Altars personified: the cult of the saints and the chapel system in Pope Pascal I's S. Prassede (817-819)

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Studies in Honor of Cecil L. Striker

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Festschriften famously take their shapes from the careers of the busy, long-lived, and successful scholars they honor. Some of these volumes can focus sharply on a theme, while others perchance will range more widely in celebration of their honoree’s diverse interests and accomplishments. Cecil L. Striker’s Festschrift belongs in this latter group. In a research and teaching career that has so far spanned more than four decades, Striker has worked at the intersection of architecture and archaeology to radically redescribe the history of Byzantine architecture in the eastern Mediterranean, Anatolia, and the Balkans. He began his career at the Myrelaion (Bodrum Camii) in Istanbul, then took the practice of medieval archaeology to a new, high plateau in his multifaceted, decades-long study of the Kalendarhane Camii, the Ottoman mosque in Istanbul that incorporates a Palaeologan-era church, a Latin Crusader church, and a Middle-, and Early-Byzantine church (and before that, a Late Imperial Roman bath!). The momentous discoveries at Kalendarhane of a sixth-century mosaic showing Christ’s Presentation in the Temple and some fragments of a mid-thirteenth-century fresco depicting the life of Francis of Assisi, to name only these two, led Striker deeply into art histories implicating both the Christian Greek and Latin Mediterranean/European worlds. In recent years, moreover, Striker has probed oak beams in medieval buildings from Italy to Anatolia to help date historic structures dendrochronologically; he co-directed the Aegean Dendrochronology Project’s Medieval Phase, and directed the Architectural Dendrochronology Project. And finally, Striker has actively fostered archaeological research in the Mediterranean area as a member of the Board of Directors of the American Research Institute in Turkey, as the founding chair and member of the Executive Board of the Council of American Overseas Research Centers, and as a consultant for the Istanbul Metro and Bosphorous Tube Tunnel Project.

The essays in this book thus take up many of the themes and activities that have particularly engaged Lee Striker during his career. Chronologically, the papers cover the classical period to the nineteenth century. Geographically they range from Gadara in Jordan to Jumièges in northern France, and are almost evenly divided between East and West. Thematically, many focus on archaeology and structure, and particularly, as Striker himself has expressed it, on the recording and analysis of the physical evidence of buildings and their remains using archaeological methods. Others take up issues of art and ceremony, urban religious topography, Byzantine and Ottoman domestic architecture in town and country, architectural proportion, historic construction techniques, dendrochronological approaches in medieval architecture, the history of marbles and building materials in the Mediterranean, even issues of cultural hybridity in the Latin Crusading states, in Byzantine Serbia, and Ottoman Istanbul. Although these topics are not all directly related to Striker’s own actual research, all were in some way inspired by his interests, by his methodologies, and by the generous intellectual exchanges he has carried on with a large number of art historians, archaeologists, and historians.

Those of us who have been privileged to be Striker’s students are perhaps best placed to appreciate the breadth of his interests and his generosity in assisting us to pursue our own. We are therefore most pleased to be able to pay this tribute to him. We are very grateful too for the enthusiasm and support of all the scholars who have contributed to this volume. The Department of the History of Art at the University of Pennsylvania has recognized Lee Striker’s years of service by generously contributing to the cost of publishing this volume, through a grant from the James and Nan Farquhar History of Art Fund.

Judson J. Emerick, Pomona College
Deborah M. Deliyannis, Indiana University
The City as Stage for Papal Leadership

When Pope Sixtus III built S. Maria Maggiore in the 430s (Figs. 1 and 2), he effectively transformed the monumental Christian topography of Rome. For the first time in the city, a pope built on imperial scale using the full panoply of the scenic Corinthian orders just as emperors had always done, and just as the Emperor Constantine had done so memorably a century previously both at the Lateran basilica and at the Vatican cemetery-basilica. Indeed, Sixtus III's S. Maria Maggiore radically adjusted or modified the meaning of these two leading Constantinian sanctuaries. Since the pope used S. Maria Maggiore as Rome's second cathedral—that is, as setting for a number of high masses that he had formerly celebrated only at the Lateran, and among them the central feast of the liturgical year at Easter—he effectively demoted the first cathedral in the hierarchy of Roman churches, and drew it, along with Constantinian's complex at the Vatican, into a new network of sanctuaries in the metropolis where he could appear more widely as leader of the faithful in worship.

As popes began to go from church to church in the city to celebrate the temporal liturgy, moving from station to station to mark the great events of Christ's life, not only did the Lateran lose its former status as the principal meeting place for the pope and people in mass, but the Vatican complex also took on new prominence as a proper eucharistic church. Pope Sixtus III almost certainly celebrated masses at a long which Constantine's complex was a cathedral in the hierarchy of Roman churches, and drew its attention to sancuaries in the metropolitan where he could appear more widely as leader of the faithful in worship.

