziana. However, more general approach to their interpretation has brought to light their connection to the antique Victories or two personifications of Rome on the relief column of Emperor Arcadius (395-408). The latest works dealing with their identity have suggested a high degree of closeness with the figures of *Ecclesia ex Gentibus* and *Ecclesia ex Circumcisione* on the mosaic of the counter-façade of the church of Santa Sabina in Rome (cat. entry n. 2.25). They could have alluded to the very up-to-date question of unification of the non-Christian and Christian communities in the city in the universal Christian church. In support of this interpretation is the victorious figure of Christ as well as the similarities between the female figures and personifications of Victories, often accompanying the representations of Roman rulers.



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2.21 PLAQUES WITH SCENES OF THE INFANCY AND MIRACLES OF CHRIST

410-420 or 440-461

Length 8.1 cm, height 20 cm

Berlin, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Skulpturensammlung und Museum für Byzantinische Kunst, inv. n. I.2719

Length 7.7 cm, height 19.7 cm

Paris, Musée du Louvre, inv. n. OA 7876, 7877, 7878

Zuzana Frantová, Ivory "Icons", Leo the Great and Monophysite Heresy, in: Ivan Foletti, Manuela Gianandrea (eds.), *The Fifth Century in Rome: Art, Liturgy, Patronage*, Roma 2017, pp. 217-242; Danielle Gaborit-Chopin, *Ivoires médievaux Ve-XVe siècle*, Paris 2004, pp. 33-35; Gudrun Bühl, Rechter Seitenstreifen eines fünfteiligen Diptychons, Linker Seitenstreifen eines fünfteiligen Diptychons, in: Christoph Stiegemann, Matthias Wemhoff (eds.), *799. Kunst und Kultur der Karolingerzeit* 2, Mainz am Rhein 1999, pp. 693-695; Gudrun Bühl, Rechter Seitenstreifen einer ehemals fünfteiligen Tafel, in: Christoph Stiegemann (ed.), Frühchristliche Kunst in Rom und Konstantinopel: Schätze aus dem Museum für Spätantike und Byzantinische Kunst Berlin, Padeborn 1996, pp. 224-227; Gabriele Mietke, Tavola in avorio, in: Angela Donati (ed.), *Dalla terra alle genti. La diffusione del cristianesimo nei primi secoli*, Milano 1996, p. 240; Petra Sevrugian, Hiltrud Jehle, Neue Untersuchungen zu einem spätantiken Diptychonfragment in Berlin, *Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen* 36, 1994, pp. 55-63; Arne Effenberger, Hans-Georg Severin (eds.), *Das Museum für Spätantike und Byzantinische Kunst. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin*, Mainz am Rhein 1992, n. 49, pp. 135-136; Catherine Metzger, Dominique Bénazeth, Jannick Durand, *Éclosion de l'art chrétien*, Paris 1989, p. 36; Lieselotte Kötzsche, Plaques with scenes of the infancy and miracles of Christ, in: Kurt Weitzmann (ed.), *Age of Spirituality. Late Antique and Early Christian Art, Third to Seventh Century*, New York 1979, n. 406-407, pp. 446-448; Wolfgang Volbach, *Elfenbeinarbeiten der Spätantike und des frühen Mittelalters,* 3rd ed., Mainz am Rhein 1976, n. 112-113, pp. 80-81; Hermann Schnitzler, Kästchen oder fünfteiliges Buchdeckelpaar?, in: *Festschrift für Gert von der Osten zum 60. Gerburtstag,* Köln 1970, pp. 24-32; Lieselotte Kötzsche-Breitenbruch, Zur Ikonographie des betlehemitischen Kindermordes in der frühchristlichen Kunst, *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 11-12, 1968-1969, p. 108; Victor Elbern, Die Fragmente eines frühchristlichen Elfenbeinwerkes - Diptychon oder Kästchen?, in: *Festschrift für Karl Hermann Usener,* Marburg 1967, pp. 1-10; Klaus Wessel, Eine Gruppe oberitalienischer Elfenbeinarbeiten, *Jahrbuch des deutschen archäologischen Instituts* 63-64, 1948-1949, pp. 122-124.

The ivory tablets from Berlin and Paris each contain three scenes from the life of Christ, arranged vertically in three picture fields, separated from each other by a decorative frame. The cycle begins with the Massacre of the innocents in Betlehem. Under Herod's orders a soldier smashes a new-born child to the ground, while two wailing mothers dressed in tunics and mantles, with their heads covered, stand behind him. Other two scenes depict the Baptism of Christ and the Miracle in Cana. The top section of the panel from Paris represents the scene of the healing of the woman with the issue of blood. She is dressed similarly to the mourning mothers and is kneeling behind Christ, holding a fold of his tunic in her hand. The scene is followed by the miraculous healing of the paralytic and the expulsion of demons in Gerasa.

The style of the fragments is coherent. A noteworthy spatial effect was achieved by the artist, with the figures almost standing before the background in a three-dimensional manner. The individual figures are depicted with rather short but voluminous proportions, round heads with high-placed ears, and are dressed in classical draperies. Their postures are static and calm, despite the violent (Massacre of the innocents) or dynamic (Healing of the paralytic) nature of the scenes they are part of. The well-worked execution, putting greater demands on the skills of the craftsmen, suggests that the panels fall into a more luxurious category of ivory diptychs.

Together with the panel from Musée Blandin de Nevers, representing the Adoration of the Magi and part of Nativity with the adoration of the animals, tablets are generally thought to have once been parts of a five-piece diptych, as attested by holes in the decorative frames. The Berlin ivory is considered to be the right-side panel of the ensemble and the one from Louvre probably constituted a left-side panel. Based on stylistic analysis, the diptych is usually dated to the first quarter of the 5th century. It can be related to early 5th-century ivories such as the plaques of the Lampadii in Brescia and of Probianus in Berlin, the ivory with the Women at the tomb and the Ascension in Munich (cat. entry n. 2.18), considered to be works of a Roman workshop.

Due to the exclusivity of the medium used in its production, the elaborate five-part composition, masterful carving and a choice of topical theological messages it is possible to assume that the diptych was publicly displayed, most probably on an altar, as a means of demonstrating the tradition and continuity of the early Christian Church. If we accept the recently proposed later dating, just like the Milan five-part diptych, dated to the reign of emperor Maiorian (457-461), with whom they share not only the composition, but also specific details in the scenes of the Massacre of the Innocents and the adoration of the Magi, alluding to a common source, the plaques from Berlin, Nevers, and Paris may have responded to the contemporary theological controversies over the dual nature of Christ, echoing, through the scenes of the Nativity, Adoration of the Magi, Massacre of the Innocents, and Christ's miracles, the ideas contained in the sermons of Leo the Great (440-461), delivered in the face of the Monophysite crisis, about the intertwined human and divine natures that cannot exist one without another.

The panel from Louvre has been broken down into individual framed scenes in 1777, but an inscription from the end of the 18th century on the reverse of the entire height of the panel documents the original arrangement.

The tablet in Berlin was acquired by the Munich art dealer Julius Böhler (1860-1934) from the collection Mallet in Amiens in 1902. The ivory in Paris was obtained for the Louvre from the collection of Jean-François-Auguste, comte de Bastard d'Estang (1792-1883) in 1926. In the 18th century it was probably located in the vicinity of Nevers, as attested by the inscription on its reverse, alluding to a certain Chouet family, of which one member, Jean-François Chouet (died 1771) used to live in the village of Mousseau close to Nevers. It may have thus partly shared the destiny of the Nevers panel, kept in the Saint-Cyr chapel of the cathedral of Nevers, where it was fixed on the altar cross before the French revolution, which remained in the region of Nevers until 1844.





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2.22 THEOPHANY WITH ST. SABINA, ST. PETER AND ST. PAUL

ADORATION OF THE MAGI

WOMEN AT THE TOMB

MEETING BETWEEN CHRIST AND PIOUS WOMEN

422-440

Dimensions unknown to author

Rome, Santa Sabina

Ivan Foletti, Singing doors: images, space, and sound in the Santa Sabina nathex, in: Bissera V. Pentcheva (ed.), *Icons of Sound: Voice, Architecture, and Imagination*, New York-London 2021, pp. 19-35; Ivan Foletti, Katarína Kravčíková, Closed doors as bearers and constructors of images: Santa Sabina in Rome and Notre Dame du Puy, in: Klára Doležalová, Ivan Foletti (eds.), *The notion of liminality and the medieval sacred space*, Brno 2019, pp. 24-45; Ivan Foletti, The doors of Santa Sabina between stational liturgy and initiation, in: Ivan Foletti, Manuela Gianandrea (eds.), *The fifth century in Rome*, Rome 2017, pp. 121-137; Danilo Mazzoleni, Nella famosa basilica romana all'Aventino: scene del ciclo pasquale nella porta lignea della chiesa di Santa Sabina, *Lazio ieri e oggi* 53, n. 4/6, 2017, pp. 91-96; Ivan Foletti, Manuela Gianadrea, *Zona liminare: il nartece di Santa Sabina a Roma, la sua porta e l'iniziazione cristiana*, Roma-Brno 2015, pp. 11-200; Ivan Foletti, Le porte lignee di Santa Sabina all'Aventino tra liturgia stazionaria e funzione iniziatica, *Hortus artium medievalium* 20, 2014, pp. 709-719; Lorenza De Maria, Il programma decorativo della porta lignea di S. Sabina: concordanza o casualità iconografica?, in: Federico Guidobaldi, Alessandra Guiglia Guidobaldi (eds.), *Ecclesiae Urbis. Atti del Congresso Internazionale di studi sulle chiese di Roma IV-X secolo* III, Roma 2002, pp. 1685-1699; Jean-Michel Spieser, Le programme iconographique des portes de Sainte-Sabine, *Journal des savant* 2, 1991, pp. 47-81; Peter Maser, Parusie Christi oder Triumph der Gottesmutter?: Anmerkungen zu einem Relief der Tür von S. Sabina in Rom, *Römische Quartalschrift für christliche Altertumskunde und Kirchengeschichte* 77, 1982, pp. 30-51; Gisela Jeremias, *Die Holztür der Basilika S. Sabina in Rom*, Tübingen 1980; Anni Wagner, Die Holztüre der Kirche Santa Sabina in Rom, *Die Kunst und das Schöner Heim* 90, 1978, pp. 74-80; Mario Petrassi, La porta lignea di S. Sabina, *Capitolivm* 48, 1973, pp. 19-32; Sahoko Tsuji, Les portes de Sainte-Sabine, *Cahiers archéologiques* 13, 1962, pp. 13-28; Félix Darsy, Les portes de Saint-Sabine: méthode d'analyse formelle et de critique interne en histoire de l'art, *Rivista di archeologia cristiana* 37, 1961, pp. 5-50; Sahoko Tsuji, *Étude iconographique des reliefs des portes de Sainte Sabine à Rome*, (dissertation thesis), École Pratique des Hautes Études (Section des Sciences religieuses), Paris 1961; Félix Darsy, Les portes de Saint-Sabine dans l'archéologie et l'iconographie générale du monument, in: *Actes du Ve Congrès International d'Archéologie Chrétienne*, Città del Vaticano 1957, pp. 471-485; Félix Darsy, *Bibliographie chronologique des études publiées sur les portes de Sainte Sabine*, Roma 1954; Richard Delbrueck, Notes on the wooden doors of Santa Sabina, *The Art Bulletin* 34, 1952, pp. 139-145; Ernst Kantorowitz, The "King's Advent" and the enigmatic panels in the door of Santa Sabina, *The Art Bulletin* 26, 1944, pp. 207-231; Alexander Coburn Soper, The Italo-Gallic School of Early Christian Art, *The Art Bulletin* 20, n. 2, 1938, pp. 145-192; Josef Strzygowski, *Orient oder Rom? Beiträge zur Geschichte der spätantiken und früchristlichen Kunst*, Leipzig 1901, pp. 37-39; Adolfo Venturi, *Storia dell'arte italiana* I. *Dai primordi dell'arte cristiana al tempo di Giustiniano*, Milano 1901, pp. 475-484; Johannes Wiegand, *Das altchristliche Hauptportal an der Kirche der hl. Sabina auf dem aventinischen Hügel zu Rom*, Trier 1900; Johachim Berthier, *La porte de Saint-Sabine à Rome,* Fribourg 1892; Giovanni Battista Cavalcaselle, Joseph Archer Crow, *Storia della pittura in Italia dal secolo II al secolo XVI* I, Firenze 1886, pp. 82-84; Nikodim Kondakov, Les sculptures de la porte de Sainte-Sabine à Rome, *Revue archéologique* 18/33, 1877, pp. 361-372; Jacob Burckhardt, *Der Cicerone. Eine Anleitung zum Genuß der Kunstwerke Italiens*, Basel 1855, pp. 562-563; Jean Baptiste Seroux d'Agincourt, *Histoire de l'art par les Monuments, depuis sa décadence au IVe siècle jusqu'à son renouvellement au XVIe* II, Paris 1823, p. 50; Tommaso Maria Mammachi *et al.*, *Annalium ordinis Praedicatorium*, Roma 1756, pp. 569-572.

Recent research suggests that the cypress doors of the church of Santa Sabina, which contain several biblical and para-biblical scenes with female involvement, were made during the construction of the basilica, in the years of the pontificate of Celestine I (422-432) or Sixtus III (432-440). Despite the notable stylistic differences between panels, the doors are considered to be a product of a single campaign and a testimony of the co-existence of different artistic styles in Rome in the 5th century. Only 18 of the original 28 panels have survived.

Different iconographical features of the door, especially the abundant presence of the water element and the fact that the majority of biblical scenes on the preserved door panels are directly tied to the Roman Lent and Easter liturgy point out to the strong connection of the object with the function of the narthex of the church, where catechumens gathered to prepare for their baptism. During the celebration of the Eucharist, they were gathered in the narthex in front of the closed doors, which could have reminded them of the homilies they had just heard. The doors could have also had a didactic function of a review of the key themes of the Lent period. Thus, they became a tool and a mirror of the Christian catechesis. Due to their unusual height of almost 5 meters, they had the capacity to activate the crowd, as it was supposed to come closer or move back in order to see all the registers. Empty inside, with panels carved from the inner side and some of them perforated, the doors might have amplified the sounds produced inside the church. This capacity might be understood as part of the process of mystification of the eucharistic part of the liturgy, which, from the point of view of the catechumens, was happening unseen.

Three scenes with female presence are part of the stories from the life and passion of Christ. The scene with theophany, on the other hand, is a figurative meditation on the eternal life and the vision of Christ, the ultimate goal of the earthly life of every baptized Christian. The triumphal carving represents Christ in a mandorla, adored by St. Peter, St. Paul and an enigmatic figure dressed in a long flowing tunic and covered by veil, which can be probably identified as St. Sabina in prayer crowned by the light of God. The iconography of the standing Christ with raised right hand, holding an open scroll, is known from the second half of the 4th until the first decades of the following century. The representation probably originated in the anti-Arian context, and its role was to emphasize the divine consubstantiality between Christ and God. Several scholars suggested that the image on the panel was similar to the original composition in the apse of the church.

The Adoration of the Magi is connected to the Easter cycle through the patristic tradition. Ambrose interprets it as an annunciation of the death and resurrection of Christ. The Virgin in the scene is seated on a *sella curulis* positioned over *suppedaneum* formed by six steps and wears a heavy *maphorion*. With an infant Jesus on her lap, she resembles a Roman matron. This type of *Theotokos* has its roots in the depiction of the Virgin in the Roman catacombs of Priscilla from the first half of the 3rd century. The six steps were introduced to elevate the importance of the Mother and Child, probably in response to the council of Ephesus in 431.

The Holy Women in front of a Sepulchre, indicated by a wall, a round arch and a triangular pediment, are moving towards an angel on the right. They are veiled and are raising their covered right hands in a gesture of speech. The scene, common in early Christian art, attests the resurrection of Christ, one of the pivotal motifs of the doors. The dress and the gesture of the pious women is repeated in the scene where Christ appears to them in a garden after his resurrection. The significance of the scene, confirming the resurrection, is similar to the one of the women at the Sepulchre. Their simultaneous appearance in Roman art of the beginning

of the 5th century seems not to be exceptional. It is possible that the stories were part of the liturgy on different days of Easter.









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2.23 SARAH AND ABRAHAM HOST 3 ANGELS

SEPARATION OF FAMILIES OF ABRAHAM AND LOT

BLESSING OF JACOB

MEETING OF RACHEL AND JACOB

JACOB ASKS FOR THE HAND OF RACHEL

MARRIAGE OF RACHEL AND JACOB

JACOB TELLS HIS WIVES ABOUT HIS ENCOUNTER WITH GOD

MOSES ADOPTED BY THE DAUGHTER OF THE PHARAOH

MARRIAGE OF MOSES AND SEPHORA

ANNUNCIATION

PRESENTATION IN THE TEMPLE

ADORATION OF THE MAGI

ENCOUNTER OF THE HOLY FAMILY WITH KING APHRODISIOS

MASSACRE OF THE INNOCENTS

422-440

Dimensions unknown to author

Rome, Santa Maria Maggiore

Ivan Foletti, Quand l'histoire devient prétexte: les cycles narratifs à Milan et Rome au Ve siècle, in: Sulamith Brodbeck *et al.* (eds.), *Histoires chrétiennes en images: espace, temps et structure de la narration. Byzance et Moyen Âge occidental*, Paris 2022, pp. 135-152; Davide Ruggeri, Dalle immagini al testo: ipotesi interpretative relative ad una scena di un mosaico in Santa Maria Maggiore, *VII. Ciclo di studi medievali. Atti del Convegno. 7-10 giugno 2021 Firenze*, Firenze 2021, pp. 228-234; Catherine Vanderheyde, Parures luxeuses ou austérité vestimentaire?: le dilemme de la représentation de la sanneté féminine à Byzance, *Iconographica* 19, 2020, pp. 21-28; Gerhard Steigerwald, *Die frühchristlichen Mosaiken des Triumphbogens von S. Maria Maggiore in Rom*, Regensburg 2016; Maria Lidova, The imperial Theotokos: revealing the concept of Early Christian imagery in Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome, *Convivium* 2, 2015, pp. 60-81; Nikodim Pavlovič Kondakov, *Iconografia della Madre di Dio* I., Roma 2014, pp. 129-147; Gerhard Steigerwald, Die Role Mariens in den

Triumphbogenmosaiken und in der Weihinschrift der Basilika S. Maria Maggiore in Rom, *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 51, 2010, pp. 137-151; Per Olav Folgerø, The Sistine Mosaics of S. Maria Maggiore in Rome: Christology and Mariology in the Interlude between the Councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon, *Acta ad archeologiam et artium historiam pertinentia* 21, 2008, pp. 33-64; Carol Neuman de Vegvar, Gendered spaces: the placement of imagery in Santa Maria Maggiore, in: Éamonn ó Carragáin, Carol Neuman de Vegvar (eds.), *Roma Felix*, Aldershot 2007, pp. 97-111; Maria Raffaella Mena, I mosaici della Basilica di Santa Maria Maggiore, in: Maria Andaloro (ed.), *L'orrizonte tardoantico e le nuove immagini 312-468,* Milano 2006, pp. 306-340; Maria Raffaella Menna, Santa Maria Maggiore, in: Maria Andaloro (ed.), *La pittura medievale a Roma 312-1431. Atlante: percorsi visivi* 1, Turnhout 2006, pp. 269-294; Beat Brenk, La tecnica dei mosaici della basilica di Santa Maria Maggiore, in: *idem, Architettura e immagini del sacro nella tarda antichità,* Spoleto 2005, pp. 100-200; Rainer Warland, The concept of Rome in late antiquity reflected in the mosaics of the triumphal arch of S. Maria Maggiore, Rome, *Acta ad archeologiam et artium historiam pertinentia* 17, 2003, pp. 127-141; Daniela Calcagnini, Le figure femminili nei mosaici paleocristiani degli edifici di culto romani, in: Federico Guidobaldi, Alessandra Guiglia Guidobaldi (eds.), *Ecclesiae Urbis. Atti del Congresso Internazionale di studi sulle chiese di Roma IV-X secolo,* III, Roma 2002, pp. 1919-1938; Aldo Nestori, Fabrizio Bisconti (eds.), *I mosaici paleocristiani di Santa Maria Maggiore negli acquarelli della collezione Wilpert,* Città del Vaticano 2000; Martin Raspe, Zwei Mosaikfelder im Langhaus von S. Maria Maggiore in Rom, in: Christoph Stiegemann, Matthias Wemhoff (eds.), *799. Kunst und Kultur der Karolingerzeit* 2, Mainz am Rhein 1999, pp. 623-624; Francesco Gandolfo, La Basilica Sistina: i mosaici della navata e dell'arco trionfale, in: Carlo Pietrangeli (ed.), *Santa Maria Maggiore a Roma*, Firenze 1988, pp. 85-123; Guglielmo Matthiae, *Pittura romana del Medioevo. Secoli IV-IX* I, Roma 1987, pp. 42-46, 52-53; Johannes Georg Deckers, *Der alttestamentliche Zyklus von S. Maria Maggiore. Studien von S. Maria Maggiore-Studien zur Bildgeschichte,* Bonn 1976; Beat Brenk, *Die frühchristlichen Mosaiken in S. Maria Maggiore zu Rom,* Wiesbaden 1975; Walter Oakeshott, *The Mosaics of Rome,* London 1967, pp. 73-89, 326-328; Nina-Anna Brodsky, *L'iconographie oubliée de l'arc éphésien de Sainte-Marie-Majeure à Rom*, Bruxelles 1966; Heinrich Karpp, *Die frühchristlichen und Mittelalterlichen Mosaiken di Santa Maria Maggiore zu Rom*, Baden-Baden 1966; Paul Künzle, *Per una visione organica dei mosaici antichi di S. Maria Maggiore*, Roma 1963; Adolf Weis, Die Geburtsgeschichte Christi am Triumphbogen von S. Maria Maggiore in Rom, *Das Münster* 13, 1960, pp. 73-88; Carlo Cecchelli, *I mosaici della Basilica di Santa Maria Maggiore,* Torino 1956; Biago Biaghetti, L'antica struttura della navata centrale della basilica di Santa Maria Maggiore e i suoi musaici e stucchi, *Atti della Pontifica Accademia Romana di Archeologia. Rendiconti* 47, 1948, pp. 241-251; Joseph Wilpert, *Die römischen Mosaiken und Malereien der kirchlichen Bauten vom IV. bis zum XIII. Jahrhundert* I, Freiburg 1916, pp. 308-318; Giovanni Biasotti, L'arco trionfale di S. Maria Maggiore in Roma, *Bolletino d'Arte del Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione* 8, 1914, pp. 1-23; Sisto Scaglia, *I mosaici antichi della Basilica di S. Maria Maggiore in Roma*, Roma 1910.

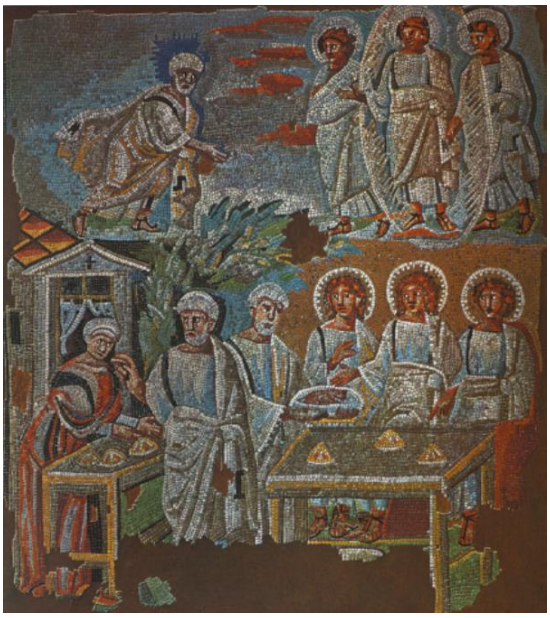
The mosaics of Santa Maria Maggiore are one of the earliest, and possibly even the first example of monumental nave decoration in Rome, organized in narrative cycles. The nave is occupied by stories from the Old Testament and the triumphal arch narrates the episodes from the infancy of Christ. Via the acts of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and Joshua the stories of the Old Testament talk about the experiences of the nation of God on its way towards the Promised land and about preparation for the coming of Christ, represented in the stories of the infancy of Christ. The mosaics were completed during the pontificate of Pope Sixtus III (432-440), as attested by the dedicatory inscription on the triumphal arch. Several scholars pointed out that some or even most parts of the decoration were created at the initiative of his predecessor Celestine I (422-432).

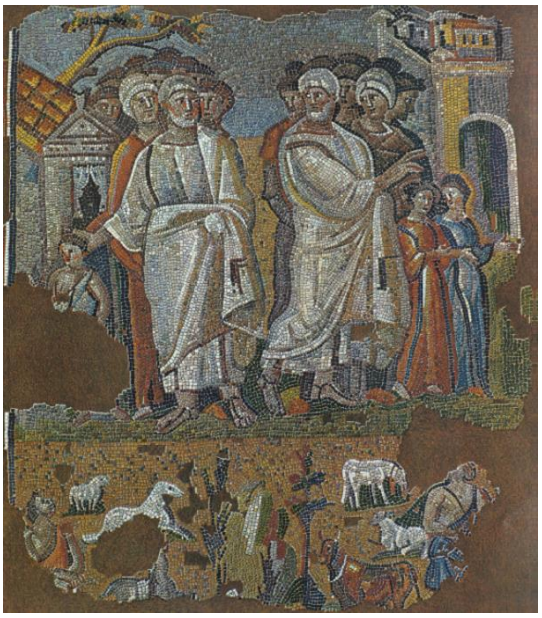
The distribution of the female figures in the scenes from the Old Testament in the nave of the Church may have followed the liturgical practice of separating men and women during the mass. In the basilica oriented to the west, men stood in the south part of the nave and in the south aisle, while women stood opposite them on the north side of the nave and in the north aisle. Mosaics on the south wall, more visible to the women, include the majority of the female characters present in the decoration as a whole, on a scale comparable to the patriarchs with whom they are associated and evenly distributed throughout the wall. Johannes Deckers reads this emphasis on women as emphasis on motherhood, in dialogue with the triumphal arch, focused on the motherhood of the Virgin, to whom the church was dedicated. By contrast, on the north wall only a handful of women are represented, most of whom

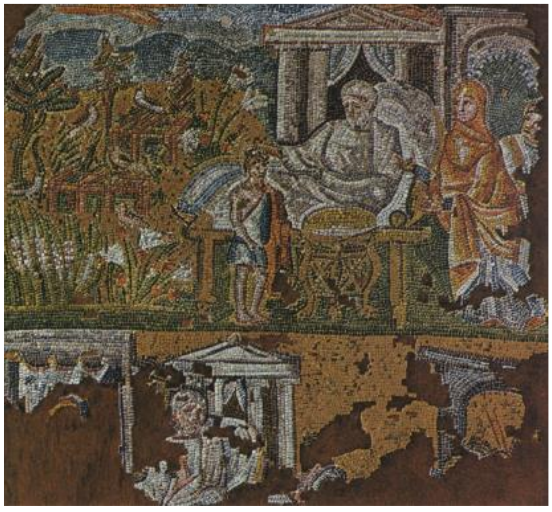
concentrated in the first two scenes closest to the triumphal arch: Moses adopted by the daughter of the Pharaoh and Marriage of Moses and Sephora, again perpetuating the idea of marriage and nurturing. Carol Neuman de Vegvar hypothesizes that the mosaics were tools helping the congregation contemplate their predecessors, the Old Testament matriarchs and patriarchs, whose placement on the walls paralleling the distribution of the genders in the space facilitated their identification with them.

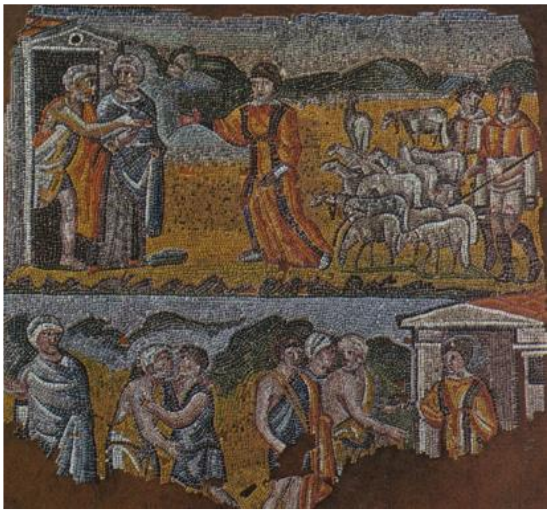
Women are represented as active participants in their respective communities, most often in the role of wives and mothers. The first role is reflected above all in the scenes of the wedding of Rachel and Jacob and Moses and Sephora, performing the Roman ritual of *dextrarum iunctio*, or in the scene depicting Sarah preparing loaves of bread for three angels. The second role is expressed for example in the figure of Rebeca, helping her son Jacob deceive his father and receive a blessing from him. Sarah, Rebeca, and Rachel also constitute a group of barren women, able to become mothers only after divine intervention. In this sense they prefigure the Virgin in the triumphal arch and her divine conception. They are part of the story of the salvation, as their conception is viewed as part of the divine plan to help the successors of Abraham conquer the Promised land. Prophetess Anna in the scene of the Presentation in the Temple is shown as equal to the priest Simeon, similarly to him granted the possibility to see Jesus and to recognise him as the Saviour. She is interpreted by Ambrose (374-397) as an exceptional example of a virtuous widow, devoted to the service in the temple and able to get closer to God through her chastity.

The attire of the female figures can be separated into three groups. Rachel and Sephora at their respective weddings are dressed almost identically to the procession of female martyrs from Sant'Apolinare Nuovo in Ravenna from the beginning of the 6th century. All wear a white tunic covered by a golden *dalmatica*. Their hair is pulled back into a coiffure held in place by a beaded diadem, from which a white veil hangs. The sumptuous finery of the golden *dalmatica* contrasts with the immaculate white of the veil and the tunic, which conveys an idea of purity and virtue. Virgin, depicted in the scenes of the triumphal arch, is adorned by bejewelled collar and pearly crown and dressed in luxurious golden fabrics, similarly to the Byzantine empress, whose imagery had not yet become standardized and did not require the presence of imperial *insignia* to convey the idea of power and high social status. After the Council of Ephesus, the role of the Virgin as mother of the New King called for visual expression of her high position in the celestial hierarchy, thus her figure was reinterpreted in the context of imperial representation. This can be seen in the composition of the Adoration of the Magi, assuming a form of real imperial audience. According to Beat Brenk, though, the luxury of the attire of *Theotokos* is not intended for her association with the empress or the Queen of Heaven, but with the Roman noblewoman. This iconographic tradition is well anchored in the city, as suggest for example the fresco with the Virgin from Cimitero Maggiore dated to the early 4th century, gold-glass medallions, or ivory polyptych from Milan dated to the second half of the 5th century. Representation of richly decorated clothing in this case aims to express virtue and spiritual wealth. On the other hand, figures such as Sarah, Rebeca, or the mourning mothers in the scene of the Massacre of the innocents are depicted wearing only a tunic, sometimes accompanied by *palla*, and heads covered either by *palla* or a cap, or completely bare, reflecting their modesty and humility.



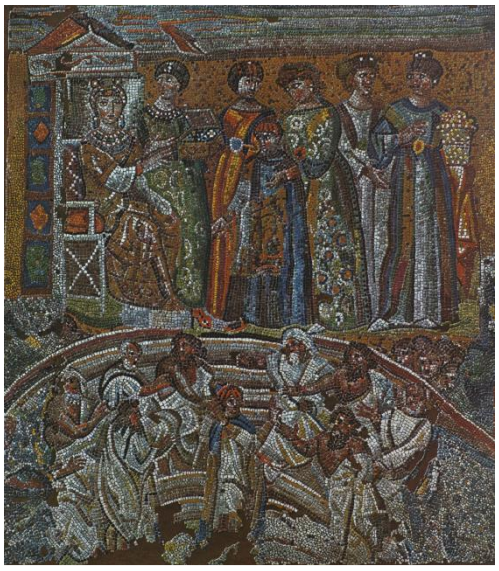


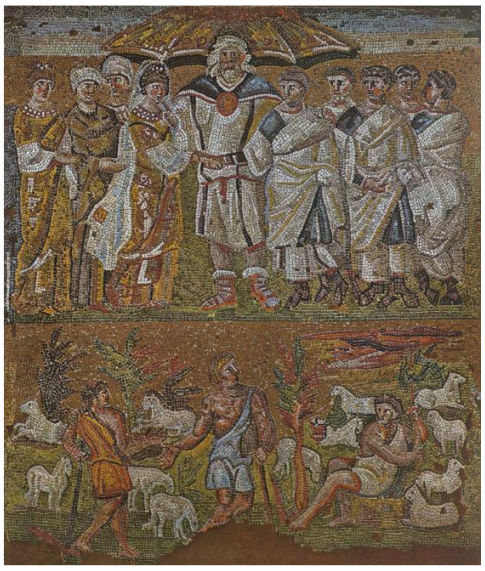


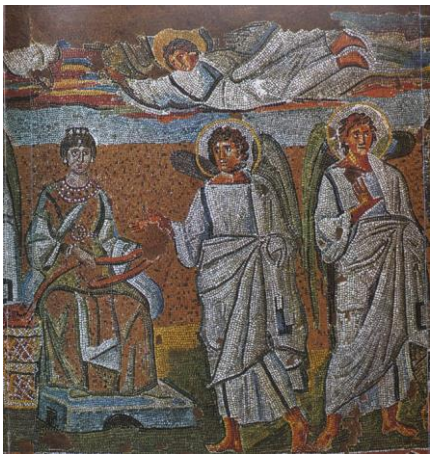


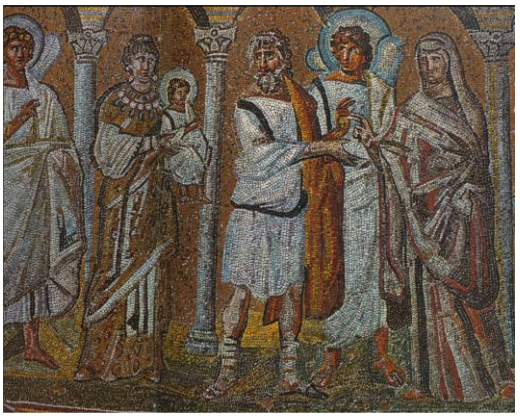




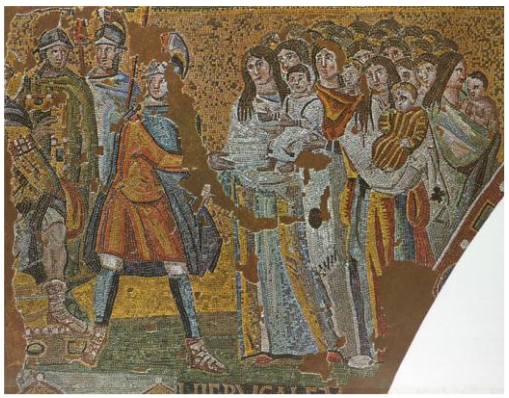














© Wilpert 1976, fig. 29-32, 34, 37-39, 51-55, 61-67

2.24 ENTHRONED VIRGIN WITH CHILD

432-440

Dimensions unknown to author

Rome, Santa Maria Maggiore (lost)

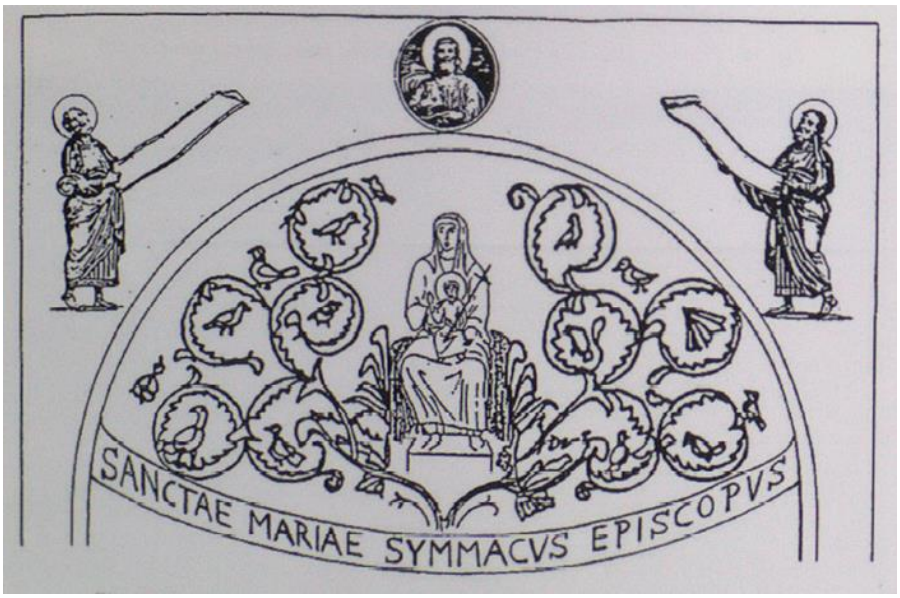
Gerhard Steigerwald, *Die frühchristlichen Mosaiken des Triumphbogens von S. Maria Maggiore in Rom*, Regensburg 2016, pp. 157-160; Maria Lidova, The imperial Theotokos: revealing the concept of Early Christian imagery in Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome, *Convivium* 2, 2015, pp. 64-66; Hugo Brandenburg, *Le prime chiese di Roma: IV-VII secolo*, Milano 2013, p. 205; Beat Brenk, *The apse, the image and the icon. A historical perspective of the apse as a space for images*, Wiesbaden 2010, p. 75, fig. 81; Maria Raffaella Mena, I mosaici della Basilica di Santa Maria Maggiore, in: Maria Andaloro (ed.), *L'orrizonte tardoantico e le nuove immagini 312-468,* Milano 2006, pp. 343-346; Maria Raffaella Menna, Santa Maria Maggiore, in: Maria Andaloro (ed.), *La pittura medievale a Roma 312-1431. Atlante: percorsi visivi* 1, Turnhout 2006, p. 272; Angelika Geyer, Bibelepik und frühchristliche Bildzyklen. Die Mosaiken von S. Maria Maggiore in Rom, *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts. Römische Abteilung* 112, 2005/2006, p. 296; Maria Andaloro, Serena Romano, *Arte e iconografia a Roma. Dal tardoantico alla fine del medioevo*, Milano 2002, pp. 80, 100; Aldo Nestori, Fabrizio Bisconti (eds.), *I mosaici paleocristiani di Santa Maria Maggiore negli acquarelli della collezione Wilpert,* Città del Vaticano 2000, p. 11; Francesco Gandolfo, La Basilica Sistina: i mosaici della navata e dell'arco trionfale, in: Carlo Pietrangeli (ed.), *Santa Maria Maggiore a Roma,* Firenze 1987, p. 87; Beat Brenk, *Die frühchristlichen Mosaiken in S. Maria Maggiore zu Rom,* Wiesbaden 1975, p. 4; James Snyder, The mosaic in Santa Maria Nova and the original apse decoration of Santa Maria Maggiore, in: Robert Enggass, Marilyn Stokstad (eds.), *Hortum imaginum*, Lawrence 1974, pp. 1-9; Gerard Wellen, *Theotokos: Eine ikonographische Abhandlung über das Gottesmutterbild in frühchristlicher Zeit*, Utrecht 1961, p. 94; Christa Ihm, *Die Programme der christlichen Apsismalerei vom vierten Jahrhundert bis zur Mitte des achten Jahrhunderts,* Wiesbaden 1960, pp. 55-56, 132-135; Carlo Cecchelli, *I mosaici della Basilica di S. Maria Maggiore,* Torino 1956, pp. 67-68; André Grabar, *Martyrium. Recherches sur le culte des reliques et l'art chrétien antique,* Paris 1946, p. 51; August Schuchert, *Santa Maria Maggiore zu Rom I. Die Gründungsgeschichte der Basilika und die ursprüngliche Apsislange,* Roma 1939, p. 17; Joseph Wilpert, La proclamazione efesina e i mosaici della basilica di Santa Maria Maggiore, *Analecta Sacra Tarraconensia* 7, 1931, p. 201.

The precise look of the oldest apse of Santa Maria Maggiore, decorated with mosaics by Pope Sixtus III (432-440), is unknown, but the most accepted hypothesis is that it represented an enthroned veiled Virgin with Child on her lap and wine scrolls in the background, similar to the apse of the basilica of Santa Maria in Capua Vetere from the same period, now destroyed but known from an 18th-century description. The presence of vines in the early Christian apse composition in Santa Maria Maggiore is further confirmed by the vine frieze running along the nave above the columns. It visualizes the idea of Paradise and divine presence within the space of the church, based on parallels that the Gospel draws between God and the True vine.

Another hypothesis proposes the presence of Virgin among martyrs. This proposition is based on medieval transcriptions of a mosaic dedicatory inscription of Sixtus III on the counter-façade, preserved until the 16th century. It clearly mentions a representation of the Virgin and Child, surrounded by five saints with symbols of their martyrdom under their feet, who offer her their crowns. According to the inscription, they also served as witnesses of her maternity. The Virgin could have been represented, similarly to the scenes from the triumphal arch, seated on a throne in golden attire like a princess. However, this mosaic may have existed on the counter-façade and not necessarily in the apse. As Sixtus III preferred an aniconic mosaic in the apse of his baptistery in Lateran, such mosaic could have decorated the apse of Santa Maria Maggiore as well.

The only source describing the mosaic of the apsidal space of the church is the note by Giovanni Diacono from 1169: *"...this apse is nicely decorated with mosaics. You can see there many fish and flowers and all sorts of animals and birds between the choir and the altar."* (PL 194, coll. 4557). The last words suggest that he was talking probably about floor mosaic and not the apse. Unlike the current apse, the apse of Sixtus III was directly connected to the triumphal arch and its iconographic programme dedicated to the emphasis on the double nature of Christ and on the Virgin as its embodiment. If Mary with the Child were represented alone in the middle of the apse, she would have become focus of attention and veneration of the viewer. The iconography would have served as powerful symbol of the human nature of Christ.

The hypothesis about the presence of the Virgin in the apse is supported by the importance of the liturgy of Nativity feast in the basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore and by the dedication of the basilica to the Virgin. It is also possible that several of the motifs of the current apse mosaic, created in the 13th century by Iacopo Torriti, such as the acanthus scrolls and the river with putti, birds, and fish at the bottom of the scene, appearing also in the first apse of San Giovanni in Lateran and the lost dome mosaic of Santa Costanza (cat. entry n. 2.5), were present in the mosaic commissioned by Sixtus III.



© Brenk 2010, fig. 81

2.25 *ECCLESIA EX GENTIBUS* AND *ECCLESIA EX CIRCUMCISIONE*

432-440

Height 1340 cm, length 346 cm (with dedicatory inscription)

Rome, Santa Sabina

Ivan Foletti, Marie Okáčová, AVREA CONCISIS SVRGIT PICTVRA METALLIS: An Epistemological and Methodological Approximation of Early Christian Multimedia Visuality, in: Matthias Grawehr, Markus Kersten (eds.), *A Second Gaze: Intertextuality and Transient Meaning in Roman Texts and Objects*, Heidelberg 2024, pp. 184-186; Ally Kateusz, Luca Badini Confalonieri, Women Church Leaders in and around Fifth-century Rome, in: Joan Taylor, Illaria Ramelli (eds.), *Patterns of Women's Leadership in Early Christianity*, Oxford 2021, pp. 254-257; Maria Andaloro, Carla d'Angelo (eds.), *Mosaici medievali a Roma attraverso il restauro dell'ICR 1991-2004*, Roma 2017, pp. 21-58; Alexej Lidov, The priesthood of the Virgin Mary as an image-paradigm of Christian visual culture, *Ikon* 10, 2017, p. 17; Patricia Krupinski, Synagoga under Erasure: *Ecclesia* and Text in Santa Sabina, *Art Journal* 1, 2016, pp. 117-125; Mary Schaefer, *Women in Pastoral Office. The Story of Santa Prassede, Rome*, Oxford 2013, pp. 202-207; Geraldine Leardi, I mosaici e la decorazione ad *opus sectile* di Santa Sabina, in: Maria Andaloro (ed.), *L'orrizonte tardoantico e le nuove immagini 312-468,* Milano 2006, pp. 292-297; Alessandra Ignesti, *Il mosaico della controfacciata della basilica di Santa Sabina in Roma: fonti ed iconografia* (master thesis), Facoltà di conservazione dei beni culturali, Università degli Studi di Tuscia, Tuscia 2005; Daniela Goffredo, Le personificazioni delle *Ecclesiae*: tipologia e significati dei mosaici di S. Pudenziana e S. Sabina, in: Federico Guidobaldi, Alessandra Guiglia Guidobaldi (eds.), *Ecclesiae Urbis. Atti del Congresso Internazionale di studi sulle chiese di Roma IV-X secolo* III, Roma 2002, pp. 1949-1962; Olaf Steen, The apse mosaic of S. Pudenziana and its relation to the fifth century mosaics of S. Sabina and S. Maria Maggiore, in: Federico Guidobaldi, Alessandra Guiglia Guidobaldi (eds.), *Ecclesiae Urbis. Atti del Congresso Internazionale di studi sulle chiese di Roma IV-X secolo* III, Roma 2002, pp. 1939-1948; Frederic William Schlatter, The two women in the mosaic of Santa Pudenziana, *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 3, 1995, pp. 4-5, 22; Guglielmo Matthiae, *Pittura romana del Medioevo. Secoli IV-IX* I, Roma 1987, p. 40; Guglielmo Matthiae, *Mosaici medioevali delle chiese di Roma*, Roma 1967, pp. 78, 408; Walter Oakeshott, *The Mosaics of Rome,* London 1967, pp. 73-89, 89-90; Giuseppe Bovini, I mosaici romani dell'epoca di Sisto III (432-440): 1: i mosaici di S. Sabina, dell'atrio del battistero lateranense e di S. Pietro in Vincoli; 2: i mosaici della navata mediana e dell'arco trionfale di S. Maria Maggiore, *Corso di cultura sull'arte ravennate e bizantina* 10, 1963, pp. 67-69; Antonio Muñoz, *Il restauro della Basilica di Santa Sabina*, Roma 1938, pp. 26-27, 29; Adolfo Venturi, *Musaici cristiani di Roma*, Roma 1926, p. 17; Marguerite Van Berchem, Etienne Clouzot, *Mosaiques chrétiennes du IVme au Xme siècle*, Genève 1924, pp. 79, 82; Antonio Muñoz, *La basilica di Santa Sabina in Roma: descrizione storico-artistica dopo i recenti restauri,* Milano 1919, pp. 12, 26-27; Joseph Wilpert, *Die römischen Mosaiken und Malereien der kirchlichen Bauten vom IV. bis zum XIII. Jahrhundert* I, Freiburg 1916, pp. 13, 307; Joachim Joseph Berthier, *L'Église de Sainte-Sabine à Rome,* Roma 1910, pp. 254-255, 262-263; Giovanni Battista de Rossi, *Mosaici cristiani e saggi dei pavimenti delle chiese di Roma anteriori al secolo XV: tavole cromo-litografiche con cenni storici e critici*, Roma 1899, p. 48; Natale Baldoria, Roma. Mosaico di Santa Sabina. Pulitura, *Archivio storico dell'arte* 3, 1890, pp. 409-410; Raffaele Garrucci, *Storia dell'arte cristiana nei primi otto secoli della chiesa* III, Prato 1877, p. 16.

The counter-façade of the church of Santa Sabina in Rome is decorated in its entire width by a mosaic consisting of three parts: dedicatory inscription, flanked by two female figures and surrounded by a double meander ornament. The female figures are identified based on inscriptions below them as personifications of *Ecclesia ex Circumcisione* (the church of the circumcised or Jews) and *Ecclesia ex Gentibus* (the church of the gentiles). They confront the viewer by directly staring down at him. The figures hold open codices, the New and the Old Testament, in their left hand, while doing a gesture of speech or teaching with the right one. Dressed in dark matron-like garments reminiscent of the widow Turtura's attire (cat. entry n. 4.13), the figures are visually close enough to suggest their connection while being distinguished by the imaginary texts in their codices and their different headdresses.

This visual arrangement was clearly designed to convey a significant political message. When presbyter Peter of Illyricum undertook the basilica's construction and decoration—likely under direct orders from Pope Celestine I (422-432)—the papacy faced pressure from its conflict with the Constantinopolitan bishop regarding Nestorius's (380-451) teachings about Mary as bearer of only Christ's human nature. Simultaneously, Rome was still addressing demographic consequences from Alaric's (395-410) siege, making the struggle for theological and political supremacy particularly challenging for Celestine. To establish Roman episcopal primacy, the pope continued what had begun with Constantine's (306-337) translation of the True Cross relic to Rome: asserting Rome's claim to Jerusalem as Christianity's original source while simultaneously obscuring its Jewish heritage. The two *ecclesiae* figures in Santa Sabina can be understood as visual representations of Celestine's agenda. Their codices reference both past and present Roman Christianity, with the crucial caveat that the past (Hebrew Scripture) no longer belonged to Jews but had been divinely granted to Christians. This concept is reinforced by the gold cross medallion adorning the *Ecclesia ex Circumcisione*'s *palla* and the divine hand holding a closed codex (possibly representing the Old Testament) depicted in the composition's upper section, as shown in Giovanni Ciampini's (1633-1698) 17th-century drawing of the now-fragmentary mosaic.

Beyond their function as politically motivated symbols of papal authority, these figures likely carried additional meaning derived from their placement within the Aventine Hill basilica. In this spatial context, which still evoked memories of the scholarly noblewomen associated with Marcella and renowned for their theological expertise, the figures could also represent two authoritative widows respected within the Church, performing teaching gestures that mirror the most venerated city martyrs—apostles Peter and Paul. According to Ciampini's drawing, these apostles, whose mission was fundamentally connected to scriptural dissemination, were positioned directly above the women. Within this interpretive framework, the codices become markers of the women's scholarship and instruments of their catechetical work, while the white handkerchief held by *Ecclesia ex Gentibus* serves as a reminder of the Eucharistic *mappula*—a symbol of participation in the highest sacraments from a position of religious authority.



© Andaloro and D'Angelo 2017, p. 24

2.26 IVORY PLAQUES WITH SCENES FROM THE ACTS OF APOSTLES

Around 430

Length 9.8 cm, height 4.2 cm

London, The British Museum, inv. n. 1856, 0623.8-10

Jeffrey Spier, Ivory Plaques with Scenes from the Acts of the Apostles, in: Jeffrey Spier *et al.* (eds.), *Picturing the Bible: the Earliest Christian Art*, New Haven 2007, pp. 237-238; Herbert Beck, Peter C. Bol (eds.), *Spätantike und frühes Christentum. Ausstellung im Liebighaus Museum alter Plastik, Frankfurt am Main (16. Dezember 1983 bis 11. März 1984)*, Frankfurt am Main 1983, n. 269, pp. 692-694; John M. Huskinson, *Concordia Apostolorum: Christian Propaganda at Rome in the Fourth and Fifth Centuries. A Study in Early Christian Iconography and Iconology*, Oxford 1982, pp. 44-46; Claudia Nauert, Rüdiger Warns (eds.), *Thekla: Ihre Bilder in der frühchristlichen Kunst*, Wiesbaden 1981, pp. 1-8; Herbert Kessler, Scenes from the Acts of the Apostles on Some Early Christian Ivories, *Gesta* 18, 1979, pp. 109-119; Lieselotte Kötzsche, Three plaques from a casket with apostle scenes, in: Kurt Weitzmann (ed.), *Age of Spirituality. Late Antique and Early Christian Art, Third to Seventh Century*, New York 1979, n. 455, pp. 507-508; Wolfgang Volbach, *Elfenbeinarbeiten der Spätantike und des frühen Mittelalters*, 3rd ed., Mainz 1976, n. 117, p. 83; Klaus Wessel, Eine Gruppe oberitalienischer Elfenbeinarbeiten, *Jahrbuch des deutschen archäologischen Instituts* 63-64, 1948-1949, p. 131; Ormonde M. Dalton, *Catalogue of Early Christian Antiquities and Objects from the Christian East in the Department of British and Medieval Antiquities and Etnography of the British Museum,* London 1901, n. 292, pp. 50-51; Raffaele Garrucci, *Storia dell'arte cristiana nei primi otto secoli della chiesa* VI, Prato 1880, p. 68.

The three small rectangular plaques, together with two fragments, decorated by acanthus and floral patterns, have once been part of a casket, perhaps holding relics. There are two drill holes on each of the plaques. The original size and iconography of the casket is unknown. Even though the surface details have been partially rubbed away, the style of carving, characterized by large, round heads and energetic gestures, suggests Roman origin in the early 5th century. It is close to that of the ivory plaques with the scenes from the Passion of Christ from the British Museum (cat. entry n. 2.27).

The panels were first documented as part of the collection of Hungarian collector Gábor Fejérváry (1780-1851). Upon his demise the objects were acquired by ecclesiastical historian, antiquary, collector and member of the Burlington Fine Arts Club reverend William Maskell (1814-1890), who sold them to the British Museum in 1856.

Each of the figural panels, framed by identical leaf border, narrates canonical and apocryphal events from the apostolic activity of Peter and Paul. On one of the plaques, which depicts Peter resurrecting devout Tabitha, the bearded Apostle extends his hand towards the woman, who sits upright on her deathbed. She is dressed in a tunic and a *dalmatica* and her head is covered by a headdress. A companion to the healing Tabitha, dressed in long tunic and covered by a veil, crouches at the left, and another woman with dishevelled long hair flees in terror. These female figures were added by the artist, as the story expressly states that the Apostle sent onlookers out from the room. To the right, another Apostle, characterized by curly hair, dressed in a tunic and wrapped in a cloak, observes the scene and stretches out his right hand in astonishment. Another plaque depicts two episodes from the life of St. Paul on his travels to Asia Minor. On the left, the bearded and balding saint sits and reads to a woman, dressed and coiffed like Tabitha, who listens to him with great attention, resting her chin on her hand, half hidden behind the walls of a city. She is Thecla, who according to apocryphal *Acts of Paul*, was inspired by Paul's teachings and rejected her betrothed and wishes of her mother. Paul was driven from her town by the enraged inhabitants, and she was to be killed,

but neither burning nor wild beasts harmed her, and she lived a long life as a saint. In the adjacent scene, a man throws a stone at St. Paul, who has fallen to his knees. This may relate to the story of Thecla, in which Paul is punished for his teachings, or possibly to his stoning at the urging of Jews from Antioch and Iconium. The theme of Thecla, but also the scene of the resurrection of Tabitha, may present a link with the forms of late antique female piety which lent women some measure of religious authority. In the narrative, Thecla listens from a window inside her mother's home. It seems that the image thematizes the modalities of access to the biblical teaching and different notions related to chastity and continence. The last plaque depicts an apocryphal story, especially popular in Rome, talking about the miracle of St. Peter striking water from a rock in prison in Rome and baptizing his captors. The story was first referred to in written source in the 6th or 7th century but was fairly spread in pictorial works of the 4th and 5th century.

It is likely that the scenes from the lives of the two Apostles originated in an extended narrative cycle, perhaps in a now lost illustrated apocryphal text from the late 4th century. Pictorial cycles with the Acts of Apostles also served to decorate the churches of San Paolo fuori le mura and San Pietro in Rome.



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2.27 FOUR PLAQUES WITH PASSION SCENES

Around 440-450

Length 9.8 cm, height 7.5 cm (plaque with Judgement of Pilate and Denial of St. Peter)

Length 10.6 cm, height 7.5 cm (plaque with Crucifixion)

Length 9.9 cm, height 7.5 cm (plaque with Women at the Tomb)

Length 9.8 cm, height 7.5 cm (plaque with Incredulity of Thomas)

London, The British Museum, inv. n. 1856, 0623.4-7

Sue Brunning et al. (eds.), *Silk Roads*, London 2024, p. 193; Adrien Palladino, *Inventing Late Antique Reliquaries: Reception, Material History, and Dynamics of Interaction (4th-6th* centuries CE), Roma 2022, pp. 186-198; Alessandra Lazzara, La *Passio Christi* negli avori Maskell. Migrazioni tematiche tra le arti maggiori e le arti minori, in: Fabrizio Bisconti *et al.* (eds.), *Arti minori e arti maggiori: relazioni e interazioni tra tarda antichità e alto medioevo*, Todi 2019, pp. 523-550; Ivan Foletti, The British Museum casket with scenes of the Passion: the easter liturgy and the apse of St. John Lateran in Rome, in: Ivan Foletti, Manuela Gianandrea (eds.), *The fifth century in Rome*, Roma 2017, pp. 139-159; Anthony Eastmond, *The Glory of Byzantium and Early Christendom*, London 2013, p. 56; Sonja Marzinzik, *Masterpieces: Early Medieval Art*, London 2013, n. 15, pp. 38-39; Felicity Harley McGowan, The Maskell Passion Ivories and Greco-Roman Art: notes on the iconography of crucifixion, in: Juliet Mullins, Jenifer Ní Ghrádaigh, Richard Hawtree (eds.), *Envisioning Christ on the Cross: Ireland and the Early Medieval West*, Dublin 2013, pp. 13-33; Felicity Harley, Ivory plaques with the Passion and Resurrection of Christ (the „Maskell Ivories"), in: Jeffrey Spier *et al.* (eds.), *Picturing the Bible: the Earliest Christian Art*, New Haven 2007, pp. 229-232; Gabriele Finaldi (ed.), *The Image of Christ*, London 2000, pp. 108-111; Timothy W. Potter, Quattro avori della Passione, in: Angela Donati (ed.), *Dalla terra alle genti. La diffusione del cristianesimo nei primi secoli*, Milano 1996, p. 239; David Buckton (ed.), *Byzantium. Treasures of Byzantine Art and Culture from British Collections*, London 1994, p. 58; Lieselotte Kötzsche, Die trauernden Frauen: Zum Londoner Passionkästchen, in: David Buckton, Thomas Heslop (eds.), *Studies in Medieval Art and Architecture: Presented to Peter Lasko*, Dover 1994, pp. 80-90; Herbert Beck, Peter C. Bol (eds.), *Spätantike und frühes Christentum. Ausstellung im Liebighaus Museum alter Plastik, Frankfurt am Main (16. Dezember 1983 bis 11. März 1984)*, Frankfurt am Main 1983, n. 267, pp. 690-691; Lieselotte Kötzsche, Four plaques with Passion scenes, in: Kurt Weitzmann (ed.), *Age of Spirituality. Late Antique and Early Christian Art, Third to Seventh Century*, New York 1979, n. 452, pp. 502-504; Wolfgang Volbach, *Elfenbeinarbeiten der Spätantike und des frühen Mittelalters*, 3rd ed., Mainz am Rhein 1976, n. 116, p. 82; Wolfgang Volbach, Max Hirmer (eds.), *Early Christian Art*, New York 1961, pp. 329-330; Richard Delbrueck, Zu spätrömischen Elfenbeinen des Westreichs, *Bonner Jahrbücher des Rheinischen Landesmuseums* 152*,* 1952, pp. 165-189; Klaus Wessel, Eine Gruppe oberitalienischer Elfenbeinarbeiten, *Jahrbuch des deutschen archäologischen Instituts* 63-64, 1948-1949, p. 125; Ormonde M. Dalton, *Catalogue of Early Christian Antiquities and Objects from the Christian East in the Department of British and Medieval Antiquities and Etnography of the British Museum,* London 1901, n. 291, pp. 49-50; Raffaele Garrucci, *Storia dell'arte cristiana nei primi otto secoli della chiesa* VI, Prato 1880, pp. 67-68.

The plaques have formed a casket. Four sides of this small box have survived, but not the lid or any internal compartments. They were product of a Roman workshop. The reliefs are outstandingly deep, with some of the figures standing out almost entirely from the background. The plasticity is enhanced by the elaborate carving. The scenes from the Passion of Christ include a total of seven episodes, spread in a condensed manner over the four sides, demonstrating the mastery of the carver. The dynamism of the figures within the reduced space allows for a scenic play between the episodes and interactions between different protagonists inside the panel, made possible through the gaze. The meticulously carved scenes indicate that the object was made to be observed, to be subject to an extended glance.

On the first plaque, Pilate washing his hands, Christ carrying the cross, and the denial of Peter are portrayed. The last two scenes have been merged, so that the Roman soldier accompanying Christ seems to be directing him toward Peter. The apostle sits behind a brazier and a maid points at him accusingly. On the second plaque, which may have served as the back of the casket, the Crucifixion is juxtaposed with the death of Judas, hanged on a tree. Mary and John the Baptist stand to the left of Christ, while Longinus to his right thrusts a spear into his side. The third plaque portrays only one event: two Marys at Christ's tomb. The panel is constructed around the empty tomb, represented with half-open doors, with one of the levers broken. Corresponding to the mourning figures on ancient funerary monuments, the women sit on either side of the tomb, while soldiers sleep in the foreground. The last panel confronts a viewer with a rare scene within late antique iconography, the Doubting of Thomas. Previous research highlights the importance of the casket's imagery in the birth of Christian narration in late antiquity, especially at the time of pope Leo the Great (440-461). Sebastian Ristow states that the ivory panels present in condensed manner the seven stations of the Passion and can be linked to sermons of Leo the Great. The birth of the Christian narrative can thus be connected to the birth of the Passion cycle in a context that associated liturgy with narrative cyclical images. Ivan Foletti connects the box to the Eater liturgy of the 5th-century Rome. According to the scholar, the box could have been commissioned by a high-ranking personage well-versed in theological and artistic issues. The box preserved the memory not only of the Easter liturgy itself, but its scenes were also connected to the imagery in the ancient apse of the basilica of San Giovanni in Laterano, around which most liturgical rites of the Roman Passion liturgy were centred. The association between Judas hanging and Christ on the cross is a memento of the universal salvation through Christ's sacrifice. The scene of Pilate washing his hands, in contrast to Peter's denial, alludes to two different types of purification: the bad example of Pilate who purges himself of his offence, and Peter's repentance, expressed in his tears and admitting of his sins. In this context the image of the Women at the Tomb can be interpreted as a memory of the period of waiting (Holy Saturday) before Christ's resurrection. The focus on Passion scenes could suggest the function of the casket as a container for Christological relics, but it cannot be excluded that it was created without clear content. Due to its inspiration by Easter liturgy, it could also have served as a container for oils or ointments for the anointing of the newly baptized.

The plates of the casket were transferred to the British Museum in 1856 from the collection of the liturgist William Maskell (1814-1890), who most probably acquired them after the death of Hungarian collector Gábor Fejérváry (1780-1851).



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2.28 FEMALE FIGURE WITH A TORCH

CHRIST AND THE SAMARITAN WOMAN

End of the 4th century

ADORATION OF THE MAGI

CHRIST CROWNING TWO FEMALE FIGURES

CHRIST CROWNING ST. VITO, ST. MODESTO, AND ST. CRESCENZA

late 5th century or early 6th century

Dimensions unknown to author

Rome, Ospedale di San Giovanni in Laterano, Ospedale dell'Angelo

Alessandra Cerrito, Nuovi dati dalle indagini nell'oratorio dei Santi Agnese, Vito e compagni sotto l'Ospedale dell'Angelo (complesso ospedaliero S. Giovanni-Addolorata, Roma), in: *Archeologia cristiana in Italia: ricerche, metodi e prospettive (1993-2022). Atti del XII Congresso Nazionale di Archeologia Cristiana, Roma, 20-23 settembre 2022* II, Roma 2024, pp. 553-563; Alessandra Cerrito, Jun Yamada, L'area dell'Ospedale dell'Angelo: ricerche in corso e prospettive future, in: *Atti del convegno Rileggere il Laterano antico: il rilievo 3D dell'Ospedale San Giovanni – work in progress (29 novembre 2018 – Sala Folchi, Presidio ospedaliero San Giovanni)*, Sesto Fiorentino 2020, pp. 91-125; Grace Stafford, *Women, Gender, and Society in Late Antiquity: A Study in Visual Culture* (dissertation thesis), Department of Archaeology, University of Oxford, Oxford 2020, cat. n. P25; Alessandra Cerrito, Jun Yamada, Scoperta di nuove pitture nell'oratorio paleocristiano sotto l'Ospedale dell'Angelo (complesso ospedaliero S. Giovanni-Addolorata), Roma, *Atti della Pontificia Accademia Romana di Archeologia Rendiconti* 91, 2018-2019, pp. 275-321; Lucrezia Spera, Monumenti cristiani e loro relazione con i centri del potere: Roma, in: *Acta XVI Congressus Archaeologiae Christianae: Costantino e i Costantinidi. L'innovazione costantiniana, le sue radici e i suoi sviluppi (Roma, 22-28. 09. 2013)* I, Roma 2016, pp. 320-321; Alessandra Cerrito, Jun Yamada, Nuovi scavi e ricerche sulle prime fasi insediative cristiane nel complesso degli horti Domitiae Lucillae e della "domus Annii" (comprensorio ospedaliero S. Giovanni-Addolorata, Roma), in: Rosanna Martorelli et al. (eds.), *Isole e terraferma nel primo cristianesimo: identità locale ed interscambi culturali, religiosi e produttivi: Atti XI Congresso nazionale di archeologia cristiana, Cagliari, Dipartimento di storia, beni culturali e territorio - sede della Cittadella dei Musei, Cagliari, Pontificia Facoltà teologica della Sardegna, Sant'Antioco, Sala consiliare del Comune, 23-27 settembre 2014*, Cagliari 2015, pp. 687-693; Maria Lidova, The Imperial *Theotokos*: Revealing the Concept of Early Christian Imagery in Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome, *Convivium* 2, 2015, pp. 67-69; Francesca Romana Moretti, Storie cristologiche della cappella 'cristiana' nell'area del complesso ospedaliero San Giovanni, I panelli dipinti della cappella 'cristiana' nell'area dell'Ospedale San Giovanni in: Maria Andaloro (ed.), *L'orrizonte tardoantico e le nuove immagini 312-468,* Milano 2006, pp. 97-104, 419-424; Francesca Romana Moretti, Cappella cristiana, in: Maria Andaloro (ed.), *La pittura medievale a Roma 312-1431. Atlante: percorsi visivi* 1, Turnhout 2006, pp. 243-250; Alessandra Cerrito, A proposito della capella paleocristiana rinvenuta nell'area del complesso storico dell'ospedale lateranense, *Rivista di archeologia cristiana* 80, 2004, pp. 326-328; Paolo Liverani, L'area lateranense in età tardoantica e le origini del Patriarchio, *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome: antiquité* 116, 2004, pp. 17-49; Beat Brenk, *Die Christianisierung der spätrömischen Welt. Stadt, Land, Haus, Kirche und Kloster in frühchristlicher Zeit*, Wiesbaden 2003, pp. 121-128; Santa Maria Trenti, L'Ospedale dell'Angelo al Laterano, *Arte medievale* 2, n. 1, 2003, pp. 83-105; Alessandra Cerrito, Oratori ed edifici di culto minori di Roma tra il IV secolo ed i primi decenni del V, in: Federico Guidobaldi, Alessandra Guiglia Guidobaldi (eds.), *Ecclesiae Urbis. Atti del Congresso Internazionale di studi sulle chiese di Roma IV-X secolo,* I, Roma 2002, pp. 397-418; Valnea Santa Maria Scrinari, Angelo Marinucci, *Il Laterano imperiale* II. *Dagli „horti Domitiae" alla cappella cristiana*, Città del Vaticano 1995; Maria Andaloro, Pittura romana e pittura a Roma da Leone Magno a Giovanni VII, in: *Committenti e produzione artistico-letteraria nell'alto medioevo occidentale* II, Spoleto 1992,

pp. 569-609; Valnea Santa Maria Scrinari, Contributo all'urbanistica tardo antica sul campo Laterano, in: Noël Duval (ed.), *Actes du XIe Congrès International d'Archéologie Chrétienne* II, Roma 1989, pp. 2201-2220; Valnea Santa Maria Scrinari, Aggiornamento sulla topografia lateranense, in: *Atti IX Congresso Internazionale di Archeologia Cristiana* 2, Città del Vaticano 1978, pp. 471-484; Valnea Santa Maria Scrinari, Documenti paleocristiani nell'ambito dello storico Ospedale di S. Giovanni al Laterano, *Atti della Pontificia Accademia Romana di Archeologia Rendiconti* 48, 1975-1976, pp. 377-391; Valnea Santa Maria Scrinari, Scavi sotto la sala Mazzoni dell'Ospedale di S. Giovanni in Laterano, *Atti della Pontificia Accademia Romana di Archeologia Rendiconti* 41, 1968-1969, pp. 167-189.

Series of rooms were discovered under the Lateran hospital during a series of archaeological campaigns directed by Valnea Santa Maria Scrinari between the end of the 1950s and the 1960s. The pictorial decoration separated into panels adorned rooms which were a product of rebuilding of parts of a former production complex used in the 2nd and 3rd centuries, connected to the imperial villas and *horti* of Domitia Lucilla, mother of the emperor Marcus Aurelius (161-180), built on the slope of the Lateran Hill. As the building of a kiln in the late Middle Ages and the construction of the Galleria delle salme of the Ospedale dell'Angelo in the 1970s partially demolished the late antique structures underneath, it remains unclear whether the spaces were part of a larger complex at the time of the creation of the pictorial decoration. The function of the rooms is obscure as well, even though the prevalent hypothesis identifies them as Christian oratory with roots in the late 4th-early 5th century, serving small semi-private group of individuals, potentially undergoing the preparation for baptism, on the basis of the iconography of the paintings and the general layout of the unearthed space.

The decorations of the room A and a room B, identified as the main room of the oratory, were uncovered in the first stage of the excavations between 1959 and 1964. The scenes decorating room A capture real personages performing actions presumably connected to the function of the main room (lighting of the fire during the ritual of *lucernarium*, benediction, anointing). Room B was decorated with scenes from the New Testament, mainly from the Gospel of John, with connotations of salvation through miraculous healing or initiation. Due to the 1970s demolition of the walls which supported them, the paintings were detached and restored. Despite the plan to build an exhibition structure near the historical hospital of San Giovanni, the paintings are still stored in an apothecary above the late antique oratory, belonging to the medieval Ospedale dell'Angelo.

All the paintings from the first two rooms, dated towards the end of the 4th century based on the stylistic closeness to the catacomb paintings from the same period (Cubicolo di Sansone from hypogeum on Via Dino Compagni, catacombs of Marcellinus and Petrus), are framed by red and black borders and are created over a common ivory-coloured background. Only two contain female figures. One of them, positioned originally on the east wall of room A, depicts an older woman with a torch, turned to the right. She is dressed in a tunic with large sleeves with embroidered cuffs in dark grey and lighter blue and with dark *clavi*, paired with a stole of the same colour, decorated by *orbicula*. Her grey hair is gathered at the back of the head and appears to be covered by a tight-fitting head-dress of a light blue colour, in style during the later 4th and the early 5th century. She is adorned with earrings made of single precious stone, potentially signalling her elevated social standing. To her left a bucket can be seen hanging from a hook in the wall, resembling slightly the fresco of the *fossore* from the catacombs of Marcellinus and Petrus. It is possible that the torch served for the lighting of the candles or oil lamps of the gathered members of the congregation during the evening religious ritual of *lucernarium*. It is worth noting, however, that according to the observations of Beat Brenk the area with the bucket and the torch seems to have been heavily restored.

Among the Christological scenes in room B a scene with Christ and the Samaritan woman at the well can be found on the east wall. Christ is depicted on the right side of the well, dressed in a lighter blue tunic with dark grey *clavi* and an ochre mantle over it. He is bearded, with long dark hair. In his left hand he holds a *rhyton*, while performing a gesture of speech with his right. The Samaritan is dressed in reddish tunic with brown *clavi* and is standing to the left of the well. Her coiffure is as simple as her dress. She is captured in the act of pulling the water bucket from the well. The scene reflects the idea of salvation through living water and has strong baptismal connotations.

On the northeastern wall of the oratory, Alessandra Cerrito and Jun Yamada have virtually reassembled the plaster fragments remaining *in situ* and have interpreted the scenes, largely unknown until late 2010s (with the use of infrared photography and high-resolution ortophotography). The scenes are divided into two registers, separated by red bands and dark brown lines. From the upper register, only the scene with a man, dressed as a monk in *cucullus* (a cloak with a heavy hood), resting his right hand on the shoulder of a youth, sometimes interpreted as the depiction of baptismal anointing, remains. A face and a right foot of two haloed saints, as well as fragments of embroidered draperies have been partially preserved next to it, suggesting that a procession of saints may have been represented in the upper register. Among the seven scenes in the lower register, dated to the 5th century and depicting biblical stories with salvific connotations, only the Three youths in the fiery furnace, Daniel in the lions' den and Adoration of the Magi remain preserved to the extent that allows for their identification. The scene of the Adoration is presented according to the scheme copying the eastern-Mediterranean iconography of Epiphany conflated with Nativity, popular in the 5th and 6th centuries. On the right, three Magi can be seen, covered in long, brightly coloured cloaks. One of them points towards a star with his right hand. A figure of a man in a seated position, dressed in *pallium* with *gammadia,* can be seen at the bottom of the scene, possibly representing Joseph. In front of him, the hardly discernible seated Virgin with Child can be discerned.

Sometime in the 5th century the hall ceiling was elevated, and two pillars were erected on the southwestern side of the oratory. Two paintings were preserved on the pillar to the right. The first one depicts two female figures crowned by Christ between two paradisiac palm trees. Christ is dressed in a purple tunic with *clavi* and large ochre mantle. He is represented as young, beardless, with longer blond hair. Unlike him the two women are shown without a red *nimbus* in orant position. They are wearing drastically differing clothes: the one to the left a softly falling veil, mantle, and tunic, the one to the right a richly embroidered *dalmatica* with an imitation of *manikion* and a soft tunic with red cuffs. The aristocratic attire inspired by the Constantinopolitan court together with stylish hair-do held by a diadem with pearls of the woman to the right led some researchers to associate the figures with members of the imperial family or at least female commissioners of elevated social status. This hypothesis was further reinforced by the fact that both women, unlike the group of saints on the other painting, which shares technique of execution and components of plasters and pigments with the painting in question, lack hallos. However, recently an inscription has been found identifying the figure on the right as saint (SNCT). To the left of Christ, next to the neck of the female figure, high resolution photography uncovered two groups of letters, AG and NE, of the same style of writing as the word SNCT, suggesting possible link with martyr Agnes. She is dressed similarly to the figure of the Virgin from the triumphal arch of Santa Maria Maggiore (cat. entry n. 2.23) in Rome and the procession of female martyrs in Sant'Apolinare Nuovo in Ravenna. The identity of the other woman remains unclear.

The second scene shows Christ between clouds, holding most probably a martyrial crown with which he crowns young martyr Vito, his tutor Modesto, and his nurse Crescenza, dressed humbly in a tunic with dark *clavi* and a large mantle. Martyrs are standing below Christ in front of an unidentifiable building and are accompanied by inscriptions. The rendering of the faces is mimetic, even if the features appear somehow stiff. The form of the letters of the inscriptions can be compared to decoration of the Neapolitan catacombs from the end of the 5th century.









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2.29 ST. FELICITAS BETWEEN HER SEVEN SONS

Around 510-530

Height 210 cm, length 134 cm

Rome, Oratorio di Santa Felicita (lost)

Flavia Salvatori, *Il gruppo agiografico di Felicita e i sette figli: genesi ed evoluzione di un culto tardoantico*, Roma 2018, pp. 114-119; Alessandra Cerrito, Sull'oratorio di Santa Felicita presso le terme di Traiano a Roma, in: Federico Guidobaldi, Aldo Nestori (eds.), *Domum tuam dilexi. Miscellanea in onore di Ado Nestori,* Città del Vaticano 1998, pp. 155-184; Ferruccio Lombardi, *Roma. Le chiese scomparse. La memoria storica della città*, Roma 1996, p. 62; Giovanna Arciprete, Felicitas, Oratorium, in: *Lexicon Topographicum Urbis Romae* II, Roma 1995, p. 246; Rainer Warland, *Das Brustbild Christi. Studien zur spätantiken und frühbyzantinischen Bildgeschichte*, Roma-Fribourg-Wien 1986, pp. 224-225; Walther Buchowiecki, *Handbuch der Kirchen Roms* I, Wien 1967, pp. 702-703; Guglielmo Matthiae, *Le Chiese di Roma dal IV al X secolo*, Roma 1962, p. 209; Christa Ihm, *Die Programme der christlichen Apsismalerei vom vierten Jahrhundert bis zur Mitte des achten Jahrhunderts,* Wiesbaden 1960, pp. 115, 118-120; 147-148; Mariano Armellini, Carlo Cecchelli (eds.), *Le chiese di Roma dal secolo IV al XIX* I, Roma 1942, pp. 178-181; Orazio Marucchi, *Basiliques et églises de Rome,* Paris 1911, pp. 308-313; Hartmann Grisar, *Roma alle fine del mondo antico*, Roma 1908, pp. 166-171; Raffaele Garrucci, *Storia dell'arte cristiana nei primi otto secoli della chiesa* III, 1876, pp. 87-88; Antonio de Romanis, *Le antiche camere esquiline dette comunemente delle Terme di Tito*, Roma 1827, pp. 80-83; Stefano Piale, Pitture di un antico oratorio scoperto nelle ultime escavazioni fatte alle Terme di Tito, in: Giuseppe Antonio Guattani, *Memorie Enciclopediche sulle antichità e Belle Arti di Roma per l'a. 1816* II, Roma 1817, pp. 153-164; Troiano Marulli, *Lettera sopra un'antica cappella cristiana scoperta di fresco in Roma nelle Terme di Tito*, Napoli 1813.

The wall-painting was discovered in 1812 in an oratory dedicated to the public worship of martyr Felicitas and her sons and is now lost. The oratory was unearthed during excavations on the west side of *Domus Aurea* in Rome, in the vicinity of the southern exedra of the baths of Trajan. It was unknown until its discovery, not being mentioned in any antique source. The oratory was built in late antiquity in one of the spaces of the *Domus* not utilized in the 2nd century by the baths, but in close proximity to them. By the time of discovery, the pictorial decoration of the space has almost vanished, together with the south and east wall of the one-nave building. After the discovery, the walls were reconstructed.

The wall with a niche, closest to the west wall of the *Domus Aurea*, persevered with intact paintings. The niche was positioned above the altar, under which the saint's relics were buried. The fresco depicted St. Felicitas in an orant position, wearing a reddish tunic and white *pallium,* which covered her head, and receiving the martyr crown from Christ, depicted in half-bust amidst blue and red clouds. He was dressed in tunic and *pallium*, bearded and with a *nimbus*. The martyr was surrounded by her seven sons, who died for the Christian faith in the times of the emperor Antoninus (138-161) along with her. They held crowns of their martyrium. Each of the figures was identified by an epigraph above its head. The row of martyrs was framed by two palm trees, one of which was captured with a haloed Fenix sitting on top of it. Two small unidentifiable figures in short reddish tunics were depicted on the far right and far left of the scene, one holding a staff (not reproduced by all drawings) and one holding a key. Above the scene *agnus Dei* was pictured on a paradisiac hill from which flew four apocalyptic rivers. The sides of the frieze depicted Jerusalem and Bethlehem, from which a procession of twelve lambs was approaching the central one.

The inscription below identified the commissioner of the oratory, Victor, who had it built as a fulfilment of a vow. On the west wall, in close proximity to the apse, a bearded male figure

was depicted in company of a young woman, from which only a face remained in the 19th century. The man pointed towards the apse with his left hand. At first, they were identified as commissioner and his wife, but this hypothesis is not supported by any strong arguments.

The paintings were executed in tempera over a previous fresco decoration from the 4th century. The decoration of the niche is the only painting from the oratory known to us through drawings from the 19th century. The others have fallen down together with the plaster merely a day after the discovery of the building. The latest research dates the paintings between the second and the third decade of the 6th century based on the motif of theophany of Christ and strong paradisiac and apocalyptic allusions in comparison with other Roman apse decorations. At this period the space of the *Domus Aurea*, utilized after the construction of the baths for commercial purposes, was turned by a pious Christian Victor to a small public oratory, dedicated to the Roman martyr who served as a model of Christian woman and mother.



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2.30 MEDALLION WITH CHRIST BETWEEN TWO ANGELS AND ADORATION OF THE MAGI

Possibly after 545

Diameter 4.3 cm

Vatican City, Musei Vaticani, inv. n. MV.60539.0.0

Nikodim Pavlovič Kondakov, *Iconografia della Madre di Dio* I., Roma 2014, pp. 122-123; Christa Ihm, *Die Programme der christlichen Apsismalerei vom vierten Jahrhundert bis zur Mitte des achten Jahrhunderts,* Wiesbaden 1960, pp. 31-32; Raffaele Garrucci, *Storia dell'arte cristiana nei primi otto secoli della chiesa* VI, Prato 1880, p. 125, pl. 480; Giovanni Battista de Rossi, Le medaglie di devozione dei primi sei o sette secoli della chiesa, *Bullettino di archeologia cristiana* 7, 1869, pp. 33-34, 37-45, 51-64; Francescantonio Zaccaria (ed.), *Dissertazioni, lettere ed altre operette del chiarissimo padre Antonmaria Lupi* I, Faenza 1785, p. 196.

The devotional bronze medal features on one side an image of victorious Christ, holding a codex in his left hand and a cross in his right hand, flanked by angels. The landscape is formed by two palm trees, sketched on the recesses of the scene, and two stars above the heads of the angels. Below the figures' feet, two deer drink from a spring surging from a hill. On the other Mother of God is sitting on a throne with high backrest, a Child in her lap, receiving the Magi. The object was found, together with other similar artefacts, in a cave in the outskirts of Rome, and was probably manufactured in the city. It is pierced at the top, which allowed for its hanging and use as an amulet. The rendering of the figures and draperies is highly schematic, done mostly by bold wave-like lines. The scenes on both sides are accompanied by depictions of stars, trees, a dove, and grazing deer with strong paradisiac connotations, alluding to salvation and resurrection of the soul of the owner. The Adoration of the Magi is captured similarly to the catacomb paintings, except for the presence of the dove with an olive branch in its beak. According to the hypothesis, formulated by Nikodim Kondakov, the medallions with depictions of Mother of God were personal possessions of consecrated virgins, whose protector and role model Mary undisputedly was. The motif of the Christ in glory, represented with an angel guard and holding a bejewelled cross in his outstretched hand, in the fashion of the victorious Roman emperor surrounded by his court, has been traced by Christa Ihm to the apse mosaic of the church of San Michele in Africisco in Ravenna, dated to the year 545. The medallion is first recorded in the letter most probably exchanged between two Jesuit scholars, Antonio Maria Lupi (1695-1737) and Orazio Borgondio (1675-1741), before the death of Lupi in 1737. It was transferred to the Vatican by cardinal Francesco Saverio de Zelada (1717-1801) in 1774 after the dissolution of the Society of Jesus. At first, it was housed in Museo Kircheriano, from which it was moved to Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana and later to Musei Vaticani.



© Garrucci 1880, pl. 480

2.31 *TRADITIO CLAVIUM* WITH ST. PAUL, FELIX, STEPHEN, AND MERITA

CHRIST CROWNS ST. FELIX AND ADAUCTUS IN THE PRESENCE OF MERITA

ST. FELIX, ADAUCTUS, AND MERITA

First half of the 6th century

Dimensions unknown to author

Rome, Catacombe di Commodilla

Fabrizio Bisconti, Giovanna Ferri, *La strada di Paolo: la via Ostiense dalle origini alla cristianizzazione*, Padova 2018, pp. 181-193; Jutta Dresken-Weiland, Albrecht Weiland, Zur Datierung der Fresken in der Basilichetta der Commodilla-Katakombe in Rom, in: Adolf Martin Ritter, Wolfgang Wischmeyer, Wolfram Kinzig (eds.), *"...zur Zeit oder Unzeit". Studien zur spätantiken Theologie-, Geistes- und Kunstgeschichte und ihrer Nachwirkung*, Mandelbachtal-Cambridge 2004, pp. 213-226; Johannes Deckers, Gabriele Mietke, Albrecht Weiland (eds.), *Die Katakombe "Commodilla". Repertorium der Malereien,* Città del Vaticano 1994, p. 50-87; Maria Andaloro, Pittura romana e pittura a Roma da Leone Magno a Giovanni VII, in: *Committenti e produzione artistico-letteraria nell'alto medioevo occidentale* II, Spoleto 1992, pp. 585-589; André Grabar, *Les voies de la création en iconographie chrétienne. Antiquité et moyen âge*, Paris 1979, p. 77; André Grabar, *Christian Iconography. A Study of Its Origins*, Princeton 1968, p. 80; Guglielmo Matthiae, *Pittura romana del medioevo* I, Roma 1965, p. 150; Guglielmo Matthiae, *Pittura politica del medioevo romano*, Roma 1964, p. 19; Frederik van der Meer, *'Maiestas Domini'. Théophanies de l'apocalypse dans l'art chrétien*, Città del Vaticano 1938, p. 353; Paul Styger, *Römische Märtyrergrüfte*, Roma 1935, p. 266; Ernst Kitzinger, *Römische Malerei vom Beginn des 7. bis zur Mitte des 8. Jahrhunderts*, München 1934, p. 21; Paul Styger, *Die römischen Katakomben. Archäologische Forschungen über den Ursprung und die Bedeutung der Altchristlichen Grabstätten*, Berlin 1933, p. 277; Joseph Wilpert, *Die römischen Mosaiken und Malereien der kirchlichen Bauten vom IV. bis zum XIII. Jahrhundert* II*,* Freiburg 1916, pp. 936-946.

The tombs of the martyrs from the reign of Emperor Diocletian (284-305), Felix and Adauctus, part of the underground cemetery of Commodilla, and the area surrounding them have been repeatedly decorated with frescoes over the centuries. The latest of these paintings were created during the last restoration of the so-called "basilichetta" in the first half of the 6th century. They share the layer of the plaster on which widow Turtura with the two martyrs was depicted in front of the Virgin and must have been created around the same period (cat. entry n. 4.13).

The paintings in question are the *traditio clavium* on the left wall of the "basilichetta" near the arch of the entrance, the coronation of Felix and Adauctus by Christ in the presence of martyr Merita on the left wall adjoining the apse and the *loculus* with the tomb of the martyrs, and a depiction of Merita between the two male martyrs in a gable above a *loculus* inside a passage south of the "basilichetta".

The painting with *traditio clavium* has been damaged by reopening of two *loculi* positioned directly above and below it. It is fragmentary and has been secured with cement in some places. In some instances, the upper layer of the painting did not bind sufficiently with the mortar below and peeled off. The scene is framed by a wide red stripe and a black stripe, separated by a thin white line. A narrow strip of yellow ground on which the figures stand stands out against a blue background. The middle of the picture field shows Christ, wearing a porphyry tunic with gold *clavi* and *pallium* of the same colour, sitting on a blue sphere. His dark hair is falling to the shoulders. He is holding a bejewelled codex in his lap and handing

with his right hand a pair of keys to Apostle Peter, standing next to him. Apart from Peter, Adauctus, almost vanished, stands on the right side of Christ, while on the left side Apostle Paul and Felix are represented. They wear white tunics with black *clavi* and *pallia* and cover their hands, prostrate towards Christ, in which they are holding either scrolls or crowns of martyrdom. The contours of the folds and hems of the clothing and facial features of the figures are outlined in black. Their heads are surrounded by golden *nimbus* with a black rim. To the far left of the picture field the figure of martyr Merita, identified by an inscription, accompanies the scene. She is captured performing a gesture of prayer. Lower section of the painting is badly damaged. Merita is dressed in a red-gold long-sleeved robe that reaches down to her ankles, held at the waist by a black belt with large buckle. She is adorned by a large pearl collar. White drapery is slung over both her arms raised in prayer, with the ends falling down at the front of her dress. The uncovered body parts such as hands, neck and face are modelled by applying white paint. Eyes, mouth, and nose are clearly highlighted by black and brown contours. The hair, which is probably parted in the middle, falls in curls down to the nape of the neck.

The painting with the crowning of Felix and Adauctus by Christ in the presence of Merita has almost completely perished apart from several fragments of light green background and the left edge with traces of black and red line of the frame. The iconography of the scene can be reconstructed only with the help of description of the painting and sketch of the state in which it was found in 1720, made by Marcantonio Boldetti (1663-1749) and published by Joseph Wilpert in 1916. In the middle of the picture field Christ with cruciform *nimbus* was standing between Felix and Adauctus, extending his hands with two crowns above their heads. Fragments of paint suggest that the saints were dressed in white tunics with dark red collars and black *clavi*. Merita, slightly smaller than the other figures, was represented in a more lavish attire, adorned by jewelled collar and earrings, performing an orant gesture in front of Christ, her head surrounded by a *nimbus*.

The painting with Adauctus, Felix, and Merita displaying crowns of their martyrdom shares its state with the abovementioned scene. It was also preserved through description and sketch of Boldetti, published by Wilpert in 1916. Only the bottom half of the scene is well preserved, capturing the white tunic with red *clavi*, mantle, and sandals of one of the male saints and ochre tunic and mantle of Merita, identified by an inscription, better portion of which was still visible at the beginning of the 20th century, together with the head of one of the male saints. Evidence suggests that the scene was framed by red and black lines, figures were depicted standing of a greenish-brown ground, modelled to resemble small hills with a blue sky above them, alluding to a heavenly setting. According to the sketch published by Wilpert all martyrs were halloed and were displaying their crowns in covered hands. While two male saints were represented as members of the Church, Merita, with luxurious *manichion*, resembled lady of the court.







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© Wilpert 1976, fig. 148-150

2.32 *MARIA REGINA* WITH CHILD AND AN ANGEL

First half of the 6th century

Height around 170 cm, length 160 cm

ST. ANNE WITH INFANT MARY

Last third of the 6th century

Height 116 cm, length 39.5 cm

STANDING VIRGIN WITH CROSSED HANDS

First half of the 7th century

Height around 205 cm, length around 90 cm

ANNUNCIATION

Second third of the 7th century

Height around 188 cm, length 165 cm

VIRGIN ELEOUSA

Height 171 cm, length around 85 cm

ENTHRONED MADONNA WITH ANGELS

Height 245 cm, length 171 cm

SOLOMONE WITH HER MARTYRED SONS

Height around 172 cm, length 174 cm

ST. BARBARA

Height 137.5 cm, length 66 cm

CHRIST BETWEEN THE VIRGIN AND JOHN THE BAPTIST

Height 172 cm, length 270 cm

Different years around the middle of the 7th century

Rome, Santa Maria Antiqua

Chiara Croci *et al.* (eds.), *Le immagini a Roma nell'alto Medioevo. Dall'atrio alla navata*, Roma 2025, pp. 245-256, 260-301; Eileen Rubery, Giulia Bordi, John Osborne (eds.), *Santa Maria Antiqua: the Sistine Chapel of the early Middle Ages*, Turnhout 2021, pp. 302-308, 311-313, 387-425, 461-485; Catherine Vanderheyde, Parures luxeuses ou austérité vestimentaire?: le dilemme de la représentation de la santeté féminine à Byzance, *Iconographica* 19, 2020, pp. 21-28; Leslie Brubaker, Migrations of the Mother of God: Santa Maria Antiqua in Rome, Hagios Demetrios in Thessaloniki, and the Blachernai in Constantinople, *Settimane di studio della Fondazione di Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo* 66/2, 2019, pp. 1003-1019; Maria Andaloro, Giulia Bordi, Giuseppe Morganti (eds.), *Santa Maria Antiqua tra Roma e Bisanzio,* Milano 2016, pp. 34-53, 154-159, 180-189; Valentino Pace, Alla ricerca di un'identità: affreschi, mosaici, tavole dipinte e libri a Roma fra VI e IX secolo, in: Cristina Carbonetti, Santo Lucà, Maddalena Signorini (eds.), *Roma e il suo territorio nel Medioevo. Le fonti scritte fra tradizione e innovazione. Atti del convegno internazionale di studio dell'Associazione italiana dei paleografi e diplomatisti (Roma, 25-29 ottobre 2012)*, Spoleto 2015, pp. 474-481; Giulia Bordi, Santa Maria Antiqua. Prima di Maria Regina, in: *L'officina dello sguardo. Scritti in onore di Maria Andaloro* I, Roma 2014, pp. 285-289; Beat Brenk, *The apse, the image and the icon. A historical perspective of the apse as a space for images*, Wiesbaden 2010, pp. 104-106; Maria Lidova, The earliest images of Maria Regina in Rome and the Byzantine imperial iconography, in: Miša Rakocija (ed.), *Niš and Byzantium. Eight Symposium (Niš, June 2009)*, Niš 2010, pp. 231-243; John Osborne, The cult of Maria Regina in early medieval Rome, *Acta ad archaeologiam et artium historiam pertinentia* 21, 2008, pp. 95-106; Stephen John Lucey, Art and Socio-Cultural Identity in Early Medieval Rome. The Patrons of Santa Maria Antiqua, in: Éamonn ó Carragáin, Carol Neuman de Vegvar (eds.), *Roma Felix*, Aldershot 2007, pp. 139-158; Beat Brenk, Papal Patronage in a Greek Church in Rome, in: John Osborne, Johann Rasmus Brandt, Giuseppe Morganti (eds.), *Santa Maria Antiqua al Foro Romano cento anni dopo: atti del colloquio internazionale, Roma, 5-6 maggio 2000*, Roma 2004, pp. 67-81; Stephen John Lucey, Palimpsest Reconsidered: Continuity and Change in the Decorative Programs at Santa Maria Antiqua, in: John Osborne, Johann Rasmus Brandt, Giuseppe Morganti (eds.), *Santa Maria Antiqua al Foro Romano cento anni dopo: atti del colloquio internazionale, Roma, 5-6 maggio 2000*, Roma 2004, pp. 83-95; Valentino Pace, Immagini sacre a Roma fra VI e VII secolo, *Acta ad archaeologiam et artium historiam pertinentia* 18, 2004, pp. 144-145; John Osborne, Images of the Mother of God in Early Medieval Rome, in: Anthony Eastmond, Liz James (eds.), *Icon and Word. The Power of Images in Byzantium*, Aldershot 2003, pp. 135-156; Stephen John Lucey, *The Church of Santa Maria Antiqua, Rome: Context, Continuity, and Change* (dissertation thesis), Graduate School-New Brunswick, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, New Jersey-New Brunswick 1999, pp. 57-72, 91-100; Guglielmo Matthiae, *Pittura romana del Medioevo. Secoli IV-IX* I, Roma 1987, pp. 94-96, 99-100; Per Jonas Nordhagen, S. Maria Antiqua: the Frescoes of the Seventh Century, *Acta ad archaeologiam et atrium historiam pertinentia* 13, 1978, pp. 89-142; Per Jonas Nordhagen, The Frescoes of John VII (A.D. 705-707) in S. Maria Antiqua in Rome, *Acta ad archaeologiam et atrium historiam pertinentia* 3, 1968, pp. 87-90; Per Jonas Nordhagen, The Earliest Decorations in Santa Maria Antiqua and their Date, *Acta ad archaeologiam et artium historiam pertinentia* 1, 1962, pp. 53-72; Richard Krautheimer, Spencer Corbett, Wolfgang Frankl, *Corpus Basilicarum Christianarum Romae. Basiliche paleocristiane di Roma (IV-IX sec.)* II., Città del Vaticano-New York 1959, pp. 249-269; Eva Tea, *La basilica di Santa Maria Antiqua,* Milano 1937, pp. 7-41, 107-112; Joseph Wilpert, *Die römischen Mosaiken und Malereien der kirchlichen Bauten vom IV. bis zum XIII. Jahrhundert* II., Freiburg 1916, pp. 658-666; Wladimir de Grüneisen, *Sainte Marie Antique*, Roma 1911, p. 4; Joseph Wilpert, Sancta Maria Antiqua, *L'Arte* XIII, 1910, pp. 82-83.