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Non-Titular
A Saluatoris q. app. Constantiniae
(Lateran basilica)
B S. Mariæ ad Præstæpm/Genetricis
ad Præstæpm (S. Mariae Maggiore)
C S. Petri
D S. Pauli

Titular

Regio I
1 S. Babuiae
2 S. Priscae
3 S. Sabinae

Regio II
4 SS. Iohannis et Pauli
5 SS. Quattuor Coronatum
6 S. Xysti

Regio III
7 S. Clementis
8 S. Eusebii
9 S. Petri ad Vincula

Regio IV
10 S. Cyriaci
11 S. Praxedis
12 S. Pudentianæ
13 S. Silvestri (S. Martinus ai Monti)
14 S. Susannaæ
15 S. Vitalis

Regio V
16 S. Laurentii in Lucina

Regio VI
17 S. Anastaziaæ
18 S. Laurentii in Damaso
19 S. Marelli
20 S. Marti

Regio VII
21 S. Ceciliaæ
22 S. Chrysigni
23 S. Maria trans Tiberim
the Vatican on Christmas, Epiphany, and Pentecost. And when he did, very likely he stood in front of the tomb of Peter, at a portable altar framed by the Constantinian, Corinthian, columnar shrine there (Fig. 3). Of course, an altar could have been set up anywhere in St. Peter’s for a mass. Before the reign of Pope Symmachus (498–504), no documentary evidence survives to show that one was ever set up near the tomb of Peter. Nevertheless, that tomb sat at the sanctuary’s architectural focus, and we may presume that a papal station, a mass meant primarily to display the pope to the faithful in all possible pomp, would have occurred there.5

Thus Sixtus III’s S. Maria Maggiore interrupted people’s expectations in Rome. If formerly Roman worshipers had associated splendid Corinthian scenic displays in large halls with papal station liturgy, it was already developing toward the end of the fourth century and the beginning of the fifth.6 And doubtless others too. By Sixtus III’s day more than ten stations from the temporeale took place at St. Peter’s; see de Blauw, Cultus et decor, 500–501 and Tabella I (stational calendar for Medieval Rome).7

On Constantine’s Peristyle shrine, see de Blauw, Cultus et decor, 467–485; more recently also, Vittoria Lanzani, “Gloriosa confessio. Lo splendore del sepolcro di Pietro da Costantino al Rinascimento,” in La confessione nella basilica di San Pietro in Vaticano, ed. Alfredo Maria Perpolizi (Cinisello Balsamo [Milan]: Silvana Editoriale, 1999), 11–41, esp. 14–19. The carving on the rear of the famous ivory casket from Samaghe near Pola in Istria (discovered 1906) provides our best evidence for the appearance of this shrine; see my Fig. 3, also Molly Teasdale Smith, “The Development of the Altar Canopy in Rome,” Rivista di Archeologia Cristiana 30 (1974): 379–414, esp. 379–383.8

Cf. de Blauw, Cultus et decor, 506–507.
with the imperial leader, now, more and more, they came to link them with the pope. Sixtus III seems to have built S. Maria Maggiore specifically to transform Constantine’s architectural rhetoric, that is, to take over the first Christian emperor’s Corinthian stage sets for himself. The new church provided Sixtus III a lever that permitted him to pry out a monumental, Christian, papal city from what had formerly been an imperial one.

When, between 817 and 819, Pope Paschal I built the large and imposing church of S. Prassede on the Esquiline in Rome and likewise filled it with scenic Corinthian orders

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Please note that throughout this essay when I speak of the popes as “builders,” I do not present them as some kind of originating power, as persons, say, whose intentions or ideas were realized by or in their buildings. I rather construe the various forms of authorship associated with a building project (and especially that of a patron whose renown a building may increase) as aspects of that building’s representational machinery — to a par, say, with its decorative apparatus, its furniture, or its place in a civic plan. Patronage in a building project is real, but it is constructed for us right along with everything else in that project. The issue has been much discussed in Modern literary criticism; see Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author” (1968) and Michel Foucault, “What is an Author?” (1969) in Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader, ed. David Lodge (London: Longman, 2007), 146–151 and 174–187 respectively.

Fig. 3 Pola Casket, ca. 400–430, ivory relief showing Constantine’s shrine of Peter at the Vatican with its six-column baldachino (photo: Istituto centrale per il catalogo e la documentazione, E. 51229).
of the kind that Romans had seen chiefly in the city's patriarchal basilicas, one can see him too as attempting to modify the map of the city's Christian monuments (Fig. 4). Certainly the Paschal presented in the Liber Pontificalis comes across in that mode – as ambitious builder – and his church of S. Prassede appears there as the first full statement of his program. For Roman worshipers in the early ninth century, however, this church did not just invoke the principal basilicas in the city generally, it called to mind St. Peter's particularly (Figs. 5 and 10).

1 Liber Pontificalis: Texte, introduction et commentaire [LP], ed. Louis Duchesne, 2 vols. (Paris: E. Thoro, 1886–1892), 100 (V. Paschalis 1), cc. 8–11. [For the convenience of his readers, Duchesne indicated the chapter divisions that Giovanni Vignoli (1663–1733) provided in his edition of the Liber pontificalis (Rome: J. B. Bernabò and J. Lazzarini, 1724–55). Since these provide a more precise system of reference to the LP's text than do Duchesne's page numbers (his large pages often comprise many of Vignoli's chapters), I refer to the text in question here by giving the number and title of the papal biography, then Vignoli's chapter number(s). For a convenient summary of Paschal's life in the LP, highlighting the chronology and dating of his various reported building activities, see now Antonella Ballandri, "Dal Casa di Pasquale I secondo il Liber Pontificalis ai Monumenta iconografici delle basiliche romane di Santa Prassede. Santa Maria in Domincia e Santa Cecilia in Trastevere (Prima Parte)," Archivio della società romana di storia patria 122 (1999): 5–68, esp. 22–23. During a relatively short reign between 817 and 824, Paschal erected an elaborate mausoleum in St. Peter's dedicated to the martyrs, Popes Sixtus II and Fabian, then constructed a "large chapel" there dedicated to the martyrs Processus and Martinianus (cc. 5). Next we hear how he built two other large churches in addition to S. Prassede – one dedicated to S. Maria in Domincia on the Celio (cc. 11–14), and another dedicated to S. Cecilia in Trastevere (cc. 14–21). Finally, in a long passage, we read how he boldly remodeled the patriarchal basilica of S. Maria Maggiore (cc. 31–34).

12 S. Prassede's nave, it is true, had only eleven pairs of columns, not 19 (like the Lateran), or 20 (like S. Maria Maggiore and S. Paolo fuori le mura) or 22 (like St. Peter's), and single, not double aisles on either side.
Fig. 5 Rome, S. Prassede, author’s reconstruction of Pope Paschal I’s church of 817-819 (adapted from R. Krautheimer, CCBR III, 1967, pl. XI).

1. shrine for the 2,500 saints
2. chapel in the crypt’s axial corridor for the 2,500 saints
3. chapel for Zeno and two other saints
4. possible location of the sacristy dedicated to the Baptist with the bodies of Maurus and 40 other saints

St. Peter’s and S. Prassede

Both St. Peter’s and S. Prassede had atriums with quadrizonitcuses reached by stairways from the street; both had trabeated nave colonnades; both had prominent triumphal arches that opened the nave to relatively narrow, continuous transepts whose ends projected beyond the aisle walls, and whose roofs were lower than that of the nave; and both had Corinthian column screens between the aisles and the transept. In both, moreover, the nave colonnades and triumphal arches focused worshipers’ attention scenically on apses at the center of the transepts. It is true that S. Paolo fuori le mura, begun in 384 or 386 at the behest of Emperor Theodosius I and later modified under Pope Leo I (440–461), had nearly all these same key features, especially the distinctive continuous transept. But at S. Paolo the transept was much wider and taller than that at St. Peter’s, and the floor level rose above that of its attached basilica, again in contrast to St. Peter’s where floor levels in the transept and basilica were the same. S. Paolo had nave arcades, not colonnades with straight entablatures like St. Peter’s, and it had archways with stairs separating the basilica’s aisles from the transept, not colonnades as at St. Peter’s. S. Paolo also had two huge Ionic columns supporting the triumphal arch, while St. Peter’s did not.

If S. Paolo was purposely designed to imitate St. Peter’s, to become a sister shrine, it nevertheless differed in form from St. Peter’s by having, as already mentioned, a much broader, taller transept whose floor level rose above that of the nave. Richard Krautheimer has argued that only at S. Paolo did the grand Roman, T-shaped basilica with an awning take on definitive form and become a “normalized type.” But, as far as I can see, S. Prassede does not conform to this type. Most

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13 The nave entablatures at S. Prassede were fashioned entirely from reused parts, but the fancier blocks available, the ones with carved ornament, were set up next to the triumphal arch to create a scenic crescendo; see my, “Focusing on the Celebrant: The Column Display inside Santa Prassede,” Mededelingen van het Nederlands Instituut te Rome, Historical Studies 59 (2001): 129–159, esp. 133. The orders in St. Peter’s nave, moreover, had a rhythmic alternation created in the column shafts, grouped according to marble type. The alternation started out slowly near the entry to the nave, but speeded up toward the triumphal arch. For more, see Emerick, Tempioetto, 217–219.

14 Pope Leo I built this triumphal arch in the 440s.

15 Providing similar grand architectural stages in Rome for the cults of Peter and Paul played into the papally sponsored propaganda campaign to feature Rome as Peter’s and Paul’s city, that is, to redirect people’s attention away from the monuments of the pagan city to those of the Christian one. Damasus (366–384) and Leo I (440–461) both memorably promoted Rome as Christian in this way. See especially Charles Pietri, “Concordia apostolorum et renovatio urbis ( culte des martyrs et propaganda pontificale),” Mélanges d’archéologie et d’histoire, 73 (1961): 275–322. Pietri and others take for granted that the topos played upon political notions of imperium in pagan style, but recently debate has opened on this topic; see Emerick, Tempioetto, 316–327, for a summary.

16 To accommodate both the site’s topography and pre-existing Pauline memorial; see now Giorgio Filippi and Sibie de Blauuw, “San Paolo fuori le mura: la disposizione liturgica fino a Gregorio Magno,” Mededelingen van het Nederlands Instituut te Rome, Historical Studies 59 (2000): 5–25.

17 The type, he said, that builders would imitate both in Rome and north of the Alps during the Middle Ages; see CCBR vol. V (1977), 284–285. It could only have taken shape very slowly in memory: the arena at both St. Peter’s and S. Paolo, Krautheimer remarked, did not become genuine quadrizonitcuses until the reign of Pope Symmachus (498–514) at the earliest. CCBR vol. V (1977), 159, 267, and 284.
Fig. 6 Plan showing St. Peter's under Pope Sixtus III (432-440) (adapted from S. de Blaauw, Cultus et decor, 1994, Fig. 19).
of its features go back emphatically to St. Peter's. Such extensive formal correspondence between two monuments in the same city could not have been casual. The builders of S. Prassede must have been harking back directly to St. Peter's, and must have expected users of their new church to understand the reference. But what "St. Peter's" did S. Prassede recall or evoke for Romans in 819? Could it possibly have been the St. Peter's that Pope Sixtus III created?