Within the sacred space of the church of Santa Maria Antiqua, gender separation of imagery can be observed, with marked prevalence of female saintly figures in the south-western section of the lateral nave, where women congregated during the liturgy (Barbara, Solomone, Anna with the young Virgin, enthroned Virgin flanked by angels, Virgin Eleousa, are all placed there). Especially the south-western pillar, neighbouring the ceremonial path of the clergy and the presbytery, and the surrounding walls bear witness to a boom in commissioning of votive images during the 7th and the 8th century.

The painting depicting Solomone, the proud mother of the martyred Maccabees, surrounded by her seven sons and accompanied by their teacher Eleazar, is remarkable for its monumentality more than any other of the other panels. The figure of Solomone, clad in yellow white *dalmatica* and *Theotokos*-like porphyry mantle and red shoes is the focal point of the painting, placed in the centre of the composition and distinguished from others by an

intensely yellow halo outlined with blackish shades. Her left hand is holding to a white cloth, probably *mappa,* sign of her privileged standing. Her right hand is held out in front of her chest, palm forward, which can be interpreted as a speaking gesture, and which certainly reinforced the connection between her and the believers praying in front of the image.

The representation of martyr Barbara on the inner eastern face of the south-west pillar belongs probably to the portfolio of the same workshop. The saint, identified by a Greek inscription, is dressed in a simple light-coloured tunic covered by a dark *maphorion* despite her noble origin (she was the daughter of a Nicomedian satrap). She is standing frontally, with a cross in her right hand. Her left hand, covered partly by the *maphorion*, rests on a peacock painted in outlines. Two indents in the corners of her mouth are believed to have been filled with nails, securing metal lips to the wall, a gift to the saint from the devoted believers.

Another of the votive images, preserved on the west wall of the sanctuary, depicts St. Anne holding infant Mary in her arms. Considerable part of the right side of the panel has been destroyed, together with most of the head of Mary. She is portrayed in the fresco as an imperial princess with purple robe, jewellery, and a diadem, holding a cross in front of her chest with her right hand. St. Anne, turned towards the viewer, is depicted with a halo. She is dressed in thickly painted red *maphorion* marked with heavy lines and shades, and yellowish tunic. Her feet are clad in red shoes, and her head is covered by a white cap and *maphorion.* The facial features of the saint are modelled with extraordinary technical and artistic skill, with thick brushstrokes suggesting three-dimensionality, and vibrant highlights. The technique used in the application of paint to create highlights and shadows closely resembles methods encountered in the painting of an angel from the scene of Annunciation on the "Palimpsest wall". Similarities in composition of the plaster and the types of pigment employed in medieval workshops close in time and space would not have been noteworthy, but the same mixture of pigments in identical quantities suggests that the same workshop or even the same painter was working on both murals, setting the date for the image of St. Anne to the last quarter of the 6th century. Representation of St. Anne was part of the introduction of worship of Holy Mothers to the church of Santa Maria Antiqua, often invoked by sterile couples who wished to have children.

Mother of God seems to have been present at the site even before it became a church. The painting of *Maria Regina*, part of the so-called "Palimpsest wall" near the apse niche of the church, was discovered in 1900, when the destruction of large parts of the layers of the stucco brought to light all the consecutive motifs between the 6th and the 8th century. One of the oldest layers on the wall depicts hieratic and frontal Virgin, seated on purple cushion positioned over a bejewelled lyre-backed throne, and holding the Child in her lap. The Child is clad in a white tunic and ochre mantle and holds a small codex in his right hand. The figure of the *Theotokos* is dressed in an imperial golden *loros* embroidered with gems and pearls, a porphyry-coloured *dalmatica*, and a white tunic with luxuriously embroidered golden cuffs. Her hair is gathered under a purple cap, crowned by a *stephanos*. The attire almost slavishly follows the official costume of the Byzantine empress. To the right of the Virgin an angel reaches towards her with a gold crown laying in his covered hands. The same gesture was most probably repeated by an angel on the left side of the throne, lost after the opening of the apse. The painting was originally part of an imperial palace building, transformed in the second half of the 6th century into a church. It was placed on the end wall of the southern chamber of the building, adjacent to a large rectangular niche. The layer of the painting with *Maria Regina* is positioned inside a depression in the surface obtained by removal of the plaster with an older decoration, which may have been destroyed for political or devotional

reasons or simply because of a change in fashion. In this first phase, corresponding possibly with the arrival of Theodoric (493-526) to Rome for celebration of his *tricennalia* in the year 500 and restoration of the old imperial palace on the Palatine Hill, Santa Maria Antiqua was probably part of the reception rooms on the level of the Roman Forum and connected by a ramp to the palace above. The image of *Maria Regina* may be a product of the Justinianic reconquest of the city in 536. According to Giulia Bordi, in the changing political climate of the city *Maria Regina*, invoked in Constantinople as the protectress of the emperor and the empire may, have been depicted in the building directly linked to the imperial palace as the new protectress of the reconquered Rome. The fresco was identified by Beat Brenk, on the other hand, as a private *ex-voto* image in what was possibly a guardroom of the palace troops residing on the Palatine, controlling the access to the ramp leading up the Palatine Hill. The scholar denies that the image may have served liturgical function. The patron of the painting is more likely to have been an imperial administrator close to the emperor from the palace nearby than a member of the Roman clergy or the papal administration. Around the middle of the 6th century, such administrator would have probably been sent from Constantinople and thus informed of the latest developments in the Marian devotion at the imperial court.

Even though the initial stages of the pictorial decoration and the history of the panel with *Aurum coronarum* are obscure, around the middle of the 7th century, in the period to which most of the votive images with female intercessory figures are dated, the space already fulfilled liturgical functions and must have been a popular place of worship attracting members of the higher social strata, if the quality of the paintings, with gentle brushstrokes, careful modelling of volumes through colour and light and intimate knowledge of Hellenising trends brought to the city by the Greek community are taken into consideration. The powerful presence of the depicted martyrs and biblical figures, introduced to the sacred space for their ability to intervene on behalf of the faithful and assuage their daily fears and pains, was strengthened by their frontality, and by the interplay between shadows of the poorly lighted nave and the light of candles and lamps. Positioned strategically close to or sometimes directly within the paintings (the painting with St. Anne holding the Virgin is perforated at St. Anne's neck and the shape of the hole suggests there was a hook for a lamp installed), they cast flickering light which enlivened the surfaces of metal votive gifts decorating the figures of the saints (Barbara had two pieces of gold attached to her mouth, while silver nails were found in the holes inside the throat of Solomone).

During the 7th century, the Virgin remained dominant figure in the iconographic programme of the church, appearing not only on the western, "female" side, where she was represented on the south-western pillar in the cluster of other female saintly figures surrounded by two angels, represented in all her splendour, seated on a red-brown throne with ornamentally decorated cushion, dressed in blue *palla,* her feet clad in red imperial shoes propped on a large ochre-brown footstool; or on the column in the nave, where she was represented as Eleousa, now strongly damaged but identified as such through the dark purplish colour of her cloak, a negative outline of a cross on the only preserved shoulder and traces of the figure of the Child, who was sitting sideways in Mother's hands, gently touching her shoulder. She was very present on the eastern, "male" side, too. Here she appeared in three separate panels. The scene depicting Christ between the Virgin and John the Baptist, or *Deesis*, is a monumental votive panel positioned at the level of the viewer on the south face of the south-east pillar of the nave, adjacent to the presbytery. This placement, as close to the chancel barrier as possible, reinforces the reality of the laity's physical exclusion from the most sacred spaces of the church, balanced at least by the donor's pictorial representations. Panel with *Deesis* is not an exception, as a male donor is depicted to the left of the Virgin in a gesture of self-

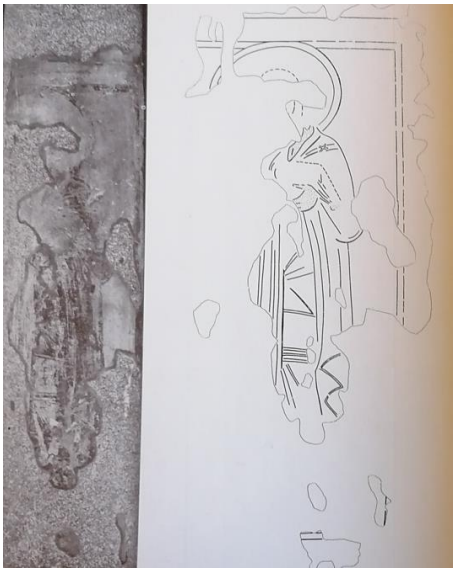
representation. He is sometimes associated with a high-ranking lay member of the Church or an important political figure. Christ stands frontally slightly to the right of the centre of the painting, surrounded by the Virgin to his right and St. John the Baptist to his left, both turned towards him. The figure of the Virgin is the only one that is preserved in almost its entire length, with elegant and elongated proportions. Her head is slightly inclined towards Christ, and her hands are lifted in gesture of prayer and supplication. She has a yellow *nimbus*, similarly to the other two figures, and is dressed in dark purple-violet *maphorion*, covering her head together with a white veil. In the close proximity to the panel with Deesis, on the same pillar, just oriented to the north, the Virgin appears again holding a Child against her body with crossed hands, standing in front of an exedra, and possibly interceding on behalf of a powerful donor, hypothesis supported by presence of remains of a votive inscription. For the third time she was represented close to the chancel barrier separating the presbytery in the scene of Annunciation, from which only an elegantly clad angel standing in contrapposto and addressing the Virgin, remains. Despite this strong presence throughout the church, her authority was especially poignant in the female part of the sacred space. When coupled with her martyr counterparts in the "female" nave, she reinforced the idea of this space not only as a place offering female faithful an entrance to an exclusive hub of sanctity, but also, having survived childbirth and lived through the fears that followed the lives of young and older women alike, together with other saintly women, especially Solomone and Anna, who were also recognised for their brave and miraculous motherhood, she was able to serve as relatable role model, and, due to her closeness to God, as powerful protector at the same time.



















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2.33 *THEOTOKOS* FROM SANTA MARIA NOVA

Second half of the 6th-early 7th century

Length 97 cm, height 132 cm

Rome, Basilica di Santa Francesca Romana (Santa Maria Nova)

Eileen Rubery, Giulia Bordi, John Osborne (eds.), *Santa Maria Antiqua: the Sistine Chapel of the early Middle Ages*, Turnhout 2021, pp. 461-469, 485-502; Maria Lidova, Monumental icons and their bodies in early Christian Rome and Byzantium, in: Jelena Bogdanović (ed.), *Perceptions of the body and sacred space in late antiquity and Byzantium*, London-New York 2018, pp. 25-58; Maria Andaloro, L'*imago antiqua* e il ritorno nella sua chiesa, in: Maria Andaloro, Giulia Bordi, Giuseppe Morganti (eds.), *Santa Maria Antiqua tra Roma e Bisanzio,* Milano 2016, pp. 190-196; Valentino Pace, Alla ricerca di un'identità: affreschi, mosaici, tavole dipinte e libri a Roma fra VI e IX secolo, in: Cristina Carbonetti, Santo Lucà, Maddalena Signorini (eds.), *Roma e il suo territorio nel Medioevo. Le fonti scritte fra tradizione e innovazione. Atti del convegno internazionale di studio dell'Associazione italiana dei paleografi e diplomatisti (Roma, 25-29 ottobre 2012)*, Spoleto 2015, pp. 481-490; Giorgio Leone, Madonna con bambino, in: *idem* (ed.), *Tavole miracolose. Le icone medioevali di Rome e del Lazio del Fondo Edifici di Culto*, Roma 2012, pp. 42-43; Giorgio Leone, *Icone di Roma e del Lazio* I, Roma 2012, p. 57; Maria Rosaria Marchionibus, *Icone in Campania: aspetti iconologici, liturgici e semantici*, Spoleto 2011, pp. 75-77; Valentino Pace, Immagini sacre a Roma fra VI e VII secolo: in margine al problema "Roma e Bisanzio", *Acta ad archaeologiam et artium historiam pertinentia* 18, 2005, pp. 140-145; Gerhard Wolf, Icons and sites, in: Maria Vassilaki (ed.), *Images of the Mother of God: Perceptions of the Theotokos in Byzantium*, Aldershot 2005, pp. 27-28; John Osborne, Images of the Mother of God in Early Medieval Rome, in: Anthony Eastmond, Liz James (eds.), *Icon and Word. The Power of Images in Byzantium*, Aldershot 2003, pp. 135-156; Maria Andaloro, Le icone a Roma in età preiconoclasta, in: *Roma fra Oriente e Occidente* (= Settimane di studio del Centro italiano per lo studio dell'alto medioevo 49), Spoleto 2002, pp. 747-750; Maria Andaloro, Dal ritratto all'icona, in: Maria Andaloro, Serena Romano (eds.), *Arte e iconografia a Roma. Dal tardoantico alla fine dei medioevo*, Milano 2002, pp. 40, 56-57; Maria Andaloro, Theotokos di S. Maria Nova (*Imago antiqua*), in: Serena Ensoli, Eugenio La Rocca (eds.), *Aurea Roma: dalla città pagana alla città cristiana*, Roma 2000, n. 375, pp. 660-661; Karin Dotzer, Die Rekonstruktion der Marientafel aus Santa Maria Antiqua und ihre Aufstellung im Kirchenraum, *Mitteilungen zur spätantiken Archäologie und byzantinischen Kunstgeschichte* 2, 2000, pp. 53-78; Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence. A History of the Image before the Era of Art,* Chicago 1994, pp. 124-126; Margherita Guarducci, *La più antica icone di Maria: un prodigioso vincolo fra Oriente e Occidente*, Roma 1989; Pietro Amato, *De vera effigie Mariae. Antiche icone romane,* Milano 1988, pp. 18-24; Guglielmo Matthiae, *Pittura romana del Medioevo. Secoli IV-IX* I, Roma 1987, p. 126; Maria Andaloro, La datazione della tavola di S. Maria in Trastevere, *Rivista dell'Istituto Archeologico* 19-20, 1972-1973, pp. 187-188; Carlo Bertelli, Icone di Roma, in: Florens Deuchler (ed.), *Stil und Überlieferung in der Kunst des Abendlandes* I., Berlin 1967, pp. 100-106; Ernst Kitzinger, On Some Icons of the Seventh Century, in: *Late Classical and Medieval Studies in Honor of Albert Mathias Friend, Jr.,* Princeton 1955, pp. 132-150; André Grabar, Découverte à Rome d'une icône de la Vierge à l'encaustique, *Cahiers techniques de l'Art* 3, 1954, pp. 5-9; Charles R. Morey, The Madonna of Sta. Francesca Romana, in: Dorothy Miner (ed.), *Studies in Art and Literature for Belle Da Costa Green*, Princeton 1954, pp. 118-121; Pico Cellini, Una Madonna molto antica, *Proporzioni* 3, 1950, pp. 1-8; Raffaele Garrucci, *Storia dell'arte cristiana nei primi otto secoli della chiesa* III, Prato 1876, p. 19; Pietro Leone Bombelli, *Raccolta delle immagini della Beatissima Vergine: ornate della corona d'oro dal Reverendissimo Capitolo di S. Pietro* I, Roma 1792, pp. 121-123.

The face and the neck of the Virgin Hodegetria and the face of the Child she is holding with her right hand are part of an early Christian panel encaustic painting, depicting *Theotokos Hodegetria*. They have been discovered in the late 1940s under the late-15th-century painting of Mother and Child of much smaller dimensions, lower parts of which are still present, during its cleaning and restoration. The faces have been cut out of a now lost over-life-size image, considering their proportions. The face of the Child bears traces of damage by fire, confirmed by sources to have consumed parts of Santa Maria Nova, which according to *Liber Pontificalis* were restored under Pope Honorius III (1216-1227). It is probable that the new image of *Theotokos* and Child can be dated to that period. Like its predecessor, whose

iconography it supposedly preserved, it was placed above the altar and incorporated the two faces, salvaged and cut from the earlier painting. According to Maria Andaloro, the decision to maintain the salvaged parts of the original image inside a new one, despite its drastically different proportions, transformed the panel painting into a reliquary. The painting from the 13th century was covered by a canvas with a newer image, copying the same iconography, in the late 15th century. This layer was repainted in 1805. After the restoration of 1940s the newer layer was returned to the altar of the church of Santa Maria Nova and the more antique image was exhibited in the sacristy.

The face of *Theotokos* is characterized by an almost ethereal beauty and mimesis, leading to a strong emotional effect on the viewer, to whom she turns her piercing gaze. The awe-inducing faculties of the image are further strengthened by the deliberate choice of grand dimensions of the figure. The more ancient picture can be probably identified with "*imaginem sanctae Dei genitricis antiquam*", mentioned in *Liber Pontificalis* in the account of the life of Pope Sergius I (678-701) and originally placed in the *diaconia* of Santa Maria Antiqua at the Roman Forum. It was transferred to the basilica of Santa Maria Nova in the 9th century when the church of Santa Maria Antiqua was partly destroyed by an earthquake and abandoned. In Santa Maria Nova it was stored under a silver cover, with only the faces of the Mother of God and the Child visible. As a titular image of Santa Maria Antiqua, the panel painting had to be created around the time of the transformation of an aula of the Palazzi Imperiali on the Palatine to a church, dated *post quem* with the help of gold coins from the reign of Justin I (518-527), found under one of the columns. Giorgio Leone suggests that the image may have been positioned inside the apse of the church during the reign of Justin II (565-578). The dating of the painting around this time is further supported by its stylistic closeness with Annunciation scene from the so-called "Palimpsest wall" in Santa Maria Antiqua, adhering to the apse and dated to the last quarter of the 6th century (cat. entry n. 2.32). Extra-large paintings, such as the one from Santa Maria Antiqua, must have been, according to Beat Brenk, donations from high-ranking individuals, probably even of imperial origin. Various forms of representation of the Mother of God in Santa Maria Antiqua prove that the church was a vital centre of Marian veneration from the 6th century onward. This veneration was carried out with the help of private images, ex-votos and panel paintings, tolerated by the official Church because they promoted the worship of the Virgin.



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2.34 MEDALLION WITH TWO MARTYRS VENERATING A CROSS AND ADORATION OF THE MAGI

Second half of the 6th- first half of the 7th century

Diameter 4.6 cm

Vatican City, Musei Vaticani, inv. n. MV.60537.0.0

Nikodim Pavlovič Kondakov, *Iconografia della Madre di Dio* I., Roma 2014, pp. 122-123; Umberto Utro, Médaille de dévotion avec l'Adoration des Mages, in: Giovanni Morello (ed.), *Pierre et Rome: vingt siècles d'élan créateur*, Milano 1997, p. 112; Claudio Franzoni, Alessandro Tempesta, Il museo di Francesco Gualdi nela Roma del Seicento tra raccolta privata ed esibizione pubblica, *Bollettino d'arte* 72, 1992, pp. 1-2, 12-14; Christa Ihm, *Die Programme der christlichen Apsismalerei vom vierten Jahrhundert bis zur Mitte des achten Jahrhunderts*, Wiesbaden 1960, pp. 89-90; Carlo Cecchelli, *La vita di Roma nel Medio Evo* I, Roma 1951, pp. 121-122; Raffaele Garrucci, *Storia dell'arte cristiana nei primi otto secoli della chiesa* VI, Prato 1880, pp. 126-127, pl. 480; Giovanni Battista de Rossi, Le medaglie di devozione dei primi sei o sette secoli della chiesa, *Bullettino di archeologia cristiana* 7, 1869, pp. 33-34, 37-45, 51-64.

The obverse side of the bronze medallion, identifiable by the original loop, bears an image of a cross in its centre, from whose shorter arm hang signs of *alpha* and *omega*. Two male figures surround it. They can be identified as martyrs, dressed in tunic and *palla*, holding a long cross in one hand and making a veneration gesture with the other. Above them a haloed bust of bearded Christ appears, crowning them with wreaths of martyrdom. The scene is completed by a small figure (possibly the owner of the medallion representing their devotion) whose gender cannot be identified, on the left, holding a torch, and theatrically framed by curtains on both sides. On the obverse side, the Virgin sits on a cathedra with the Child in her lap, while three Magi approach them, guided by a bright star and accompanied by a dove. A cross is visible above the head of the Child. Similarly to the medallion with victorious Christ between two angels, according to the hypothesis of Nikodim Kondakov based on the presence of the Magi and the Mother of God, it is possible that the object may have been in possession of a consecrated virgin or a female traveller. But as these motifs are not exclusive to only female portable devotional objects, even if they were certainly very popular among female faithful, this cannot be proven with certainty. The *crux gemmata*, sign of Christ's victory over death, at the centre of the scene alludes strongly to the relic of the Christ's cross, kept in the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, represented on several Holy Land pilgrim ampoules containing sacred oil, preserved since the early 7th century in the cathedral of Monza and Bobbio. That the iconography of the Adoration of the Cross by martyrs does not date to the early 7th century, but must have been circulating in the eastern Mediterranean and being transferred by pilgrims outside of it at least several decades earlier is attested by the now lost 6th-century apse mosaics of the martyrial basilica of Sant'Eusebio in Vercelli and of the church of San Gregorio fuori le mura in Rimini. In them local saints were represented venerating the cross, standing on a hill from which paradisiac rivers were flowing. In the case of the church in Rimini even the palm trees such as those on the Vatican medallion appeared on the fringes of the scene and the martyrs held crowns of their martyrdom in their hands, but the bust of Christ was absent. In the first half of the 7th century the iconography of the cross flanked by two martyrs crowned by Christ appeared in the apse mosaic of the chapel of Primus and Felicianus in Santo Stefano Rotondo in Rome, commissioned by pope Theodore (642-649). It is also noteworthy that the motifs of martyrs flanking a victorious cross and *crux gemmata*

decorated by *pendilia* with letters A and Ω can be seen on the walls of the two central rooms of the Roman Catacomba di Ponziano, to be dated to the first half of the 7th century as well.

The medallion is documented for the first time as part of the collection of Francesco Gualdi (1574-1657), a well-connected Roman intellectual and antiquarian. Its presence in the collection is attested *ex post* by the stamped dedication letter addressed to cardinal Francesco Barberini (1597-1679) on behalf of pope Urban VIII (1623-1644). The richly decorated document written in verses, dated to 1630, depicts and identifies the object as a coin and attests its donation to the Vatican Library. Apart from a detailed description of the iconography it does not offer any information as to its origin. The wide circulation of such medallions among the Roman erudites, noted by De Rossi on the basis of primary sources such as letters, may however point out towards the city of Rome or its suburbs as its finding place.



© Garrucci 1880, pl. 480

2.35 MADONNA DELLA CLEMENZA

End of the 6th-7th century

Length 116 cm, height 164 cm

Rome, Santa Maria in Trastevere, Cappella Altemps

Lada Řezáčová, *The Image of the Madonna della Clemenza and its Functions* (bachelor thesis), Seminář dějin umění, FF MU, Brno 2021; Grażyna Jurkowlaniec, Church authority and individual devotion: the cult of the Maria Regina of Santa Maria in Trastevere, Rome, until the late sixteenth century, in: Maria Dieters, Ruth Slenczka (eds.), *Häuslich-persönlich-innerlich. Bereiche der privaten Frömmigkeitsausübung im Spätmittelalter und der Frühen Neuzeit*, Berlin 2020, pp. 379-395; Maria Lidova, Empress, Virgin, Ecclesia: the Icon of Santa Maria in Trastevere in the Early Byzantine Context, *IKON* 9, 2016, pp. 109-128; Kirstin Noreen, Time, space, and devotion: the Madonna della Clemenza and the Cappella Altemps in Rome, *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 47, n. 4, 2016, pp. 883-914; Valentino Pace, Alla ricerca di un'identità: affreschi, mosaici, tavole dipinte e libri a Roma fra VI e IX secolo, in: Cristina Carbonetti, Santo Lucà, Maddalena Signorini (eds.), *Roma e il suo territorio nel Medioevo. Le fonti scritte fra tradizione e innovazione. 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Maria in Trastevere, *Rivista dell'Istituto Archeologico* 19-20, 1975, pp. 139-215; Dale Kinney, *S. Maria in Trastevere from its founding to 1215* (dissertation thesis), Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, New York 1975, pp. 60-70; Maurice Dejonghe, *Roma Santuario Mariano*, Bologna 1969, pp. 163-167; Cesare Brandi, Il restauro della Madonna della Clemenza, *Bollettino dell'Istituto Centrale del Restauro* 41-44, 1964, pp. 5-11; Carlo Bertelli, *La Madonna di Santa Maria in Trastevere: storia, iconografia, stile di un dipinto romano dell'ottavo secolo*, Roma 1961; Carlo Bertelli, Osservazioni sulla Madonna della Clemenza, *Atti della Pontifica Accademia Romana di Archeologia. Rendiconti* 30-31, 1957/1959, pp. 141-152; Joseph Wilpert, L'immagine della Madonna detta della Clemenza in Santa Maria in Trastevere, *L'arte* 9, 1906, pp. 161-164; Pietro Leone Bombelli, *Raccolta*

delle immagini della Beatissima Vergine: ornate della corona d'oro dal Reverendissimo Capitolo di S. Pietro II, Roma 1792, pp. 28-38.

The panel painting was executed in encaustic technique on a cloth attached to three pieces of wood. It depicts Virgin, dressed in the garments of Byzantine empress (*stemma* with pearly *prependoulia*, porphyry-coloured *dalmatica* with hems, cuffs and shoulders embroidered with pearls, and heavily bejewelled *maniakion*) seated on a throne with the Child on her lap, flanked by two wingless angels. In the corner a figure in *proskynesis* is present, often interpreted as a pope. In the most recent research, the painting has been viewed as a fusion of separate iconographical types: Mary enthroned between angels, *proskynesis* and *Maria Regina*, in one work of art.

The composition of the Virgin seated on a throne flanked by angels can be traced back to ivory panels, such as the diptych from Bode Museum, Berlin, from the 6th century. The roots of the motif, however, run deeper, leading to the imperial and consular representations. From the ivory diptychs the iconography soon migrated to the monumental imagery, as illustrated by the panel painting of Mary between angels and saints from the monastery of St. Catherine on Sinai dated to the 6th century as well.

Proskynesis was customary act of devotion performed in front of the Byzantine emperor, eventually transformed in the imagery to a sign of devotion of commissioners towards Christ or the Virgin. The sign of reverence of the donor, possibly a pope, kneeling in front of the Virgin, seems to be appropriate considering the reputation of the painting as a miraculous divine image.

There isn't a complete agreement on the area of origin of the iconographic type of *Maria Regina*, fluctuating between Italy and Constantinople. Its emergence can be linked to the change of the position of the Virgin in the celestial hierarchy after the Council of Ephesus (431), which officially claimed her as the Mother of God, and subsequent rise of her cult and opulent representation. According to Maria Lidova, the adoption of the image of imperial power by religious imagery aimed to translate to *Theotokos* all the associations and emotions linked to the imperial majesty. The royal imagery of Mary was justified on historical grounds, as she came from the House of David, and by her importance as the mother of the King of Heaven. The earliest depiction of *Maria Regina* in Rome is tied to the fresco on the so-called "Palimpsest wall" in Santa Maria Antiqua, executed in the first half of the 6th century (cat. entry n. 2.32). The 7th century saw a sudden decline in such depictions until the pontificate of Sergius I (687-701), who introduced a cycle of Marian feasts to the Roman liturgical calendar.

The attempts to reconstruct the liturgical function of the painting has been hindered by the scarcity of direct testimonies, as first explicit records about it come from the 16th century. Its position inside the building of the early Christian church, *titulus Iulii*, constructed in the middle of the 4th century, is unknown. The monumental dimensions and the official character of the representation of the Virgin suggest that it was positioned in the main space of the church, rather than in one of the side aisles, more suitable for private devotion. In her thesis, Lada Řezáčová notes that the presence of the pope in the painting is unusual, as the church was not connected to papal liturgy. This observation is in agreement with the statement of Maria Lidova, claiming that the papal vestments and square *nimbus* of the figure in *proskynesis* are later additions made in tempera. Řezáčová also proposes that the revered Marian painting may have been gifted to the *titulus* as a substitution for relics, absent from the church until the 9th century, despite the wide-spread custom.

After the transfer of the panel to the new church in the 12th century it was likely moved to the so-called Cappella della Clemenza in the southern aisle, dedicated to St. Stephen, after the 14th century. Much venerated for its antiquity and miraculous powers, it was moved in 1593 to the newly constructed Cappella Altemps, which emphasized Marian devotion. It is plausible that the reputation of the image was based on a long tradition.

Although written evidence suggests that liturgical processions were part of the religious life of early medieval Rome, the involvement of this panel painting in them remains undocumented. What can be attested is the role the painting played as a focal point of Marian devotion together with other Roman Marian images, a practice specific to the Roman environment, as in Constantinople the devotion was closely connected to the Marian relics. Per Jonas Nordhagen also proposes that the painting was a receiver of votive gifts, pointing at now almost invisible cross in the hands of the Virgin. He considers it a later tempera substitution of a metal cross, donated to the painting and attached to it, but without referring to any physical evidence.

The dating of the painting fluctuates between the end of the 6th and the beginning of the 8th century. Researchers have been separated into two camps, even though they all base their assumptions on the same criteria: stylistic analysis, palaeographical analysis of the inscription on the frame of the image, and a few medieval sources mentioning the panel painting.

Titulus Iulii is called *Sancta Maria Trastiberis* in a *Salzburg itinerary*, a guide for pilgrims, dated, even though not univocally, to around 640. The itinerary mentions also a miraculous image of the Virgin inside the church, but not explicitly *Madonna della Clemenza*. New palaeographical analysis of the inscription in the corner of the frame speaks for a dating preceding the 8th century. It is therefore possible to assume that the painting was created either towards the end of the 6th or during the 7th century.



© Amato 1988, p. 27

2.36 VIRGIN AS HODEGETRIA

Around 609

Length 47.5 cm, height 100 cm

Rome, Santa Maria ad Martyres (Pantheon)

Eileen Rubery, Giulia Bordi, John Osborne (eds.), *Santa Maria Antiqua: the Sistine Chapel of the Early Middle Ages*, Turnhout 2021, pp. 465-469; Valentino Pace, Alla ricerca di un'identità: affreschi, mosaici, tavole dipinte e libri a Roma fra VI e IX secolo, in: Cristina Carbonetti, Santo Lucà, Maddalena Signorini (eds.), *Roma e il suo territorio nel Medioevo. Le fonti scritte fra tradizione e innovazione. Atti del convegno internazionale di studio dell'Associazione italiana dei paleografi e diplomatisti (Roma, 25-29 ottobre 2012)*, Spoleto 2015, pp. 484-490; Giorgio Leone, *Icone di Roma e del Lazio* I, Roma 2012, pp. 59-60; Maria Rosaria Marchionibus, *Icone in Campania: aspetti iconologici, liturgici e semantici*, Spoleto 2011, pp. 2, 61, 67, 108; Bissera Pentcheva, *The Sensual Icon: Space, Ritual, and the Senses in Byzantium*, Pennsylvania 2010, p. 153; Valentino Pace, Icon with Virgin and Child, in: Robin Cormack, Maria Vasillaki (eds.), *Byzantium 330-1453*, London 2008, n. 47, p. 389; Tanja Velmans, *Il viaggio dell'icona. Dalle origini alla caduta di Bisanzio*, Milano 2008, p. 20; Gerhard Wolf, Icons and sites, in: Maria Vassilaki (ed.), *Images of the Mother of God: Perceptions of the Theotokos in Byzantium*, Aldershot 2005, pp. 29-31; Valentino Pace, Immagini sacre a Roma fra VI e VII secolo: in margine al problema "Roma e Bisanzio", *Acta ad archaeologiam et artium historiam pertinentia* 18, 2004, pp. 146-149; Beat Brenk, Kultgeschichte versus Stilgeschichte: von der „raison d'être" des Bildes im 7. Jahrhundert in Rom, in: *Uomo e spazio nell'alto Medioevo. Atti della 50. settimana di studio del Centro Italiano di studi sull'alto Medioevo, Spoleto, 4-8 aprile 2002*, Spoleto 2003, pp. 974-988; John Osborne, Images of the Mother of God in Early Medieval Rome, in: Anthony Eastmond, Liz James (eds.), *Icon and Word. The Power of Images in Byzantium*, Aldershot 2003, pp. 135-156; Erik Thunø, The cult of the Virgin, icons and relics in early Medieval Rome: a semiotic approach, *Acta ad archaeologiam et artium historiam pertinentia* 17, 2003, p. 81; Maria Andaloro, Le icone a Roma in età preiconoclasta, in: *Roma fra Oriente e Occidente* (= Settimane di studio del Centro italiano per lo studio dell'alto medioevo 49), Spoleto 2002, pp. 734-737; Maria Andaloro, Dal ritratto all'icona, in: Maria Andaloro, Serena Romano (eds.), *Arte e iconografia a Roma. Dal tardoantico alla fine del medioevo*, Milano 2002, pp. 40, 42, 53; Maria Andaloro, Icona con l'Hodigitria, in: Serena Ensoli, Eugenio La Rocca (eds.), *Aurea Roma: dalla città pagana alla città cristiana*, Roma 2000, n. 376, pp. 661-662; Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence. A History of the Image before the Era of Art,* Chicago 1994, pp. 121-124; Pietro Amato, *De vera effigie Mariae. Antiche icone romane,* Milano 1988, p. 34-37; Carlo Bertelli, Pittura in Italia durante l'iconoclasmo: le icone, *Arte Cristiana* 75, 1988, n. 724, p. 50; Guglielmo Matthiae, *Pittura romana del Medioevo. Secoli IV-IX* I, Roma 1987, pp. 126-127; Maria Andaloro, La datazione della tavola di S. Maria in Trastevere, *Rivista dell'Istituto Archeologico* 19-20, 1972-1973, pp. 190-192; Maurice Dejonghe, *Roma Santuario Mariano*, Bologna 1969, pp. 131-133; Carlo Bertelli, La Madonna del Pantheon, *Bollettino d'arte* 46, 1961, pp. 24-32; Pietro Leone Bombelli, *Raccolta delle immagini della Beatissima Vergine: ornate della corona d'oro dal Reverendissimo Capitolo di S. Pietro* III, Roma 1792, pp. 22-33.

The tempera painting on one solid piece of elm wood is unique among the other panel paintings of the Virgin currently kept in Rome because of the materials used for its creation. Currently capturing a half-figure of the Virgin with Child propped on her left hand, it is a fragment of what may have been a monumental depiction of a standing *Theotokos* with Child, close to the standing figures of the Virgin in Rabbula Gospel of Syriac origin from 586 or to an apse mosaic in Kiti, Cyprus, from the 7th century. The right hand of the Virgin, gently laid on the knee of the Child, is gilded, according to a devotional practice manifesting itself in the Syro-Palestinian image of Hagiosoritissa from the Monasterium Tempuli in Rome, dated to the first half of the 7th century, as well. Despite the damaged outer layer of the painting, it can be deciphered that *Theotokos* is dressed in a porphyry-coloured *maphorion*, under which her hair is covered by a light blue cap. The Child most probably wears a tunic and a mantle and holds a scroll in its left hand. The painting of its face is of the highest quality, its mimetic character comparable only to the portraits from Fayyum, early Christian paintings from the

catacombs of Marcellinus and Petrus, or Pompeian *erotes*. Heads of both the Virgin and the Child are surrounded by interlaced haloes, gilded with gold.

Two metal hooks, ending with a ring at the back of the panel, were originally used to secure the panel to a support structure. The precise placement of the panel inside the Pantheon remains unknown. It is, however, hypothesized that it may have been kept in one of the aediculas on the sides of the main apse of the church, its longitudinal form ideally framed by the columns.

The most accepted hypothesis is that the monumental image of Hodegetria was created as a reaction to the dedication of the antique building of the Pantheon, built by Hadrian (117-138), to the Virgin and all the martyrs in 609, after it was given by the Byzantine emperor Phocas (602-610) to the Pope. This information is confirmed by the section of *Liber Pontificalis* describing the activities of Pope Boniface IV (608-615). The conversion of the Pantheon is also recorded by Beda Venerabilis (c. 673-735). The icon probably had the function of a secondary relic, associated also with the *maphorion* and the girdle of the Virgin in Constantinople. Based on contemporary sources a reconstruction of its veneration, following the example of the rituals connected to the images of the imperial couple, can be made. It was not only used for prayer by the worshippers, but possibly also carried around during processions. The Roman provenance and papal commission of the painting is widely accepted, but historiography places it firmly in the so-called Hellenising current, present in the art of the city between the 6th and the 8th century.



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2.37 JUDGEMENT OF SOLOMON

FEMALE SAINT

Late 6th and first half of the 7th century

Length 141 cm, height 93 cm (Judgement of Solomon)

Length 66 cm, height 157 cm (fragment of the fresco with female saint)

Rome, Museo Nazionale Romano, Crypta Balbi, inv. n. ICR 4027, 4034

Claudia Sanchioni, Santi e sante stanti: analisi e riflessioni su alcuni pannelli iconici di VII secolo a Santa Maria in Via Lata, in: *idem et al.* (eds.), *In Corso d'Opera 6*, Roma 2026 (forthcoming); Claudia Sanchioni, Le pitture nei vani centrali dell'oratorio della diaconia di Santa Maria in via Lata, in: Chiara Croci *et al.* (eds.), *Le immagini a Roma nell'alto Medioevo. Dall'atrio alla navata*, Roma 2025, pp. 413-431; Giulia Bordi, Tra pittura e parete. Palinsesti, riusi e obliterazioni nella diaconia di Santa Maria in via Lata tra VI e XI secolo, in: Alessandra Molinari, Riccardo Santangeli Valenziani, Lucrezia Spera (eds.), *L'archeologia della produzione a Roma (secoli V-XV). Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi: Roma, 27-29 marzo 2014*, Bari 2015, pp. 395-410; Simona Moretti, *Roma bizantina. Opere d'arte dall'impero di Costantinopoli nelle collezioni romane*, Roma 2014, pp. 207-214; Giulia Bordi, *Pittura e parete a Roma tra VII e XI secolo. Gli affreschi di San Saba e Santa Maria in via Lata* (dissertation thesis), Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa, Pisa 2008; Roberta Pardi, *La Diaconia di Santa Maria in Via Lata*, Roma 2006; Fabio Betti, La chiesa di Santa Maria in via Lata, in: Maria Stella Arena *et al.* (eds.), *Roma dall'antichità al medioevo. Archeologia e storia,* Roma 2001, pp. 448-465; Giulia Tamanti, Storia conservativa degli affreschi, in: Maria Stella Arena et al. (eds.), *Roma dall'antichità al medioevo. Archeologia e storia,* Rome 2001, pp. 466-469; Maria Righetti Tosti-Croce, Gli affreschi di Santa Maria in Via Lata, in: Maria Andaloro *et al.* (eds.), *Fragmenta Picta. Affreschi e mosaici staccati del Medioevo romano*, Roma 1989, pp. 179-182; Carlo Bertelli, Carlo Galassi Paluzzi, *S. Maria in Via Lata*, Roma 1971; Joseph Wilpert, *Die römischen Mosaiken und Malereien der kirchlichen Bauten vom IV. bis zum XIII. Jahrhundert* II, Freiburg 1916, pp. 698-700; Luigi Cavazzi, Chiesa di S. Maria in via Lata, *Studi Romani* 1-2, 1914, pp. 64-71, 151-152; Luigi Cavazzi, *La diaconia di S. Maria in via Lata e il monastero di S. Ciriaco*, Roma 1908, pp. 200-240.

The frescoes from the underground spaces of the church of Santa Maria in Via Lata were discovered between the years 1904 and 1914 due to the initiative of the canon of the church Luigi Cavazzi, in search of the dwelling of Apostle Paul, marked according to the tradition by a pillar and a well. Early medieval oratory consisting of six not entirely rooms was unearthed inside a *porticus* from the imperial era (middle of the 1st-end of the 2nd century), transformed a century later into a collective housing building with workshops or a *horreum* (granary). Most scholars agree that the building was turned into a Christian ritual place in the period of the reconquering of Rome by Justinian in the middle of the 6th century and it is remembered as a *diaconia* in *Liber Pontificalis* during the pontificate of Leo III (795-816). Crucial for the present scholarship is the detailed photographic campaign organized by Joseph Wilpert on the occasion of the excavations, capturing the now missing parts of the wall-paintings, which, heavily damaged by the humidity, were mostly detached from the walls and restored by Istituto Centrale per il Restauro at the end of the 1960s. In the year 2000 they were moved to Museo Nazionale Romano, where they are presently installed.

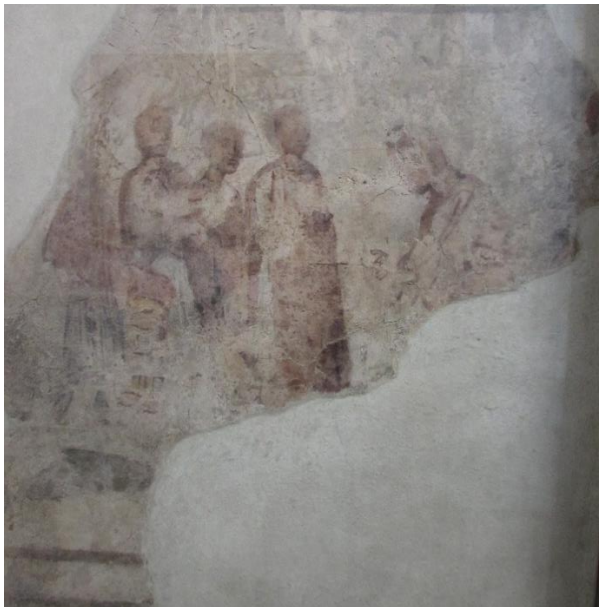
The scene with the Judgement of Solomon and the fragment of painting with a temple and female saint constitute the oldest decoration of the oratory from the late 6th and the first half of the 7th century and were both found in room IV, covered in at least 20 scenes from the Old Testament cycle and devotional panels representing saints, decorating the connecting arches and entrances not only of room IV, but also of rooms III and V. Current research suggests that

room IV must have been a transit area or some sort of a vestibule, which led to rooms V and II, the actual *diakonia*.

The scene of the Judgement of Solomon, part of the late 6th-early 7th century decoration of the west wall of room IV, is framed by dark and red lines. To the left the king is depicted sitting on a throne, his head surrounded by a *nimbus*. Next to him two of his courtiers and a soldier with red shield are standing. To the right one of the mothers remains visible. The woman's head and shoulders are covered by what seems to be a cloak. She is depicted in a pose of subservience and plea, expressed in the gesture of her arms and the position of her upper body. Despite the mediocre state of conservation, the viewer can still marvel at the quick and fluid lines of the painting, elegant movement of the draperies and figures and the modelling of the volumes with the help of light, mastery comparable for example to the miniatures of *Codex purpureus Rosanensis* from the 6th century.

The fresco depicting a temple and a bust of female orant under it was part of the decoration of an arch on the east wall of room IV. The state of preservation and fragmentation of the painting do not allow for the precise understanding of the iconography. In the upper portion of the fragment little rectangular elevated temple with an entrance framed by two Corinthian columns and steps can be seen. The photographs done by Wilpert were able to capture the now missing altar with a wooden canopy, and a book laid in the middle of it. The scene also included a male figure, still present *in situ* on the left side of the arch, whose closeness with one of the miniatures of *Vatican Octateuch* identify it as Aron nearing the temple. In the lower part, separated by a red and a white line, an orant female saint with head covered by *maphorion* is represented. The figure has a greenish complexion, large, upward-facing eyes, a small mouth, a head covered by a brown veil and is dressed in a dark robe. Her head is adorned with a golden halo, bordered in red, and the background on which it is painted is light brown. While many scholars have thought that the figure of the saint and the temple were contemporary, proposing a dating to the late 6th-7th century, Claudia Sanchioni remarks that the brown layer on which the saint is painted overlaps with that of the garland, which runs on the border of the whole fragment under discussion, in several places. Considering that the small temple and the garland have been unanimously dated to the late 6th-early 7th century, the praying figure should be assigned to a later period, perhaps the first half of the 7th century, as demonstrated by 7th-century iconographic comparisons, such as the image of Saint Euphemia in the apse of the church of the same name (cat. entry n. 2.42) – now lost but known through various documentary sources –, and that of the Virgin in the chapel of San Venanzio (cat. entry n. 2.39). As regards the decorative typology of a static image of a standing saint depicted on a vertical space, one should also remember the entire series of devotional panels painted in Santa Maria Antiqua, around the middle of the 7th century, which include, for example, the famous images of Saint Demetrius or Saint Barbara (cat. entry n. 2.32). Cavazzi, responsible for the discovery of the painting, reported seeing another *nimbus* beneath the praying saint, which means that there must have been a double register of saints on the wall. Giulia Bordi then hypothesized that on the left upright there were two other saints painted, obliterated by the subsequent insertion of the panel with the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus in the mid-7th century. The original decoration must therefore have included the representation of several saints standing in the arch bases of room IV. Since the saint is depicted in a gesture of prayer, with her eyes turned upwards, it is also possible that she was in dialogue with a theophanic image painted on the top of the arch, but it is impossible to confirm this hypothesis since the paintings located here have been destroyed. As proposed by Sanchioni, room IV was accessible not only to the workers in the *diakonia* but also to those who visited the complex in search of assistance. This would perhaps explain the multiple

representations of votive panels: since it was one of the most frequented spaces in the entire complex, it seems natural that it was the most "popular" for the commissioning of paintings by wealthy members of the Byzantine administration in the city (similarly to Santa Maria Antiqua), perhaps the same ones who headed the *diakonia*, who requested the creation of painted wall icons, as was customary in their homeland, which would thus have been appreciated and visible to a large number of faithful, who were able to use them for private devotion.