The Vatican and the Cult of Relics

In the nearly four centuries that had passed between the reigns of Popes Sixtus III and Paschal I, the Roman people's perception of the great church at the Vatican had again changed radically.20 If in the 430s, Sixtus III had used the temporal liturgy, that is, the papal station liturgy, to transform Constantine's old cemetery complex into a full-fledged church in a papal system of churches, then a few generations later, in the early sixth century, Pope Symmachus exploited the rapidly growing cult of the saints, that is, the sacramental liturgy, in a new attempt to remake St. Peter's – to make it over into a cathedral.

Symmachus used the church in his struggle to secure the papal throne from the antipope Lawrence between 498 and 506.21 Since Lawrence had possession of the regular papal palace and cathedral at the Lateran, Symmachus worked to project his claims from St. Peter's at the Vatican where he built a papal residence in the atrium (some rooms called episcopia in the LP) and remodelled the late fourth-century baptistery in the north transept's exedra as the double of the one that his rival Lawrence was using at the Lateran. That project required him to set up three separate sacred foci, or confessio (confessiones), around the baptistery's font – for John the Baptist and John the Evangelist in the exedra, and then in the north transept arm, another for the Holy Cross (Fig. 7). In the Liber Pontificalis we read that the confessio were fashioned of silver and that they were set up under arches and/or ciboria of silver inside cubicula or oratories.22 We would call them chapels.23 But while Symmachus patterned his cubicula on the chapels that Pope Hilarus (461–468) had built at the Lateran Baptistery,24 Symmachus's stood right out in the basilica of St. Peter's itself, a genuine first in Rome. Moreover, Symmachus converted the easternmost of the two imperial mausolea that had long been attached to St. Peter's into a basilica Sancti Andreæ apostoli, that is, into a holy place like the church of St. Peter's proper, and then in five of the converted mausoleum's seven exedrae he set up chapels with confessio dedicated to saints, and among them one for Andrew, Peter's brother, at the main exedra opposite the entry.25

From the later fifth-century onward, the word confessio was often used to designate the memoria or tomb of a Christian hero, martyr or other kind of saint.26 Aediculae and other memorials in honor of the dead, heroic or otherwise, had always punctuated the space in the Vatican complex, which had started out as a Christian cemetery. Though the confessio of the saints that Symmachus erected contained no bones, they probably had contact relics, and could recall for worshipers "real confessio" where one found the actual bones of the honored dead, and at this site, of course, the confessio of Peter at the center of the transept. Symmachus thus exploited the cult of the saints to amplify the solemnity of his cathedral at the Vatican, and by extension to provide a more imposing architectural theater in which to display him-

19 Except for the atrial quadrilateral, see the previous note.
24 LP 48 (V. Hilarius), cc. 2–5.
25 LP 53 (V. Symmachus), c. 6; de Blauw, Cultus et decor, 485–487, esp. n. 199 on p. 487.
26 See "confessio" in Medio Latinitatis Lexicon Minus. In his or her sacrifice of lift, the martyr (= witness in Greek) acknowledges or "confesses" to the truth of the Gospels.
Fig. 7 Plan showing the chapels that Pope Symmachus (498-514) erected in St. Peter's (adapted from S. de Blaauw, Cultus et decor, 1994, Fig. 19).
self as leader of the Roman people in worship. Of course, a papal mass had long been celebrated at the Vatican on June 29\(^{27}\) each year for the *natalitium Petri Apostolorum Principis*.\(^{27}\) The papal stational liturgy early comprised some important feasts in the sanctoral calendar (not only the moveable feasts of the temporal). By the early fifth century, as we have seen, papal masses on Christmas Day (December 25\(^{29}\)) and Epiphany (January 6\(^{h}\)) were being celebrated at St. Peter’s as well.\(^{28}\) As Pierre Jounel has underlined, Late Antique and Medieval worshipers saw Christ as the church’s main and principal martyr, and thus treated the *natalitium Domini nostri Iesu Christi* and the *Epiphania Domini* as feasts in both the temporal and the sanctoral liturgies.\(^{29}\) To these papal stations at St. Peter’s Symmachus very likely established a new one for the *natalitium Beatle Andreae Apostoli* on November 30\(^{4}\).\(^{30}\) Around 500, then, the temporal and sanctoral liturgies intertwined under *papal* leadership most strikingly at St. Peter’s.

By distinguishing St. Peter’s both architecturally and liturgically as the preeminent sanctuary in Rome for the papal sanctoral liturgy, Symmachus reinforced a developing trend and provided future popes with special opportunities.\(^{31}\) As the cult of the saints burgeoned in the city during the next centuries, and as popes sought to direct and even control such worship for their own advantage, they turned again and again to St. Peter’s for the purpose. And the tool they used there was the altar.\(^{32}\)