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2.38 ST. AGNES BETWEEN POPES HONORIUS AND SYMMACHUS

625-638

Dimensions unknown to author

Rome, Sant'Agnese fuori le mura

Ivan Foletti, Marie Okáčová, AVREA CONCISIS SVRGIT PICTVRA METALLIS: An Epistemological and Methodological Approximation of Early Christian Multimedia Visuality, in: Matthias Grawehr, Markus Kersten (eds.), *A Second Gaze: Intertextuality and Transient Meaning in Roman Texts and Objects*, Heidelberg 2024, pp. 189-192; Ivan Foletti, Martin Lešák, Hidden Treasure and Precious Pearl: Sant'Agnese fuori le mura, Its Apse Mosaic, and the Experience of Liturgy, in: Elisabetta Scirocco, Sible de Blaauw (eds.), *From Words to Space. Textual Sources for Reconstructing and Understanding Medieval Sacred Spaces,* Roma 2023, pp. 75-96; Chiara Croci, Manuela Gianandrea, Irene Quadri, Serena Romano (eds.), *Una finestra su Roma altomedievale. Pitture e mosaici*, Roma 2022, pp. 129-172; Ivan Foletti, Martin Lešák, Zrození pozdně antické avantgardy ve Sv. Anežce za hradbami: factor, kočovníci, liturgie a Max Dvořák, in: Jan Galeta *et al.* (eds.), *Od dějin umění k uměleckému dílu: Cesty k porozumění vizuální kultuře*, Brno 2021, pp. 35-46; Gabriele Ferraù, *Sant'Agnese fuori le mura. Il complesso monumentale sulla via Nomentana*, Castiglione di Sicilia 2020, pp. 174-179; Catherine Vanderheyde, Parures luxeuses ou austérité vestimentaire?: le dilemme de la représentation de la sanneté féminine à Byzance, *Iconographica* 19, 2020, pp. 21-28; Dennis E. Trout, Pictures with words: reading the apse mosaic of S. Agnese f. l. m. (Rome), *Studies in iconography* 40, 2019, pp. 1-26; Antonella Ballardini, *Habeas corpus*: Agnese nella basilica di via Nomentana, in: Silvia Pedone, Andrea Paribeni (eds), *"Di Bisanzio dirai ciò che è passato, ciò che passa e che sarà": scritti in onore di Alessandra Guiglia* I, Roma 2018, pp. 253-279; Jana Čuprová, *Kostel Sv. 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The period between the second half of the 6th and the end of the 7th century was time of clashes with the Byzantine power in Italy, religious disputes between the Pope and the Constantinopolitan patriarch and continuous conflict with Lombards. Gradually popes began

to distance themselves from the imperial administration. As they became increasingly significant figures in the public life of Rome, they had to represent their prestige and power and despite the tumultuous times they had to continue to build. In the 7th century mosaics became an intrinsic part of papal display, a public demonstration of faith and carrier of various messages both to the local population and to the pilgrims.

The mosaic in Sant'Agnese commemorates the construction of a new basilica, commissioned by pope Honorius (625-638) around 630 to replace the much bigger Constantinian one over the tomb of the martyr Agnes. It depicts Agnes triumphant over the instruments of her martyrdom—sword and fire—accompanied by the basilica's patron Pope Honorius on the left and an unidentified figure on the right, possibly Pope Symmachus (498-514) or Gregory the Great (590-604). This arrangement reflects Honorius's acknowledgment of his predecessors' artistic programs at Santi Cosma e Damiano and San Lorenzo fuori le mura yet gives prominence to the martyr venerated at this site, placing her rather than Christ at the composition's centre.

Against a background of different shades of gold, young martyr is depicted on a stylised ground line dressed in lavish imperial attire, consisting of a tunic with sleeves, porphyry *dalmatica* embroidered with gold thread and *loros* encrusted with jewels, crossed on the chest and reaching the knees. The young saint is adorned by a diadem and large elaborate *manichion* and her feet are clad in red boots. She is holding a scroll of Sacred Scriptures with both her hands, one of which is covered by an embroidered white veil, attributes of the deacon. The mosaic in the apse is accompanied by an inscription on the apsidal arch, sponsored by Pope Honorius I, which prior to the restauration by Pope Pius IX (1846-1878) in 1855-1856 red: "*The hall of the virgin shines, decorated with various metals, but even more brightly it shines for ample merits.*"

Unlike the naturalistic and classical elements found in the mosaics that served as its inspiration, Agnes's representation is notably linear, abstract, and ethereal. Set against a shimmering golden tessellated background and seemingly divorced from temporal and spatial constraints, her figure was previously understood as evidence of Byzantine aesthetic influence. However, this stylistic approach actually aligns with a fundamental priority of Honorius's era: emphasizing martyrs' tombs as sacred spaces where saintly power (*virtus*) transcended ordinary existence, employing visual techniques that prioritized conceptual expression over realistic representation.

In this apse, the martyr's dematerialized, pale countenance served as a reminder of the material world's transience and the physical body's limitations. By departing from classical mimetic traditions, the mosaic created a luminous, conceptual image of the virgin's immaterial yet eternal celestial form—transcending gender, pain, sin, and suffering. Through this connection between material representation and inner divine presence, the work established a new form of sacred encounter.



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2.39 VIRGIN AS ORANT

640-649

Dimensions unknown to author

Rome, San Giovanni in Laterano, Cappella di San Venenzio

Ivan Foletti, Marie Okáčová, AVREA CONCISIS SVRGIT PICTVRA METALLIS: An Epistemological and Methodological Approximation of Early Christian Multimedia Visuality, in: Matthias Grawehr, Markus Kersten (eds.), *A Second Gaze: Intertextuality and Transient Meaning in Roman Texts and Objects*, Heidelberg 2024, pp. 192-194; Ivan Foletti, *Ženy u oltáře?: Matka Boží a gender v raném křesťanství*, Brno 2023, pp. 12-13; Ally Kateusz, Luca Badini Confalonieri, Women Church Leaders in and around Fifth-century Rome, in: Joan Taylor, Illaria Ramelli (eds.), *Patterns of Women's Leadership in Early Christianity*, Oxford 2021, pp. 230-231; Ally Kateusz, *Mary and Early Christian Women. Hidden Leadership*, London 2019, pp. 86-88; Vittoria Artico, *Gli oratori del Battistero lateranense: il caso di San Venanzio* (bachelor thesis), Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia, Università degli Studi Roma Tre, Roma 2015, pp. 54-69; Erik Thunø, *The Apse Mosaic in Early Medieval Rome: Time, Network, and Repetition*, Cambridge 2015, pp. 54-69; p. 3, 6-7, 23-28, 41-42, 58-60, 66-69, 86-89, 94-96, 104-105, 108, 120, 131, 143-147, 153-159, 191, 196, 207; Valentine Giesser, De la côte est de l'Adriatique à Rome ou quand l'image accompagne la relique: réflexions autour de la mosaïque de la chapelle de San Venanzio au baptistère du Latran, *Convivium* 1/1, 2014, pp. 116-125; Nikodim Pavlovič Kondakov, *Iconografia della Madre di Dio* I., Roma 2014, p. 306; Mary Schaefer, *Women in Pastoral Office. The Story of Santa Prassede, Rome*, Oxford 2013, pp. 229-230; Emilio Marin, Il mosaico della cappella di S. Venanzio al Battistero Lateranense: status questionis, in: Emilio Marin, Danilo Mazzoleni (eds.), *Il cristianesimo in Istria fra tarda antichità e alto medioevo*, Città del Vatikano 2009, pp. 209-215; Alessandra Themelly, Immagini di Maria nella pittura e nei mosaici romani dalla crisi monotelita agli inizi della seconda iconoclastia (640-819), *Acta ad archeologiam et artium historiam pertinentia* 21, 2008, pp. 107-111; Francesca Romana Moretti, Battistero lateranense, in: Maria Andaloro (ed.), *La pittura medievale a Roma 312-1431. Atlante: percorsi visivi* 1, Turnhout 2006, pp. 203, 205, 211; Gillian Mackie, *Early Christian Chapels in the West: decorations, function, and patronage*, Toronto 2003, pp. 212-230; Francesco Gandolfo, Il ritratto di committenza, in: Maria Andaloro, Serena Romano (eds.), *Arte e iconografia a Roma. Dal tardoantico alla fine dei medioevo*, Milano 2002, pp. 143-144; Alessandra Themelly, Il mosaico di San Venanzio in Laterano (640-649): arte romana e influssi dall'oriente bizantino negli anni della crisi monotelita, *Romanobarbarica* 16, 1999, pp. 317-345; Gaetano Curzi, I mosaici dell'oratorio di S. Venanzio nel Battistero Lateranense: problemi storici e vicende conservative, in: Federico Giudobaldi, Andrea Paribeni (eds.), *Atti del V colloquio dell'Associazione Italiana per lo Studio e la Conservazione del Mosaico*, Ravenna 1999, pp. 267-282; Gillian Mackie, The San Venanzio Chapel in Rome and the Martyr Shrine Sequence, *RACAR: revue d'art canadienne* 23, n. 1/2, 1996, pp. 1-13; Giuseppe Bovini, I mosaici dell'oratorio di S. Venanzio a Roma, *Corsi di cultura sull'arte ravennate e bizantina* 18, 1971, pp. 141-154; Fabijan Veraja, Kapela Sv. Venancija u Rimu i kult solinskih mučenika, in: *Zbornik u čast sv. Nikole Tavelića*, Roma 1970, pp. 165-187; Guglielmo Matthiae, *Mosaici medioevali delle chiese di Roma*, Roma 1967, pp. 191-198; Walter Oakeshott, *The Mosaics of Rome*, London 1967, pp. 150-153; Christa Ihm, *Die Programme der christlichen Apsismalerei vom vierten Jahrhundert bis zur Mitte des achten Jahrhunderts,* Wiesbaden 1960, pp. 99-100, 144-145; Giuseppe Bovini, Restauro di mosaici fuori del Vaticano – Cappella di S. Venanzio al Battistero Lateranense, *Atti della Pontifica Accademia Romana di Archeologia. Rendiconti* 23-24, 1950, pp. 402-405; André Grabar, *Martyrium. Recherches sur le culte des reliques et l'art chrétien antique,* Paris 1946, pp. 211-212; Joseph Wilpert, *Die römischen Mosaiken und Malereien der kirchlichen Bauten vom IV. bis zum XIII. Jahrhundert* I, Freiburg 1916, pp. 94-95; Giovanni Battista de Rossi, Abside dell'oratorio di S. Venanzio presso il battistero Lateranense, *Bulletino di archeologia e storia dalmata* 12 (Supplementum), 1901, pp. 1-20; Hartmann Grisar, Il musaico dell'oratorio lateranense di San Venanzio e gli antichi abiti liturgici e profani ivi rappresentati, in: *Analecta Romana. Dissertazioni, testi e monumenti dell'arte* I, Roma 1899, pp. 507-553.

The mosaic was created following the translation of the relics of several Dalmatian martyrs, among which bishops Venantius, Anastasius, and Maurus, to the Lateran by Pope John IV (640-642), himself a native to the region. The relics were placed in a small *domus* from the 5th century, which was subsequently transformed into an oratory dedicated to St. Venantius and connected with the Lateran baptistry. Due to the short pontificate of John IV, the decoration was probably finalized by his successor Theodore (642-649). The mosaic was intended to

represent all the Dalmatian saints whose relics were venerated in the oratory and kept in the altar directly beneath the apse, the commissioner of the building, Pope John IV, holding a model of the oratory, Apostles Peter and Paul, John the Evangelist, John the Baptist and the Virgin in the middle of them. Another papal figure, holding a codex, represented in the scene, has been variously identified as either Pope Theodore or Pope Hilarius (461-468), whose oratory dedicated to St. Stephen John IV possibly transformed into the oratory of St. Venantius, commemorating him in the apse mosaic.

Virgin is represented in an orant pose, in a purple *maphorion* with golden hue, decorated by a gold cross, covering her head and falling over her shoulders to the elbows in intricate folds. The *chiton* underneath is of purple colour as well. The drapery is stiff, with almost no movement captured. The face of the *Theotokos* was probably modelled after the representation of the Virgin in Sant'Apolinare Nuovo, Ravenna, as they share similar features. In order to be able to represent Christ together with the Mother of God and a group of saints, the ideator of the mosaic employed the slightly modified model of the scene of Ascension of Christ. Christ and two angels among red clouds are represented as half-figures, possibly inspired by the much-venerated image of the face of Christ, covering according to one of the hypotheses the apse of the Lateran Basilica since the mid-5th century. In other words, the visual scheme recalled both the foreign saints who had just ‘arrived’ in Rome and the tradition of the Urbs.

The composition of the scene has common roots with the depiction of the Ascension in the Rabbula Gospel from 586 or in the chapel of the convent Apa Apollo in Bawit from the 7th century. The orientalising character of the iconography of the mosaic has often been ascribed to the origin of its main ideator, Pope Theodore, native to the city of Jerusalem.

Nikodim Kondakov, Mary Schaeffer, Ivan Foletti, and Ally Kateusz all underline the importance of the *pallium*, showing at the front of the dress of *Theotokos*, beneath the *maphorion*. They suggest that the *pallium* assigns a role of *diakonessa* or even *episcopa* to the Mother of God, who in her own right serves as a guarantee for women engaged in liturgical service. Alessandra Themelly, on the other hand, emphasizes the role of the vertical axis of the composition, created between the orant Virgin and Christ, confirming the Incarnation and double nature of Christ in response to the spread of Monothelitism in the eastern Mediterranean in the first half of the 7th century.



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2.40 VIRGIN AND CHILD

VISITATION

BATHING OF INFANT CHRIST

STORY OF SALOME

642-649

Dimensions unknown to author

Rome, Catacomba di San Valentino (partially lost)

Cinzia Palombi, "Mons Sancti Valentini": la catacomba, la necropoli e la basilica martiriale, in: Marcello Fagilo, Alessandro Mazza (eds.), *I Monti Parioli e il "Nuovo Campo Marzio" della cultura internazionale*, Roma 2022, pp. 35-45; Cinzia Palombi, Le testimonianze del culto di San Valentino a Roma tra fonti scritte e resti archeologici, in: Edoardo d'Angelo (ed.), *Valentino martire, santo e vescovo. Dalla tradizione alla storia*, Napoli 2020, pp. 122-125; Michele Asciutti, *Il complesso monumentale di S. Valentino nell'area Flaminia a Roma: storia, riscoperta e valorizzazione di un sito archeologico*, Foligno 2019, pp. 61-97; Fabrizio Bisconti, *Primi cristiani. Le storie, i monumenti, le figure,* Città del Vaticano 2013, pp. 286-290; Simone Piazza, *Pittura rupestre medievale: Lazio e Campania settentrionale (secoli VI-XIII)*, Roma 2006, pp. 114-119; Maria Andaloro, Pittura romana e pittura a Roma da Leone Magno a Giovanni VII, in: *Committenti e produzione artistico-letteraria nell'alto Medioevo occidentale*, Spoleto 1992, p. 602; Fabrizio Bisconti, Le levatrici incredule in una pittura del cimitero di S. Valentino, *Bessarione* 7, 1989, pp. 187-209; Alejandro Rezio Veganzones, S. Valentino di Terni nell'iconografia antica pittorica e musiva di Roma, in: Isaac Vázquez Janeiro (ed.), *Noscere sancta. Miscellanea in onore di Agostino Amore*, Roma 1985, pp. 436-440; John Osborne, Early Medieval Wall-Paintings in the Catacomb of San Valentino, *Papers of the British School of Rome* 49, 1981, pp. 82-90; Raffaella Farioli, *Pitture di epoca tarda nelle catacombe romane*, Ravenna 1963, pp. 40-41; Carlo Cecchelli, La pittura dei cemeterii cristiani dal V al VII secolo, *Corsi di cultura sull'arte ravennate e bizantina* 2, 1958, p. 48; Joseph Wilpert, *Le pitture delle catacombe romane*, Roma 1903, p. 519; Orazio Marucchi, Das Coemeterium und die Basilica des h. Valentin zu Rom, *Römische Quartalschrift* III, 1889, pp. 15-30, 114-133, 305-342; Antonio Bosio, *Roma sotteranea*, Roma 1632, pp. 579-581.

The hypogeal cemetery of martyr Valentine was excavated in the Roman quarter Parioli along Via Flaminia in 1887-1888 by Orazio Marucchi (1852-1931), together with a 4th-century basilica, which was rebuilt in the 7th century, when the suburban cemeteries were becoming increasingly important as sites for veneration of martyrs' relics. The complex was dedicated to a martyr, whose cult was attested at the place from the first half of the 4th century. It is the only Roman catacomb known to us in the area. Situated on the main road to the city, it was an important shrine throughout the Middle Ages, until the translation of relics of the saint to the church of Santa Prassede during the pontificate of Nicholas IV (1288-1292).

The strongly deteriorated remains of the pictorial decoration of the catacomb are limited to the four walls of the small room at the entrance to the lower level of the cemetery. An enlargement of the chamber, which aimed to provide easier access to the passage beyond, used for storage of wine by the Augustinian monks who owned the surrounding property at least since the beginning of the 15th century, involved partial destruction of the wall on which the most important frescoes were located. On the wall opposite the entrance, to the left of the niche intended for private devotion (burning of lamps or candles), which bears the half-figures of the Virgin and Child, a depiction of Visitation with embracing figures of Mary and

Elisabeth could have been observed. To the right of the niche two midwives, one identified by an inscription as Salome, were bathing infant Jesus, standing in a bath between them. Above a niche Salome was standing next to the crib of Jesus, extending her lame arm (a result of her refusal to believe in virginity of Mary) to him in order to be cured. The apocryphal iconography of the bath and of the story of Salome, both of eastern Mediterranean origin and established around the second half of the 6th century, are documented only in an engraving of Roman antiquarian Antonio Bosio (1576-1629) from the end of the 16th century. Possible reason for the unusual choice of motifs may be the intention to emphasize the role of Mary as *Theotokos*, which is reinforced by the inscription in the niche, *sancta Dei genetrix*. Thus, the most important figure in the sequence of scenes is the Virgin, not her Son.

The solely preserved part of the fresco, the Virgin in the niche, has rather severe features. She is dressed in luxurious *maphorion*, with her head veiled and a *nimbus* surrounding it. Infant Jesus with a halo leans to her chest, his shoulders held by his mother.

Descending to the lower part of the wall under the niche, the no longer discernible traces of decoration, reproduced in the 16th-century sketch of a Spanish Dominican scholar Alphonsus Ciacconius (1530-1599), represented a quadruped in the act of devouring leaves of a plant, surmounted by a horizontal band of reddish-brown colours. The cycle was completed by the depiction of the Crucifixion, which followed the composition proposed in the Syriac Rabbula Gospels, with Christ dressed in a long sleeveless tunic (*colobium*), flanked by the Virgin and Apostle John at the feet of the Cross, and by representations of the Sun and the Moon above it, from which only a fragment with the Apostle turned towards the Cross and holding a bejewelled codex remains. The Passion scene was surrounded by now fragmentary images of anonymous male saints on the western and south-western walls. The precarious state of conservation of majority of the frescoes makes the observer appreciate even more the painted panels of the northern wall, positioned next to the entrance to a transverse gallery, which show a series of seven frontally standing figures, dressed as bishops and presbyters, in tunics and *pallia*, and wearing *campagi* or sandals, no longer recognisable through their physiognomy, wiped out by time, or through now lost inscriptions. Only the first figure on the right was identified by Recio Veganzones as the image of martyr Valentin, based on a currently already indiscernible inscription.

The papal attention, given to the basilica adjoining the catacombs in the 7th century, as evidenced by *Liber Pontificalis*, as well as the iconography of the frescoes, more spread from this century onward, point out to the *terminus post quem*. The most widely accepted dating is that to the papacy of Theodore (642-649), who rebuilt and furnished the basilica. This hypothesis is further supported by the stylistic closeness of the frescoes in the catacomb with the depictions of saints Primus and Felicianus in the church Santo Stefano Rotondo, another commission of the same pope. It is important to know that dating of the decoration at least a century after the abandonment of the catacomb as a place of burial, testifies for the uninterrupted strong cult of the martyr at the site, endorsed by the Church.





© Bosio 1632, p. 579

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2.41 CHRIST BETWEEN STS. SIMPLICIUS, FAUSTINIANUS, BEATRIX, AND RUFINIANUS

Before 682

Length 238 cm, height 122 cm

Rome, Catacombe di Generosa

Simone Piazza, *Pittura rupestre medievale: Lazio e Campania settentrionale (secoli VI-XIII)*, Roma 2006, pp. 100-103; Mara Minasi, L'affresco di Cristo tra Santi della catacomba di Generosa alla Magliana: revisione critica e nuove ipotesi interpretative, *Rivista di archeologia cristiana* 81, 2005, pp. 53-98; Mara Minasi, Cristo tra i santi Simplicio, Faustiniano, Viatrice e Rufiniano, in: Angela Donati (ed.), *Romana pictura: La pittura romana dalle origini all'età bizantina,* Milano 1998, pp. 298-299; Guglielmo Matthiae, *Pittura romana del Medioevo. Secoli IV-IX* I, Roma 1987, p. 120; Mario Santa Maria, Le vicissitudini dell'affresco di Cristo fra i quattro santi della catacomba di Generosa, *Rivista di archeologia cristiana* 60, 1984, pp. 199-212; Emilio Venditti, *Le catacombe di Generosa alla Magliana, Roma*, Roma 1981, pp. 50-55; Raffaella Farioli, *Pitture di epoca tarda nelle catacombe romane*, Ravenna 1963, pp. 10-13; Joseph Wilpert, *Die Malereien der Katakomben Roms* I, Freiburg 1903, pp. 457-458; Giovanni Battista de Rossi, *Roma sotterranea* III, Roma 1877, pp. 567-597; Giovanni Battista de Rossi, Il cristiano sepolcreto presso il quinto miglio della via Portuense e il cimitero di Generosa, *Bullettino di archeologia cristiana* 7, 1869, pp. 1-16.

The hypogeal cemetery of Generosa was discovered by accident in 1867 by an archaeologist Wilhelm Henzen (1816-1887) during excavations on a hill coinciding in the Roman era with the sacred forest of the priestly college of *Fratres Arvales*. Soon after the discovery Giovanni Battista de Rossi identified the Christian underground cemetery through research of contemporary written sources and epigraphs as the place of burial of martyrs Simplicius, Faustinianus, and Beatrix, siblings killed during the reign of Emperor Diocletian (284-305). In the vicinity of their tomb a small basilica from the second half of the 4th century has been discovered. The structure with three naves was enclosed by an apse, connected by a *fenestella confessionis* with the tomb of the martyrs.

The west wall of the *cubiculum* hosting the tomb was decorated with a monumental painting capturing Christ holding a codex accompanied on the left side by Beatrix and Simplicius and on the right side by Faustinianus and Rufinianus, identified by inscriptions. Rufinianus, a martyr from the reign of Diocletian, buried probably in the same cemetery as the others and celebrated similarly to them at the end of July has probably been added to the painting for the sake of symmetry.

Unfortunately, due to the damage of the outer layer of the painting by humidity and saline crystallization between 1869 and 1875 it was detached from the wall, mounted on a canvas and reattached, losing not only the original framing with false bluish marbles, simulating celestial setting of the scene, but also its support plaster base and the outer layer with final touches made *al secco*. The subsequent restoration almost obliterated the original masterful rendering of the faces of the figures and the draperies. Only sources attesting to the original appearance of the painting are an aquarelle by Giuseppe Gnoli and a photo of the bust of Christ, made before the intervention.

Christ is depicted seated in the centre of the composition, performing a gesture of blessing with his right hand and holding in his left hand a bejewelled codex. He is dressed in a tunic and *pallium* of purple-red colour with gold touches, his head surrounded by a large cruciform halo. To his immediate left and right Simplicius and Faustinianus are standing, dressed in white tunic with purple-red lines outlining the sleeves and yellow *pallium* embroidered with

purplish motifs. Both are holding crowns of their martyrdom in left hand, covered by the *pallium*. To the far left, Beatrix is represented with her hair and ears adorned by jewellery. Her dress, consisting of soft white tunic and golden *dalmatica*, is richly decorated at the neckline, the hem, and the cuffs by large porphyry-coloured stripes embroidered with pearls and rubies. Ornamental *segmenta* are applied to the shoulders. Her attire follows the customary fashion of the ladies of the Constantinopolitan court. She is holding a gold bejewelled crown in her covered left hand. Rufinianus, added to the right of the family of martyrs is dressed not according to the common Roman fashion but as a member of the palace guards with white tunic decorated by embroidered purplish *segmenta*, covered by a *chlamys* fastened by *fibula* on the right shoulder. All saints are halloed. Despite the flat background, light blue in the upper and reddish-brown in the lower section, the spatial effect of the scene is maintained by employment of curtains forming a niche behind each of the saints.

The dating of the painting can fall back on the note from *Liber Pontificalis* reporting that during the pontificate of Leo II (682-683) the relics of Beatrix, Faustinianus, and Simplicius were moved to the city of Rome and kept in the church of Santa Bibiana. As the damage in the lower part of the painting can be attributed to the reopening of the burial chamber underneath it, the transfer of the relics forms *terminus ante quem* for creation of the images. The refined facial features of the figures, use of vivid colours, and the modelling of the forms through blots of colour and light, captured prior to the intervention, can be compared to the angel and the Maccabees from Santa Maria Antiqua in Rome (cat. entry n. 2.32) and associated with the Hellenising current in Roman painting of the first half of the 7th century.



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2.42 ST. EUPHEMIA

After 451 or between 687-701

Rome, Chiesa di Sant'Eufemia (destroyed)

Margherita Cecchelli, Un identico valore paradigmatico nella dedicazione maschile e femminile delle chiese di Roma tra IV e IX secolo, in: *Masculum et feminam creavit eos (Gen. 1,27). Paradigmi del maschile e femminile nel cristianesimo antico*. *XLVII Incontro di Studiosi dell'Antichità Cristiana (Roma, 9-11 maggio 2019)*, Roma 2020, pp. 63-65; Maria Andaloro, Serena Romano, L'immagine nell'abside, in: *idem* (eds.), *Arte e iconografia a Roma. Dal tardoantico alla fine del medioevo*, Milano 2002, p. 83; Daniela Calcagnini, Le figure femminili nei mosaici paleocristiani degli edifici di culto romani, in: Federico Guidobaldi, Alessandra Guiglia Guidobaldi (eds.), *Ecclesiae Urbis. Atti del Congresso Internazionale di studi sulle chiese di Roma IV-X secolo* III, Roma 2002, p. 1935; Giuseppe Bovini, *Mosaici paleocristiani di Roma (secoli III-VI),* Bologna 1971, pp. 209-211; Christa Ihm, *Die Programme der christlichen Apsismalerei vom vierten Jahrhundert bis zur Mitte des achten Jahrhunderts,* Wiesbaden 1960, pp. 115, 118-120, 156; Mariano Armellini, Carlo Cecchelli (eds.), *Le chiese di Roma dal secolo IV al XIX* I*,* Roma 1942, pp. 246-247; Carlo Cecchelli, *Studi e documenti sulla Roma sacra* I, Roma 1938, pp. 23-32; Raffaele Garrucci, *Storia dell'arte cristiana nei primi otto secoli della chiesa* IV, Prato 1877, p. 92; Giovanni Ciampini, *Vetera Monumenta* II, Roma 1699, pp. 118-119.

The church of St. Euphemia, positioned near Santa Pudenziana on *Vicus Patricius*, was demolished during the pontificate of Sixtus V (1585-1590) to give way to the construction of present Via Urbana. It was built probably after the council in Chalcedon (451) and reconstructed by Pope Sergius I (687-701), who adorned it with mosaics according to *Liber Pontificalis*. The purpose of the small basilica was possibly to conquer the space, famous for the pre-Christian cult of Lupercale, for the Christians.

The mosaic in the apse of the church was positioned above the altar, under which the relics of martyr Euphemia were buried. It depicted the Chalcedonian virgin in an orant pose between two snakes in the process of being crowned by the hand of God. She was dressed in a long tunic with richly decorated sleeves and *palla*, fastened by a precious brooch at the waist. Below it, at the hem, a thin strip of what seems to be a *pallium* was showing. Her neck was adorned by jewels, and her hair was dressed in a thin veil, fastened by a headdress. The saint was therefore represented as a noble woman. Her head was surrounded by a *nimbus*. The snakes can be interpreted as symbols of paganism and heresy or temptations, overcome by the faith and virtue of the virgin. The mosaic has survived only through drawings of Alfonso Ciacconio (1540-1599), edited by an archaeologist Giovanni Ciampini (1633-1698) in *Codex Vaticanus Latinus 5407*. It follows the tradition of the apses of the Byzantine 7th century in Rome, such as Sant'Agnese fuori le mura (cat. entry n. 2.38) and Santo Stefano Rotondo, where the number of depicted figures on the golden background is reduced to a maximum of three.



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2.43 ENTHRONED VIRGIN WITH CHILD, FLANKED BY ANGELS

Late 7th century

Height approximately 200 cm, length approximately 400 cm

Rome, San Crisogono (lower church)

Manuela Gianandrea, Serena Romano, San Crisogono. Le pitture tardoantiche e altomedievali dell'aula, in: Chiara Croci *et al.* (eds.), *Le immagini a Roma nell'alto Medioevo. Dall'atrio alla navata*, Roma 2025, pp. 321-329; Giulia Bordi, The Apse Wall of Santa Maria Antiqua (IV-IX centuries), in: Eileen Rubery, Giulia Bordi, John Osborne (eds.), *Santa Maria Antiqua: the Sistine Chapel of the early Middle Ages*, Turnhout 2021, p. 395; Giulia Bordi, Santa Maria Antiqua attraverso i suoi palinsesti pittorici, in: Maria Andaloro, Giulia Bordi, Giuseppe Morganti (eds.), *Santa Maria Antiqua tra Roma e Bisanzio*, Roma 2016, p. 53; Anna Melograni, Le pitture del VI e VIII secolo nella basilica inferiore di S. Crisogono in Trastevere, *Rivista dell'Istituto Nazionale d'Archeologia e storia dell'Arte* Serie III/12, 1990, pp. 153-161; Federico Hermanin, Nuove scoperte artistiche a S. Crisogono in Trastevere, *Atti della Pontificia Accademia Romana di Archeologia. Rendiconti* 3, 1923-1924, p. 163; Gioacchino Mancini, Gli scavi sotto la Basilica di S. Crisogono in Trastevere, *Atti della Pontificia Accademia Romana di Archeologia. Rendiconti* 1, 1923-1924, p. 156.

Even if the first, unsystematic and poorly documented attempts at excavating it are known from the early 19th century, the lower basilica under the present church of San Crisogono in Trastevere peaked the interest of the Christian archaeologists after a chance discovery of a capital under the pavement of the upper church during maintenance works in 1878. It was subsequently uncovered in a series of archaeological excavations, spanning from the first years of the 20th century to its end.

The early Christian basilica was created by transforming a 4th-century one-nave trapezoidal hall with a narthex, whose perimeter walls, decorated by false marble wall-painting, are still visible underground. The transformation must have happened sometime before the year 499, when three presbyters *tituli Chrysogoni* signed the list of participants of that year's Church council in Rome. The lower basilica was abandoned on the orders of cardinal Giovanni da Crema (died 1137) between 1121-1127, when the new basilica was constructed above it, following the rising of the street level of the city by pope Paschal II (1099-1118).

Before the 8th century, the interventions that affected the nave of the lower basilica seem to have had only episodic character or perhaps have been related to the needs of liturgy or devotion not entirely coinciding with the entrance-apse axis which is automatically perceived by the modern observer. Exactly on the border between the southern wall and the counter-façade, which the excavation works and the subsequent 20th-century interventions changed so much that they made it impossible to read the relevance of the structures to the original spaces, fragmentary scene can be observed high on the southern wall. The fragments had to constitute a panel of imposing dimensions, which must have sat much lower than today on the then visible portion of the wall, probably visually linked to some type of painted band, perhaps of fake marble. Comprehending the panel, which now lacks the distance from which it was intended to be viewed, is difficult. The entire upper part is missing, having been cut off by the building of the upper basilica in the 12th century, and vast areas have been lost even throughout the lower part.

Anna Melograni was the first to identify an enthroned Virgin with the Child in her lap between two angels as the central figural group of the panel. The Virgin is seated on a majestic throne, depicted as a block of light-coloured marble with porphyry inserts, a sort of large counter with a cushion on top, also purple and not scarlet red as in, for example, the panel of the Madonna della Clemenza (cat. entry n. 2.35). She is dressed in a mantle of the same colour. Her left arm and hand, holding the Child, whose figure is almost entirely lost, are clearly visible. It is not easy to understand whether the Child was depicted frontally or sidewise in his mother's arms, and whether he was surrounded by a mandorla or clypeus, similarly to the fresco panel in the narthex of Santa Sabina (708-715) and, later, perhaps already in the mid-8th century or shortly thereafter, in the right nave of Santa Maria Antiqua. The angels wear loose-fitting white-beige robes, falling in soft folds, still clearly visible in the case of the angel on the right, just as the wide sleeves and the square neckline, highlighted by a thin purple band, are in the case of the angel on the left, who holds a long staff in his fleshy hand that has retained touches of pink-red. Perhaps a patron's figure may have been kneeling lower on the wall but is now lost. The fragments of the two angels suggest that they were almost life-size figures, framed by a spacious, stately architecture characterized by precious materials such as porphyry and purple fabrics.

Despite the *lacunae*, making it difficult to determine what or who was depicted at the sides of the angels, recently Serena Romano and Manuela Gianandrea suggested that on the right, below a layer of plaster overlapping with the layer of the fresco with the Virgin, visible yellow marks likely belonged to the robe of a figure whose shoulder and slightly outstretched arm, covered by a sleeve, can be discerned. However, based on the comparison with the mosaic in San Lorenzo fuori le mura they refuted the hypothesis of Giulia Bordi that it holds a set of keys and can be therefore recognised as Apostle Peter.

Looking at it now, one perceives the painting as almost two-tone—golden yellow and burgundy red—but it is clear that what has survived is almost exclusively the preparatory

drawing, with almost all the layers of paint and certainly all the dry finishing touches having disappeared. However, the fluidity of the drawing is still evident, consisting of long strokes, sometimes angular and sometimes very free and airy. The broken but fluid movements of the draperies and the way in which the architectural elements are depicted are reminiscent for example of the Anastasis from Santa Maria Antiqua, generally assigned to the pontificate of John VII (705-707) but may have appeared in the Roman painting slightly earlier, at the very end of the 7th century, as Serena Romano and Manuela Gianandrea hypothesize.



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© Manuela Gianandrea, Serena Romano 2025, p. 324

3 WOMEN PERFORMING RITUAL ACTIONS

3.1 AFINIA IUNIANA IN ORANT POSE

4th century

Length 51cm, height 24 cm, width 1.5 cm

Rome, Catacomba Anonima di Via Anapo

Elisabeth Ehler, *Figürliche Loculusplatten aus dem frühchristlichen Rom. Katalog* (dissertation thesis), Philipps-Universität, Marburg 2008, p. 224; Barbara Mazzei, Lastra funeraria di Afinia Iuniana, in: Angela Donati, Giovanni Gentili (eds.), *Deomene. L'immagine dell'orante fra Oriente e Occidente*, Milano 2001, p. 214; Enrico Josi, Le iscrizioni rinvenute nel Cimitero dei Giordani, *Rivista di archeologia cristiana* 8, 1931, p. 221.

The marble slab with funerary inscription was found during the excavations, following the discovery of an anonymous cemetery on Via Anapo in Rome in 1921 (now called dei Giordani). The slab was probably made to close a burial site inside a *loculus*. It was commissioned by a mourning husband, whose name is given in the engraved epitaph, for his well-deserving wife Afinia Iuniana, who after 30 years of marriage died at 56.

The text is interrupted between the second and third line by a depiction of dove, holding a twig in its beak. This iconographical motive, reminder of the episode with the Noe in the ark, was widely used in the funerary environment as allusion to the salvation after death. In the left corner of the slab, the deceased Afinia Iuniana is represented, wearing typical garments of the Roman matron: *tunica* and *palla* (rectangular mantle made of wool). She is shown veiled, in an orant pose, with lifted hands and open palms, praising God and being reunited with him in the eternal peace.



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3.2 VOLUMNIA REDEMPTA IN ORANT POSE

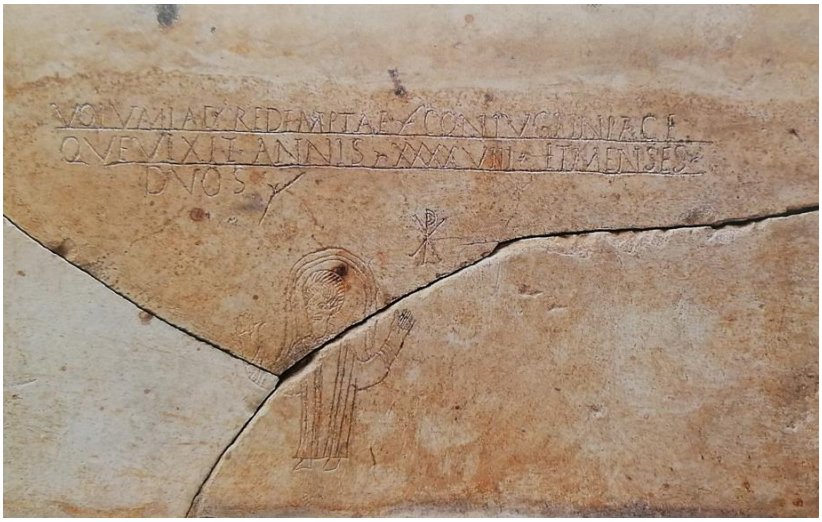
4th century

Length 145 cm, height 68.5 cm, width 6 cm

Rome, Catacombe di Priscilla

Elisabeth Ehler, *Figürliche Loculusplatten aus dem frühchristlichen Rom. Katalog* (dissertation thesis), Philipps-Universität, Marburg 2008, p. 215; Barbara Mazzei, Lastra funeraria di Volumnia Redempta, in: Angela Donati, Giovanni Gentili (eds.), *Deomene. L'immagine dell'orante fra Oriente e Occidente*, Milano 2001, p. 214; Fabrizio Bisconti, La rappresentazione dei defunti nelle incisioni sulle lastre funerarie paleocristiane aquileiesi e romane, in: *Antichità Altoadriatiche XXX. Aquileia e Roma*, Trieste 1987, p. 299; Orazio Marucchi, Notizie. Roma. Scavi nelle catacombe romane, *Nuovo Bullettino di Archeologia Cristiana* 13, 1907, p. 229.

The sizeable marble slab was created to close a tomb located under the second step of the staircase S15 in the catacombs of Priscilla in Rome. In the upper part of the slab a funerary inscription gives the name and the age of the dead inhabitant of the tomb: 48-year-old Volumnia Redempta, whose husband commemorated her with it. His wish for her peaceful afterlife is embodied not only in the epitaph, but also in the representation of the deceased in an orant pose in the bottom part of the slab. She is dressed in *dalmatica* and veiled. The depiction of the dead is schematic, with a few unsuccessful attempts of accurate portrayal, expressed for example by the strange turban-like hairstyle. However, the slight turning of the head and exaggeration of the hands as a tool of communication with God add emotional depth to the engraving.



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3.3 ORANT FEMALE FIGURE

4th century

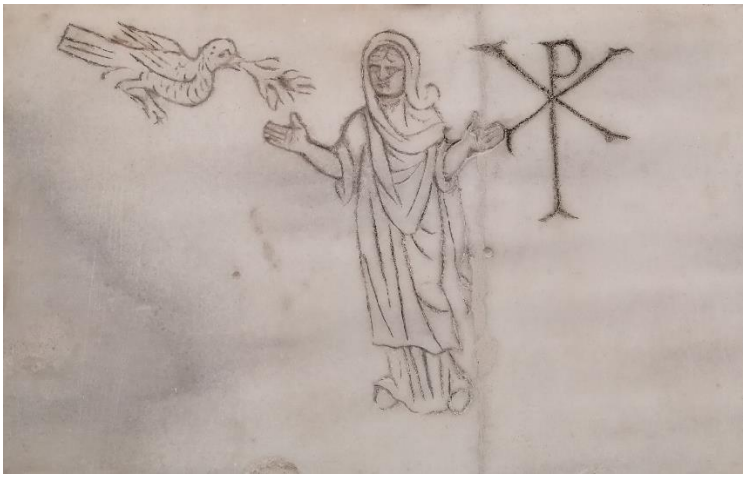
Length 47 cm, height 29 cm, width 2 cm

Rome, Museo Nazionale Romano, Terme di Diocleziano, inv. n. 67657

Alexandra Neuner, Grabplate mit Orante, Taube und Christogramm, in: *Imperium der Götter: Isis-Mithras-Christus. Kulte und Religionen im Römischen Reich*, Karlsruhe 2013, p. 402; Elisabeth Ehler, *Figürliche Loculusplatten aus dem frühchristlichen Rom. Katalog* (dissertation thesis), Philipps-Universität, Marburg 2008, p. 216.

The iconography of the marble slab indicates that the woman buried in the grave enclosed by it was Christian. It shows a praying orant female figure in the centre, with outstretched arms and palms facing outwards, dressed in a long flowing tunic and *palla*, which covers her head. The detailed engraving of the dress, the hands, and the face of the orant attests to the mastery of the artist working on the commission.

To the left a dove with an olive branch in its beak flies towards the woman. It announces divine peace in the afterlife. On the right a sizeable Christogram is depicted. While the orant and the dove form a compositional unit, the Christogram seems to have been added to the slab at a later date.



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3.4 SCENE WITH FUNERARY BANQUET

Around the middle of the 4th century

Length 170 cm, height 67 cm

Rome, Catacombe dei SS. Pietro e Marcellino, Cubiculo del Tricliniarca

Ulrich Kunder, Die Eucharistie in Bildwerken vom frühen 3. bis zum 7. Jahrhundert. Beispiele und Probleme, in: David Hellholm, Dieter Sänger (eds.), *The Eucharist - Its Origins and Contexts*, Tübingen 2017, pp. 1339-1342; Norbert Zimmerman, Zur Deutung spätantiker Mahlszenen: Totenmahl im Bild, in: Georg Danek, Irmtraud Hellerschmid (eds.), *Rituale - identitätstiftende Handlungskomplexe. Tagung des Zentrums Archäologie und Altertumswissenschaften an der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (2.-3. November 2009)* 2, Wien 2012, pp. 175-181; Janet Tulloch, Women Leaders in Family Funerary Banquets, in: Carolyn Osiek *et al.* (eds.), *A Woman's Place: House Churches in Earliest Christianity*, Minneapolis 2006, pp. 164-193; Norbert Zimmermann, *Werkstattgruppen römischer Katakombenmalerei*, Münster 2002, pp. 163-241; Barbara Mazzei, Cubicolo detto del tricliniarca, in: Letizia Pani Ermini (ed.), *Christiana loca: lo spazio cristiano nella Roma del primo millenio* II, Roma 2001, p. 76; Janet Tulloch, *Image as artifact: a social-historical analysis of female figures with cups in the banquet scenes from the catacomb of SS. Marcellino e Pietro, Rome* (dissertation thesis), University of Ottawa, Ottawa 2001; Peter Dückers, Agape und Irene. Die Frauengestallen der Sigmamahlszenen mit antiken Inschriften in der Katakombe der Heiligen Marcellinus und Petrus, *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 35, 1992, pp. 147-167; Johannes Deckers, Hans Seeliger, Gabriele Mietke, *Die Katakombe "Santi Marcellino e Pietro". Repertorium der Malereien*, Città del Vaticano-Münster 1987, pp. 266-270; Josef Engemann, Der Ehrenplatz beim antiken Sigmamahl, in: Alfred Stuiber *et al.* (eds.), *Jenseitsvorstellungen in Antike und Christentum. Gedenkschrift für Alfred Stuiber*, Münster 1982, pp. 239-250; Elżbieta Jastrzębowska, Les scènes de banquet dans les peintures et sculptures chrétiennes des IIIe et IVe siècles, *Recherches Augustiniennes* 14, 1979, pp. 62-64; Antonio Ferrua, Una nuova regione della catacomba die SS. Marcellino e Pietro (continuazione), *Rivista di Archeologia Cristiana* 46, 1970, pp. 7-83; Antonio Ferrua, Una nuova regione della catacomba die SS. Marcellino e Pietro, *Rivista di Archeologia Cristiana* 44, 1968, pp. 29-78.

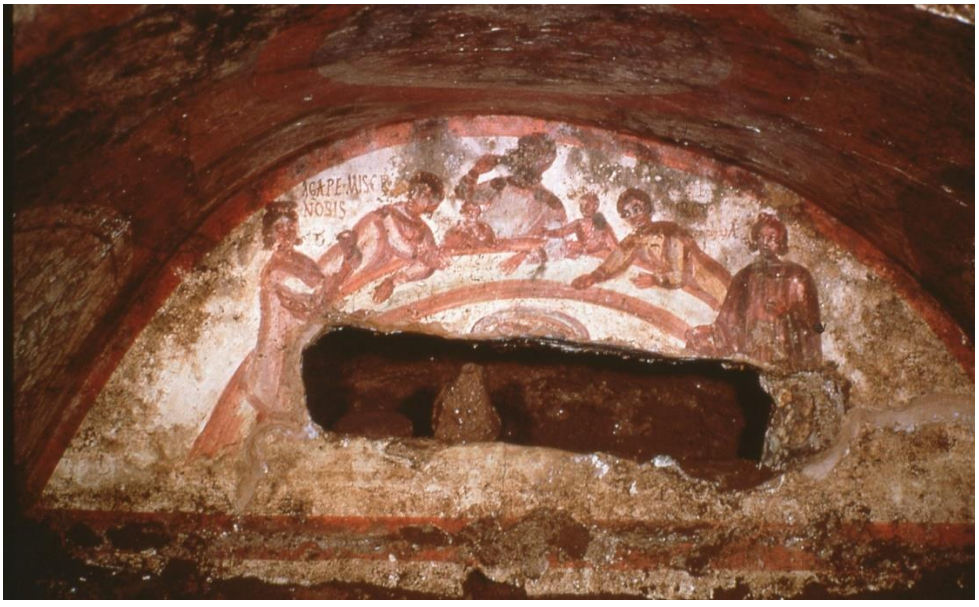
The scenes of funerary banquets, popular above all in the catacomb art between the end of the 3d and the 4th century, refer back to dinners held in the honour of the dead in classical antiquity. The rite, embedded into the Roman culture, was used as a tool of commemoration and immortalization of the deceased and of his place in society. The funerary feasts were organized by the family for their dead members. They took place next to their tomb. The first banquet, called *refrigerium*, was given at the place of the burial directly after the inhumation, probably with the tomb still opened. Its role was to provide relief to the soul of the dead. In the 4th and the 5th century a series of commemorative meals is attested on the third, the seventh, the nineth and the thirtieth day after the death. These feasts were then repeated every year on the death anniversary, often with involvement of the community whose part the deceased were.

The funerary chamber in the catacombs of martyrs Marcellinus and Petrus on Via Labicana in Rome is a prime example of the funerary rite mentioned above. The rectangular structure contained an *arcosolium* in the back wall and two rows of *loculi* on each of the longitudinal walls, with the one near the entrance being associated with child burials due to the reduced size of the openings. Due to the disposition, it is supposed that the *cubiculum* served as a family tomb. In the angle between the right wall and the entrance a *mensa* was inserted into the wall, with remains of a clay plate still present. In the left wall, directly opposite the table, a small niche was built to accommodate a source of light, probably an oil lamp. Thus, the chamber was equipped with all the objects necessary for a *refrigerium*, which is depicted on the wall painting decorating the *arcosolium*. Under the row of small *loculi* on the left wall a painting of a *tricliniarch*, a man in charge of banquets, which gave the name to the burial

chamber, can be found. In the latest research it has been interpreted as a representation of the deceased, participating in his funerary feast. It must be noted that the image is positioned directly in correspondence with an actual table for food offerings.

The representation of the dead is connected to the painting in the lunette of the *arcosolium*, where a scene of the banquet is depicted. Four adult figures are reclining around the semi-oval table, and one is standing next to it. The central figure is captured in the act of drinking, surrounded by two smaller figures, probably children, who, together with other two adults prostrate their hands towards the centre of the table, where a plate with fish is placed. Two female figures at the ends of the table are variably identified as active participants of the meal or female servants. They are holding a chalice and what appears to be either a pitcher, a codex, a tablet, or a small box. The female figure to the right is wearing a dalmatic with two wide *clavi* at the front. Her hair is parted in the middle and waived, with two small rolls pinned at the top. The garment of the female to the left probably has a purple band sewn onto the hem. Her curled hair is parted in the middle. A braided section of it is fastened to the top of her head with the aid of either a hairnet or a *vitta* (woollen band).

The representation oscillates between the reality of the funerary banquet, given in the name of the deceased by their family, including the children, and the celestial celebration of the souls of the dead in the otherworld, where one can find peace and love/charity, to which the inscriptions, interpreted as communication between the dead, asking for offerings of wine, and their relatives, allude. The latest scholarship also tends to interpret the female figures with cups as signs of leading role of women in the religious rituals connected with death, such as the libation ritual to honour the deceased depicted in the catacombs. According to this interpretation, the dalmatic with dark purple *clavi* is a sign of a person who has responsibility for the ritual purity of the event, as the colour was seen by Romans as having special apotropaic powers.



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3.5 FRAGMENT OF A SARCOPHAGUS LID WITH A DECEASED WOMAN BETWEEN TWO BIBLICAL SCENES

Last third of the 4th century

Length 66 cm, height 28.5 cm, width 2.1 cm

Rome, Catacombe dei Santi Marco, Marcelliano e Damaso, inv. n. MeM 279

Barbara Mazzei, Alzata frammentaria di coperchio di sarcofago, in: Angela Donati, Giovanni Gentili (eds.), *Deomene. L'immagine dell'orante fra Oriente e Occidente*, Milano 2001, p. 215; Friedrich Wilhelm Deichmann, *Repertorium der christlich-antiken Sarkophage* I, Wiesbaden 1967, n. 638, p. 257; Friedrich Gerke, *Die christlichen Sarkophage der vorkonstantinischen Zeit*, Berlin 1940, pp. 358, 379; Joseph Wilpert, *I sarcophagi cristiani antichi* II/1, Roma 1932, pp. 216, 332.

The fragment of the sarcophagus lid was found inside an enclosure wall of the area of the Roman catacombs dedicated to martyrs Marcus and Marcellinus. The right portion of the relief, probably bearing a figure, has been lost. The remaining figures are standing on a cornice and are separated by palm trees from each other. The trees form niches, in which the figures are positioned.

The central niche is occupied by a female orant, slightly turned to the left, her right foot sustaining the whole weight of her body and her right hip protruding. The axial positioning of the body is underlined by the head, which is turned to the left. The woman is dressed in a long tunic and a *dalmatica*, fastened under the breasts. Her head is covered by a veil. She raises both of her hands in the typical gesture of *expansis manibus*, which identifies her as the deceased.

The left side of the fragment depicts an apocryphal scene with St. Peter, holding a *rotulus*, who miraculously makes water surge from a rock. He is accompanied by a prisoner, who drinks from the miraculous spring, being previously baptized with its water by the Apostle. On the right side another female figure is carved. She has her head turned to the left and tries to cover her nudity by a fig leaf. She was probably accompanied by a lost nude male figure and a tree in a representation of the original sin. We can hypothesize that the choice of iconography alluded to the sins of the deceased, who were purged by her baptism, granting her soul the hope of resurrection.



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3.6 DIPTYCH LEAVES OF THE SYMMACHI AND NICOMACHI

388-401

Height 29.8 cm, length 12.2 cm (Symmachi leaf)

Height 29.9 cm, length 12.4 cm (Nicomachi leaf)

London, Victoria and Albert Museum, inv. n. 212-1865 (Symmachi leaf)

Paris, Musée de Cluny, inv. n. CL 17048 (Nicomachi leaf)

Anthony Eastmond, *The Glory of Byzantium and Early Christendom*, London 2013, pp. 36-37; Paul Williamson, *Medieval Ivory Carvings. Early Christian to Romanesque*, London 2010, n. 3, pp. 34-39; Paul Williamson, On the date of the Symmachi panel and the so-called Grado Chair ivories, in: Chris Entwistle (ed.), *Through a Glass Brightly*, Oxford 2003, pp. 47-50; Kenneth Painter, Dittico dei Nicomaci e dei Simmaci, in: Serena Ensoli, Eugenio La Rocca (eds.), *Aurea Roma. Dalla città pagana alla città cristiana*, Roma 2000, n. 68-69, pp. 465-468; Alan Cameron, Consular Diptychs in their Social Context. New Eastern Evidence, *Journal of Roman Archeology* 11, 1998, pp. 398-403; Carolyn L. Connor, *The Color of the Ivory. Polychromy on Byzantine Ivories*, Princeton 1998, pp. 15-16; Dale Kinney, A late-antique ivory plaque and modern response, *American Journal of Archeology* 98, n. 3, 1994, pp. 457-480; Jerome Eisenberg, The Symmachi ivory diptych panel. A nineteenth-century interpretation of a lost original?, *Minerva* 4, 1993, pp. 12-18; Erika Simon, The diptych of the Symmachi and Nicomachi. An interpretation, *Greece and Rome* 39, n. 1, 1992, pp. 56-65; Bente Kiilerich, A Different Interpretation of the Nicomachorum-Symmachorum Diptych, *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 34, 1991, pp. 115-128; Herbert Beck, Peter C. Bol (eds.), *Spätantike und frühes Christentum. Ausstellung im Liebighaus Museum alter Plastik, Frankfurt am Main (16. Dezember 1983 bis 11. März 1984)*, Frankfurt am Main 1983, n. 141, pp. 533-535; Kathleen J. Shelton, The diptych of the young office holder, *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 25, 1982, pp. 132-171; Kathleen J. Shelton, Diptych leaf of the Nicomachi, Diptych leaf of the Symmachi, in: Kurt Weitzmann (ed.), *Age of Spirituality. Late Antique and Early Christian Art, Third to Seventh Century*, New York 1979, n. 165-166, pp. 186-188; Wolfgang Volbach, *Elfenbeinarbeiten der Spätantike und des frühen Mittelalters ,* 3rd ed., Mainz am Rhein 1976, n. 55, p. 51; Robert H. Barrow (ed.), *Prefect and Emperor: The „Relationes" of Symmachus A.D. 384,* Oxford 1973; Ernst Kitzinger, On the Interpretation of Stylistic Changes in Late Antique Art, *Bucknell Review* 15, n. 3, 1967, pp. 2-3; Herbert Bloch, The Pagan Revival in the West at the End of the Fourth Century, in: Arnaldo Momigliano, *The Conflict between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century,* Oxford 1963, pp. 193-218; Wolfgang Volbach, Silber- und Elfenbeinarbeiten vom Ende des 4. bis zum Anfang des 7. Jahrhunderts, in: *Beiträge zur Kunstgeschichte und Archäologie des Frühmittelalters. Akten zum VII. internationalen Kongress für Frühmittelalterforschung 1958,* Graz-Köln 1962, p. 24; Richard Delbrueck, *Die Consulardiptychen und verwandte Denkmäler*, Berlin 1929, pp. 209-215.

The Symmachi plaque represents a priestess before an altar, dressed in a sleeveless *chiton* with *himation* over it, scattering incense over a small fire. Her head is adorned by an ivy wreath. She is accompanied by an attendant girl, dressed in the same manner, who holds a bowl of fruits and a *kantharos*. An oak garland hangs from the altar and an oak tree can be seen in the background. The ivy wreath of the woman identifies her as a priestess of the cult of Bacchus. According to the oak tree and garland the altar is dedicated to Jupiter. Despite the damages, the subject matter of the Nicomachi panel is relatively clear: a priestess stands before a round altar with sacrificial fire. She lowers two lighted torches, perhaps to extinguish their flames, and she stands in front of a large pine tree from which hang cymbals and bells, references to the cult of Cybele. The priestess is dressed in a sleeveless garment, revealing one of her breasts. Her torches, pointing to opposite directions, are emblematic for the cult of Ceres. The cult of Cybele was often united with the mysteries of Ceres in late antiquity and one woman could simultaneously accumulate functions in several cults.

The ivory is carved in a classical style, with great attention to detail. Human forms are captured in elegant lines and the intricate folds of the robes seamlessly copy the curves of the body. A palmette border frames each panel and accentuates the volume of the figures. Traces of pigments attest to formerly polychromed surfaces.

Richard Delbrueck interpreted the function of the sacerdotal diptychs as analogous to the consular ones: they should have informed families from the high social rang about the sacred festivities, organized by other members of the circle. He also identified both priestesses as depictions of real persons: mother of Quintus Aurelius Symmachus (c. 345-c. 402) and his daughter-in-law, both originally belonging to the Nicomachi family.

According to the vast majority of scholars the diptych commemorated an alliance between two prominent non-Christian aristocratic families in Rome, Symmachi and Nicomachi, named in the inscriptions at the top of their respective leaves. The alliance celebrated in the artwork is probably the marriage of the daughter of Quintus Aurelius Symmachus to Nicomachus Flavianus (died after 432), son of Virius Nicomachus Flavianus (334-394). It is variously dated to the year 388, 392, or 394. Another possible date is indicated by the marriage of Quintus Fabius Memmius Symmachus (born 383/384), son of Quintus Aurelius, and a daughter or granddaughter of Virius Nicomachus Flavianus, which took place in 401. These marriages established legal ties between senatorial families closely associated through participation in the government of the Empire. Perhaps more important to the understanding of the diptych are the leading roles the families played in the attempt to preserve and defend the pre-Christian rites of the state religion in the face of an increasingly powerful Christian Church. They are tied to the last flowering of non-Christian cults in Rome, where after the Theodosian law of 391 pagan sacrifices were outlawed and in 407 public cults of divinities were definitively suppressed. However, as brought to attention by Alan Cameron, the classicizing style of the carvings does not necessarily date the ivories to the late 4th century. They are not strictly „western“ either, if compared to works from the eastern part of the Empire. As the families of Symmachi and Nicomachi were influential in the 5th century as well and may have preserved some non-Christian beliefs, the dating and origin of the panels is solely hypothetical.

The diptych leaves were spoliated in the 13th century and included in a reliquary, gifted to the monastery Montier-en-Der and documented by an engraving from 1717. According to the inscription on the reliquary, which cannot be verified, the panels were brought in from Palestine by Frankish Benedictine abbot Bercharius (died 685) in the 7th century. During the French revolution the reliquary was destroyed by fire, in which the Nicomachi leaf was damaged. By 1840 the ivories had both disappeared. The Nicomachi panel was found in a fountain in Montier-en-Der in 1860 and moved to Musée de Cluny. The Symmachi panel was at the same time in private hands in Montier. In 1865 it was bought by South Kensington Museum (present Victoria and Albert Museum).





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3.7 DRINKING-GLASS WITH A MAN AND A WOMAN AT PRAYER

Around 380-400

Diameter 11.4 cm

Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, inv. n. AN2007.26

Susan Walker (ed.), *Saints and Salvation. The Wilshere Collection of gold-glass, sarcophagi and inscriptions from Rome and Southern Italy*, Oxford 2017, pp. 155-157; Hans-Jörg Nüsse, Römische Goldgläser – alte und neue Ansätze zu Werkstattfrage, *Prähistorische Zeitschrift* 83, 2008, pp. 229, 235; Sarah L. Smith, *Gold-glass vessels of the late Roman empire: production, context and function* (dissertation thesis), Rutgers State University of New Jersey, New Jersey 2000, n. 299, p. 116; Lucia Faedo, Per una classificazione preliminare dei vetri dorati tardoromani, *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa*, Serie III, 8, 1978, pp. 1049-1050; Charles R. Morey, *The Gold-Glass Collection of the Vatican Library, with Additional Catalogues of Other Gold-Glass Collections*, Città del Vaticano 1959, n. 379, p. 63; Thomas B. L. Webster, The Wilshere Collection at Pusey House in Oxford, *The Journal of Roman Studies* 19, 1929, p. 153; Hermann Vopel, *Die altchristlichen Goldgläser: ein Beitrag zur Altchristlichen Kunst- und Kulturgeschichte* (= Archäologische Studien zum christlichen Altertum und Mittelalter 5), Freiburg 1899, n. 139; Raffaele Garrucci, *Storia dell'arte cristiana nei primi otto secoli della chiesa* III, Prato 1876, p. 175; Raffaele Garrucci, *Vetri ornati di figure in oro, trovati nei cimiteri dei cristiani primitivi di Roma*, 2nd ed., Roma 1864, pp. 142-143.

The raw glass of Syro-Palestinian origin was decoloured with a mixture of antimony and manganese. Surface details were executed on a gold foil in red and black pigment. Part of the base and the whole vessel wall were broken away. The cut and incised gold foil is fragmented.

On the bottom of the vessel, a man and a woman stand with their arms raised in prayer, separated by a *rotulus*. Both are dressed in an elaborated contemporary aristocratic attire. The man is beardless, wearing a tunic and a dalmatic with ornament on the hem, consisting of two large double circles, each surmounted by an irregular triangle, decorated in reddish enamel. The woman wears a jewelled collar, an elaborately ruffled mantle, and a decorated dalmatic underneath it. Her hair is dressed in small curls around her round face, confined under a jewelled hood. To the man's right a tree bearing fruit is depicted with a Christogram beneath it. Below, a water flows over a rock. A second Christogram appears above the man's left hand.

The two figures in a traditional orant pose are to be identified most probably as wealthy deceased individuals, for whom the glass was commissioned in order to celebrate their faith and to express the hope that it will be rewarded in the afterlife. Similar portraits appear in the catacombs and on the sarcophagi. However, two orants are rarely depicted side by side (for example orants on a Roman sarcophagus, now in the museum adjacent to the catacomb of martyr Sebastian, dated to 392 and on the Samagher casket, dated around 440, cat. entry n. 3.9). The fruit-bearing tree growing from a rock with its flowing spring echoes the symbolic elements of baptism expressed by Tertullian (c. 155-after 220). It evokes the previous baptism of the deceased. The Christogram underneath the tree strengthens this association. A painting of a male and a female orant standing next to a hill, identical in composition, decorated the so-called Cappella Greca of the catacomb of Priscilla.

Based on stylistic analysis of the glass, bringing into consideration the clumsy execution of the figures in the landscape, the misspelling of the inscription „*dignitas amicorum*“ and the use of recycled glass, the latest research proposed a date around 380-400 for the object.

The glass was first documented in 1797 in a museum of baron Alessio Recupero in Catania, Sicily. In 1862 it was sold to a famous Roman antiquity dealer Tommaso Capobianchi, who shortly after re-sold it to Charles Wilshere (1814-1906). Left by Wilshere to Pusey House, Oxford, the collection was for many years on loan to the Ashmolean Museum. In 2007 the Ashmolean purchased it.



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3.8 FUNERARY PLAQUE WITH AN ORANT IN FRONT OF A SANCTUARY

5th century

Length 28 cm, height 60 cm, width 1.5 cm

Vatican City, Musei Vaticani, inv. n. MV.32495.0.0

Lucrezia Spera, Architetture voute e "lessemi" architettonici su alcune lastre incise dalle catacombe romane, in: Fabrizio Bisconti, Matteo Braconi (eds.), *Incisioni figurate della tarda antichità. Atti del Convegno di Studi (Roma, Palazzo Massimo, 22-23 marzo 2012)*, Città del Vaticano 2013, p. 332; Elisabeth Ehler, *Figürliche Loculusplatten aus dem frühchristlichen Rom. Katalog* (dissertation thesis), Philipps-Universität, Marburg 2008, p. 205; Claudia Lega, *Le iscrizioni cristiane di Roma conservate nei Musei Vaticani, indice dei vocaboli*, Città del Vaticano 2000, p. 407; Alice G. Mülhern, *The iconography of the orant image on Roman cemeterial inscription stones* (dissertation thesis), Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana, Vatican City 1978-1979, n. 8; Orazio Marucchi, *I monumenti del Museo Cristiano Pio Lateranense*, Milano 1910, p. 45; Théophile Roller, *Les catacombes de Rome. Histoire de l'art et des croyances religieuses pendant les premieres siécles du christianisme* I., Paris 1881, p. 45; Raffaele Garrucci, *Storia dell'arte cristiana nei primi otto secoli della chiesa* VI, Prato 1880, p. 143.

The fragmentary funerary marble plaque depicts an upper body of a woman dressed in tunic and *dalmatica,* with a head covered by a cap, standing in an orant position in front of a presbyterial space of a temple, separated from the rest of the world outside of the plaque by an ornamental arch. The columns with fastened curtains frame the sacred space and offer the viewer a glimpse of burning candles within. It is interesting to note that the female figure was placed within the sanctuary between the columns at first, as suggested by the traces of colour and small lines created in the process of erasure of the initial sketch that remain visible. Given the privileged position of what must be the representation of the deceased woman commemorated by the plaque, and the fact that she is captured performing prayer, the image may allude to the liturgical duties she had during her life, namely performance of public prayer in the name of other members of the congregation. The plaque most probably originates from one of the Roman catacombs. It was documented for the first time in the 18th century, when it was in possession of the Sacrestan of the Apostolic Palace. Around 1855 it became part of the Lapidario Cristiano Lateranense, where it remained until 1963.



© Musei Vaticani

3.9 SAMAGHER CASKET

Around 440

Length 20.5 cm, height 16 cm, width 18.5 cm

Venice, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, inv. n. Avori 279/52

Adrien Palladino, *Inventing Late Antique Reliquaries: Reception, Material History, and Dynamics of Interaction (4th-6th* centuries CE), Roma 2022, pp. 166-186; Ally Kateusz, Luca Badini Confalonieri, Women Church Leaders in and around Fifth-century Rome, in: Joan Taylor, Illaria Ramelli (eds.), *Patterns of Women's Leadership in Early Christianity*, Oxford 2021, pp. 233-241; Grace Stafford, *Women, Gender, and Society in Late Antiquity: A Study in Visual Culture* (dissertation thesis), Department of Archaeology, University of Oxford, Oxford 2020, cat. n. I6; Jaś Elsner, Concealment and Revelation: The Pola Casket and the Visuality of Early Christian Relics, in: Richard Neer (ed.), *Conditions of Visibility*, Oxford 2019, pp. 74-110; Galit Noga-Banai, *Sacred Stimulus: Jerusalem in the Visual Christianization of Rome*, Oxford 2018, pp. 129-139; Jaś Elsner, Closure and Penetration: Reflections on the Pola Casket, *Acta ad archaeologiam et artium historiam pertinentia* 26, 2013, pp. 183-227; Mary Schaefer, *Women in Pastoral Office. The Story of Santa Prassede, Rome*, Oxford 2013, pp. 197-200; Michela Sediari, Capsella di Samagher, in: Gemma Sena Chiesa (ed.), *Costantino 313 d.C. L'editto di Milano e il tempo della tollleranza*, Milano 2012, pp. 269-270; Anja Kalinowski, *Frühchristliche Reliquiare im Kontext von Kultstrategien, Heilserwartung und sozialer Selbstdarstellung*, Wiesbaden 2011, pp. 30-31, 143-148; Holger A. Klein, The Pola Casket, in: Martina Bagnoli *et al.* (eds.), *Treasures of Heaven: Saints, Relics, and Devotion in Medieval Europe*, Cleveland-Baltimore-London 2010, n. 16, p. 40; Fabrizio Bisconti, La capsella di Samagher: il quadro delle interpretazioni, in: Emilio Marin, Danilo Mazzoleni (eds.), *Il cristianesimo in Istria fra tarda antichità e alto medioevo*, Città di Vaticano 2009, pp. 217-232; Luca Trolese, The *Capsella* of Samagher, in: Jean-Jacques Aillagon (ed.), *Rome and the Barbarians. The Birth of a New World*, Milano 2008, pp. 488-489; Davide Longhi, *La capsella eburnea di Samagher: iconografia e commitenza*, Ravenna 2006; Fernando Rigon (ed.), *Restituzioni 1999: capolavori restaurati*, Vicenza 1999, pp. 23-30; Alessia Trivellone, Capsella di Samagher, in: Mario d'Onofrio (ed.), *Roma & Giubilei: il pellegrinaggio mediavale a San Pietro (350-1350)*, Milano 1999, p. 436; Davide Longhi, Il lato sinistro della capsella di Samagher e la memoria constantiniana di S. Lorenzo, *Felix Ravenna* 141/144, 1997, pp. 95-128; Renato Polacco, Gustavo Traversari, *Sculture romane e avori tardo-antichi e medievali del Museo archeologico di Venezia*, Roma 1988, pp. 47-56; Margherita Guarducci, *La capsella eburnea di Samagher: un cimelio di arte paleocristiana nella storia del tardo impero*, Trieste 1978; Paul Künzle, Das Petrusreliquiar von Samagher, *Römische Quartalschrift für christliche Altertumskunde und Kirchengeschichte* 71, n. 1/2, 1976, pp. 22-41; Wolfgang Volbach, *Elfenbeinarbeiten der Spätantike und des frühen Mittelalters* , 3rd ed., Mainz am Rhein 1976, n. 120, p. 85; Helmut Buschhausen, *Die spätrömischen Metallscrinia und frühchristlichen Reliquiare* (= Wiener Byzantinische Studien 9), Wien 1971, n. B10, pp. 219-223; Anna Angiolini, *La capsella eburnea di Pola*, Bologna 1970; Tilmann Buddensieg, Le coffret d'ivoire de Pola, Saint Pierre et le Latran, *Cahiers Archéologiques* 10, 1959, pp. 157-185; Carlo Cecchelli, *La vita di Roma nel Medio Evo* 1: *Le arti minori*, Roma 1951, pp. 205-210; Joseph Wilpert, Le due più antiche rappresentazioni della "Adoratio crucis", *Memorie della Pontificia Accademia Romana di Archeologia* 3, 1927, pp. 144-145, 154-155; Anton Gnirs, La basilica ed il reliquiario d'avorio di Samagher presso Pola, *Atti e memorie della società istriana di archeologia e storia patria* XXIV, 1908, pp. 3-48.

The ivory casket from Samagher, a small village close to Pula, was found in 1906. Its parts were unearthed in a thick stone box inside a *loculus* under the apse of the remains of a late antique church of Saint Hermagoras. The object was brought to the Museo Civico in Pula and reassembled twice: at the same museum upon its discovery, and in 1909 at the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, using plaster and brass mesh. It is currently housed in Museo Archeologico Nazionale in Venice, where it has been restored once again by an interdisciplinary team formed from experts employed by Museo Archeologico Nayionale, Soprintendenza Speciale per il Patrimonio Storico, Artistico ed Etnoantropologico and Polo Museale della Città di Venezia e dei Comuni della Gronda Lagunare. The results of the work were presented to the public in 2013.

Recent studies place the object around the year 440. After having been attributed to various places around the Mediterranean basin, it was finally ascribed to Rome. It shares its material, construction technique and angular legs with the Brescia casket. The object was made from ivory pieces of different sizes, combined without a supporting structure to compose a box, a technique frequent in Egypt and the Roman world. Apart from the ivory plaques, the box is also decorated with small silver gilded plates, applied to the corners. An internal compartment, formed by a thin ivory plaque positioned horizontally in the right part of the casket could have been intended to keep its contents distinct. Its presence may point to the creation or reuse of the casket as a reliquary.

Each of the plates forming the casket has only one central scene framed by ornamental decorations representing lambs, doves, and crosses. The lid of the box is occupied by a scene of the so-called *Traditio legis*, considered one of the oldest representations of the apsidal mosaic of the basilica of St. Peter in Rome, just as it was probably designed in the second half of the 4th century. It shows Christ standing on a hill from which the rivers of the Paradise surge, accompanied by four lambs on the sides of the hill, raising his right hand towards St. Paul to his right, and holding a scroll received by St. Peter with his left hand. The remainder of the scenes are not drawn from the Bible but depict architectural spaces with various personages performing acts of devotion. The back panel has been univocally interpreted as accurate representation of the tomb and the access to the *memoria sancti Petri* in the Constantinian basilica of St. Peter in the Vatican on the basis of the famous twisted columns of the *confessio Petri*, described in *Liber Pontificalis* and confirmed by excavations in the 1940s. The *memoria* is represented surmounted by a crown, opening towards the lunette of the *confessio.* The front panel of the casket with a procession of Apostles turned towards an empty throne in the centre under which the Lamb stands on the four rivers of Paradise has been associated with either the apse decoration of the Lateran Basilica from the first half of the 5th century or more probably with the lower register of the apse of the basilica of St. Peter. The spaces on the two last panels do not allow for clear identification. The panel on the right depicts a decorated ciborium-like structure, accessible through what seem to be curtains. Due to the loss of the central part, however, it is impossible to interpret the function of the ciborium. The opening towards the centre of the space is suggested by the half-open curtain, underlining its importance. It has been variously identified as a fountain in the atrium of St. Peter's Basilica or the Lateran baptistery, rebuilt during the pontificate of Sixtus III (432-440). The panel on the left has an ambiguous interpretation as well. According to scholars it either represents a narthex, a chancel in the nave of the Basilica of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem, the facade of the basilica San Paolo fuori le mura or more probably the now-lost crypt of San Lorenzo fuori le mura before it was remodelled by Sixtus III. The last option is supported by the presence of a grill allowing access to an inner memory space.

The rear and the two side panels present a similar composition: a central group of figures is interacting in different ways with the spaces. The focal group is composed of a woman and a man, sometimes accompanied by a child. In each scene they are flanked by a pair of veiled women to the right and a couple of men to the left. On the rear panel, the two central figures are shown in an act of prayer or donation in front of or inside of the Petrine *memoria*. The pairs of women and men framing the central space are depicted as orants and seem to be singing and praying. On the right panel, most of the central group is lost and only the woman can be identified. She is represented behind the curtain leading to the centre of the structure, pointing with her gesture towards a now-lost figure. The accompanying figures likewise perform introductory gestures and guide the attention of the viewer towards the central composition. On the left panel, the man and a woman either place a child into a space

accessed through a grill gate and half-open curtains or point inside this space. The two accompanying groups perform gestures of prayer and intercession.

The interpretation of the figures is complicated. It has been proposed that the panels could represent a single Christian family visiting important places of worship (either pilgrimage sites linked to the memory of St. Peter in order to obtain contact relics or to pray for the health of the child at the tomb of St. Peter, to baptise him in the Lateran and to consecrate him in the basilica of San Paolo fuori le mura). Davide Longhi interprets the pilgrim lady as Galla Placidia (around 390-450), visiting San Lorenzo fuori le mura, venerated by the Theodosian dynasty, with her child Valentinian III (419-455), and receiving a relic of the True Cross in the Basilica of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem. He underlines the interest of the empress for relics and the fact that only a high-ranking person would be able to access the *memoria Petri* to deposit a gift or to obtain contact relics. The casket's function in this case would have been to preserve relics of private devotion from various Roman sanctuaries.

The representations focused on the architecture draw attention to the fact that the casket reflects decorations and furnishings of important late antique cult buildings. The figures populating the spaces could well be members of a family who wanted to preserve memories of their travel to sacred buildings in Rome by commissioning or acquiring the casket. The visit could have corresponded with the obtaining of relics, which could have been held in the box to be transported and venerated. The complex decoration of the casket allows the hypothesis that it could have also served as a portable private decorative object inducing rhetorical meditation. The figures represented on the different sides of the box in the process of accessing sacred places could also be imaginary and mirror the pilgrim's desire to enter the inner sanctuary, repeatedly obscured by columns, curtains, and closed doors.







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4 WOMEN ACCOMPANIED BY SAINTS

4.1 FUNERARY PLAQUE WITH DECEASED WOMAN BETWEEN TWO SAINTS

4th century

Length 61 cm, height 14.5 cm, width 5 cm

Vatican City, Musei Vaticani, inv. n. MV.32496.0.0

Elisabeth Ehler, *Figürliche Loculusplatten aus dem frühchristlichen Rom. Katalog* (dissertation thesis), Philipps-Universität, Marburg 2008, p. 165; Carl Maria Kaufmann, Handbuch der altchristlichen Epigraphik, Freiburg 1917, p. 54; Orazio Marucchi, *I monumenti del Museo Cristiano Pio Lateranense*, Milano 1910, p. 46; Théophile Roller, *Les catacombes de Rome. Histoire de l'art et des croyances religieuses pendant les premieres siécles du christianisme* I., Paris 1881, p. 46; Raffaele Garrucci, *Storia dell'arte cristiana nei primi otto secoli della chiesa* VI, Prato 1880, pp. 142-143.

Only the upper right portion of the marble plaque survives, preserving part of the inscription and figural motif with which it was decorated. What remains depicts a roughly carved bust of a woman, with head covered by a *palla*, placed within what appears to be a halo and surrounded by the apocalyptic letters *alpha* and *omega*. Other comparable contemporary representations of deceased on gold glass and plaques point to the fact that the female figure may have been captured performing an orant gesture. Two haloed male figures dressed in tunics and *pallia* flank her. They may be the apostles Peter and Paul or other combination of martyrs. The preserved fragment of a word CISSI may have informed about the name or the qualities of the deceased (*dulcissima?, Felicissima?*).

The plaque was discovered during excavation campaign in the early Christian cemetery on Ager Veranus and was included in the collection of early Christian objects in the basilica of San Lorenzo fuori le mura. Between approximately 1855 and 1963 it was kept in Lapidario Cristiano Lateranense, from which it was transferred to Musei Vaticani.



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4.2 CRESCENTIA BETWEEN TWO MALE SAINTS

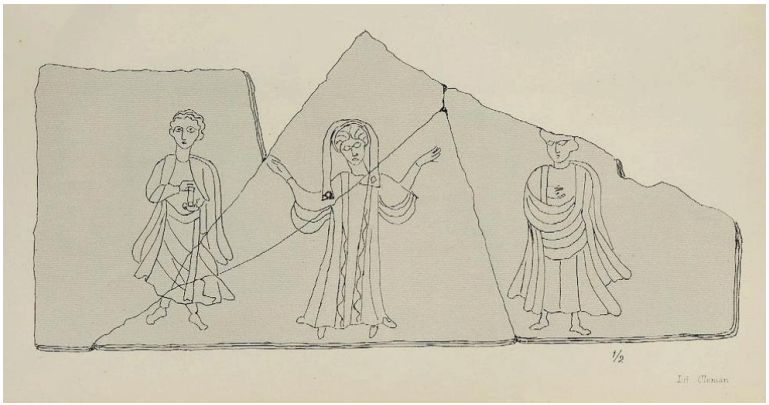
4th century

Length 35.7 cm, height 15 cm, width 1.5 cm

Rome, Cimitero Maggiore

Cristina Cumbo, Al fianco dei santi: un percorso privilegiato verso l'aldilà, in: Paolo de Vingo *et al.* (eds.), *Sepolture di prestigio nel bacino mediterraneo (secoli IV-IX). Definizione, immagini, utilizzo. Atti del convegno Pella (NO), 28-30 giugno 2017* 2, Firenze 2021, p. 122; Cristina Cumbo, *Le c.d. gammadiae nelle catacombe cristiane di Roma. Censimento, confronti e ipotesi interpretative*, Oxford 2019, p. 65 and pl. 82.1; Cristinan Cumbo, Vetri dorati e lastre incise: alcuni casi interessati dalle c.d. *gammadiae*, in: Chiara Cecalupo, Giovanna Assunta Lanzetta, Priscilla Ralli (eds.), *RACTA 2018: Ricerche di Archeologia Cristiana, Tardantichità e Altomedioevo. 1st International Conference of Ph.D. Students (5th-7th February 2018, Rome)*, Oxford 2019, pp. 57-58; Alice G. Mülhern, *The iconography of the orant image on Roman cemeterial inscription stones* (dissertation thesis), Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana, Vatican City 1978-1979, n. 108; Mariano Armellini, Una visione narrata da martiri africani del secolo terzo ed un graffito simbolico. Comunicazione del 2 marzo 1879, *Bulletino di Archeologia Cristiana* V, III. serie., 1880, pp. 66-68; Orazio Marucchi, Conferenze della Società di cultori della cristiana archeologia in Roma, *Bulletino di Archeologia Cristiana* V, III. serie., 1880, pp. 93-95, pl. 3.

The fragmentary funerary plaque, discovered in 1879 in Cimitero Maggiore, commemorates certain Crescentia, whose crudely sketched effigy, decorating the lower part of the marble slab, is the only preserved part of the object. The deceased is portrayed frontally, in an orant position. She is dressed in long *dalmatica* with *clavi* and flowing wide sleeves, under which a tunic, tapered at the wrists, peeks. Her hair, waved and gathered at the top of the head, is covered by a small veil, the ends of which, decorated by what appear to be embroidered circles, fall just below her shoulders. The deceased is flanked by two male figures, dressed in tunics and *pallia*. Based on the composition of the scene it can be assumed that they are martyrs, accompanying Crescentia to the otherworld and adding to the authority of her commemorative image. The martyr on the left (from the viewers point of view) holds a scroll, while his counterpart performs a speaking/teaching gesture with his right hand, positioned in front of his torso. The image, albeit detailed, is engraved with rough simple lines and some distortions of the garments and body parts, such as the long, tilted neck and the off-centre facial features of the orant, can be observed.



© Marucchi 1880, pl. 3

4.3 SARCOPHAGUS LID FRIEZE WITH CRISPINA

Around the middle of the 4th century

Length 209 cm, height 27 cm

Vatican City, Musei Vaticani, inv. n. MV.31552.0.0

Christine Schenk, *Crispina and Her Sisters. Women and Authority in Early Christianity*, Minneapolis 2017, pp. 195-198; Giandomenico Spinola, I sarcofagi paleocristiani del Museo Pio Cristiano ex lateranense nei Musei Vaticani, *Rivista di archeologia cristiana* 77, 2002, pp. 558-559; Cristina Gennacciari, Museo Pio Cristiano. Documenti inediti di rilavorazioni e restauri settecenteschi sui sarcofagi paleocristiani, *Bollettino dei Monumenti Musei e Gallerie Pontificie* XVI, 1996, p. 159; Friedrich Wilhelm Deichammann *et al.*, *Repertorium der christlich-antiken Sarkophage* I. Rom und Ostia, Wiesbaden 1967, pp. 89-90; Manuel Sotomayor, *S. Pedro en la iconografia paleocristiana: testimonios de la tradicion cristiana sobre San Pedro en los monumentos iconograficos anteriores al siglo sexto*, Granada 1962, p. 63; Gilberte Vezin, *L' adoration et le cycle des Mages dans l'art chrétien primitif: étude des influences orientales et grecques sur l'art chrétien*, Paris 1950, pp. 41-45; Franz Dölger, *ΙΧΘΥΣ. Das Fischsymbol in frühchristlicher Zeit* 5, Münster 1943, p. 464; Joseph Wilpert, *I sarcofagi cristiani antichi* II, Roma 1932, p. 338; Orazio Marucchi, *Guida del Museo Lateranense Profano e Cristiano,* Roma 1922, p. 25; Erich Becker, *Das Quellwunder des Moses in der altchristlichen Kunst*, Strassburg 1909, p. 35; Hugo Kehrer, *Die heiligen drei Könige in Literatur und Kunst* 2, Leipzig 1909, pp. 21-24; Johannes Ficker, *Die altchristlichen Bildwerke im Christlichen Museum des Laterans*, Leipzig 1890, p. 147; Max Schmid, *Die Darstellung der Geburt Christi in der bildenden Kunst: entwicklungsgeschichtliche Studie*, Stuttgart 1890, n. 6; Theophile Roller, *Les catacombes de Rome: histoire de l'art et des croyances religieuses pendant les premiers siècles du christianisme* 2, Paris 1881, p. 144; Raffaele Garrucci, *Storia della arte cristiana nei primi otto secoli della chiesa* V, Prato 1879, p. 126.

The frieze, currently displayed in the Musei Vaticani, is a composite object created by joining of three lid fragments, which makes the precise dating impossible. However, general consensus places all the fragments in the period between the years 320-360, with many scholars leaning towards the latter date. All the fragments were housed in the basilica of San Paolo fuori le mura before they were acquired for the papal collection in 1757. The two fragments of the extremities were transferred to the basilica from the church of San Giuseppe de' Falegnami, but their history before the 17th century, as well as the history of the central fragment, is obscure. It was in the papal Museo Sacro that the fragments, deemed uninteresting for the privileged visitors of the pontifical museum on their own, were assembled by the sculptor Bartolomeo Cavaceppi (1716-1799) to form a long continuous freeze, the height of which was regulated by the marble plaques at the top and the bottom, providing a frame for the disparate reliefs. As from the scene of Adoration of the Magi on the fragment on the left only the enthroned Virgin and Child remained, Cavaceppi undertook the task to "restore" it by adding the figures of the Magi, the shepherd, and the manger with Jesus warmed by donkey and ox, framed by two palms. The fragment with the scene of Daniel in the lions' den, which joins the Adoration of the Magi on the right, underwent some remodelling as well. Major part of Daniel's right arm and feet was sculpted anew in the 18th century. The same can be said about the head and the left leg of Habakuk holding a bowl, flanking him to the viewer's right, and the right hands of the male figures to the viewer's left, one of which, turning towards Daniel and raising hand in a speech gesture was identified tentatively as an angel. The least re-touched is the fragment on the right, forming substantial part of the composite frieze. Based on the iconography, which will be discussed below, it can be assumed that the left part of the piece is missing, while the right survived intact. In 1854 the composite object was transferred to the newly formed Museo Pio Cristiano in the Lateran, to be moved to Musei Vaticani by 1974 after the formerly mentioned museum was dissolved.

The fragment, interesting in the context of female representation and self-representation in Rome, depicts female figure, most probably the deceased, dressed in tunic and *palla* covering her head, turned to the right and reading a *codex* monogrammed with a Christogram, pointing towards its theological nature. In what must have been the central portion of a sarcophagus lid which commemorated her, she is identified by a name, Crispina, a rare occurrence in the case of late antique sarcophagi. Surrounded by neotestamental scenes (multiplication of fish and loaves, arrest of Peter and miracle of the spring must have been matched by biblical scenes of similar nature to the left of Crispina) and reading the Scriptures, she proclaims herself or is proclaimed to be a learned woman with some measure of theological authority and possibly significant economic status, as the marble used for carving of the relief is of high quality.



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4.4 SARCOPHAGUS WITH A LEARNED WOMAN BETWEEN TWO APOSTLES

Middle of the 4th century

Length 161 cm, height 58 cm

Vatican City, Musei Vaticani, inv. n. MV.31512.0.0

Christine Schenk, *Crispina and Her Sisters. Women and Authority in Early Christianity*, Minneapolis 2017, pp. 267-268; Giandomenico Spinola, I sarcofagi paleocristiani del Museo Pio Cristiano ex lateranense nei Musei Vaticani, *Rivista di archeologia cristiana* 77, 2002, pp. 562-564; Cristina Gennacciari, Museo Pio Cristiano. Documenti inediti di rilavorazioni e restauri settecenteschi sui sarcofagi paleocristiani, *Bollettino dei Monumenti Musei e Gallerie Pontificie* XVI, 1996, p. 161; Friedrich Wilhelm Deichammann *et al.*, *Repertorium der christlich-antiken Sarkophage* I. Rom und Ostia, Wiesbaden 1967, pp. 68-69; Joseph Wilpert, *I sarcofagi cristiani antichi* I, Roma 1929, pp. 88-89; Orazio Marucchi, *Guida del Museo Lateranense Profano e Cristiano,* Roma 1922, p. 20; Johannes Ficker, *Die altchristlichen Bildwerke im Christlichen Museum des Laterans*, Leipzig 1890, p. 108; Theophile Roller, *Les catacombes de Rome: histoire de l'art et des croyances religieuses pendant les premiers siècles du christianisme* 2, Paris 1881, pp. 7-8; Raffaele Garrucci, *Storia della arte cristiana nei primi otto secoli della chiesa* V, Prato 1879, p. 124; Giovanni Gaetano Bottari, *Sculture e pitture sagre estratte dai cimeteri di Roma* 2, Roma 1754, p. 99; Paolo Aringhi, *Roma subterranea novissima* I, Arnheim 1671, p. 168; Antonio Bosio, *Roma sotteranea*, Roma 1632, p. 291.

The front wall of the marble sarcophagus is separated into three fields. Both corner fields contain a figure of a young shepherd dressed in short-sleeved tunic, gaiters and simple leather shoes, carrying a sheep on his shoulders and holding a shepherd's crook or a milking pail in his hand. The figures are framed by olive trees. In the central field a woman dressed in long tunic and *palla* covering her head is shown standing frontally, holding a scroll in both hands. She is flanked by two bearded short-haired men dressed in tunics and *pallia* who turn towards her. One of them has his right hand on the woman's shoulder in an affectionate gesture, while the other holds a scroll and performs a speech gesture. The men were identified by the previous research as Apostles, suggesting that the deceased, who can be associated with the female figure in the centre, wanted to be remembered as a woman well-learned in the Scriptures (thus the choice of a scroll as her attribute), with the path to the afterlife paved by the Apostles, who, affectionately and respectfully turned towards her, point to her aspiration to or possession of authority within the Christian community.

The sarcophagus was found in the underground cemetery dedicated to martyr Sebastian along Via Appia. By 1757 it was part of the papal collections, where the object, which was poorly preserved and broken into 11 fragments, was reassembled by sculptor Bartolomeo Cavaceppi (1716-1799), who not only rearranged the parts, thus creating a new composition, with the shepherds strangely facing away from the central group, but also sculpted portions of the figures, draperies, and trees in the background *ex novo*, so as to return the sarcophagus its former glory, completely reshaping it in the process. In 1854 the object was transferred to the newly formed Museo Pio Cristiano in the Lateran, to be moved to Musei Vaticani by 1974 after the formerly mentioned museum was dissolved.



© Musei Vaticani

4.5 BOTTOM OF A PLATE WITH PEREGRINA, ST. PETER AND ST. PAUL

Middle of the 4th century

Length 13.3 cm, height 11.5 cm

New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. n. 18.145.2

Grace Stafford, *Women, Gender, and Society in Late Antiquity: A Study in Visual Culture* (dissertation thesis), Department of Archaeology, University of Oxford, Oxford 2020, cat. n. GG5; Daniel Thomas Howells (eds.), *A Catalogue of the Late Antique Gold Glass in the British Museum*, London 2015, p. 87; Barbara Drake Boehm, Gold Glass with Peregrina between Sts. Peter and Paul, in: Martina Bagnoli *et al.* (eds.), *Treasures of Heaven: Saints, Relics, and Devotion in Medieval Europe*, Cleveland-Baltimore-London 2010, n. 10, p. 35; Lucy Grig, Portraits, pontiffs, and the Christianization of fourth-century Rome, *Papers of the British School at Rome* 72, 2004, pp. 224-225; Nancy Patterson Ševčenko, Bottom of plate with Peregrina and SS. Peter and Paul, in: Kurt Weitzmann (ed.), *Age of Spirituality. Late Antique and Early Christian Art, Third to Seventh Century*, New York 1979, n. 510, p. 572; Charles R. Morey, *The Gold-Glass Collection of the Vatican Library, with Additional Catalogues of Other Gold-Glass Collections,* Città del Vaticano 1959, n. 449, p. 73; Louise Avery, Early Christian Gold Glass, *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 16, n. 8, 1921, p. 174; Anton Kisa, Ernst von Bassermann-Jordan, Oscar Almgren, *Das Glas im Altertume* 3/3, Leipzig 1908, pp. 859-860; Hermann Vopel, *Die altchristlichen Goldgläser: ein Beitrag zur Altchristlichen Kunst- und Kulturgeschichte* (= Archäologische Studien zum christlichen Altertum und Mittelalter 5), Freiburg 1899, pp. 50, 57; Raffaele Garrucci, *Storia dell'arte cristiana nei primi otto secoli della chiesa* III, Prato 1876, p. 170; Raffaele Garrucci, *Vetri ornati di figure in oro, trovati nei cimiteri dei cristiani primitivi di Roma*, Roma 1858, p. 49.

The glass is broken around the edges and the surface is discoloured in several areas. The plate has a ring foot. Within a square frame three frontal figures are depicted. Two beardless men stand beside a woman, looking slightly towards her and pointing at her with their right hands. With their left hands they hold the fold of their *pallia*. The woman is dressed in a long tunic and belted *dalmatica*, wearing earrings, large necklace and a fillet in her elaborated plaited hair. She stands in an orant position looking directly at the viewer. None of the figures, identified by inscriptions above them as Peter, Paul, and Peregrina, is labelled as a saint and has a distinguishing halo. Despite this, the two men are unanimously associated with St. Peter and St. Paul, who are often paired on the surviving gold-glasses. The flowery landscape behind the figures probably alludes to paradise.