Nowhere in the written record treating Symmachus’s chapels at St. Peter’s do we read of altars in connection with the saints’ confessio. The confessio must have had altars of course, because the masses performed for the saints’ *natalitia* required them. But around 500, such altars were secondary items. Roman builders around then only slowly to make them the primary focus of a sanctuary by combining the mensa and confessio in one single, sacred, architectural form, that is, in a permanent altar-block made of masonry.\(^{33}\) Between 588 and 604, Popes Pelagius II and Gregory I took a giant step in this direction when they magnified the grave of Peter at the main focus of the Vatican complex (Figs. 8 and 9).\(^{34}\) They erected an altar on top of Peter’s grave to create a tower-like two-story structure at the chord of the apse. Priests served at the altar above by standing upon a more or less high podium that filled the apse behind the altar-grave. The grave below was accessible in front via a *fenestella confessionis*, and in back via an annular crypt buried in the high podium. A *pergola* of six Corinthian columns standing on the transept floor in front of the altar-grave, and a ciborium with four more such columns rising over the altar, both focused worshipers’ attention dramatically during the mass on the celebrants standing at the front of the podium or seated upon the *synthonion and cathedra* at the back. This mise-en-scène put the tomb of Peter beyond the easy reach of worshippers, forcing them to approach it from in front via a narrow vestibule framed by a column screen, or from behind through a dark and narrow ring-crypt and a somewhat less narrow axial corridor inside the podium. Moreover, during mass this stage set separated

and elevated the clergy both actually and figuratively from lay participants gathered on the transept and nave floor.

The axial corridor in its turn had an altar analogous to that visible from outside at the focus of the ensemble. It too was made of solid masonry set up permanently on its site and like the altar-grave out front, combined mensa and confessio, with receptacles for relics in the altar-block itself. This reliquary altar, which historians can confidently date and reconstruct from the data provided by archaeologists, is one of the earliest and best documented such examples in Rome.\(^{35}\) It

\(^{27}\) De Blauw, *Cultus et decor*, 509–511. Nota, *natalitium* a saint’s “birthday,” that is, the day when his or her death is said to have occurred — to be commemorated each year with a mass (thus the yearly cycle of feasts in the sanctoral calendar).

\(^{28}\) See n. 6 above.

\(^{29}\) Pierre Jounel, *Le culte des saints dans les basiliques du Latran et du Vaticain au douzième siècle* (Rome: Collection de l’École Française de Rome, 1977), 106, 212, 326–327. The item, *Natus Christus in Basilica Indica*, tops the list of martyrs’ birthdays celebrated by the early Roman church recorded in the *Depositio Morpynum* of A.D. 354; see Roberto Valentini and Giuseppe Zucheretti, ed., *Codice topografico della città di Roma*, 4 vols. (Rome: R. Istituto Storico Italiano, 1940–53), vol. II. Of course, the birthday celebrations in question (see December 25\(^{h}\) and January 6\(^{h}\)) commemorated Christ’s actual birth, not his martyrdom by crucifixion. In the temporal liturgy throughout the Middle Ages, only Christmas and Epiphany had fixed calendar dates.

\(^{30}\) The cult of Andrew was introduced in Rome by Pope Simplicius (468–483) and was celebrated on November 30\(^{th}\) throughout the Mediterranean world in the later fifth century (in Rome, Constantinople, Antioch, and Alexandria); see Jounel, *Le culte des saints*, 158. The writer of the *vita* of Pope Leo III (795–816) in the *LP* calls the pope’s celebration of Andrew on that day at St. Peter’s an “ancient custom” (*LP* 98, cc. 19–20); discussed by de Blauw, *Cultus et decor*, 601. Was the papal mass in honor of Andrew celebrated in Symmachus’s basilica of St. Andrew, or elsewhere in St. Peter’s? We do not know.

\(^{31}\) The trend, that is, that began in the later fourth century when popes came to St. Peter’s to officiate at the two chief *sanual* celebrations of the Roman calendar: Christmas and the Feast of Peter and Paul (June 29\(^{h}\)).

\(^{32}\) For the emergence of the *ciborium* altar in Rome under papal patronage, see Sible de Blauw, “L’alare nelle chiese di Roma come centro di culto e della commemorazione papale,” *Roma nell’alto medioevo*, 27 April – 1 May 2000. Serimina di studio del Centro Italiano Spoletrino dell’Alto Medioevo 48. (Spoleto: Centro Italiano Spolerino dell’Alto Medioevo, 2001). 969–989. Here de Blauw focuses mainly on the archaeological record; he does not link his account with the rise of the cult of the saints in Rome.


\(^{34}\) Bruno M. Apolloni Gherri, *Cultus et decor*, 178–182. True, the *ciborium* altar sits on top of the Pelagian/Gregorian pavement in the axial corridor and
Fig. 8 Plan showing the chapels in St. Peter's under Pope Gregory I (590–604) (adapted from S. de Blaauw, Cultus et decor, 1994, Fig. 19).
transformed the axial corridor into a proper chapel, that is, into another autonomous sanctuary focused on relics. Both the famous altar-grave at the focus of the transept and this chapel buried in its apse were devices for the papal/priestly control of the worship of the saints.

Indeed, this entire system with its two special altars responded to a new, radically changed conception of the mass. During the Early Middle Ages, the church, represented by the priest, came to insist on its power to recreate the body and blood of Christ on the altar, and came to present that eucharistic act as its offering to the Father. Here a religious image of the gift and counter-gift came into play – an image as old as the northern Germanic sagas or as ancient as the Roman Republican notion of sacrifice summed up in the phrase, *do ut des* ("I give so that you give"). Thus during the mass, the Early Medieval church saw God as receiving a gift or offering that He would be constrained to reciprocate by granting a gift of like value in return. This opened the way for the so-called *missive mass*. Such a *missa specialis*, celebrated ad hoc at the request of an individual who was seeking to intensify his or her plea for some specific hoped-for future outcome, contrasted with the traditional *missa publica* that the faithful celebrated corporately on a regular, predetermined schedule to reconfirm their union with God. Indeed the *missa specialis* took on a definite apotropaic function.