It is not clear who Peregrina might have been: perhaps an otherwise unknown saint (St. Agnes, for example, was frequently depicted standing between Peter and Paul on gold-glass medallions), but more likely a deceased Roman lady Peregrina, who recommends her soul to the care of the two apostles. Parallels for such composition can be found on sarcophagi that show the apostles flanking a standing female orant, obviously meant to represent the dead woman buried within. The name Peregrina, while not common, is found in a dozen sepulchral inscriptions.

The representation of Peter and Paul as beardless suggests the date cannot be later than the middle of the 4th century when beards became a standard for depiction of these saints. The object was acquired by Metropolitan Museum in 1918 from a Roman antiquarian Alfredo Barsanti through the antiquities art collector John Marshall (1862-1928).



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4.6 VENERANDA AND PETRONILLA

After 356

Dimensions unknown to author

Rome, Catacomba di Domitilla, *arcosolium* of Veneranda

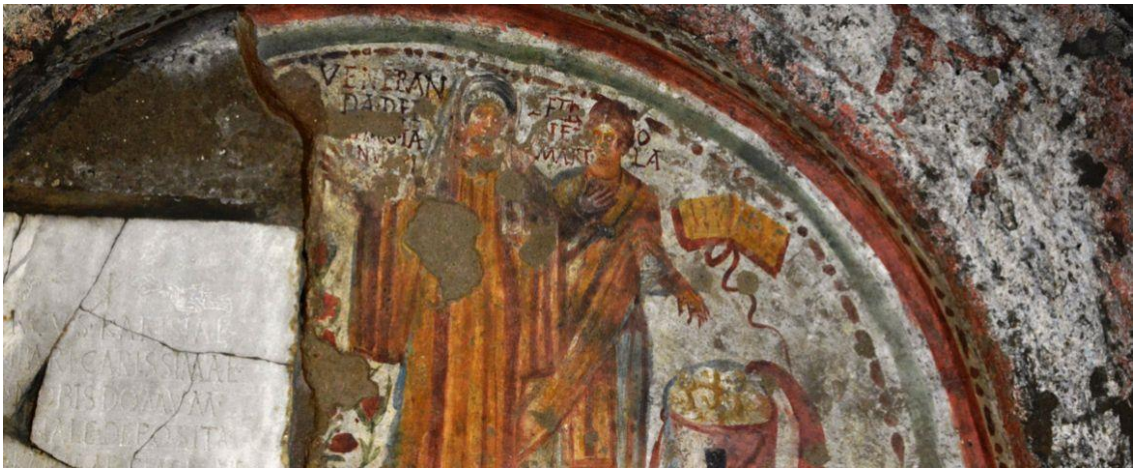
Cristina Cumbo, Al fianco dei santi: un percorso privilegiato verso l'aldilà, in: Paolo de Vingo *et al.* (eds.), *Sepolture di prestigio nel bacino mediterraneo (secoli IV-IX). Definizione, immagini, utilizzo. Atti del convegno Pella (NO), 28-30 giugno 2017* 2, Firenze 2021, pp. 117-124; Grace Stafford, *Women, Gender, and Society in Late Antiquity: A Study in Visual Culture* (dissertation thesis), Department of Archaeology, University of Oxford, Oxford 2020, cat. n. P31; Matteo Braconi, L'immaginario figurativo dei defunti nelle catacombe di Domitilla a Roma: sagome, bozzetti e ritratti, in: Fabrizio Bisconti (ed.), *Catacombe di Domitilla: restauri nel tempo*, Città del Vaticano 2017, pp. 38-39; Raffaella Giuliani, L'arcosolio di Veneranda, in: Fabrizio Bisconti (ed.), *Catacombe di Domitilla: restauri nel tempo*, Città del Vaticano 2017, pp. 83-100; Nicola Denzey, *The Bone Gatherers. The Lost Worlds of Early Christian Women*, Boston 2007, pp. 125-147; Stefania Pennesi, Le figure di Veneranda e di santa Petronilla nell'arcosolio detto di Veneranda della catacomba di Domitilla, in: Maria Andaloro (ed.), *L'orrizonte tardoantico e le nuove immagini 312-468,* Milano 2006, pp. 163-165; Raffaella Giuliani, Il restauro dell'arcosolio di Veneranda nelle catacombe di Domitilla sulla via Ardeatina, *Rivista di archeologia cristiana* 70, 1994, pp. 67-87; Philippe Pergola, Petronella martyr: une évergète de la fin du IV^{e} siècle, in: *Memoriam sanctorum venerantes: miscellanea in onore di Monsignor Victor Saxer* (= Studi di antichità cristiana 48), Città del Vaticano 1992, pp. 629-633; Guglielmo Matthiae, *Pittura romana del Medioevo. Secoli IV-IX* I, Roma 1987, p. 28; Agostino Amore, Petronilla, in: *Biblioteca Sanctorum* X*,* Roma 1968, pp. 514-517; Pasquale Testini, *Le catacombe e gli antichi cimiteri cristiani in Roma,* Bologna 1966, pp. 296, 302; Orazio Marucchi, *Roma sotteranea cristiana,* Roma 1909, pp. 242-245; Joseph Wilpert, *Le pitture delle catacombe romane,* Roma 1903, pp. 360-383, 426-428; Giovanni Battista de Rossi, Rome - cimetière de Domitille: découverte d'une fresque représentant Ste Pétronille, *Bulletin d'archéologie chrétienne* 5, n. 1, 1874, pp. 138-142.

The *arcosolium*, where according to the inscription a woman named Veneranda has been buried, is located in a *cubiculum* behind the apse of the basilica of martyrs Nereus and Achilleus, in the region of the catacombs of Domitilla, discovered by Giovanni Battista de Rossi in 1874. The burials in this small space are extremely crowded, probably because of the proximity of the venerated tombs of saints.

The masonry that closed the *arcosolium* with two burials was coated with a thin layer of lime plaster and red pozzolana, on which the fresco decoration was later painted. It most probably referred to the burial built in front of the *arcosolium* that occupies most of the space. The deceased Veneranda is depicted in the position of an orant, wearing a loose terracotta-coloured *dalmatica,* with a veil decorated by dark circles covering her head. She is accompanied by a young girl, dressed in a white tunic with red lines and a terracotta-coloured *palla*. The inscription suggests that it is martyr Petronilla. She is holding Veneranda around her shoulders in a gesture of introduction. The deceased is introduced to a heavenly garden, indicated by a group of red flowers to the left of the scene. The saint is pointing at a case full of *rotuli*, which is paired with an open codex at the top of the scene. This could be a hint on the Scripture, piously followed by the matron during her life.

It is probable that the tomb of Petronilla has been located close to the burial chamber of Veneranda. The fresco, restored in 1993, is the oldest archaeological evidence for the cult of Petronilla and reflects the promotion of the cult of martyrs during the pontificate of Damasius I (366-384). It represents the intercession of the saints in favour of the deceased.

The red lines framing the painting cover the border of a marble tombstone of Karisia in the *arcosolium*, dated by the inscription to the year 356, giving *terminus post quem*. The hairstyle of Veneranda with tight curls framing her face and plaited hair at the top of the head, together with a loose *dalmatica* and a veil with *orbiculi* sets the date of the execution of the fresco to the second half of the 4th century.



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4.7 TWO DEPICTIONS OF DECEASED WOMEN BETWEEN APOSTLES PETER AND PAUL

Second half of the 4th century

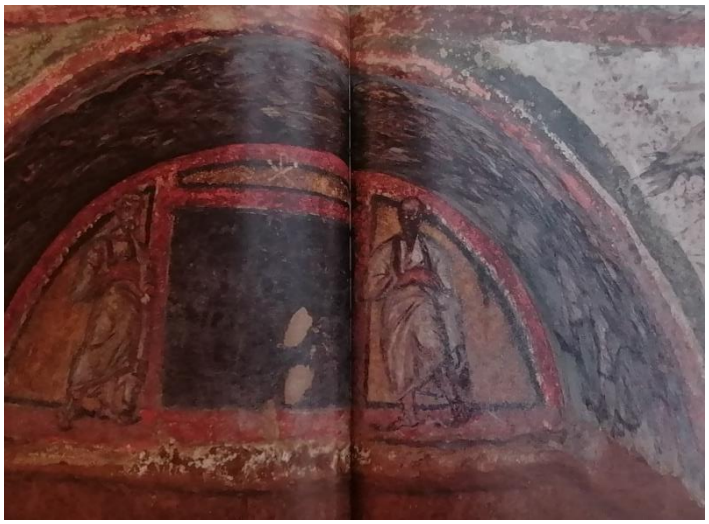
Dimensions unknown to author

Rome, Catacomba di Domitilla, *arcosolium* degli Apostoli Piccoli and *loculus* 28

Matteo Braconi, L'immaginario figurativo dei defunti nelle catacombe di Domitilla a Roma: sagome, bozzetti e ritratti, in: Fabrizio Bisconti (ed.), *Catacombe di Domitilla. Restauri nel tempo*, Città del Vaticano 2017, pp. 34-36; Raffaella Giuliani, L'arcosolio degli Apostoli Piccoli, in: Fabrizio Bisconti (ed.), *Catacombe di Domitilla. Restauri nel tempo*, Città del Vaticano 2017, pp. 103-106; Raffaella Giuliani, Il restaurato cubiculo detto degli Apostoli Piccoli nelle catacombe di Domitilla e alcune note a margine della sua iconografia, *Rivista di archeologia cristiana* 86, 2010, pp. 53-80; Aldo Nestori, *Repertorio topografico delle pitture delle catacombe romane*, Città del Vaticano 1993, pp. 123-124; Joseph Wilpert, *Die Malereien der Katakomben Roms* I, Freiburg 1903, pp. 370, 498; Mariano Armellini, *Gli antichi cimiteri cristiani di Roma e d'Italia*, Roma 1893, pp. 461-462; Giovanni Marangoni, *Acta S. Victorini episcopi Amiterni et martyris illustrata*, Roma 1740, pp. 39-41.

The *arcosolium* on the eastern wall of the so-called *cubiculum* of Little Apostles, characterised by use of bright colours (green, yellow, red, dark blue), contains in the centre of its lunette, divided into three parts by red bands, an unusual, barely perceptible dainty depiction of a silhouette of a female orant, outlined in white colour on black background, dressed in what appears to be a *dalmatica* and with a head covered by a veil, if we are to believe the reconstruction by Joseph Wilpert. Above the almost invisible praying figure a Christogram can still be seen. The orant, most probably a "portrait" the deceased inhabitant of the *arcosolim*, is accompanied by full-length representations of apostles Peter and Paul, identified as such by the typical beards, hairstyles and attire. In the soffit of the *arcosolium*, the twelve Apostles are depicted seated, flanking the figure of teaching Christ. The front of the *arcosolium* is divided into several not fully finalized sections, decorated by imitation of marble revetment, birds and vegetal motifs. The dark background of the depiction of the deceased, contrasting with the brightness of the colours with which the presence of the Apostles and Christ is embodied, may hint at the fact that the temporary darkness of death can be overcome through the intercession of the Apostles, allowing the soul of the deceased to join the eternal light, symbolized by the Christogram, sign of triumph over death and resurrection. Based on epigraphic elements and parallels with other painted cycles in the Roman catacombs, e.g. the decoration of the *cubiculum* of the Apostles in the catacomb of St. Thecla, the *cubiculum* of the Little Apostles is dated to the second half of the 4th century.

The *matrona*, immortalized in the moment of continuous prayer on the later 4th-century painting on the *extrados* of the *arcosolium* on the right wall of *cubiculum* 45, is likewise accompanied by two male figures dressed in tunics and *pallia*, associated with Apostles and martyrs. Contrary to the female orant in the *cubiculum* of the Little Apostles, the deceased is captured with wide brushstrokes, a few simple lines depicting her face and attire, consisting of wide *dalmatica* and a transparent veil covering her hair, without any personalizing detail.





© Giuliani 2017, pl. 2

© Wilpert 1903b, pl. 154



© Braconi 2017, p. 37

4.8 GOLD-GLASS VESSEL BASE WITH ST. PETER AND FEMALE ORANT

c. 360-400

Diameter 8.69 cm

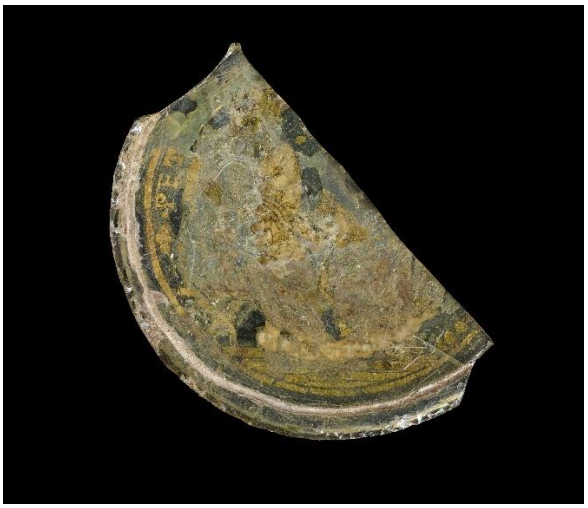
London, The British Museum, inv. n. 1854,0722.3

Daniel Thomas Howells (eds.), *A Catalogue of the Late Antique Gold Glass in the British Museum*, London 2015, pp. 86-87; Charles R. Morey, *The Gold-Glass Collection of the Vatican Library, with Additional Catalogues of Other Gold-Glass Collections,* Città del Vaticano 1959, n. 342, p. 57; Ormonde M. Dalton, *Catalogue of Early Christian Antiquities and Objects from the Christian East in the Department of British and Medieval Antiquities and Etnography of the British Museum,* London 1901, n. 634; Oliviero Iozzi, *Vetri cimiteriali con figure in oro conservati nel Museo Brittanico*, Roma 1900, p. 20; Hermann Vopel, *Die altchristlichen Goldgläser: ein Beitrag zur Altchristlichen Kunst- und Kulturgeschichte* (= Archäologische Studien zum christlichen Altertum und Mittelalter 5), Freiburg 1899, n. 318; Raffaele Garrucci, *Storia dell'arte cristiana nei primi otto secoli della chiesa* III, Prato 1876, p. 155; Raffaele Garrucci, *Dissertazioni archeologiche di vario argomento*, Roma 1864, p. 102; Raffaele Garrucci, *Vetri ornati di figure in oro, trovati nei cimiteri dei cristiani primitivi di Roma*, Roma 1858, p. 37.

The object is a fragment of a vessel, composed of two layers of greenish brown glass, between which a thin layer of incised gold leaf was sandwiched. As the foot ring of the vessel is positioned higher than the vessel base, the object, probably a bowl of some sort, could not have been stable, a fact suggesting that it was used for decorative purpose. It seems that the wall of the vessel was broken away and the bottom was neatly trimmed along the line encircling the incised scene, creating a portable medallion. The half-missing base disk is severely cracked and discoloured, partially obscuring the figures depicted on it.

On the left the remaining portion of the gold leaf captures, within the band border, a full-length figure of a bearded, short-haired man dressed in tunic and *pallium*, decorated by red enamel stripe at the bottom, sitting on a cross-legged chair. He is holding a scroll with both hands, while performing a gesture with three extended fingers of his right hand. While his torso is captured frontally, his bare feet, resting on what appear to be floorboards, and head are depicted in profile, pointing towards the figure on the right, which he apparently addresses. Only the lower portion survives from his companion, but the dress, consisting of tunic, *palla* and a veil, visible just below the fracture line, indicate that she is a woman. The absence of hands at her sides can be accredited to the fact that she performs an orant gesture. In the field on the inside of the circular border the remaining partial inscription reads PET, identifies one of the figures, according to all researchers who studied the object, as PETRUS. The identity of the Apostle is corroborated by the physical appearance, by his attire and also by the teaching gesture and the scroll he is holding, signs of erudition and authority. If we interpret the scene in the light of the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostle, the female figure may be one of his virginal students, Petronilla, Pudentiana or Praxede. Unfortunately, the section of the glass, mirroring the portion containing the name PETRUS, which most probably unmasked the identity of his companion, is lost. Thus, the option that the image is of devotional nature and the woman is simply a faithful female commissioner, recommending her soul to the Apostle, remains likewise possible.

The glass fragment was most probably uncovered in a further unidentified Roman catacomb. It was part of the collection of Christian Karl Josias, Baron von Bunsen (1791-1860), Prussian scholar and diplomat, who gifted it to the British Museum in 1854, while residing in London as ambasador.





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© Garrucci 1876, pl. 185

4.9 PORTRAIT OF A DECEASED WOMAN BETWEEN APOSTLES

End of the 4th century

Dimensions unknown to author

Rome, Catacombe di Santa Tecla, Cubicolo degli Apostoli

Cristina Cumbo, Al fianco dei santi: un percorso privilegiato verso l'aldilà, in: Paolo de Vingo *et al.* (eds.), *Sepolture di prestigio nel bacino mediterraneo (secoli IV-IX). Definizione, immagini, utilizzo*. *Atti del convegno Pella (NO), 28-30 giugno 2017* 2, Firenze 2021, pp. 118-119; Grace Stafford, *Women, Gender, and Society in Late Antiquity: A Study in Visual Culture* (dissertation thesis), Department of Archaeology, University of Oxford, Oxford 2020, cat. n. P33; Fabrizio Bisconti, Giovanna Ferri, *La strada di Paolo: la via Ostiense dalle origini alla cristianizzazione*, Padova 2018, pp. 197-203; Fabrizio Bisconti, *Primi cristiani. Le storie, i monumenti, le figure*, Vatican City 2013, pp. 114-122; Barbara Mazzei (ed.), *Il cubicolo degli apostoli nelle catacombe romane di Santa Tecla: cronaca di una scoperta*, Città del Vaticano 2010; Giuliana Santagata, Note sulle pitture del cimitero di S. Tecla, *Rivista di archeologia cristiana* 56, 1980, pp. 103-132; Umberto Fasola, La basilica sotteranea di S. Tecla e le regioni cimiteriali vicine, *Rivista di archeologia cristiana* 46, 1970, pp. 193-288; Umberto Fasola, Il complesso catacombale di Santa Tecla, *Rivista di archeologia cristiana* 40, 1964, pp. 19-50; Marcantonio Boldetti, *Osservazioni sopra i cimiteri de' santi martiri ed antichi cristiani di Roma*, Roma 1720, pp. 548-549.

The catacomb complex on Via Ostiense near the basilica San Paolo fuori le mura was first discovered at the beginning of the 18th century by Marcantonio Boldetti (1663-1749) but its decoration was in terrible state of conservation that prevented the identification of iconographical motifs. The space was completely excavated and studied just in the course of the 20th century. The most detailed studies of the complex were done by Umberto Fasola in 1960s and 1970s, when the fresco decoration was captured in drawings and cleaned with the use of laser. Some parts of it were heavily damaged by the humidity and became legible only after the complex restoration at the beginning of the 21st century.

The *cubiculum* of the Apostles was named after the scene above its entrance, which depicts Christ, seated on a throne, making a gesture of speech with his right hand, and holding a scroll with his left, with Apostles sitting at his side as a court. Their gestures and posture are identical, yet they are individualized by their facial features. Under them appears the paradisiacal motif of six sheep, approaching a central hill, from which four springs surge. Apostles are painted also on the vault of the *cubiculum*, together with the Good Shepard.

The burial chamber contains three *arcosolia* with scenes on a greenish blue background, framed by red lines, from which figures in reddish-brown tones modulated by light emerge. The one near the entrance hosts the remnants of three figures, clad in oriental robes, to be associated with the Magi, bringing their gifts to infant Jesus, due to the position of the bodies reverted to the right and expressing adoration. The northern and the southern wall show scenes from the story of Jonah. The entrance is also framed by images of young Daniel in orant pose between lions and St. Peter miraculously drawing water from a rock in the presence of his newly converted prison guards.

The recently restored lunette of the northern *arcosolium* depicts richly dressed female orant, clad in light-coloured *dalmatica* with dark *clavi*, neckline covered by pearls and embroidered sleeves. Her head is covered by a soft veil, under which appears a highly representative hairstyle with curls framing the face and a plait encircling the top of the head. In front of the torso, she is holding a scroll with both hands. She is turned slightly to the side, with her gaze

focused on some distant space outside of the chamber and probably the tangible world as a whole. Her eyes are expressive and melancholic. She is accompanied by a figure of a girl, probably her daughter, in similar orant position and attire. Due to the damaged plaster, it is impossible to distinguish her features. On each side two male figures in tunic and *palla* are looking toward the spectator. Due to their position, it can be stated that they probably represent two saints. The typology of their faces may suggest that they can be identified as St. Peter and St. Paul, but this identification is by no means certain. The fact that one of the saints is resting his hand on the shoulder of the deceased woman in a gesture of support and blessing and the presence of busts of Apostles in the iconographic programme of the *cubiculum* may hint on her elevated position in society and possibly also her importance for the Church in the city of Rome. On the other hand, it is also possible that the iconography is not directly connected to the reality of life of the deceased and was cleverly employed to upgrade her self-representation. The girl, not included in the main composition, was most probably added slightly later on top of the primary painting. The fact that there was an ample space left between the saint on the right and the female orant shows that the *loculus* was intended not only for the woman, but also for at least one other member of her family.

In the *arcosolium* facing the entrance, the sacrifice of Isaac is being represented. The *cubiculum*, with its variety of vivid colours, birds, flowers, and garlands depicted in red hues on white background on the bottom portion of the walls, spaciousness of which is in stark contrast with the constricted composition of the scenes above, is one of the most richly decorated ambientes of the catacombs. The anatomy of the human bodies follows the classical tradition in its fluid movements and the relatively natural lines, but at the same time several disproportions are visible. They are due mainly to the restrictive effect of the frames defining the pictorial space and the subsequent verticality of the figures, achieved by supressing of the volumes of the bodies. The play with light gives the rather canonical repertoire of scenes, often found in the sumptuous mausolea of the Roman *élites* and emanating the message of salvation through faith and resurrection of the soul, a theatrical effect. The monumental decorative complex of the *cubiculum* was unanimously dated to the end of the 4th century based on the stylistic closeness with the so-called Cubicolo dell'Esodo in the Catacomba dei Giordani, Cubicolo del Lazaro in the catacombs of Priscilla, and the frescoes in the catacombs ex Vigna Chiaraviglio in Rome (cat. entry n. 6.14), as well as mausoleums and churches of the time. The burial complex, separated from the rest of the catacomb not only physically, but also by the quality of the decoration, represents a well-planned and generously funded project realized by a skilled workshop.



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4.10 RELIEF WITH *ECCLESIA* OR A DECEASED WOMAN BETWEEN TWO APOSTLES

Early 5th century

Length 56 cm, height 29 cm

Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, inv. n. AN 2007.43

Susan Walker (ed.), *Saints and Salvation. The Wilshere Collection of gold-glass, sarcophagi and inscriptions from Rome and Southern Italy*, Oxford 2017, pp. 201-202; Ellen Schraudolph, *Römische Götterwiehungen mit Reliefschmuck aus Italien. Altäre, Basen und Reliefs. Archäologie und Geschichte herausgegeben von Tonio Hölscher* 2, Heidelberg 1993, p. 247; Raffaele Garrucci, Storia dell'arte cristiana nei primi otto secoli della chiesa V, Prato 1880, p. 11; Giovanni Battista de Rossi, Un singolare marmo votivo cristiano scritto e figurato, *Bullettino di archeologia cristiana* Series II, 3, 1872, pp. 36-40.

The limestone relief was set in its present frame sometime after 1880, as evidenced by preceding drawings and photographs. The lower right corner has been broken off. A crack runs diagonally from the upper frame through the neck and left shoulder of the central figure and the lower part of the figure on the right. Both defects have been repaired with plaster.

The provenance of the relief is cryptic. It was purchased by Charles Wilshere (1814-1906) in Rome in 1869/1870. He believed that it was found in the vicinity of the Roman Forum. *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinum* and *Inscriptiones Christianae Urbis Romae* reports it as being in the possession of a dealer of marble at the Mamertine Prison in 1869. However, *Inscriptiones Latinae Christianae Veteres* record that the relief was said to have been discovered earlier in Sant'Agnese fuori le mura, or at the site of the Roman city Aminternum, 90 km northeast from Rome, where Christian catacombs were uncovered.

The relief depicts a woman in the centre, holding an open book in her left hand and making a gesture of speech with her right. She wears a tunic and *palla*, which also covers her head. Both garments are meticulously carved, with soft folds falling to the ground and copying the lines of the body. On either side stand two bearded males clad in tunics and mantles, facing the central figure. Both men grasp their mantles with their left hand. The one on the left extends his right hand towards the woman, while the one on the right raises it in a gesture of acclamation. Two cylindrical containers for scrolls are depicted at the corners of the stone and a bunch of scrolls is tied together at the feet of the man on the left. Between the figures runs a Latin inscription stating: "*Lygyrius fulfilled his vow.*" It was added after the carving of the figures.

The central figure can be interpreted either as a personification of the faith or the Church, or the representation of a deceased woman, who the plaque commemorated. Depictions of a female figure holding a scroll or a book and flanked by male Apostles or saints is common on sarcophagi produced in Rome in the 4th century. Many of these examples also feature containers for scrolls, intended to emphasize the authority of the male figures. The men are not named or characterized by their appearance, but they can most probably be identified as St. Peter and St. Paul. The inscription and the iconography of the plaque suggest that Lygyrius (a name uncommon for Rome and connected to the tribe of the Ligures), donated a votive plaque as a fulfilment of a previous vow to either the Church, God, or the dead woman (consecrated virgin?, martyr?). Based on the closeness of the relief with the carving of theophany with St. Sabina, St. Peter, and St. Paul on the doors of the church of Santa Sabina the relief can be dated to the early 5th century.



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4.11 MARBLE PLAQUE WITH THE EPITAPH OF BESSULA

First half of the 5th century

Length 35 cm, height 89 cm, width 7 cm

Vatican City, Musei Vaticani, Museo Pio Cristiano, inv. n. 32494

Elisabeth Ehler, *Figürliche Loculusplatten aus dem frühchristlichen Rom. Katalog* (dissertation thesis), Philipps-Universität, Marburg 2008, p. 201; Umberto Utro, Lastra incisa con epitaffio di Bessula, in: Fabrizio Bisconti, Giovanni Gentili (eds.), *La rivoluzione dell'immagine. Arte paleocristiana tra Roma e Bisanzio*, Milano 2007, pp. 160-161; Umberto Utro, Lastra di chiusura di loculo con orante (Bessula), in: Paolo Liverani, Giandomenico Spinola (eds.), *Ritratti romani dai Musei Vaticani*, Tokyo 2004, p. 102; Giandomenico Spinola, Lastra con epitaffio di Bessula, in: Angela Donati, Giovanni Gentili (eds.), *Deomene. L'immagine dell'orante fra Oriente e Occidente*, Milano 2001, p. 215; Ivan Di Stefano Manzella (ed.), *Le iscrizioni dei Cristiani in Vaticano*, Città del Vaticano 1997, p. 306; Fabrizio Bisconti, La rappresentazione dei defunti nelle incisioni sulle lastre funerarie paleocristiane aquileiesi e romane, in: *Antichità Altoadriatiche XXX. Aquileia e Roma*, Trieste 1987, p. 297; Alice G. Mülhern, *The iconography of the orant image on Roman cemeterial inscription stones* (dissertation thesis), Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana, Vatican City 1978-1979, n. 7; Orazio Marucchi, *I monumenti del Museo Cristiano Pio Lateranense*, Milano 1910, p. 57.

The marble plaque, whose function was to close a *loculus* with a burial, was found in 1837 in the catacombs of Ciriaca, along Via Tiburtina in Rome. The inscription, filling its bottom part, commemorates young girl Bessula, who died circa 13-years old.

The deceased young woman is represented in full figure above the inscription. She is dressed in elaborate tunic and *dalmatica*, decorated in front with *clavi* (two stripes, either golden or purple) and with fringes on the sides. She turns her head slightly to the right and reveals oblong face with closed eyes and ecstatic expression. Her hands, larger than the rest of the body, are elevated in an orant gesture. The gesture is similar to the one used by the first Christians during prayer. It insinuates the state of eternal bliss, which the soul of Bessula entered after reunion with God. Differently from the other depictions of the female orants Bessula's head is not covered by a veil. This leaves her rather naturally depicted voluminous hair on full display. The sculptor appears to have been skilled and able to express emotions and individual features through carving.

On each side of the body of the deceased a burning candle inside an elaborate candleholder supported by statues of sea horses is visible. They remind the spectator of the otherworld full of light, where the souls are resting. Above Bessula's arms two heads were depicted, which are interpreted as those of her saintly protectors. Only the one on the left remains, followed by a sign of alfa and omega with a Christogram, reminding us of the eternal life in Christ after the death. The name of the girl and the details of her dress (especially fringes), as well as the presence of candles, typical for the Nord African and South Italian iconography, led to the assumption about her African origin. After the Vandal invasion around the year 428 and the following persecutions of orthodox Christians by Arians, large groups moved from Nord Africa to Italy together with the relics of their saints. It may be hypothesized that while one of the saints on the plaque can be associated with St. Laurence, near whose tomb Bessula was buried for protection, the other represents an African saint.



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4.12 FUNERARY PLAQUE OF VICTORIA

First half of the 5th century

Height 31 cm, length 160 cm

Vatican City, Musei Vaticani, Lapidario Cristiano, inv. n. MV.32493.0.0

Elisabeth Ehler, *Figürliche Loculusplatten aus dem frühchristlichen Rom. Katalog* (dissertation thesis), Philipps-Universität, Marburg 2008, p. 209; Alice G. Mülhern, *The iconography of the orant image on Roman cemeterial inscription stones* (dissertation thesis), Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana, Vatican City 1978-1979, n. 6; Carl Maria Kaufmann, Handbuch der altchristlichen Epigraphik, Freiburg 1917, p. 54; Orazio Marucchi, *I monumenti del Museo Cristiano Pio Lateranense*, Milano 1910, p. 43; Théophile Roller, *Les catacombes de Rome. Histoire de l'art et des croyances religieuses pendant les premieres siécles du christianisme* I., Paris 1881, p. 43; Raffaele Garrucci, *Storia dell'arte cristiana nei primi otto secoli della chiesa* VI, Prato 1880, p. 142.

The marble funerary plaque bears an engraved image of a veiled female orant dressed in a *dalmatica,* reaching below her elbows, and a close-fitting tunic, peaking below it and encircling her wrists. The *dalmatica* is decorated with two *clavi* symmetrically embroidered at the front and two stripes at the bottom of the sleeves. Light slippers cover the feet of the figure and her hair, parted in the middle, waved and gathered at the top of her head, is partially hidden beneath a veil. The Christogram above her head identifies the deceased as Christian. She is flanked by two male busts, interpreted by previous research as apostles Peter and Paul. The features of the orant's face are simplified and indistinct, making the image more a generic representation of a devoted woman, potentially having or aspiring to some authority within her community, than a portrait. The inscription surrounding the figural composition from both sides reads: VICTORIA Q(V)AE VIXIT CVM VIRGINIVM SVVM | ANNOS XIII MENSES DVO DIES XXII DEPOSITA N|ONV KALENDAS AVGVSTAS IN PACAE, identifying the depicted woman as a wife, most probably commemorated by the husband with whom she lived for 13 years.

The object was discovered in a further unidentified Roman catacomb. At some point in time, it was re-used as part of the pavement of the chapel of St. Anne in the monastery of Santa Maria Maddalena on the Quirinal, where it remained until the demolition of the convent in 1888, when it was transferred for keeping to the Lapidario Cristiano Lateranense. It is housed by Musei Vaticani since 1963.



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4.13 ENTHRONED VIRGIN WITH CHILD BETWEEN ST. FELICIUS AND ADAUTUS, PRESENTING THE DEAD TURTURA

Early 6th or mid- to late 7th century

Height 240 cm, length 220 cm

Rome, Catacombe di Commodilla, basilica of Santi Felicio e Adautto

Bernhard Jussen, *Das Geschenk des Orest : eine Geschichte des nachrömischen Europa 526-1535*, München 2023, pp. 25-62; Grace Stafford, *Women, Gender, and Society in Late Antiquity: A Study in Visual Culture* (dissertation thesis), Department of Archaeology, University of Oxford, Oxford 2020, pp. 152-164 and cat. n. P35; Fabrizio Bisconti, Giovanna Ferri, *La strada di Paolo: la via Ostiense dalle origini alla cristianizzazione*, Padova 2018, pp. 175-181; Michael Karambinis, L'affresco di Turtura nella catacomba di Comodilla: dal culto delle reliquie al culto delle icone; un esempio di opere devozionali nell'arte romana dell'alto medioevo, *Bolletino della Badia Greca di Grottaferrata* 6, 2009, pp. 143-165; Nicola Denzey, *The Bone Gatherers. The Lost Worlds of Early Christian Women*, Boston 2007, pp. 205-211; Mara Minasi, Madonna in trono col Bambino tra i SS. Felice e Adautto che presentano la defunta Turtura, in: Serena Ensoli, Eugenio La Rocca (eds.), *Aurea Roma: dalla città pagana alla città cristiana*, Roma 2000, n. 373, pp. 656-660; Mara Minasi, Madonna col Bambino tra i santi Felice e Adautto e la donatrice Turtura, in: Angela Donati (ed.), *Romana Pictura*: *la pittura romana dalle origini all'età bizantina*, Milano 1998, n. 81, pp. 296-298; Mara Minasi, Le vicende conservative dell'affresco di Turtura nel cimitero di Commodilla, *Rivista di archeologia cristiana* 73, 1997, pp. 65-94; Johannes Deckers, Gabriele Mietke, Albrecht Weiland (eds.), *Die Katakombe "Commodilla". Repertorium der Malereien,* Città del Vaticano 1994, p. 61-65; Maria Andaloro, *Pittura romana e pittura a Roma da Leone Magno a Giovanni VII,* Spoleto 1992, pp. 587-589; Guglielmo Matthiae, *Pittura romana del Medioevo. Secoli IV-IX* I, Roma 1987, pp. 120-121; John Osborne, The Roman Catacombs in the Middle Ages, *Papers of the British School in Rome* 53, 1985, pp. 300-302; John Osborne, From Turtura to Alfanus: Funerary Monuments in Early Medieval Rome, *RACAR: revue d'art canadienne* 9, n. 1/2, 1982, pp. 3-8; Eugenio Russo, L'affresco di Turtura nel cimitero di Commodilla, l'icona di Santa Maria in Trastevere e le più antiche feste della Madonna a Roma, *Bullettino dell'Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medioevo e Archivio Muratoriano* 89, 1980/81, pp. 71-150; Raffaella Farioli Campanati, *Pitture di epoca tarda nelle catacombe romane,* Ravenna 1963, pp. 13-16; Bellarmino Bagatti, *Il cimitero di Commodilla o dei martiri Felice ed Adautto presso la via Ostiense,* Città del Vaticano 1936, p. 103-105; Joseph Wilpert, Di tre pitture recentemente scoperte nella basilica dei Santi Felice e Adautto nel cimitero di Commodilla, *Nuovo Bullettino di Archeologia Cristiana* 10, 1904, pp. 166-170; Orazio Marucchi, Il cimitero di Commodilla e la basilica cimiteriale dei SS. Felice ed Adautto ivi recentemente scoperta, *Nuovo Bullettino di Archeologia Cristiana* 10, 1904, pp. 142-146.

The catacombs of Commodilla were discovered between 1902-1904 by *Pontificia Commissione di Archeologia Sacra* during maintenance work in the surrounding area, prompted by dangerous changes in the terrain. This modern discovery was preceded by explorations of Marcantonio Boldetti (1663-1749), who in 1720 managed to reach the heart of the underground cemetery, the small basilica of martyrs Felicius and Adauctus, and left a summary description of the structure, buried after his visit by a fallen vault. One of the few preserved wall decorations of the basilica that attracted the attention of Boldetti, apart from three scenes with martyrs Felicius, Adauctus and Merita (catalogue entry n. 2.31), now partly lost, was the fresco depicting an enthroned Virgin with Child, surrounded by martyrs Felicius and Adauctus, introducing to her a deceased woman, identified by the accompanying inscription as widow Turtura. The painting was positioned on the left-side wall next to the entrance to the adjacent burial space next to the tomb of the martyrs.

At the beginning of the 20th century the fresco was discovered in excellent conditions, strongly contrasting with the conservation state of the rest of the basilica. It impressed the archaeologists with its dimensions, as well as the quality of the painting. However, in 1971 it was badly damaged by vandals who entered the catacombs and fragmented it in search of

burial treasures, hidden according to them in the *loculi* behind it. Only the upper portion of the fresco and its right lateral side were pieced together by the restorers. The rest had to be reconstructed based on photographs and drawings from the first half of the century, which impacted above all the dimensions of the figures and the expressiveness of their gazes and facial features. Despite this, the fresco is the best preserved and most impressive document of the last stages of the use of the late antique catacomb spaces.

The iconography of the painting oscillates between the well-established patterns of the funerary representations of the previous centuries and the static timeless atmosphere of the votive images. The main protagonist of the painting is the Virgin, seated on a soft red cushion, positioned over a gold throne, encrusted with pearls and gemstones. She is dressed in what seems to be a dark loose tunic and *palla*, which covers her head, hidden under a white cap. Her face is elongated and marred by deep lines around the mouth and nose. The Virgin is holding a delicate handkerchief (*mappa*) in her right hand, while with the left she supports on her lap a gold-clad infant Jesus displaying a scroll. To the left and right of the Virgin the titular saints of the basilica, identified by inscriptions, are depicted standing. They are dressed as members of the clergy in tunic with *clavi* and in *pallium*, with tonsures on their heads. Their faces follow typological models of the time, with old Felix and young and beardless Adauctus. The two martyrs are the only figures that introduce movement to the scene, with Felix making a gesture of speech and Adauctus holding the shoulder of the older widow Turtura as if showing her his support and introducing her to the Virgin. The widow is depicted as a figure of reduced dimensions on the left side of the fresco. She is clad in a plain long tunic and *palla*, similarly to that of the Virgin of dark purple colour and covering her head. The widow holds either scrolls or candles, which she offers in a gesture of reverence, expressed by her covered hands, to the Virgin.

According to the accompanying poetic eulogy the fresco is identified as part of a funerary monument of widow Turtura, sponsored by her mourning son in an act of commemoration. The inscription also suggests that Turtura was an influential widow, involved in her community and economically active after the death of her husband, whom she outlived by 37 years. The placement of the burial near the tomb of the venerated martyrs also hints on her closeness to the most important members of the Church hierarchy of the time and probably on her role of consecrated virgin. The stylistic analysis together with a fragment of inscription, found next to the tomb, which is suspected to be the actual burial inscription of Turtura, and which can be dated to the consulate of Mavortius in the year 528, suggest that the fresco can be dated around this year as well.



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5 WOMEN IN THEIR EVERYDAY LIFE

5.1 WOMAN SELLING HERBS

Second half of the 4th century

Length 100 cm, height 85 cm

Rome, Catacombe di San Callisto

Grace Stafford, *Women, Gender, and Society in Late Antiquity: A Study in Visual Culture* (dissertation thesis), Department of Archaeology, University of Oxford, Oxford 2020, cat. n. P30; Aurélien Caillaud, La figure du commanditaire dans l'art funéraire des catacombes de Rome (IIIe-VIe siècles), in: Sulamith Brodbeck, Anne-Orange Poilpré (eds.), *La culture des commanditaires. L'œuvre et l'empreinte. Actes dela journée d'étude organisée à Paris le 15 novembre 2013*, Paris 2015, pp. 75-79; Fabrizio Bisconti, *Mestieri nelle catacombe romane. Appunti sul declino dell'iconografia del reale nei cimiteri cristiani di Roma*, Città del Vaticano 2000, pp. 189-190; Joseph Wilpert, *Le pitture delle catacombe romane*, Roma 1903, pl. 143, p. 489.

The fresco was discovered in the second half of the 19th century in an *arcosolium* located in the eastern part of the second floor of the catacombs of Calixtus in Rome. It was partially destroyed by what seems to be a forceful opening of two *loculi* which it originally covered. The white background of the vault and the front part of the *arcosolium* is framed by bright red lines. The frontal wall depicts on the left side poorly preserved resurrection of Lazarus and on the right side a miraculous drawing of water from the rock. The scenes bear strong baptismal and salvific connotations and their placement in the funerary context is by no means surprising. The vault is covered by vine leaves and tendrils, growing from tufts of long grass, and populated by birds, alluding to paradisiacal space. In the lunette the fresco shows a table positioned on two stands, on which herbs are displayed. Some of them also fill the basket under the table. To the right a woman is seen standing, dressed in long ochre tunic with purple *clavi*. Upper portion of her body is completely destroyed, apart from part of her hair, but it is unclear whether it is covered or not. She seems to rearrange the herbs with her right hand. To her left another, smaller table holding herbs is depicted. It is possible to assume that the burial in the *loculus* belonged to a female merchant selling herbs and the scene captures her everyday activity. On the basis of stylistic analysis, the second half of the 4th century was proposed as possible date of creation of the fresco.



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5.2 FRAGMENT OF A BOWL WITH SPINNING WOMAN

Second half of the 4th century

Length 14.27 cm, height 6.72 cm, width 0.25 cm

Rome, Museo Nazionale Romano, Terme di Diocleziano, inv. n. 401117

Stefanie Nagel, *Die figürlich gravierten Gläser der Spätantike. Archäometrische und archäologische Untersuchungen*, Regensburg 2020, p. 280; Marta Giacobelli, Nr. 8 Frammento di piatto vitreo, in: Paola Palazzo, Carlo Pavolini (eds.), *Gli deì propizi. La Basilica Hilariana nel contesto dello scavo dell'Ospedale militare Celio (1987-2000)*, Roma 2013, pp. 404-405; Fabrizio Paolucci, *I vetri incisi dall'Italia settentrionale e dalla Rezia nel periodo medio e tardo imperiale*, Firenze 1997, p. 55; Giandomenico de Tommaso, Vetri incisi dalla Tuscia annonaria. Note sulla produzione di vetri incisi tra III e IV secolo, *Archeologia Classica* 46, 1994, p. 272.

The fragment (an edge) of a large flat glass bowl was discovered in 1987/1988 during excavations on the premises of the Ospedale Militare on the Caelian Hill in Rome, in the structure of the large cult basilica dedicated to Magna Mater (*basilica Hilariana*). The glass fragment was found in a heap of rubble in a room adjacent to the vestibule of the basilica, belonging to a phase of change of the function of the basilical space in favour of manufactures. The figurative decoration and the Latin inscriptions were cut into the outer wall of the bowl using copper wheels with different widths. Two female figures dressed in long sleeveless tunics and with their hair gathered in a chignon, covered by a head-dress in one case, survive from the decoration. One of them, identified by the inscription as Tapena, stands and gazes at a spindle she holds in her raised left hand. With her right hand she spins a long thread of wool. The second woman, named Doris, is possibly shown in a seated position, with her legs bent, which cannot be determined precisely because of the missing parts of the object. She holds a basket filled with small, unidentifiable round objects: balls of yarn, fruits, or maybe vegetables. The interpretation of the iconography is quite tricky in this case. It may represent an idealized image of the rural life, as in the case of the shepherdess spinning wool on a Roman mosaic from Tabarka in Tunisia. From the technical and stylistic point of view the fragment founds counterparts among Roman exemplars, for which a provenance from a workshop operating in the city in the second half of the 4th century has been proposed. Such glass vessels were often in the possession of aristocratic families who exchanged them as prized gifts.



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5.3 PLAQUE WITH A FEMALE FIGURE

End of the 4th century

Length 6.1 cm, height 5.9 cm

Rome, Antiquarium Comunale, inv. n. 17337

Margherita Albertoni, Lastrina con figura femminile, in: Serena Ensoli, Eugenio La Rocca (eds.), *Aurea Roma. Dalla città pagana alla città cristiana*, Roma 2000, n. 76, pp. 471-472; Margherita Albertoni, Lastrine di rivestimento dall'antica via di Porta S. Lorenzo, *Bullettino della Commissione archeologica comunale di Roma* 94, 1991-1992, n. 5, pp. 341-392.

The fragment of the left right corner of a bone plaque is composed of two parts, restored in 1984. It displays, inside a geometrically decorated frame, a carving of a woman standing next to a hanging curtain. She wears a tunic with *clavi* and a mantle with a wide fringe, probably buckled on the left shoulder. The available literature suggests a similarity between her and the brides on the marriage box from Saqqarah (Coptic Museum in Cairo) and on Proiecta casket (British Museum in London, cat. entry n. 6.7). The elaborate hairstyle finds comparisons in the portrait of the wife of Emperor Honorius (395-423) on the Rothschild cameo, represented according to the traditional interpretation on the day of the wedding in 390. The minute waives are finished with a laurel crown. The top of the head is covered with fine veil, secured around the crown. In the folds of the drapery and in the lines of the hair the surface is scratched in a preparation for polychromy. In the space of the frame, two holes used for fixing of the plaque on a more complex structure, are visible. The object was found in Rome during excavations prompted by a construction of a sewer on via di Porta San Lorenzo (currently via Marsala) in 1874. At the time of discovery, the bone and ivory fragments, uncovered inside a *caldarium* (private thermal baths covered in mosaic with marine motives), were identified as parts of different caskets for cosmetics, but the absence of the wooden structure, on which they were secured, makes their reconstruction impossible. The relatively refined carving technique used for their decoration, as well as the setting in which they were discovered, were used as a basis for hypothesis about the elevated status of their owner. Most comparable objects come from what has been defined as a big workshop in Egypt distributing its production around the Mediterranean. The Via Porta San Lorenzo group is, however, not isolated in the environment of Rome, as well. Several similar plaques have been discovered in the Roman catacombs and parts of ivory caskets now in Berlin and London attest to the existence of workshops experienced in bone-carving around the beginning of the 5th century in the city itself.



© Albertoni 2000, p. 471

6 FAMILY GROUPS AND COUPLES

6.1 EPITAPH OF ANNIA BONIFATIA

4th century

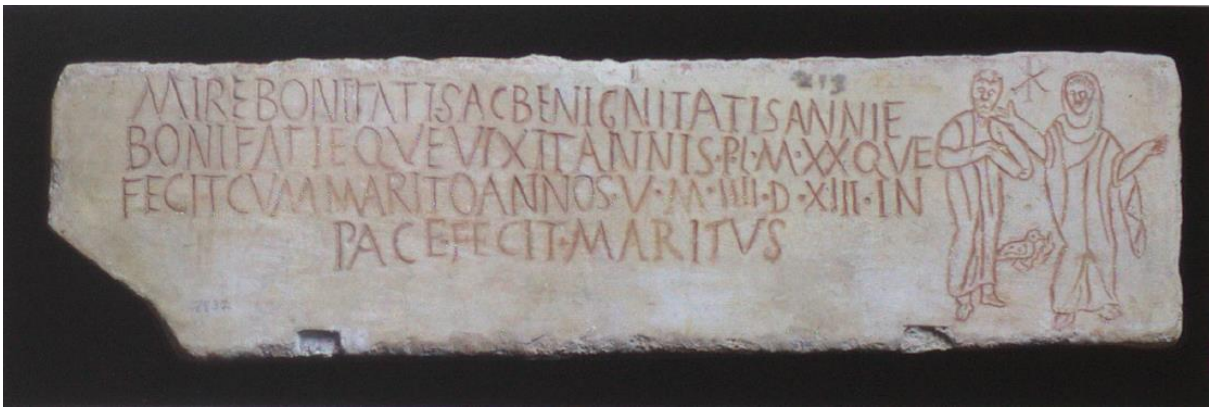
Length 99 cm x height 25 cm

Rome, Musei Capitolini, Galleria Lapidaria, inv. n. NCE 2837

Daniela Velestino, *La Galleria Lapidaria dei Musei Capitolini*, Roma 2015, p. 63; Anita Rocco, Iscrizione di *Annia Bonifatia*, in: Letizia Pani Ermini (ed.), *Christiana loca: lo spazio cristiano nella Roma del primo millenio* II, Roma 2001, p. 43; Orazio Marucchi, I monumenti egizi ed i monumenti cristiani recentemente sistemati nel Museo Capitolino II: Collezione cristiana, *Bullettino della Commissione Archeologica Comunale di Roma* 40, 1912, p. 195.

The marble slab of an unspecified Roman origin, used for enclosure of a tomb, comes from the collection of the cardinal Alessandro Albani (1692-1779). Together with many other antique Roman artefacts from the collection, it was bought by pope Clement XII (1730-1740) in 1734 and incorporated into what was to become a predecessor of the Musei Capitolini.

It was commissioned by a mourning husband for his wife, Annia Bonifatia, whose name is mentioned in the epitaph. The inscription stresses her admirable qualities, such as goodness and kindness. The affiliation of the dead woman to the Christian faith is demonstrated by the Christological monogram, engraved between the heads of two figures depicted on the right side of the slab. They most probably represent the married couple: the wife in an act of prayer, the husband holding a *rotulus*, signalling his wisdom. The deceased is dressed in a tunic, with her head covered by *palla*, falling over her shoulder. The dove at the feet of the couple adds paradisiac notes to the depiction.



© Velestino 2015, p. 63

6.2 FAMILY GROUP OF TREBIUS IUSTUS

Middle of the 4th century

Dimensions unknown to author

Rome, Ipogeo di Trebio Giusto

Grace Stafford, *Women, Gender, and Society in Late Antiquity: A Study in Visual Culture* (dissertation thesis), Department of Archaeology, University of Oxford, Oxford 2020, cat. n. P26; Fabrizio Bisconti, *Le pitture delle catacombe romane: restauri e interpretazioni*, Todi 2011, pp. 209-220; Fabrizio Bisconti, Le pitture dell'ipogeo di Trebio Giusto, in: Maria Andaloro (ed.), *L'orrizonte tardoantico e le nuove immagini 312-468,* Milano 2006, pp. 259-263; Fabrizio Bisconti, Il programma decorativo dell'ipogeo di Trebio Giusto tra attitudine e autorappresentazione, in: Rossela Rea (ed.), *L'ipogeo di Trebio Giusto sula Via Latina. Scavi e restauri*, Roma 2004, pp. 133-147; Josepha Weitzmann-Fiedler, Frescoes from tomb of Trebius Justus, in: Kurt Weitzmann (ed.), *Age of Spirituality. Late Antique and Early Christian Art, Third to Seventh Century,* New York 1979, n. 253, pp. 276-278; Mario Petrassi, Torna alla luce affreschi dell'ipogeo di Trebio Giusto, *Capitolium* 51, 1976, pp. 17-32; Giovanni Casalone, Note sugli affreschi dell'ipogeo di Trebio Giusto a Roma, *Cahiers Archéologiques* 11, 1962, pp. 53-64; Orazio Marucchi, Il simbolismo cristiano delle pitture dell'ipogeo di Trebio Giusto sulla via Latina, *Atti della Pontifica Accademia Romana di Archeologia. Rendiconti* 11, 1917, pp. 311-327; Joseph Wilpert, Die Malereien der Grabkammer des Trebius Iustus aus dem Ende der Konstantinischen Zeit, in: *Konstantin der Grosse und seine Zeit: gesammelte Studien,* Freiburg 1913, pp. 276-296; Orazio Marucchi, Il singolare ipogeo di Trebio Giusto, in: *Konstantin der Grosse und seine Zeit: gesammelte Studien,* Freiburg 1913, pp. 297-314; Johan Peter Kirsch, Die neue Entdeckte Grabkamer des Trebius Iustus aus der via Latina, *Römische Quartalschrift für christliche Altertumskunde und Kirchengeschichte* 26, 1912, pp. 51-54; Orazio Marucchi, L'ipogeo sepolcrale di Trebio Giusto recentemente scoperto sulla via Latina e proposta di spiegazione gnostica delle sue pitture, *Nuovo bulletino di archeologia cristiana* 17, 1911, pp. 209-235; Rodolfo Kanzler, Scoperta di un ipogeo sulla via Latina, *Nuovo Bullettino di Archeologia Cristiana* 25, 1911, p. 107.

The hypogeum has been discovered near Via Mantellini in Rome in 1909. It was probably part of a sepulchral complex adherent to the catacombs of Aproniano near Via Latina. The structure was abandoned after a general inspection and complex research was undertaken only in the 1970s.

According to the inscription the funerary chamber was dedicated to Trebius Iustus, called Ansellus, the son of Trebius Iustus and his wife, Honoratia Severina, by his parents. The number of the *loculi* on the western wall of the chamber (2), suggest, however, that at least one of the parents, if not both, may have been buried here as well. The perfectly square space of the chamber has both the walls and the barrel vault ceiling decorated with frescoes. The scenes captured encompass daily activities of the family, such as the deceased inspecting the produce from the fields, brought to him by his workers, his father assisting the construction of *villa rustica*, holding instruments needed for its projecting, and dealing with the architect. The deceased Trebius Iustus is depicted in the lunette of the *arcosolium* in the back wall with objects such as *capsa* for codices, open codex, and double *tabula inscripta*, marking him as a scribe or more probably as a well-learned man. The features, beards, and hairstyles of both men of the family are specific, therefore they are easily recognisable in the scenes.

Above the *arcosolium* three excessively large figures are represented. The male in the middle is dressed in a white tunic, decorated with black lines and circles (*segmenta* and *orbicoli*) and seated in a chair without the front part, his feet resting of a four-legged *suppedaneum*. He is flanked by standing male and female figure. They may be identified as parents of the buried Ansellus. While the male is dressed similarly to the deceased, the female wears large ochre dalmatic with wide decorative dark *clavi* and sleeves. Her head is disproportionately small,

with short curly hair and non-specific features. The movements and posture of the lateral figures are stiff and symmetric. They are holding white decorated cloth in front of the dead, on which precious objects (arm bands, coins, a ring, and a vase) are positioned. The fresco, contrary to older interpretations, does not allude to a funerary offering or to an unidentified ritual, but is a simple expression of the wealth belonging to the deceased and his family, frequent in the post-mortem representations of late antiquity.

The fresco decoration commemorates the involvement of young Trebius in the economic activities of the family and in the organization of the household duties. It is a celebration of a family with all its liveliness and its riches. The names, given in the inscriptions under various depictions of animals and servants add to the nostalgic and familiar feeling of the paintings. The dating to the middle of the 4th century is based on the rendering of the anatomy of the figures and the pastorality of the household scenes.

Orazio Marucchi suggested that the frescoes relate to the rituals of a gnostic sect or a syncretic cult. This suggestion was proven to be unrealistic, as it is not rare that representations of the everyday life of the deceased appear in funerary context in the 4th century. Were it not for the fresco of a Good Shepard in a *clypeus* on the ceiling of the same chamber, the vivid scenes could well have belonged to a non-Christian catacomb.



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6.3 FUNERARY PORTRAIT OF SIMPLICIA RUSTICA

Middle of the 4th century

Height 64 cm, length 64 cm

Vatican City, Musei Vaticani, Museo Pio Cristiano, inv. n. 31584, 31585

Alessandro Vella, Mosaik-Clipea mit Porträtbüsten von Simplicia Rustica und Flavius Iulius Iulianus, in: *Imperium der Götter: Isis-Mithras-Christus. Kulte und Religionen im Römischen Reich*, Karlsruhe 2013, p. 406; Umberto Utro, Ritratto musivo di *Simplicia Rustica*, in: Fabrizio Bisconti, Giovanni Gentili (eds.), *La rivoluzione dell'immagine. Arte paleocristiana tra Roma e Bisanzio*, Milano 2007, p. 158; Paola Pogliani, I ritratti clipeati a mosaico dal cimitero di Ciriaca presso San Lorenzo fuori le mura e conservati nei Musei Vaticani, in: Maria Andaloro (ed.), *L'orrizonte tardoantico e le nuove immagini 312-468,* Milano 2006, pp. 92-96; Umberto Utro, Mosaici con i ritratti di *Simplicia Rustica* e *Flavius Iulius Iulianus,* in: Angela Donati, Giovanni Gentili (eds.), *Costantino il Grande: la civiltà antica al bivio tra Occidente e Oriente,* Milano 2005, p. 303; Cristina Gennaccari, Osservazione sul Registro Inventariale Lateranense. Un contributo per ricostruire la storia del Museo Pio Cristiano, *Bollettino dei Monumenti, Musei e Gallerie Ponteficie* XXV, 2005, pp. 185-186; Umberto Utro, Ritratti in mosaico di *Fl. Iulius Iulianus* e *Simplicia Rustica*, in: Paolo Liverani, Giandomenico Spinola (eds.), *Ritratti romani dai Musei Vaticani*, Tokyo 2004, pp. 97-98; Klaus Werner, *Die Sammlung antiker Mosaiken in den Vatikanischen Museen,* Città del Vaticano 1998, p. 35-42; Klaus Werner, *Mosaiken aus Rom. Polychrome Mosaikpavimente und Emblemata aus Rom und Umgebung*, Würzburg 1994, pp. 297-298; Antonio Ferrua, *Nuove correzioni alle silloghe del Diehl*, Città del Vaticano 1981, p. 164; Frank Sear, Roman wall and vault mosaics, *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts. Römische Abteilung: Ergänzungsheft* 23, 1977, p. 135; Richard Krautheimer, Roger Jones, The diary of Alexander VII. Notes on art, artists and buildings, *Römisches Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte* 15, 1975, p. 204; Orazio Marucchi, *Guida del Museo Lateranense profano e cristiano,* Roma 1922, pp. 152-153; Orazio Marucchi, Importante dono del Pontefice Benedetto XV al Museo Cristiano Lateranense, *Nuovo Bullettino di Archeologia Cristiana* XXIV-XXV, 1918-1919, pp. 95-97; Eugène Müntz, *La mosaique chrétienne pendant les premiers siècles* II*: La mosaique dans les catacombes,* Paris 1893, pp. 70-74; Edouard Gerspach, *La mosaique*, Paris 1886, pp. 36-42.

The mosaic bust portraits represent one of the best examples of use of mosaic in funerary art. They depict married couple, identified by inscription as Flavius Iulius Iulianus and Simplicia Rustica. Simplicia is captured with raised hands and upturned palms in the position of an orant, symbolizing from the beginning of the 3d century the salvation and the eternal bliss of the soul of the deceased. She wears a dark tunic decorated by two vertical gold stripes and her coiffure, fastened with a gold clasp, is covered by a veil. Her husband is depicted with short hair and a beard, dressed in tunic with purplish *clavi* and *pallium*.

The inscription accompanying the portraits is now lost. It was probably originally positioned at the closing tablet of the *loculus* and is known to us via transcriptions by the prefect of the Archivi Segreti Vaticani Gaetano Marini (1742-1815), who observed it in Palazzo del Quirinale, where it was moved after its discovery. It was dedicated to Simplicia, "*the sweetest wife*", who died at the age of 18 after three years and two months of marriage, by her mourning husband, who accompanied her portrait by his own in a loving gesture alluding to the reunion of the couple beyond death.

The portraits come from catacombs of Ciriaca, situated in *agro Verano* on Via Tiburtina, where they were discovered in a sepulchral space in 1656 at the occasion of the moving of the relics of saints, initiated by Pope Alexander VII Chigi (1655-1677). They were then restored and moved to the Chigi collection in Rome, where they were displayed near the stairs leading to the library. After the sale of the Chigi palace to the Italian state in 1918 they were bought by Pope Benedict XV (1914-1922) for Museo Cristiano Lateranense. When the museum was

closed, the mosaics were finally moved to the Musei Vaticani and restored once again in 1972.

The mosaics, supposedly adorning the walls of the *cubiculum* or the *arcosolium* of the sepulchre of Simplicia, were heavily damaged during the transfer from the catacomb and were extensively supplemented (the golden and blue outer frame of the portraits, the violet background of the male portrait). The stylistic closeness with the pictorial decoration of a Spanish mausoleum in Centcelles sets the date of their creation to the middle of the 4th century.



© Musei Vaticani

6.4 GOLD-GLASS WITH MARRIED COUPLE AND SCENES FROM THE BIBLE

Around the middle of the 4th century

Diameter 10.8 cm

Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, inv. n. AN2007.13

Chiara Croci, Reused from Banquet to Grave: Gold Glass, a „Popular" Medium in Late Antiquity?, *Eikón Imago* 11, 2022, p. 48; Susan Walker (ed.), *Saints and Salvation. The Wilshere Collection of gold-glass, sarcophagi and inscriptions from Rome and Southern Italy*, Oxford 2017, pp. 131-133; Anthony Eastmond, *The Glory of Byzantium and Early Christendom*, London 2013, p. 32; Michael Vickers, The Wilshere Collection of early Christian antiquities in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, *Acta Provinciae SS. Redemptris Ordinis Fratrum Minorum in Croatia* 42, 2011, pp. 610-611; Sarah L. Smith, *Gold-glass vessels of the late Roman empire: production, context and function* (dissertation thesis), Rutgers State University of New Jersey, New Jersey 2000, n. 23; Lucia Faedo, Per una classificazione preliminare dei vetri dorati tardoromani, *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa*, Serie III, 8, 1978, pp. 1041-1042; Charles R. Morey, *The Gold-Glass Collection of the Vatican Library, with Additional Catalogues of Other Gold-Glass Collections,* Città del Vaticano 1959, n. 366, p. 62; Thomas B. L. Webster, The Wilshere Collection at Pusey House in Oxford, *The Journal of Roman Studies* 19, 1929, p. 153; Hermann Vopel, *Die altchristlichen Goldgläser: ein Beitrag zur Altchristlichen Kunst- und Kulturgeschichte* (= Archäologische Studien zum christlichen Altertum und Mittelalter 5), Freiburg 1899, n. 126.

The object is a representative example of the exquisite glass with gold leaves sandwiched between it, produced in Rome in the 4th century. In the centre of the broken base of the glass vessel, a couple appears accompanied by an inscription PIE ZESES, a Latin transcription of a Greek phrase, meaning „*Drink! May you live!*". The wife is dressed in a *palla* of which one side is decorated with zigzags separated by plain bands. Her tunic is barely visible beneath a jewelled neck collar. Her hair is drawn back from her face and bound by radial bands. She holds a *rotulus* in both hands, and stands behind her husband, who holds out his hands in prayer. Both faces are oval and schematic. The portraits and the text are enclosed within a simple narrow band. They are surrounded by images from the Bible: nude Adam and Eve, committing the primordial sin by plucking apples from the Tree of Knowledge, sacrifice of Isaac, the miracle of Moses striking water from a rock, healing of a paralytic by Christ, and raising of Lazarus. The field is filled with flowers evoking a paradisiacal landscape.

Moses' appearance as a prophetic and salvific figure prefigures the birth of Christ, as Isaac's near-sacrifice prefigures his crucifixion. Christ appears three times as a magician, echoed by Moses as a magician, creating a visual and semantic rhythm of images. The user of the vessel was reminded of the story of salvation.

According to the custom, the decorated base was cut away from the vessel and imbedded in the walls of an unknown catacombs, presumably close to the depicted couple's tomb. The scenes of salvation seem very appropriate for a funerary commemoration of married life. What we may see is a reuse in funerary context of gold glass with a possible funerary meaning, not produced for such a context and deliberately chosen from a wider range of objects. The biblical scenes around the edge are consistent with the other early Christian narrative cycles in the catacombs, including catacomb paintings and sarcophagi, as well as other gold glasses. Based upon the use of manganese alone as decolourant, the iconography, and the slight roughness of the style, the dish was created around the middle of the 4th century.

The object was bought, together with many similar ones, by Charles Wilshere (1814-1906) from Tommaso and Vincenzo Capobianchi (1836-1928), antiquity dealers situated on Via del Babuino in Rome, between 1862 and 1865. On their account they acquired it in a public sale in Catania in 1862 from the museum of baron Alessio Recupero. Left by Wilshere to Pusey House, Oxford, the collection was for many years on loan to the Ashmolean Museum. In 2007 the Ashmolean purchased it.



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6.5 SARCOPHAGUS WITH CLIPEUS PORTRAIT OF A COUPLE

Second third of the 4th century

Length 207 cm, height 72 cm, width 96 cm

Rome, Catacombe di San Sebastiano, inv. n. SEB 236

Stine Birk, *Depicting the Dead. Self-Representation and Commemoration on Roman Sarcophagi with Portraits*, Aarhus 2013, pp. 141, 277; Friedrich Wilhelm Deichmann, *Repertorium der christlich-antiken Sarkophage* I, Wiesbaden 1967, n. 239, pp. 138-139.

The frontal relief of the sarcophagus, excavated in the basilica of San Sebastiano, is divided into five panels. The outer panels depict two ram-bearers. The central panel contains a *clipeus* with portrait busts of a married couple inside a shell. They are carved with rather generic features. Two small figures of the Sun and the Moon surround the shell. A scene with two shepherds and their herd is depicted beneath the *clipeus*.

The woman is adorned by a necklace, which signals her power and status in a way that became more and more popular during the 4th century. Even though the surviving evidence is scarce, the hypothesis exists that the jewellery was sometimes painted or attached to the figures. The dresses, too, had ornaments painted on them to make them more distinguishable and far less generic than they appear now. Even though they always consisted of a tunic and *palla*, the polychromy was used to emphasize the status and the gender of the deceased. The wife is accompanied by a husband depicted as a learned man holding a scroll in a common composition alluding to marital bliss, as she is gently holding his arm and turning towards him.



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6.6 SARCOPHAGUS WITH CLIPEUS PORTRAITS OF A COUPLE

353

Length 197 cm, height 64 cm, width 72 cm

Vatican City, Musei Vaticani, Museo Pio Cristiano, inv. n. 31583

Stine Birk, *Depicting the Dead. Self-Representation and Commemoration on Roman Sarcophagi with Portraits*, Aarhus 2013, n. 433, p. 277; Paolo Liverani, Giandomenico Spinola (eds.), *Le necropoli vaticane. La città dei morti di Roma*, Milano 2010, p. 35; Friedrich Wilhelm Deichmann, *Repertorium der christlich-antiken Sarkophage* I, Wiesbaden 1967, n. 87, p. 71; Margarete Gütschow, *Das Museum der Prätextat-Katakombe* (= Atti della Pontificia Accademia Romana, Serie 3, Vol. 4), Città del Vaticano 1938, p. 238.

The sarcophagus, discovered in the Praetextatus catacombs in 1852, can be dated based on the inscription in the centre of its lid, decorated by swimming dolphins, to the year 353. The inscription also states the name of the deceased, Flavius Faustinus.

The frontal strigilated part of the sarcophagus, framed on both sides by a pillar, bears in its centre a depiction of a wealthy couple inside a *clipeus*. Under it two shepherds are carved, one of them milking a sheep. It is interesting to note that the relief of the couple is not complete. While the face of the husband, captured as a learned man, dressed in a toga and holding a scroll, bears all individual features, the head of the wife, dressed in tunic and *palla* and adorned by a necklace and a bracelet, has no face. It is apparent that even though the sarcophagus was intended to unite the bodies of both spouses after the burial, only the husband, mentioned in the inscription, was laid to rest in it. We can hypothesize that either unforeseeable circumstances forbade the relatives to bury the wife in the sarcophagus, or she remarried and shared a sepulchre with her second husband.



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6.7 THE PROIECTA CASKET

Second half of the 4th century

Length 33.2 cm – 56 cm, height 23.4 cm – 48.8 cm, width 28.6 cm

London, The British Museum, inv. n. 1866, 1229.1

Grace Stafford, *Women, Gender, and Society in Late Antiquity: A Study in Visual Culture* (dissertation thesis), Department of Archaeology, University of Oxford, Oxford 2020, cat. n. S1; Anna Kelblová, *Projektina krabička z Říma* (bachelor thesis), Seminář dějin umění, FF MU, Brno 2016; Anthony Eastmond, *The Glory of Byzantium and Early Christendom*, London 2013, p. 44; Sonja Marzinzik, *Masterpieces: Early Medieval Art*, London 2013, n. 3, p. 14; Jaś Elsner, The Projecta Casket, from the Esquiline treasure, in: Robin Cormack, Maria Vasillaki (eds.), *Byzantium 330-1453*, London 2008, n. 12, p. 380; Jaś Elsner, Visualising women in Late Antique Rome: The Projecta casket, in: Chris Entwistle (ed.), *Through a Glass Brightly*, Oxford 2003, pp. 22-36; Kenneth Painter, Cofanetto di Proiecta, in: Serena Ensoli, Eugenio La Rocca (eds.), *Aurea Roma. Dalla città pagana alla città cristiana*, Roma 2000, n. 115, pp. 493-495; Timothy W. Potter, Cofanetto di Proiecta, in: Angela Donati (ed.), *Dalla terra alle genti. La diffusione del cristianesimo nei primi secoli*, Milano 1996, p. 261; Jaś Elsner, *Art and the Roman Viewer. The Transformation of Art from the Pagan World to Christianity*, Cambridge 1995, pp. 252-257; Bente Kiilerich, *Late Fourth-Century Classicism in the Plastic Arts. Studies in the So-Called Theodosian Renaissance*, Odense 1993, pp. 160-164; Lucia Pirzio Biroli Stefanelli, *L'argento dei Romani. Vasellame da tavola e d'apparto*, Roma 1991, pp. 302-303; David Buckton (ed.), *Byzantium. Treasures of Byzantine Art and Culture from British Collections*, London 1994, n. 10, pp. 33-34; Angelo Salvioni (ed.), *Milano capitale dell'impero romano 286-402 d. c.*, Milano 1990, p. 81; Kathleen J. Shelton, The Esquiline Treasure: the Nature of the Evidence, *American Journal of Archeology* 89, 1985, pp. 147-155; Alan Cameron, The Date and the Owners of the Esquiline Treasure, *American Journal of Archeology* 89, 1985, pp. 135-145; Lambert Scheneider, *Die Domäne als Weltbild. Wirkungsstrukturen der spätantiken Bildersprache*, Wiesbaden 1983, pp. 5-38; Kathleen J. Shelton, *The Esquiline Treasure,* London 1981, pp. 72-75; Kathleen J. Shelton, The Projecta casket, in: Kurt Weitzmann (ed.), *Age of Spirituality. Late Antique and Early Christian Art, Third to Seventh Century*, New York 1979, n. 310, pp. 330-332; John Kent, Kenneth Painter, *Wealth of the Roman World. Gold and Silver AD 300-700,* London 1977, n. 88, p. 44; Helmut Buschhausen, *Die spätrömischen Metallscrinia und frühchristlichen Reliquiare* (= Wiener Byzantinische Studien 9), Wien 1971, n. B7, pp. 210-214; Géza de Frankovich, *Il palazzo di Teoderico a Ravenna e la cosidetta „architettura di potenza",* Roma 1970, pp. 34, 81-87; Edmond Barbier, La Signification du cortège réprésenté sur le couvercle du coffret de ‚Projecta', *Cahiers Archéologiques* 12, 1962, pp. 7-33; Maria Teresa Tozzi, Il tesoro di Projecta, *Rivista di archeologia cristiana* 9, 1932, pp. 279-314; Stefan Poglayen-Neuwall, Über der ursprünglichen Besitzer des spätantiken Silberfundes vom Esquilin und seine Datierung, *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts. Römische Abteilung* 45, 1930, pp. 124-136; Ormonde M. Dalton, *Catalogue of Early Christian Antiquities and Objects from the Christian East in the Department of British and Medieval Antiquities and Etnography of the British Museum,* London 1901, n. 304, p. 64; Otto Pelka, *Altchristliche Ehedenkmäler*, Strasbourg 1875, pp. 119-123; Ennio Quirino Visconti, *Lettera di Ennio Quirino Visconti intorno ad una antica suppelletile d'argento scoperta in Roma nell'anno 1793* I, Roma 1827; Carl August Böttinger, *Sabina oder Morgenszenen in Putzzimmer einer reichen Römerin,* Leipzig 1803.

The partially gilded silver casket is trapezoidal in shape and decorated on all sides and the lid by partially gilded repoussé reliefs capturing mythological and everyday scenes. At the front a scene is unfolding between columns in which a lady is shown pinning her hair while a female servant holds a mirror for her. The lady is carefully dressed in a wide belted *colobium* over a tunic with sleeves. Her hair is gathered in an elaborated hairdo. The back panel of the casket is occupied by a toilette procession. Some of the boxes and containers carried by the attendants depicted on the casket body resemble the Proiecta casket itself. The gesture of the lady is repeated by the nude Venus in the mythological scene on the lid, before whom a sea creature also holds a mirror. The three other sides also depict playful mythological sea scenes. On the top, in a wreath held by two cupids, a finely clad couple is represented, the woman on the left holding a scroll and the men on the viewer's right performing a speaking gesture with his hand. An inscription, possibly contemporary with the

decorative elements of the casket, which runs around the horizontal rim of the lid, reads: "*Secundus and Proiecta, live in Christ*". The narrative that unfolds seems to refer to a late Roman wedding: the preparations of the bride, the procession to the baths or to the groom's house, the imagery related to the goddess of love and her court, and the medallion showing the wedded pair. The iconography appears to be inter-related and self-referential, as the domestic functions of the casket within the female sphere of the household are both portrayed on its surface and reflected upon in its imagery.

One of the readings of the casket is that it helped provide its owner the means for beautification in order to resemble the Venus on the lid for the delight of her husband. The chosen scenes rendered the process of crafting the female body into an object of desire. According to this interpretation like the casket itself, the woman was a carefully adorned object of display. On the other hand, in celebrating the domestic world within the female control, the casket may have affirmed the identity and to some extent the power of its female viewers. The fact that the lady of the house is depicted seated on a chair resembling *sella curulis* inside a curtained niche and emulates the divine Venus and a late antique emperor at the same time is worth mentioning.

The use of mythological imagery alongside Christian inscription may initially seem contradictory, but its alignment with the representations of marriage was common in the 4th century. In fact, Christian scenes may have been considered inappropriate in connection with the everyday activities of the female part of the aristocratic household. Thus, the casket illustrates how a late antique workshop could have provided luxury goods for customers from different religious groups in a style that was accepted and understood by all.

The iconography of the panel with the lady of the house, reflecting the scene with toilette of Venus, is paralleled by surviving late Roman silverware and mosaics, such as the late 4th or early 5th-century panel from private baths at Sidi Ghrib near Tunis or mosaics from Piazza Armerina in Sicily. The visual formula of two putti holding a celebratory medallion accompanied by dedicatory wish was common in 4th-century Rome as well. It appeared frequently on sarcophagi.

The gilding adds to the liveliness of the silver relief. Despite its detailed repoussé work the casket is rough from the inside, with no filling of smooth silver lining to disguise the deep hammered relief. It is suggested that the initial work on the object included hammering from the front onto a mould, which would make possible the production of more than one example at the same time. The casket would therefore make a competent but not outstanding imitation of a court style object, made possibly for rich patrons, but not one of the grandest families in the city.

The object is often described as the richest surviving object of late antique silverware and is identified as a container for toiletries of an aristocratic Roman woman or for her dress and jewellery in the baths. It was discovered with other silver items, known as the Esquiline treasure, in 1793 on the Esquiline Hill in Rome in the remains of a private Roman house.







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6.8 VESSEL BASE WITH MARRIED COUPLE AND HERCULES

c. 360-400

Diameter 10.5 cm

London, The British Museum, inv. n. 1863, 0727.3

Valerio Mezzolani, David Rini, The Materozzi Collection of Early-Christian Gold Glass at the British Museum: An Investigation of Textual Records and an Edition of Archival Sources, Journal of the History and Collections 35, n. 1, 2023, pp. 13-22; Grace Stafford, *Women, Gender, and Society in Late Antiquity: A Study in Visual Culture* (dissertation thesis), Department of Archaeology, University of Oxford, Oxford 2020, cat. n. GG2; Daniel Thomas Howells (eds.), *A Catalogue of the Late Antique Gold Glass in the British Museum*, London 2015, pp. 121-123; Alan Cameron, Orfitus and Constantius: a note on Roman gold-glasses, *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 9, 1996, pp. 295-301; David Buckton (ed.), *Byzantium: Treasures of Byzantine Art and Culture from British Collections*, London 1994, n. 9b; Donald Harden (ed.), *Glass of the Caesars*, Milano 1987, n. 155, p. 280; Charles R. Morey, *The Gold-Glass Collection of the Vatican Library, with Additional Catalogues of Other Gold-Glass Collections,* Città del Vaticano 1959, n. 316, p. 54; Ormonde M. Dalton, *Catalogue of Early Christian Antiquities and Objects from the Christian East in the Department of British and Medieval Antiquities and Etnography of the British Museum,* London 1901, n. 608, pp. 119-120; Otto Pelka, *Altchristliche Ehedenkmäler*, Strasbourg 1901, p. 104; Oliviero Iozzi, *Vetri cimiteriali con figure in oro conservati nel Museo Brittanico*, Roma 1900, pp. 28-30; Hermann Vopel, *Die altchristlichen Goldgläser: ein Beitrag zur Altchristlichen Kunst- und Kulturgeschichte* (= Archäologische Studien zum christlichen Altertum und Mittelalter 5), Freiburg 1899, n. 133, p. 230; Augustus W. Franks, Early Christian glass, *Fine Arts Quarterly Revue* 3, 1864, pp. 383-384; Celestino Cavedoni, *Osservazioni sopra alcuni frammenti di vasi di vetro con figure in oro trovati ne' cimiteri de' cristiani primitivi di Roma*, Modena 1859, pp. 34-35; Raffaele Garrucci, *Vetri ornati di figure in oro, trovati nei cimiteri dei cristiani primitivi di Roma*, 2nd ed., Roma 1864, pp. 186-188.

The base of the glass vessel has been very carefully trimmed and survives intact. Its provenance is unknown; however, the hypothesis exists that along with most of the examples of gold-glass vessels from the 4th century it belonged to the production of a big workshop based in Rome in the second half of the century. It has been acquired through an antiquities dealer signor Mosca (possibly Luigi Mosca, known as second hand dealer in Pesaro) in 1863 and has been previously part of the collection of Count Alessandro Matarozzi of Urbania (1713-1783). While part of his outstanding collection of art and antiquities with unique moral, religious, and exemplary value, together with other objects of applied arts it was framed and displayed on one of the walls of the sacristy of the purpose-built chapel inside the family palace on Piazza del Borgo (now Piazza San Cristoforo) in Urbania.

The gold leaf design displays two busts of a married couple enclosed by a band bearing inscription. On the right a beardless man with short hair is depicted wearing *toga contabulata* and tunic with *clavi*, one of which is painted over by red enamel. To the left a woman is shown. Her hair is waved, braded, and drawn together to create a broad band, pulled to the back of her head at the nape, forming an intricate design, covered with a tight cap at the back. This particular hairstyle has been introduced by empresses in the middle of the 3rd century and continued to appear on imperial statues until the early 4th century. The woman wears earrings and a broad jewelled collar, painted over with white, greenish, and red enamel. Her attire closely resembles that of her husband, but she is probably dressed in tunic and mantle instead of toga.

Between the couple, at the level of the shoulder, a statue of Hercules on a stand is positioned. He is bearded and dressed in the skin of the Nemean lion. In his right hand he holds a club. In his left hand are the apples of Hesperides, painted with greenish enamel. The apples mark his

final task, and, being given to Zeus and Hera as a wedding present, represent marriage and fertility. Hercules blesses the couple in a way in which Christ does on other objects.

The inscription deviates from the generic wishes for life and health present on most preserved examples of cut and incised gold-glasses. The inscription enclosed in the band border reads: „*Orfitus and Costantia, in the name of Hercules.*“ The male figure, named Orfitus, has been identified by Alan Cameron as Memmius Vitrasius Orfitus, non-Christian aristocrat and prefect of Rome in every January between the years 354 and 359, apart from the year 357. He appears to be the only known individual from the 4th century with such name, but given the lack of any supportive evidence, this identification remains speculative. Close to the figures another inscription is visible: „*Acerentino felices bibatis*“. Its translation has created a heated debate, but lately it has been interpreted by Cameron as a wish for the couple to live/drink in the name of Hercules of Acerentia, a small but flourishing town in southern Italy with its own cult dedicated to Hercules. As the cult was small and local, we can suppose that the couple had some connection to the town and the vessel was possibly gifted to them by its inhabitants.



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6.9 VESSEL BASE WITH MARRIED COUPLE AND CUPID

c. 360-400

Diameter 8 cm

London, The British Museum, inv. n. 1863, 0727.11

Valerio Mezzolani, David Rini, The Materozzi Collection of Early-Christian Gold Glass at the British Museum: An Investigation of Textual Records and an Edition of Archival Sources, Journal of the History and Collections 35, n. 1, 2023, pp. 13-22; Chiara Croci, Reused from Banquet to Grave: Gold Glass, a „Popular" Medium in Late Antiquity?, *Eikón Imago* 11, 2022, p. 48; Grace Stafford, *Women, Gender, and Society in Late Antiquity: A Study in Visual Culture* (dissertation thesis), Department of Archaeology, University of Oxford, Oxford 2020, cat. n. GG3; Daniel Thomas Howells (eds.), *A Catalogue of the Late Antique Gold Glass in the British Museum*, London 2015, pp. 123-124; Donald Harden (ed.), *Glass of the Caesars*, Milano 1987, n. 156, p. 281; Ormonde M. Dalton, *Catalogue of Early Christian Antiquities and Objects from the Christian East in the Department of British and Medieval Antiquities and Etnography of the British Museum,* London 1901, n. 612, p. 121; Oliviero Iozzi, *Vetri cimiteriali con figure in oro conservati nel Museo Brittanico*, Roma 1900, pp. 24-25; Hermann Vopel, *Die altchristlichen Goldgläser: ein Beitrag zur Altchristlichen Kunst- und Kulturgeschichte* (= Archäologische Studien zum christlichen Altertum und Mittelalter 5), Freiburg 1899, n. 125; Raffaele Garrucci, *Storia dell'arte cristiana nei primi otto secoli della chiesa* III, Prato 1876, p. 181; Raffaele Garrucci, *Vetri ornati di figure in oro, trovati nei cimiteri dei cristiani primitivi di Roma*, 2nd ed., Roma 1864, p. 156.

The glass vessel base shares its destiny with a previously mentioned base depicting married couple blessed by Hercules from the British Museum (cat. entry n. 6.8). It has been acquired through an antiquities dealer signor Mosca (possibly Luigi Mosca, known as second hand dealer in Pesaro) in 1863 and has been previously part of the collection of Count Alessandro Matarozzi of Urbania (1713-1783). While part of his outstanding collection of art and antiquities with unique moral, religious, and exemplary value, together with other objects of applied arts it was framed and displayed on one of the walls of the sacristy of the purpose-built chapel inside the family palace on Piazza del Borgo (now Piazza San Cristoforo) in Urbania.

The wall of the vessel has been broken away and carefully trimmed along the base, which has been broken and mended. The upper left part of the object is missing. There is some discolouration between the layers of the glass, obscuring the decoration, which is more visible when viewed on a black background.

The glass displays two half-length figures of a married couple inside a circular single line border. The man, depicted on the right, has short curly hair and is dressed in *toga contabulata*. He holds a scroll in both hands and the first two fingers of his left hand are extended in a gesture of speech and teaching. The woman appears to the left, partly obscured by the male figure. Her face is framed by curls below a thin band, her hair intricately plaited and coiled at the top of her head. She is dressed in a tunic decorated by spirals, standing for rich embroidery, and holds a scroll in both hands. The fingers of her left hand are extended in the same manner as the fingers of her husband.

Between the bodies of the couple at the level of their shoulders a figure of a youthful naked winged Cupid can be seen. His hands are outstretched above the heads of the pair in a gesture of blessing. It has been suggested that the supposedly non-Christian scene has been inspired by more wide-spread motif of Christ crowning couples. Cupid has been associated throughout the Roman and late antique period with love and sexual desire. He was also worshipped as

fertility god and was thus a good choice of a deity to symbolize marital unity. In the field, curved in correspondence with the inner edge of the border, is the text of the inscription, punctuated by heart-shaped leaves. The most convincing translation and reading is: „*[...]ne Tzucinus drink/live*.“ Tzucinus constitutes the unusual non-Roman name of the male figure. The word preceding it probably named his wife.



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6.10 VESSEL BASE WITH A FAMILY GROUP

c. 360-400

Diameter 8.4 cm

London, The British Museum, inv. n. 1863, 0727.5

Valerio Mezzolani, David Rini, The Materozzi Collection of Early-Christian Gold Glass at the British Museum: An Investigation of Textual Records and an Edition of Archival Sources, Journal of the History and Collections 35, n. 1, 2023, pp. 13-22; Chiara Croci, Reused from Banquet to Grave: Gold Glass, a „Popular" Medium in Late Antiquity?, *Eikón Imago* 11, 2022, p. 48; Grace Stafford, *Women, Gender, and Society in Late Antiquity: A Study in Visual Culture* (dissertation thesis), Department of Archaeology, University of Oxford, Oxford 2020, cat. n. GG8; Daniel Thomas Howells (eds.), *A Catalogue of the Late Antique Gold Glass in the British Museum*, London 2015, pp. 128-129; Charles R. Morey, *The Gold-Glass Collection of the Vatican Library, with Additional Catalogues of Other Gold-Glass Collections,* Città del Vaticano 1959, n. 315, p. 54; Ormonde M. Dalton, *Catalogue of Early Christian Antiquities and Objects from the Christian East in the Department of British and Medieval Antiquities and Etnography of the British Museum,* London 1901, n. 610, p. 120; Otto Pelka, *Altchristliche Ehedenkmäler*, Strasbourg 1901, p. 154; Hermann Vopel, *Die altchristlichen Goldgläser: ein Beitrag zur Altchristlichen Kunst- und Kulturgeschichte* (= Archäologische Studien zum christlichen Altertum und Mittelalter 5), Freiburg 1899, n. 119, p. 83; Raffaele Garrucci, *Storia dell'arte cristiana nei primi otto secoli della chiesa* III, Prato 1876, p. 183; Raffaele Garrucci, *Vetri ornati di figure in oro, trovati nei cimiteri dei cristiani primitivi di Roma*, 2nd ed., Roma 1864, p. 159; Augustus W. Franks, Early Christian glass, *Fine Arts Quarterly Revue* 3, 1864, p. 383.

The gilded glass fragment has been trimmed in accordance with the iconographic border. It exhibits some cracks throughout the gold leaf and minor iridescence. The object was part of the collection of Count Alessandro Matarozzi of Urbania (1713-1783) and was acquired by the British Museum in 1863 from an antiquities dealer named Mosca, possibly Luigi Mosca, known to have been active in Pesaro around the year 1852. Alessandro Matarozzi of Urbania. While part of the Matarozzi collection, together with other objects of applied arts it was framed and displayed on one of the walls of the sacristy of the purpose-built chapel inside the family palace on Piazza del Borgo (now Piazza San Cristoforo) in Urbania.

The family group, consisting of a man, a woman, and their daughter, depicted in the centre, is encircled by a circular reciprocal border of triangles. The right side of the field portrays beardless adult male with short hair, wearing *toga contabulata*. He appears to perform a gesture of speech and address with his left hand, signalled by two extended fingers. The left side portrays an adult female dressed in simple tunic and *palla*, adorned with a wide jewelled collar, earrings, and a necklace. Her hair is curled and plaited around the face, gathered at the nape and covered tightly at the back, with a part at the back falling and framing the face. A female child is depicted between the two adults, superimposed on the typical married couple portraiture scene. She is dressed similarly to the mother but lacks the jewelled collar and possesses a simpler hairstyle, with the hair drawn up in a knot, or possibly a ring, on top of her head. Above the shoulders and between the heads of the two adult figures is the *chi-rho* monogram. Further above the monogram a floating crown is represented in the form of a wreath.

The inscription, bend according to the border, reads "*Severa [or Severus] Cosmas Lea, drink/live*". Direct attribution of the names to the depicted characters is not straightforward. According to Vopel the name Lea suggests Jewish origin for the family. The adult figures in the family group are portrayed similarly to the portrayal of married couples, with emphasis on

idealized wealth and status. Similar is also the format of the inscriptions, hinting at a possibility of a shared creator.



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6.11 VESSEL BASE WITH A FAMILY GROUP

c. 360-400

Diameter 10.2 cm

London, The British Museum, inv. n. 1863, 0727.7

Valerio Mezzolani, David Rini, The Materozzi Collection of Early-Christian Gold Glass at the British Museum: An Investigation of Textual Records and an Edition of Archival Sources, *Journal of the History and Collections* 35, n. 1, 2023, pp. 13-22; Grace Stafford, *Women, Gender, and Society in Late Antiquity: A Study in Visual Culture* (dissertation thesis), Department of Archaeology, University of Oxford, Oxford 2020, cat. n. GG9; Daniel Thomas Howells (eds.), *A Catalogue of the Late Antique Gold Glass in the British Museum*, London 2015, pp. 129-130; Charles R. Morey, *The Gold-Glass Collection of the Vatican Library, with Additional Catalogues of Other Gold-Glass Collections,* Città del Vaticano 1959, n. 308-309, p. 53; Ormonde M. Dalton, *Catalogue of Early Christian Antiquities and Objects from the Christian East in the Department of British and Medieval Antiquities and Etnography of the British Museum,* London 1901, n. 609, p. 120; Otto Pelka, *Altchristliche Ehedenkmäler*, Strasbourg 1901, p. 155; Oliviero Iozzi, *Vetri cimiteriali con figure in oro conservati nel Museo Brittanico*, Roma 1900, p. 25; Hermann Vopel, *Die altchristlichen Goldgläser: ein Beitrag zur Altchristlichen Kunst- und Kulturgeschichte* (= Archäologische Studien zum christlichen Altertum und Mittelalter 5), Freiburg 1899, n. 116; Raffaele Garrucci, *Storia dell'arte cristiana nei primi otto secoli della chiesa* III, Prato 1876, p. 183; Raffaele Garrucci, *Vetri ornati di figure in oro, trovati nei cimiteri dei cristiani primitivi di Roma*, 2nd ed., Roma 1864, p. 158-159; Augustus W. Franks, Early Christian glass, *Fine Arts Quarterly Revue* 3, 1864, p. 383.

Like most of the examples of gold-glass vessel bases in the British Museum, the object has been acquired through an antiquities dealer signor Mosca (possibly Luigi Mosca, known as second hand dealer in Pesaro) in 1863 and has been previously part of the collection of Count Alessandro Matarozzi of Urbania (1713-1783). While part of his outstanding collection of art and antiquities with unique moral, religious, and exemplary value, together with other objects of applied arts it was framed and displayed on one of the walls of the sacristy of the purpose-built chapel inside the family palace on Piazza del Borgo (now Piazza San Cristoforo) in Urbania.

The base is lower than the foot-ring, therefore the bowl could not have been stable when placed on a flat surface. The bottom layer of the glass is heavily cracked. The subsequent discolouration has obscured the scene, which is only visible under close inspection.

The double band border is filled with floral pattern. Inside a family group is represented, consisting of parents with son and daughter. The man, standing on the right side of the field, is half turned towards his wife and touches her shoulder in a tender gesture. This gesture is repeated by the parents in relation to their children. The father is dressed in *toga contabulata* and wears sandals. The daughter, standing in front of him, holds a scroll and wears a tunic with wide embroidered *clavi* and embroidered shoes. Her left hand extends towards her brother. The mother stands to the left, half turned towards her family. Her neck is adorned by a necklace, and she wears richly embroidered mantle over a tunic. Her face is framed by curls. Her right hand is wrapped in the mantle and performs a speaking gesture. The boy, standing in front of her, wears an ankle-length tunic with circular ornaments (*orbiculi*) at the hem. He holds an open scroll in his left hand and his right is extended in a gesture of speech. A hypothesis has been made that the gesture expresses superiority of the brother over his sister, whom he teaches, which, however, doesn't seem plausible, given that the gesture is performed by the mother as well. Christian *chi-rho* monogram appears between heads of the

two children. The family is shown standing between two trees, format known from depictions of saints, possibly intended to symbolize paradise.

The inscription between the heads of the two adult figures reads: „*Pompeianus, Theodora, live.*“ The names probably relate to the parents. The glass celebrates their family and their status (literacy, richness) and expresses a wish for their peaceful life, which should continue beyond death.





© Howells 2015, pp. 129-130.

6.12 GOLD-GLASS WITH SIX SAINTS AND CHRIST CROWNING A COUPLE

c. 360-400

Diameter 10.2 cm

Florence, Museo Nazionale del Bargello, inv. n. 32 VA

Grace Stafford, *Women, Gender, and Society in Late Antiquity: A Study in Visual Culture* (dissertation thesis), Department of Archaeology, University of Oxford, Oxford 2020, cat. n. GG19; Sara Segatori, Vetro dorato con coppia di sposi incoronati da Cristo e attorniati da santi, in: Fabrizio Bisconti, Giovanni Gentili (eds.), *La rivoluzione dell'immagine. Arte paleocristiana tra Roma e Bisanzio*, Milano 2007, p. 232; Maria Sternini, Vetro dorato con Cristo che incorona due sposi e con sei Apostoli, in: Serena Ensoli, Eugenio La Rocca (eds.), *Aurea Roma. Dalla città pagana alla città cristiana*, Roma 2000, n. 136, pp. 511-512; Franca Zanchi Roppo, *Vetri paleocristiani e figure d'oro conservati in Italia*, Bologna 1969, pp. 44-45; Charles R. Morey, *The Gold-Glass Collection of the Vatican Library, with Additional Catalogues of Other Gold-Glass Collections,* Città del Vaticano 1959, n. 240, p. 43; Giuseppe Bovini, *Monumenti figurati paleocristiani conservati a Firenze nelle raccolte pubbliche e negli edifici di culto*, Città del Vaticano 1950, pp. 18-22; Maurizio Borda, *Lares. La vita familiare romana dei documenti archeologici e letterari*, Città del Vaticano 1947, p. 33; Filippo Rossi, Vetri dorati cristiani nel Museo Nazionale di Firenze, in: *Miscellanea di Storia dell'arte in onore di Igino Benvenuto Supino*, Firenze 1933, p. 3; Hermann Vopel, *Die altchristlichen Goldgläser: ein Beitrag zur Altchristlichen Kunst- und Kulturgeschichte* (= Archäologische Studien zum christlichen Altertum und Mittelalter 5), Freiburg 1899, n. 108; Raffaele Garrucci, *Vetri ornati di figure in oro, trovati nei cimiteri dei cristiani primitivi di Roma*, 2nd ed., Roma 1864, pp. 115-116; Giovanni Gaetano Bottari, *Sculture e pitture sagre estratte dai cimiteri di Roma* III, Roma 1737, pp. 189-190; Antonio Bosio, *Roma sotterranea*, Roma 1632, p. 509.