Early Medieval sacramentaries are full of votive masses meant could be either an integral feature of the shrine or a later addition to it. The altar's surviving stump looks very roughly made. It has a trapezoidal, not rectangular, plan, and it has irregular courses of reused brick set in high mortar beds (all once succo clad?). This roughness induced Apollonio Ghetti and the other writers of the *Esplomzioni* to designate it a later addition to the Pelagian/Gregorian shrine (through an Early Medieval one to be sure). In *CBCR* vol. V (1977), 197, Richard Krautheimer pointed out that the altar's masonry was adequate for an architectural element that had no weight-bearing role. Since the Pelagian/Gregorian shrine generally has a rough fabric that incorporates many ill-fitting, reused parts – in walls, balustrades, and pavements – the roughness of the reliquary altar from the axial corridor does not really stand out. It could well be an integral part of the original shrine.


to protect and/or obtain this-worldly favors for an individual in all possible emergencies. In them, intercession and propitiation came to the fore as the mass's purpose, and this development quickly colored and transformed the meaning of the missa publica as well. If in Early Christian times the mass gave concrete form to the idea that God dwells among his people, and if the priest performed at the altar as one among the celebrants, then during the Early Middle Ages as the mass took on a more intercessory aspect, the priest came to the fore as the main focus of the ceremony, as the celebrant whom the faithful now followed at a certain distance and no longer quite as equals or as co-celebrants. To join with God in eucharistic celebration, that is, to obtain favors and intercessions from Him or to appease and conciliate Him, the faithful now sought first to join with the priest, the sacrificer who offered the church's greatest gift to God. The mass became a peculiarly clerical affair, the priests sacrificing for the faithful and becoming thereby mediators between them (the faithful) and God, or rather, between them and the saints who sponsored them in God's heavenly court. 38

Thus as Early Medieval pilgrims approached the tomb of Peter in the axial corridor inside St. Peter's apsidal podium, they found the way quite barred by the meter-high reliquary altar which stood out in the space immediately in front of the memorial. Prayers for Peter's intercession at this site, or at least the kind that the votive mass made efficacious, required priestly mediation. The Pelagian/Gregorian liturgical stage set at St. Peter's helped put priests, and by extension popes, in control of a worshiper's access to the holy.

The Vatican Complex: Many Churches in One

St. Peter's under Symmachus had already become a church with a main memorial to Peter accompanied by a number of similar, supplementary memorials to other saints. In all of the latter, one may suppose, liturgical furniture was soon installed that permitted strict clerical direction and control of worship. Were the chapels that Symmachus built soon re-equipped with permanent reliquary altars in masonry? We do not know, but in 688, a century after the Pelagian/Gregorian altar-grave was installed, documents show that Pope Sergius I established a new chapel in the transept on the south side of Peter's shrine, where apparently he set up an altar over a tomb into which he translated the body of the confessors Pope Leo I from its former resting place at the entry to the sacristy (Fig. 10). 39 In the Liber Pontificalis, moreover, we read how, in the 730s, Gregory III established a chapel to the Savior, His Mother, and All the Saints in the southwest corner of St. Peter's nave, and set up a reliquary altar there behind a column-screen or pergola. 40

In the 750s, Stephen II transformed the imperial mausoleum at the church's southwest corner into a basilica for St. Petronilla, Peter's legendary daughter; in the 760s Paul I translated the body of Petronilla there from her tomb on the Via Appia. 41 Since the Liber Pontificalis says that Leo III en-shrined Petronilla's altar with a silver-clad ciborium on porphyry columns, 42 we may suppose that Paul had already provided it with the requisite liturgical furniture for the display of the celebrant at mass. In 783-4 Pope Hadrian translated relics of some unknown saints into the chapel that Pope John VII (705-707) had erected in honor of Mary which was located at the back of the basilica's north outer aisle. Very likely Hadrian put the relics in question inside the altar that John VII had already provided at the chapel's eastern focus, which stood beneath a deep arch whose west end stood on a pair of fancy helical columns, and whose east end butted against (and was supported by) the chapel's rear east wall. Thus if John VII did not set up a reliquary altar here, Hadrian apparently did. 43 Hadrian also erected a chapel in

38 Angenendt, Das Frühmitteleurop, in the fourth through ninth-century process in the Western church in terms of loss and retreat. As the public civic society of the Ancient Roman Empire disappeared, he said, and a ruralized western Europe reverted to a society based on person-to-person bonds secured by oath and by the age-old communal form of the giving and receiving of gifts, religion reverted at the same time to more rigid and "simplex," that is, "archaic" forms. But see the 1979 article by Patrick Geary, "Coercion of Saints in Medieval Religious Practice," reprinted in Living with the Dead in the Middle Ages (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 116-124. Such pejorative assessments of the workings of reciprocity in Medieval forms of piety, he argued, may highlight or even underpin modern religious values, but they (the pejorative assessments) beg the historical question.

39 LP 86 (V. Sergii III), c. 12. De Blauw, Catae et decet, 568-569, noted that, in 1607, the sarcophagus of Leo I came to light beneath a more recent reliquary altar and the foundations of an older altar from their placement in the chapel, the sarcophagus and altar took to go back to the time of Sergius I. In LP 98 (V. Leonis III), cc. 84 and 87, one reads that Leo III established both an altar and a confessio of Leo I in St. Peter's.

40 LP 92 (V. Gregorii III), cc. 6-7: "In quo faciens pergolam . . . et faciem altaris et confessionem carnem regidam vestivit argento . . . ."

41 LP 94 (V. Stephani I), cc. 52: and LP 95 (V. Pauli), c. 3.

42 LP 98 (V. Leonis III), c. 60.

43 See LP 88 (V. Johannis VII), cc. 1 and 6 for the founding of Pope John VII's chapel; originally the chapel enshrined an icon of Mary, and not, apparently, any relics. But compare De Blauw, Catae et decet, 573, who noted that the guide for pilgrims to St. Peter's in the Notitia Ecclesiarum (in its eighth-century reduction) named John VII's chapel, ad Pentecosten. Couldn't it (the church, he asked, have enthroned relics of the stable and/or manager of Christ's Nativity? However this may be, an historic inscription, cut crudely in marble, which came from the chapel's north wall, and is now preserved in the Capella di S. Maria delle Forni (or Lateran) in the Vatican Grottoes, tells, that during the reign of Pope Hadrian I, "relics of the saints" were stored in this chapel on November 22 of indiction VII (i.e., in 783-784); the inscription also names a fenced-in vineyard located "in Septimianum," probably to insure that all its revenue, in integra, would go to the support of offices in the chapel (possibly for lighting?):

+ TEMPORIBVS

D N HADRIANI

PAPA HIC RECVDN

DTA SVM (tune) RELIQVII

AS (reliquiae) SANCTOR IN

MESE NOEBBRI

IN D XXII IND SEPTIMA. BINE

55
Fig. 10  Plan showing the major chapels in St. Peter's under Pope Paschal I (817–824) (adapted from S. de Blaauw, Cultus et decor, 1994, Fig. 25).
honor of his patron saint, Hadrian of Nicomedia, in the transept's southwestern corner (next to the exedra) and seems very likely to have focused it on a reliquary altar.  

In 805–806, as we can deduce from the report in the Liber Pontificalis, Leo III remodeled Symmachus's chapel of the Holy Cross and likewise set up a ciborium over a silver-clad altar provided with many rich decorations. Did this altar contain a cross relic? In 807–808, Leo III clad the tomb of Gregory I in the narthex with silver which shows that it had become a proper "altar." Moreover, in 817, at very nearly the moment that he began work at S. Prassede, Paschal I built two important chapels in St. Peter's transept, one small, and one large. He translated the bodies of the third-century papal martyrs, Sixtus II and Fabian, into the smaller, located just south of the Pettine shrine; and translated the bodies of the Roman protomartyrs Processus and Martinianus, Peter's juniors, into the larger, located in the southeast corner of the transept's south exedra. These too seem to have been outfitted with reliquary altars for the display of the celebrant in the new, Early Medieval fashion.

At the same time that the Early Medieval popes installed all this new liturgical furniture in St. Peter's, they undertook to enhance the Pelagian/Gregorian altar-grave at the church's main focus— that is, they kept remodeling it to bring more dignity and attention to the celebrant there. Thus Pope Honorius I (625–638) embellished Peter's confessio with silver, and Sergius (687–701) lifted a silver ciborium over the cathedra at the back of the apse. In the 730s, Gregory III set up a second pergola of six columns in front of the shrine, a column screen that further distanced the celebrant from the faithful while heightening the worshippers' focus upon him (and further dramatizing the celebrant's special status during the mass).

Hadrian (772–795) outdid all his predecessors in dignifying the altar-grave as a special place. He paved the confessio's vestibule with silver, clad the confessio, the front of the altar, and the crypt with hundreds of pounds of gold, put silver railings around the area in front of the podium, and provided many images, in the round and in relief, which glittered in gold. He also suspended a huge cross-shaped lamp with 1365 "candles" over the pretbyterium. His successor Leo III went even further. He enlarged the apsidal podium to provide more space for liturgical movement, extending it eastward, which required him to suppress the two frontal Pelagian/Gregorian stairways and set up new ones which ran perpendicular to the longitudinal axis of the confessio's vestibule. In the process, Leo III took care to preserve and reuse the striking porphyry steps from the Pelagian/Gregorian shrine. The resulting flat, front face of the podium was luxuriously clad with porphyry slabs to match the reused steps in the new stairway. Leo III also dismantled the original ciborium over the altar-grave and set up a much larger one clad with gilded silver, raised on four tall porphyry columns, also clad in silver. As for the altar-grave that rose at the center of this composition, Leo III re-clad it in gold from bottom to top, thus improving on his predecessor's effort here. He entirely fenced off the space in front of the podium with railings in silver to restrict the movement of worshipers in front of Peter's shrine. He also covered the entablatures of the two imposing six-column pergolas to the east of the altar-grave with silver sheets. Finally, he set up a huge silver arch over the central intercolumniation of the easternmost pergola in front of the apsidal podium, a focusing device par excellence.