The base of an open vessel is formed by two layers of glass, between which an incised gold leaf has been inserted. The base has been chipped off from the rest of the vessel quite precisely and without sustaining major damage. The glass was discovered in a further unidentified Roman catacomb and was later part of the collections of humanists Orazio della Valle (first half of the 16th century) and Fulvio Orsini (1529-1600).

The decoration consists of two concentric circles. The internal one contains the busts of two spouses, identified by the inscription as Festa and Fidelis, turned towards the viewer and crowned by a smaller figure dressed in tunic and *pallium*, who holds wreaths over their heads. It represents Christ, sanctifying the union. The wife has her hair waived around the face, with the rest swept back in a plait encircling her head and a projecting roll at the nape of her neck. She is dressed in a richly decorated tunic and *palla* and adorned by a necklace. She is seen to her husband's right, as is usual on gold-glasses. The husband, beardless and with short hair, is dressed in tunic and *toga contabulata*. In the outer circle apostles Peter and Paul and saints Laurence, Sixtus, Cyprian and Hippolytus, widely venerated in Rome, are depicted. They are identified by inscriptions, displayed on *tabulae ansatae*, resting on pillars, separating them from each other. The coronation of the spouses, the remnant of a pre-Christian rite, which entered into the Christian marriage iconography, was united with the idea of protection of the spouses by Christ, in this case reinforced by several venerated saints. The dating of the object to the end of the 4th century is based on the hairstyle of the bride and her sumptuous attire. It is probable that before being used as a funerary object the glass vessel was commissioned to commemorate a wedding or a wedding anniversary.



© Bisconti and Gentili 2007, p. 233

6.13 BOTTOM OF A BOWL WITH A MARRIAGE SCENE

Late 4th century

Diameter 8.4 cm

New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. n. 15.168

Chiara Croci, Reused from Banquet to Grave: Gold Glass, a „Popular" Medium in Late Antiquity?, *Eikón Imago* 11, 2022, p. 51; Grace Stafford, *Women, Gender, and Society in Late Antiquity: A Study in Visual Culture* (dissertation thesis), Department of Archaeology, University of Oxford, Oxford 2020, cat. n. GG6; Daniel Thomas Howells (eds.), *A Catalogue of the Late Antique Gold Glass in the British Museum*, London 2015, p. 62; Christopher Lyon, *Couples in Art: Artworks from the Metropolitan Museum of Art selected by Colin Eisler in collaboration with Caroline Kelly*, München-London 2011, p. 97; Josepha Weitzmann-Fiedler, Bottom of a bowl with marriage scene, in: Kurt Weitzmann (ed.), *Age of Spirituality. Late Antique and Early Christian Art, Third to Seventh Century*, New York 1979, n. 261, pp. 282-283; Wayne Craven, The Iconography of the David and Bathsheba Cycle at the Cathedral of Auxerre, *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians,* 34, 1975, p. 234; Charles R. Morey, *The Gold-Glass Collection of the Vatican Library, with Additional Catalogues of Other Gold-Glass Collections,* Città del Vaticano 1959, n. 447, p. 72; Gustavus Eisen, Fahim Joseph Kouchakji, *Glass: Its Origin, History, Chronology, Technic, and Classification to the Sixteenth Century* 2, New York 1927, p. 569; Louise Avery, Early Christian Gold Glass, *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 16, n. 8, 1921, p. 173; Gustavus Eisen, Antique Glass, *The Art Bulletin* 2, 1919, pp. 113-114; Gisela Richter, Department of Classical Art Accessions of 1915, *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 11, n. 6, 1916, pp. 128-129; Hermann Vopel, *Die altchristlichen Goldgläser: ein Beitrag zur Altchristlichen Kunst- und Kulturgeschichte* (= Archäologische Studien zum christlichen Altertum und Mittelalter 5), Freiburg 1899, pp. 8, 45, 81-83.

The bottom of a cup, cut already in antiquity to a perfectly circular medallion, depicts a couple standing turned towards the viewer and joining their right hands over an altar in a classic form of *dextrarum iunctio*, the marriage contract. Above their joined hands are the marriage symbols, a ring (possibly a wedding ring) and a large, wreathed crown, with which the couple was crowned according to the traditional Christian wedding custom from the 4th century. The inscription reads VIVATIS IN DEO (live in God), a formula used since at least the 3rd century in the Christian wedding ceremony. The man is beardless, dressed in *toga contabulata*, a customary Roman ceremonial attire of the late antique period. The woman is wearing a jewelled necklace with earrings, tunic with wide sleeves that are than fitted at the wrists, *dalmatica* with decorated short wide sleeves and *palla,* dotted with small circles indicating jewelling or embroidery. Even though the golden glass has been associated with the production boom of gold glass in the second half of the 4th century, the female attire represented on it closely resembles the attire of the younger female figure crowned by Christ in the oratory under Ospedale dell'Angelo in Lateran (cat. entry n. 2.28) and of the procession of female martyrs in Sant'Apolinare Nuovo in Ravenna, dated to the period after 561.

It is plausible that gold-glass vessels with marriage motifs were purchased by or for the people that the wedding ceremony commemorated. Alternatively, as there is no strong evidence suggesting that they were produced as wedding gifts, it is possible that they simply imply the notion of marital harmony (*concordia*) and unity between two people and could have been purchased at any stage of their married life. As a prized possession of the couple after the death of one of the spouses the bottom of the vessel was usually inserted into the wall next to the *loculus* with their burial. The object in question is one of the very few that does represent the marriage ceremony quite explicitly and was most probably produced to mark the occasion of a wedding. It was acquired for the Metropolitan Museum in 1915 by the antiquities art collector John Marshall (1862-1928) from Museo Kircheriano in Rome.



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6.14 FUNERARY PORTRAIT OF SEVERA AND HER FAMILY

Last quarter of the 4th - beginning of the 5th century

Dimensions unknown to author

Rome, Catacomba di Vigna Chiaraviglio, gallery F12

Grace Stafford, *Women, Gender, and Society in Late Antiquity: A Study in Visual Culture* (dissertation thesis), Department of Archaeology, University of Oxford, Oxford 2020, cat. n. P34; Fabrizio Bisconti, *Primi cristiani. Le storie, i monumenti, le figure*, Città del Vaticano 2013, pp. 139-147; Fabrizio Bisconti, *Le pitture delle catacombe romane: restauri e interpretazioni*, Todi 2011, pp. 249-269; Cecilia Proverbio, I dipinti della catacomba di San Sebastiano, ex Vigna Chiaraviglio, in: Maria Andaloro (ed.), *L'orrizonte tardoantico e le nuove immagini 312-468,* Milano 2006, pp. 194-205; Raffaella Giuliani *et al.*, Nuove indagini nella catacomba della ex Vigna Chiaraviglio sulla via Appia Antica. Relazione delle campagne di scavo nella regione F (1997-1999), *Rivista di archeologia cristiana* 77, 2001, pp. 97-362; Fabrizio Bisconti, Nuovi affreschi dal cimitero ex Vigna Chiaraviglio, *Atti della Pontifica Accademia Romana di Archeologia. Rendiconti* 73, 2000-2001, pp. 18-34; Antonio E. Felle, Raffaella Giuliani, Nuove indagini nella catacomba dell'ex Vigna Chiaraviglio nel comprensorio dell'Appia Antica a Roma (1990-1991), *Vetera Christianorum* 37, 2000, pp. 337-351; Fabrizio Bisconti, Il finarello dell'ex Vigna Chiaraviglio, in: *Dieci anni di restauro nelle catacombe romane. Bilancio, esperienze e interventi conservativi delle pitture catacombali,* Città del Vaticano 2000, n. 15; Fabrizio Bisconti, L'abbraccio tra Pietro e Paolo ed un affresco inedito del cimitero romano dell'ex Vigna Chiaraviglio, *Corsi di Cultura sull'Arte Ravennate e Bizantina* XLII, 1995, pp. 71-93.

The *arcosolium* of Primenius and Severa is positioned in the western wall of the gallery F12 of the catacombs of martyr Sebastian in Rome. It was found by accident in 1983 during the installation of a lighting system between the catacombs of Calixtus and Sebastian. The frontal part of the arch is divided by red lines into separate decorative fields, which bear the still visible depictions of two palm trees. They allude to the paradisiac environment, in which the deceased reside after death. This idea is reinforced by the image of the animals on pasture at the apex of the arch, heavily damaged by the fall of plaster. The most complex decoration adorns the intrados of the arch. It is a complex palimpsest, in which two iconographic phases, depicting the miracles of Christ, are visible. On the left, first the Multiplication of breads and later the Resurrection of Lazarus was painted. On the right, the Miracle in Cana took place of the further unidentified healing scene. The vault is also illegible, with two symmetrically placed figures (possible theophanic scene), preceded with a bust of Christ in the middle of red clouds. The main message is that of salvation, created by a traditional *repertorium* of scenes, cultivated in the environment of Bible illuminations.

The lunette is decorated by portrait of a dead couple, between which an image of their son was added at a later time. The father and son are dressed in dark *poenulas* (leather or wool cloak), alluding to their African or oriental origin. The female figure wears light-blue mantle. Her voluminous hair is covered by a tight-fitting blue cap and loose translucent veil. Above the three busts appears the figure of the apocalyptic God, dressed in a purple tunic, rising from clouds and crowning the couple. In the earlier layer of the painting a staurogram, flanked by letters alpha and omega, is still visible. The names of the couple, Primenius and Severa, are commemorated by an inscription, which follows the profile of the lunette. The painting on the far left of the lunette, in the space next to Severa, is almost illegible. Lately it has been interpreted as an open scroll box filled with scrolls.

The hairstyles of the figures place them chronologically between the reigns of Theodosius (379-395) and Arcadius (395-408). The features of the faces follow generally the imperial

portraiture of the time. The apocalyptic vision of Christ among red clouds finds parallels in the apse of Santa Pudenziana from the first decades of the 5th century (cat. entry n. 2.25), which it precedes, or in *arcosolium* of Biator in the catacombs of Grottaferrata from the end of the 4th century.



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6.15 BOWL WITH A REPRESENTATION SCENE

4th/5th century

Dimensions unknown to author

Rome, Collection of Francesco Gualdi (1576-1657) (lost)

Stefanie Nagel, *Die figürlich gravierten Gläser der Spätantike. Archäometrische und archäologische Untersuchungen*, Regensburg 2020, p. 25; Grace Stafford, *Women, Gender, and Society in Late Antiquity: A Study in Visual Culture* (dissertation thesis), Department of Archaeology, University of Oxford, Oxford 2020, cat. n. GG21; Francesco Paolucci, *L'arte del vetro inciso a Roma nel IV. Secolo d.C.*, Firenze 2002, pp. 43-46; Rainer Warland, Die Kuppelmosaiken von Centcelles als Bildprogramm spätantiker Privaträpresentation, in: Javier Arce (ed.), *Centcelles. El monumento tardoromano. Iconografia y arquitectura*, Roma 2002, p. 26; Andrea Rottloff, Spätantike Repräsentationskunst in Süddeutschland. Einige Überlegungen zu den Glasschliffschalen von Augsburg, Obernburg und Pfaffenhofen, in: Michaela Hermann, Lothar Bakker (eds.), *Sammelband 2000. Augsburger Beiträge zur Achäologie* 3, Augsburg 2001, p. 155; Beaudoin Caron, Note sur deux dessins représentant un verre gravé, *Échos du monde classique* 37, n. 2, 1993, pp. 349-365; Cornelius Clarkson Vermeule, The Dal-Pozzo Albani Drawings of Classical Antiquities in the Royal Library at Windsor Castle, *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 56, n. 2, 1966, p. 31; Giovanni Battista de Rossi, Le *horrea* sotto l'Aventino e la *statio annonae urbis romae*, *Annali dell'Istituto di Corrispondenza Archeologica* 57, 1885, pp. 223-234.

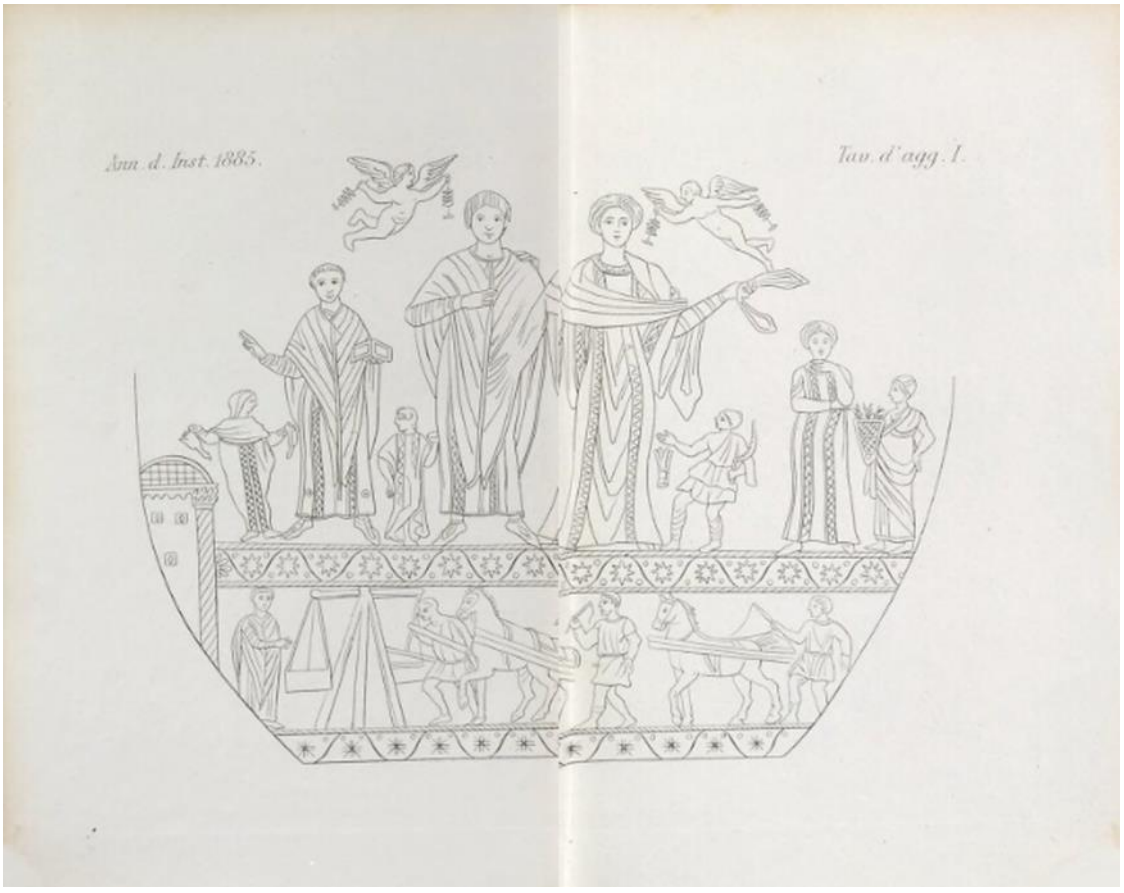
The flat glass bowl has survived only in two independently created drawings (*Codex Vaticanus* 9136, fol. 217, now in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana; drawing from Cassiano Dal Pozzo (1588-1657), now in the Windsor Castle). In the 17th century, the object was in possession of the collector Francesco Gualdi (1576-1657), whose collection was partly donated to Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana in 1630. The whereabouts of the bowl, however, have not yet been clarified.

The bottom part of the bowl showed a representative scene. In the upper register, which occupies more than half of the circular picture field, a prefect of *annona* (system supplying Rome with grain) is probably depicted with his family. The figures stand facing the viewer. Two putti are hovering next to the heads of the couple in the centre, who is emphasized by the size of the bodies. The man is beardless, dressed in a long tunic, adorned by two geometrically decorated stripes, and a cloak. He wears *calcei*, heeled shoes of high-ranking officials. He raises his right hand to his chest, holding out his index and middle finger in a gesture of speech and authority. His wife is dressed similarly to him, but her tunic is a little longer and she wears *palla* over it. She holds her husband's shoulder with her right hand and what seems to be a cloth in her left. Her hair is swept back in a coiffure. To the right of the couple, a smaller version of the husband, representing the son of the couple, holds an open codex. Like the father, he raises his hand in a gesture of speech. The daughter to their left, dressed in a long tunic with two geometrically decorated stripes, raises her left hand to her chin and rests her left elbow on her right hand. Four small figures are scattered between the family members. The woman on the left side of the bowl, dressed in tunic and *palla*, covering her head, holds a bird in each hand. The second woman looks towards the son of the family. She is dressed in a long tunic with two vertical stripes and holds her left hand half raised to her shoulder, while the right hand is propped on her hip. The male figure between the mother and the daughter is dressed in a short tunic and holds a sickle in his left hand. In *Codex Vaticanus* a sheaf of wheat is seen next to him. Finally, on the far right, a woman dressed in a tunic and a cloak holds a basket with wheat on her right arm. In the lower register is a large pair of scales, with an official in a tunic and *pallium* standing beside it. From the opposite

side, three men, identified as workers by short tunics, are leading horses. According to the interpretation of Giovanni Battista de Rossi the scene represents the arrival of convoy with wheat to the granaries of either Ostia or Portus. The unloading and transfer of supplies in the ports of Rome were carried out by corporations and closely supervised by *praefectus annonae* and *praefectus urbi*.

The purpose for commissioning the bowl may have been the ascending of the main protagonist of the scene to the function of *praefectus annonae*. The holder of the office from 326 moved to a senatorial rank and in 331 became responsible for supplying Rome not only with wheat, but also with oil and therefore gained even stronger position in society. The ascension to this rank thus might have prompted a celebration and distribution of gifts, such as the bowl, to friends and clients.

The Roman provenance of the lost object is suspected based on its stylistic closeness with the fragments from Campo Santo collection, especially on the shared motif of foliage separating the registers of the picture field.



© De Rossi 1885, pl. I

6.16 NECKLACE WITH A MARRIAGE SCENE AND AN AMULET

First half of the 5th century (necklace), 2nd century (amulet)

Diameter 6.5 cm

New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. n. 58.12

Grace Stafford, *Women, Gender, and Society in Late Antiquity: A Study in Visual Culture* (dissertation thesis), Department of Archaeology, University of Oxford, Oxford 2020, cat. n. J12; Daniel Thomas Howells (eds.), *A Catalogue of the Late Antique Gold Glass in the British Museum*, London 2015, pp. 126-127; Katharine Reynolds Brown *et al.* (ed.), *From Attila to Charlemagne: Arts of the Early Medieval Period in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, New York-New Haven 2000, pp. 60-62, 358; Isabella Baldini Lippolis, *L'oreficeria nell'impero di Costantinopoli: tra IV e VII secolo*, Bari 1999, pp. 34-35, 132; Diana Kleiner, Susan Matheson (eds.), *I Clavdia: Women in Ancient Rome*, New Haven-Austin 1996, pp. 151-152; Katharine Reynolds Brown, *Migration Art, A.D. 300-800*, New York 1995, pp. 24-25; Gary Vikan, Art and Marriage in Early Byzantium, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 44, 1990, pp. 149, 155-156; Katharine Reynolds Brown, Necklace with marriage scene and amulet, in: Kurt Weitzmann (ed.), *Age of Spirituality. Late Antique and Early Christian Art, Third to Seventh Century*, New York 1979, n. 281, pp. 307-308; *Collection Kalebdijan. Exposition de bijoux antiques*, Paris 1913, n. 111.

Two pendants are suspended from a long gold chain. The larger of the two is a gold repoussé medallion with a double beaded border, showing a pair of confronted, profile busts of a married couple, with Christ Pronubis between them. The medallion follows a Roman format with the important substitution of Christ Pronubis for Concordia, blessing the union. By the 5th century the representation of Christ Pronubis has become a familiar idea in the Roman world. The figure has been identified on the basis of its high degree of similarity with Christ on marriage gold-glasses. The man is displayed wearing a cloak draped over his body and fastened at the right shoulder. Hairstyle and facial features suggest a Theodosian date. The woman is dressed in a light tunic, emphasizing the lines of her body, while a heavier cloak is draped over her shoulders. She is adorned by a necklace and large pearl earrings. Her hair is arranged in a crown-like hairstyle, with a fringe covering the forehead and the temples. No indication of the identity of the couple is given. The absence of diadems excludes the possibility of them being representation of the imperial pair. Nevertheless, the pendant may have been commissioned to commemorate a wedding ceremony or an anniversary.

The smaller pendant is an oval hematite amulet decorated on the obverse with a rooster-headed god with serpent legs and on the reverse with a Harpocrates, the Greek god of silence with roots in Egyptian solar cult of Horus the Child. The rooster-headed god is one of the most common amuletic types, even though it seems to be a merged creature without clearer explanation. The rooster has solar links, and it is possible that the creature as a whole evoked a solar cult, especially when it was often paired with solar deities, such as Harpocrates in this case. The amulet was probably attached to the chain for its healing qualities.

The necklace is part of a treasure found in the Piazza della Consolazione in Rome in 1908, which also included a gold bracelet with the bust of Dea Roma (cat. entry n. 1.13) and two other necklaces, one of which has a Byzantine medallion and a significantly older amulet. Hidden for safety most probably before the sack of Rome by Visigoths in 410 or by Vandals in 455, the artefacts from the treasure represent the complex situation in Rome between the second half of the 4th century and the first half of the 5th century, when the Christian religion strengthened, but part of the aristocracy clung to their pre-Christian beliefs and Oriental cults were revived.





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6.17 PORTRAIT OF THE MOTHER OF GREGORY THE GREAT, SILVIA

Possibly around 587

Dimensions unknown to author

Rome, Monastery of Sant'Andrea al Celio (destroyed)

Alessandra Acconci, L'Oratorio di Sant'Andrea al Celio. Alcune note sul dipinto medievale nel sottotetto, *Römisches Jahrbuch der Bibliotheca Hertziana* 42, 2005-2006, p. 45; Alberto Bartola, Gregorio Magno e il monastero di Sant'Andrea ad Clivum Scauri, in: Letizia Pani Ermini (ed.), *L'Orbis Christianus Antiquus di Gregorio Magno: convegno di studi, Roma, 26-28 ottobre 2004*, Roma 2007, p. 143; Margherita Cecchelli, *Monasteri e diaconie tra l'età tardoantica e l'alto medioevo : vita contemplativa e solidarietà nell'antica chiesa di Roma*, Roma 2005, pp. 79-80; Anna Maria Pedrocchi, *San Gregorio al Celio. Storia di una abbazia*, Roma 1993, p. 86; Ilaria Toesca, Antichi affreschi a Sant'Andrea al Celio, *Paragone. Arte* 23, 1972, p. 13; Gerhart Ladner, *I ritratti dei papi nell'antichità e nel medioevo I. Dalle origini fino alla fine della lotta per le investiture*, Città del Vaticano 1941, pp. 70-75; Enrico Wüscher-Becchi, Sulla ricostruzione di tre dipinti descritti da Giovanni Diacono ed esistenti al suo tempo (Sec. IX.) nel convento di S. Andrea ad Clivum Scauri, *Nuovo Bulettino di Archeologia Cristiana* 6, 1900, pp. 241-244.

If we are to believe the *vita* of Gregory the Great (590-604), recorded by John the Deacon (c. 852-before 882) around the year 875, the fresco, depicting Gregory's mother, Silvia, decorated the atrium or the oratory of Gregory's family *domus* next to Clivus Scauri, which he transformed into a monastery dedicated to martyr Andrew sometime before the year 587. Silvia, whose image was paired with a complementary representation of her husband Gordianus, shown as *patritius romanus*, dressed in tunic, brown *paenula* and *calcei*, standing next to an enthroned figure of apostle Peter and outstretching his hand towards him in a heartfelt devotional gesture, was depicted seated in full height on a throne, maybe supplemented with *suppedaneum*. Her face is vividly described by John the Deacon as round, fair, wrinkled with age, but still bearing traces of great beauty, with large blue eyes, delicate eyebrows, and cheerful expression. Dressed in a white tunic and *dalmatica* decorated with richly embroidered *clavi*, with a head covered by a *palla* and a cap underneath it, hiding her hair, she was performing a sign of either benediction or teaching with her right hand while holding a Book of Psalms in the left. Inscribed on the pages was the verse 175 from psalm 119: "*Let my soul live, and it shall praise thee; and let thy judgements help me*". In the upper portion surrounding the head of Silvia the painting bore an inscription *Gregorius Silviae matri fecit*. Nothing apart from the description remains from the image, which succumbed to the restructuring of the monastery in the late 11th century.



© Wüscher-Becchi 1900, pl. VII

7 SOLITAIRE FEMALE PORTRAITS

7.1 FRAGMENTS OF A TOMB PLAQUE WITH A GIRL, A BIRD AND A BUTTERFLY

4th century

Length 65 cm, height 45 cm (whole plate)

Berlin, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Skulpturensammlung und Museum für Byzantinische Kunst, inv. n. 6778

Elisabeth Ehler, *Figürliche Loculusplatten aus dem frühchristlichen Rom. Katalog* (dissertation thesis), Philipps-Universität, Marburg 2008, p. 161; Thomas Schmidt, Zwei zusammengehörige (?) Fragmente einer Verschlußplatte für ein Wandgrab (Loculus), in: Christoph Stiegemann (ed.), *Frühchristliche Kunst in Rom und Konstantinopel: Schätze aus dem Museum für Spätantike und Byzantinische Kunst Berlin*, Padeborn 1996, pp. 180-182; Arne Effenberger, Hans-Georg Severin, *Das Museum für spätantike und byzantinische Kunst*, Mainz am Rhein 1992, p. 94; Klaus Wessel, *Rom-Byzanz-Rußland. Ein Führer durch die Frühchristlich-byzantinische Sammlung*, Berlin 1957, p. 116.

Two marble fragments, presumably belonging to a closing plate of a child wall compartment grave (*loculus*), were part of an anonymous donation from Rome, done in 1914. The engraved image shows a girl sitting in a paradisiacal garden indicated by a little plant on the right. In the raised left hand, she holds a bird, probably a dove. With the thumb and forefinger of the right hand, she gently grasps a butterfly. Depictions of doves have survived on numerous *loculus* plates, but butterflies are quite rare in this context. Both animals were perceived as symbols of the soul. In antique Roman art, Psyche wears butterfly wings. This symbolism was later adopted by Christianity, with the caterpillar symbolizing life, the chrysalis, death, and the butterfly, resurrection. The girl is dressed in a tunic with sleeves and a top garment, the neckline and vertical hem of which are decorated with an embroidered border. A belt with a large round buckle holds it together. Due to the lack of inscription and ambiguous iconography the viewer is kept in the dark regarding the question whether she was a Christian or not.



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7.2 FEMALE PORTRAIT

Around the middle of the 4th century

Height 22.5 cm

Rome, Museo Nazionale Romano, Terme di Diocleziano, inv. n. 382986

Mariana Bodnaruk, The Representation of Senatorial Women in Late Antique Inscribed Honorific Texts and Statue Monuments, in: *idem* (ed.), *Artistic Practice, Materiality and Ideology in the Medieval Eastern Roman Empire and Neighboring Polities*, London-New York 2026 (forthcoming); Marta Fortini, Ritratto femminile, in: Fabrizio Bisconti, Giovanni Gentili (eds.), *La rivoluzione dell'immagine. Arte paleocristiana tra Roma e Bisanzio*, Milano 2007, pp. 238-239; Paola Palazzo, Carlo Pavolini, Ritratto femminile, in: Maria Antonietta Tomei (ed.), *Roma. Memorie dal sottosuolo: ritrovamenti archeologici 1980/2006*, Milano 2007, p. 120; Kathrin Schade, *Frauen in der Spätantike – Status und Repräsentation,* Mainz am Rhein 2003, pp. 192-193; Andrea Carignani, Ritratto femminile, in: Serena Ensoli, Eugenio La Rocca (eds.), *Aurea Roma. Dalla città pagana alla città cristiana*, Roma 2000, n. 40, pp. 452-453; Andrea Carignani, Ritratto femminile tardo antico dal Celio, *Bollettino di archeologia* 5-6, 1990, pp. 189-191; Ranuccio Bianchi Bandinelli, *Roma. La fine dell'arte antica*, Milano 1970, pp. 5-38; Giovanni Becatti, *L'arte dell'età classica*, Milano 1965, pp. 451-461.

The portrait depicts a young lady with fine and aristocratic features. Her elegant, long, slender neck is of particular interest. The right eye is in a slightly elevated position in respect to the left one, a detail which lends the gaze a slightly hieratic expression. The intensity of the gaze is achieved by deep lines defining the pupils and rendering them the focal point of the whole face. The hair appears soft and natural due to fine carved lines. The stylistic features of the portrait place it in the middle of the 4th century, in the late Constantinian era. The subtle lines of the face and the natural curves of the hair point to the aesthetic of the court art, with its interest in classical antiquity and its refined language. Some details, such as the restricted proportions of the face at the level of the temples and the diminished height of the face in comparison to the hair show that the portrait may have been created from an older statue. Spoliation is a relatively common phenomenon in the late antique Roman empire, caused by both ideological and economic motifs. The head comes from the courtyard of *basilica Hilariana* on the Caelian Hill in Rome, which was dedicated to meetings of college of priests of the goddess Kybele. The woman may be identified as a female relative of the Symmachi family, whose sumptuous residence was situated near the *basilica* and who were supporters of the cult of the goddess.



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7.3 JUG WITH A FACE OF A WOMAN

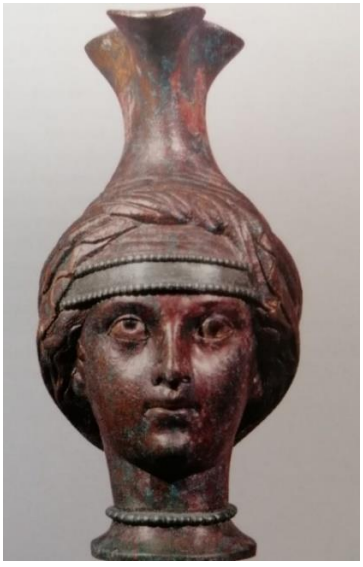
Second half of the 4th century

Height 21.5 cm, width 6.3 cm

Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, inv. n. 69086

Marianne Bergmann, Testa femminile, in: Angela Donati, Giovanni Gentili (eds.), *Costantino il Grande: la civiltà antica al bivio tra Occidente e Oriente,* Milano 2005, p. 313; Kenneth Painter, Brocca configurata a volto di donna, in: Serena Ensoli, Eugenio La Rocca (eds.), *Aurea Roma. Dalla città pagana alla città cristiana*, Roma 2000, n. 117, pp. 496-497; Kathleen J. Shelton, *The Esquiline Treasure,* London 1981, p. 84; Ennio Visconti, *Lettera di Ennio Quirinio Visconti intorno ad una antica suppelletile d'argento scoperta in Roma nell'anno 1793,* Roma 1827, p. 21.

The bronze jug takes the form of a female head, with the neck serving as a foot, the rounded face corresponding with the body of the vessel and the back part forming an elaborate turban. On the back of the head a handle in the form of an arched wreath of grape leaves and tendrils is attached. Beaded decoration of the jug translates into a necklace and a headband of the woman. The features of the face are slender, soft, and smooth, executed in a low relief. The head-dress and the hair are detailed, with a series of plastically rendered waves and folds, which contrast with the smooth surfaces of the face itself. The lack of a proper bottom of the vessel makes its practical use improbable. The object was found in 1793 near the church of Santa Lucia in Selci on the Esquiline Hill in Rome as part of the so-called Esquiline treasure. After the discovery it was reported to be part of the collection of Cardinal Stefano Borgia (1731-1804) in Velletri and was moved to the Museo Borbonico (later Museo Nazionale) in Naples at the beginning of the 19th century. The jug is dated based on the other objects with which it was found. Despite the comparisons made with several examples of late antique glass objects and ceramics there is no indication leading to a more precise dating. The typology of the object (*oinochoe*, a classical form of ceramics spread in the Roman world from the 1st century BC) and its slender parts point towards the group of luxurious objects from the 4th century that intentionally drew inspiration from the classical models of the early imperial period.



© Bergmann 2005

7.4 FEMALE HEAD WITH A CROWN

c. 360-390

Height 27 cm

Rome, Museo Nazionale Romano, Palazzo Massimo alle Terme, inv. n. 575

Eliana Fileri, Ritratto femminile con corona, in: Carlo Gasparri, Rita Paris (eds.), *Palazzo Massimo alle Terme: le collezioni*, Milano 2013, p. 372; Lucia Guerrini, Carlo Gasparri (eds.), *Il Palazzo del Quirinale. Catalogo delle sculture*, Roma 1993, pp. 97-99; Anna Laura Cesarano, Ritratto femminle coronato, in: Antonio Giuliano (ed.), *Museo Nazionale Romano. Le sculture* I, 9/2, Roma 1988, pp. 424-425; Helga von Heintze, Ein spätantikes Mädchenporträt in Bonn. Zur stilistischen Entwicklung des Frauenbildnisses im 4. und 5. Jahrhundert, *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 14, 1971, p. 78; Bianca Maria Feletti Maj, *Museo Nazionale Romano. I ritratti*, Roma 1953, n. 322; Roberto Paribeni, *Le Terme di Diocleziano e il Museo Nazionale Romano*, Roma 1932, n. 805.

The marble statue, found inside the Colosseum in Rome, is in good state of preservation, with only the nose and parts of the ears missing. It depicts a mature woman, the fact which is signalled by deep lines around the mouth and the nose. The oblong deep eyes, heavily hooded by eyelids, have slightly outlined pupils, but the irises are missing. The slender triangular face has soft features with pronounced mouth. The hair is gathered in a coiffure at the back of the head, with several curls freely falling on the neck. The forehead is framed by voluminous waves, which cover the ears and are held by a subtle vegetal crown. The aforementioned hairstyle does not correspond to the contemporary fashion but is a homage to the portraits of Faustina the Younger (161-175) from the 2nd century. The fascination with the portraiture of the Antonine dynasty, the form of the eyes, and the shape of the head are features shared between several female portraits from the period between the years 360 and 390 (portrait from Palazzo del Quirinale, from Glyptothek in Monaco, and from a museum in Bursa). Based on the vegetal crown Bianca Maria Feletti Maj hypothesizes about the poetic activity of the portrayed woman.



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7.5 VESSEL BASE WITH A GIRL HOLDING A SCROLL

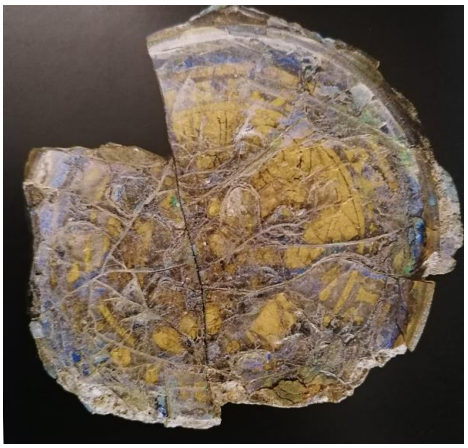
360-400

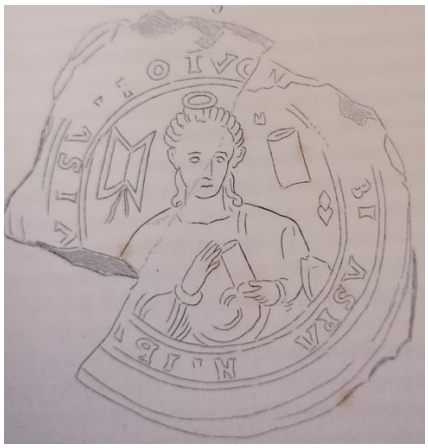
Diameter 7.8 cm

London, The British Museum, inv. n. 1859, 0618.1

Grace Stafford, *Women, Gender, and Society in Late Antiquity: A Study in Visual Culture* (dissertation thesis), Department of Archaeology, University of Oxford, Oxford 2020, cat. n. GG1; Daniel Thomas Howells (eds.), *A Catalogue of the Late Antique Gold Glass in the British Museum*, London 2015, pp. 117-119; Charles R. Morey, *The Gold-Glass Collection of the Vatican Library, with Additional Catalogues of Other Gold-Glass Collections,* Città del Vaticano 1959, n. 343, p. 57; Ormonde M. Dalton, *Catalogue of Early Christian Antiquities and Objects from the Christian East in the Department of British and Medieval Antiquities and Etnography of the British Museum,* London 1901, n. 607, p. 119; Hermann Vopel, *Die altchristlichen Goldgläser: ein Beitrag zur Altchristlichen Kunst- und Kulturgeschichte* (= Archäologische Studien zum christlichen Altertum und Mittelalter 5), Freiburg 1899, n. 100; Raffaele Garrucci, *Storia dell'arte cristiana nei primi otto secoli della chiesa* III, Prato 1876, p. 186.

The base of the glass vessel was crudely broken away from the rest of the object. It is formed by three layers of glass. As the upper one is partially broken, the exposed middle layer is cracked through, and the gold foil design is badly damaged. The iridescence and discolouration obscure the image from the reverse and make it visible only under very close inspection. The left portion of the design is missing. Garrucci's schematic drawing captures the iconography of the glass and enables its reading. It depicts a bust of a female figure with her head slightly turned to the right. Her hair is secured on the back of her head, with two curled strands falling on her shoulders. A ring appears above her head. Based on the finds of glass, jet, and bronze rings too small to serve as bracelets we can assume that the ring was intended to be part of the hairstyle. The woman is dressed in tunic and plain *palla*, worn diagonally across the body. She holds a scroll in both hands. Another scroll is depicted above her to her left, and an open diptych to her right. They display the literacy of their owner and are indicators of her high status, marking her as person of intellect and education. The band enclosing the portrait bears an inscription, which despite the omissions can be interpreted as: „*Drink/Life to your parents [and] to your husband.*" The glass was bought by Sir John Charles Robinson (1824-1913) in Rome in 1859 from an antiquities dealer Baneggio and subsequently donated to the British Museum.





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7.6 FEMALE BUST

Around 390

Height 66 cm

Rome, Musei Capitolini, Palazzo dei Conservatori, inv. n. MC0404

Mariana Bodnaruk, The Representation of Senatorial Women in Late Antique Inscribed Honorific Texts and Statue Monuments, in: *idem* (ed.), *Artistic Practice, Materiality and Ideology in the Medieval Eastern Roman Empire and Neighboring Polities*, London-New York 2026 (forthcoming); Giulia Colugnati, Ritratto femminile con busto in marmo pavonazzetto, in: Eugenio La Rocca, Claudio Parisi Presicce, Annalisa Lo Monaco (eds.), *Ritratti: le tante faccie di potere*, Roma 2011, p. 411; Francesco Paolo Arata, Busto femminile, in: Fabrizio Bisconti, Giovanni Gentili (eds.), *La rivoluzione dell'immagine. Arte paleocristiana tra Roma e Bisanzio*, Milano 2007, pp. 242-243; Marilda De Nuccio, Lucrezia Ungaro (eds.), *I marmi colorati della Roma imperiale*, Venezia 2002, p. 343; Marianne Bergmann, Busto femminile, in: Serena Ensoli, Eugenio La Rocca (eds.), *Aurea Roma. Dalla città pagana alla città cristiana*, Roma 2000, n. 260, pp. 576-577; Margherita Guarducci, Licinia Eudoxia imperatrice d'Occidente, *Bullettino della Commissione Archeologica Comunale di Roma* 93, 1989-1990, pp. 41-52; Klaus Fittschen, Paul Zanker, *Katalog der römischen Porträts in den Capitolinischen Museen und den anderen kommunalen Sammlungen der Stadt Rom* III, Mainz am Rhein 1983, p. 118; Wilhelm von Sydow, *Zur Kunstgeschichte des spätantiken Porträts im 4. Jahrhunderts n. Chr.*, Bonn 1969, p. 153; Henry Stuart Jones (ed.), *A Catalogue of the Sculptures of the Museo Capitolino*, Roma 1912, p. 191.

The bust was formerly part of the collection of cardinal Alessandro Albani (1692-1779). Together with many other antique Roman artefacts from the collection, the it was bought by pope Clement XII (1730-1740) in 1734 and incorporated into what was to become a predecessor of the Musei Capitolini.

The oval oblong face of the woman with its smooth features, free of wrinkles and pronounced lines, does not betray the age of the portrayed. The eyes, slightly turned to the left like the head itself, with their expressive gaze, underlined by the deeply engraved pupils, exude dignity and distancing from the viewer at the same time. The hair is mostly contained in a thick plait, from which ringlets fall at the nape and the temples. Several unevenly distanced holes are visible on the plait. They probably held decorative pins or other types of hair jewellery, possibly even a diadem. According to Mariana Bodnaruk, the unusual head ornament may have visually marked the portrayed woman as Vestal virgin.

Both the head and the bust are sculpted from a single block of Dokimeion marble, but while the marble of the head is white, the ample folds of the mantle and the tunic have visible violet veins. The portrait represents an aristocratic woman or an empress from the end of the 4th century. It is inspired by the classicizing representations of the members of the Constantinian dynasty and does not display individual features. Many shared traits can be found between the female portrait and the marble bust of Emperor Valentinian II (388-392) dated around the year 390. Recent studies have identified signs of what is considered to be a hasty reworking in the lower part of the discussed bust and have pointed out the smaller dimensions of the head in comparison with the rest of the object. It has been suggested that the portrait was created from an earlier, 2nd-century work (Antonine dynasty), by a Roman workshop, well informed about the works of the Constantinopolitan court workshops.



© Bisconti and Gentili 2007, p. 243

7.7 HEAD OF AN EMPRESS (GALLA PLACIDIA?)

Middle of the 5th century

Height 28 cm

Rome, Museo dell'Alto Medioevo, inv. n. 2603

Marina Lindhagen, Ritratto femminile (Galla Placidia?), in: Maria Andaloro, Giulia Bordi, Giuseppe Morganti (eds.), *Santa Maria Antiqua tra Roma e Bisanzio,* Roma 2016, pp. 168-169; Elena Calandra, Testa di imperatrice, in: Gemma Sena Chiesa (ed.), *Costantino 313 d.C. L'editto di Milano e il tempo della tollleranza*, Milano 2012, p. 267; Kathrin Schade, *Frauen in der Spätantike – Status und Repräsentation,* Mainz am Rhein 2003, pp. 215-216; Marianne Bergmann, Testa di una imperatrice (Galla Placidia?), in: Serena Ensoli, Eugenio La Rocca (eds.), *Aurea Roma: dalla città pagana alla città cristiana*, Roma 2000, n. 262, p. 578; Maria Stella Arena, Lidia Parioli, *Museo dell'Alto Medioevo Roma*, Roma 1993, pp. 11-12; Jutta Meischner, Das Porträt der Galla Placidia im Museo dell'Alto Medioevo, Rom, *Latomus 50,* 1991, pp. 861-864; Hans Peter L'Orange, Max Wegner, *Das spätantike Herrscherbild von Diokletian bis zu den Konstantin-Söhnen 284-361 n. Chr.,* Berlin 1984, p. 155; Bianca Maria Felletti Maj, Ritratto imperiale tardo antico, *Aquileia nostra* 45-46*,* 1974-1975, pp. 397-408; Hans Peter L'Orange, Ein unbekanntes Porträt einer spätantiken Kaiserin, in: *idem* (ed.), *Likeness and Icon,* Odense 1973, pp. 73-77; Raissa Calza, *Iconografia romana imperiale*, Roma 1972, pp. 336-338; Helga von Heintze, Ein spätantikes Mädchenportät in Bonn. Zur stilitischen Entwicklung des Frauenbildnisses im 4. und 5. Jahrhundert, *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 14, 1971, p. 77; Wilhelm von Sydow, *Zur Kunstgeschichte des spätantiken Porträts im 4. Jhr. n. Ch.,* Bonn 1969, p. 90.

The marble head probably comes from Rome or its surroundings. Until the Second World War, it was part of the collection of counts Siciliano de Gentili in Viterbo. Currently it is exhibited in the Museo dell'Alto Medioevo in Rome.

The portrait captures an elderly woman. This is evident from the wrinkles that form around the mouth and at the base of the nose. The oblong face with distinct angular jaw, the absence of a smile, and a forward gaze exude dignity, but also severity. The woman's hair is arranged in a complex hairstyle. It consists of several elements. From the top of the head to the nape, a wide flat band of hair surrounds the entire head. The strands above the forehead are curled and bent into a narrow U shape. Two large strands of hair at the nape are left loose and then curled and tucked under the braid so as to cover the ears. A diadem is attached to the braid. The lower part consists of a twisted strip of fabric or metal. Above it is a metal band into which square gems are set at regular intervals, with one oval jewel above the forehead. Pearls or small metal ornaments are inserted into the metal framing of the gems. Both parts of the diadem are fastened with strings and tied. Since the diadem is carefully carved only on the right side, the head was probably turned to the left.

The hairstyle of the statue is similar to that of the female portrait from Pisa, dated around the middle of the 4th century. In the case of the portrait from Rome, however, the hairstyle could also be an imitation of an older model. As Hans L'Orange proved on the basis of the examination of sarcophagi, this type of hairstyle was widespread in the 4th century, but it persisted even in the 5th century. The heavy eyelids, the shape of the eyes, the folds of skin below them, and the plastic rendering of the wrinkles around the mouth are identical to the head of a man from Chios, dated to the late 4th or early 5th century. As for the attribution of the discussed portrait, L'Orange expresses the opinion that it represents Galla Placidia, daughter of Emperor Theodosius, who married Emperor Constantius III in 421. Galla was also the mother of Emperor Valentinian III. (423-455), with whom she ruled in the Western Roman Empire between 425-437. In the position of co-ruler, she was compared to the

mothers of the Severian dynasty. It is therefore not impossible that a depiction of one of them was chosen as the basis of Galla's portrait. The hairstyle and diadem, which correspond to her representation on the coins, testify to the fact that the portrait was created during the period of her greatest influence on the political scene, that is, in the first half of the 5th century.

The flat chisel that was used to shape the headdress left the surface unsmoothed. This is a common occurrence in late antique Roman portraits that were cut from older works. According to Marina Lindhagen, the portrait we are examining could have been originally created for an empress from the Severian dynasty, for example Julia Domna, the wife of Septimius Severus (193-211). Careful work with the material in modelling the eyelids, wrinkles around the mouth, nose and cheeks are evidence of the artist's ability to create a face that reflects both individuality and authority. This attempt at *mimesis* is not common in female imperial portraits in the period under study.



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