Thus during the course of the seventh and eighth century, but mostly in the eighth, the popes used a new liturgical tool, the reliquary altar, to transform St. Peter's into a church focused on the worship of the saints, a church that had a main shrine to Peter and many secondary ones to other important saints in side chapels, and a church in which the people's access to the sacred in all the shrines was under clerical, indeed papal, mediation.
The Petrine Sacred Machinery Put to Work at S. Prassede

In a recent publication I argued that Paschal put exactly the same kind of liturgical furniture into S. Prassede as was found at St. Peter’s. The isometric drawing in Fig. 11 summarises my reconstruction of Paschal I’s presbytery, which I based upon an inspection of its remains and on a close reading of both Paschal’s vita in the Liber Pontificalis and an eye-witness account of an eighteenth-century excavation at this site.55 The pope clearly built an altar-grave in the Early Medieval Petrine mode and put it at the focus of a church that, as I argue above, was planned to recall or evoke St. Peter’s (compare Figs. 5 and 10). Moreover, just as at St. Peter’s, at S. Prassede a chapel focused on a reliquary altar was set out beneath the apsidal podium in the crypt’s axial corridor.56 The Liber Pontificalis says that Paschal translated “many bodies of saints” into his church. Thanks to the contemporary account of that translation inscribed in a marble plaque still preserved at S. Prassede, we know that Paschal specifically distributed these bodies in various memorials there – some 2000 plus bodies in the main shrine at the apse, with its chapel under the apsidal podium, then the body of Zeno and two other saints in a chapel dedicated to Zeno attached to the right aisle, and finally the bodies of Maurus and forty others in the sacristy dedicated to the Baptist “on the left side of the church.”57

No side altars survive; they, like the main shrine in S. Prassede’s apse, have all disappeared during the church’s numerous remodelings campaigns. Moreover, from the original array of chapels, only the Zeno Chapel survives (or survives in large part). But by analogy to the reliquary altar that can be reconstructed for the chapel beneath S. Prassede’s apsidal podium, we can safely presume that the altars in the Zeno Chapel and the sacristy were similar, and thus also similar to those in the side chapels at St. Peter’s.58 S. Prassede, like St. Peter’s, was a church conceived as a “family” of saints’ memorials.59 Goodson has shown how Pope Paschal I re-step-graded culminating in the period between 600 and 800 when the worship of the saints became linked indissolubly with the celebration of the eucharist: I reason that as long as priests are required for worship of a saint (as his or her confessio understood as a reliquary altar), an individual worshipper has no “direct” contact with that saint. Whether standing in a presbytery or a chapel, the reliquary altar puts a priest in strict control of the people’s access to the holy.

55 Emerick, “Focusing on the Celebrant.” S. Prassede’s original presbytery furniture, much of which survived down to the early eighteenth century, was destroyed between 1728 and 1734 when the present presbytery was constructed. Benigno Alosi, prior of the monastery at S. Prassede, who participated in this project and in the exploratory excavations at the site that preceded the church’s remodeling, kept a record of what was found in his “Riformazione Della Fabbrica del nuovo Mostre Maggiori della Venerabile Chiesa di S. Prassede di Roma . . . ,” 1729. Alosi’s manuscript, once preserved in the monastery at Vallombrosa, was lost in the 1970s. The Bibliotheca Hertziana, Rome, has a photocopy (partial) and the monastery library at St. Prassede has a transcription made in 1881 (apparently complete). For a new edition based on both the photocopy and the transcription, see now Caterina-Giovanna Coda, Duemilaercento corpi di morti (Rome: Missione Eclesiastica di Roma, 2004), 17–78.

56 For the altar there, see especially Bruno M. Apollonii Ghetti, Santa Prasse (Rome: Le Chiese di Roma Illustrate, 1961), 44–48, who provides a cogent sequel to his earlier pages on the reliquary altar from the Pelagian/Gregorian liturgical stage set at the Vatican (see his Esplainati cited in n. 34 above). Apollonii Ghetti cited excerpts from Alosi’s manuscript (see previous note) in which Alosi described the “cherche altar” he saw inside the chapel below S. Prassede’s apsidal podium. Since that altar so closely resembled the Pelagian/Gregorian one that Apollonii Ghetti had found at the Vatican in the 1940s, he judged that the altar that Alosi saw must have been the one that Paschal had installed there.


The Zeno Chapel, oriented to the north, opened off the north aisle about halfway down. The chapel to the 2000 saints, oriented to the east, was located beneath the apsidal podium. But where was S. Prassede’s sacristy, the Chapel dedicated to the Baptist (and Maurs and forty others)? I suggest that it was located at the basilica’s southeast corner, and that it had a western orientation in a manner similar to the sacristy at St. Peter’s in Paschal I’s day. See my hypothetical reconstruction of S. Prassede’s original plan in Fig. 5 (compare Fig. 10; see de Blauw, Cultus et decore, 460–470, for the location of the original sacristy at St. Peter’s).

Benigno Davanzati, Notizie al pellegrino della basilica di Santa Prassede (Rome: Antonio de’ Rossi, 1725). 393–394, suggested that the sacristy in Paschal I’s S. Prassede must have been located near the altar of S. Carlo Borromeo in the chapel dedicated to him that stood (and still stands) near the southeast corner of the basilica of S. Prassede. He wrote that vestiges of an old chapel, ruined by the passage of time, were visible there immediately behind the altar. “Ma proponiamo credere, che fosse (la sacristia), dove ad presente l’altare di S. Carlo, poiché si vede appresso al medesimo si vedono le vestige d’una Cappella, esistente dal tempo . . . .” For the location of the chapel of S. Carlo Borromeo see the convenient plan in Apollonii Ghetti, Santa Prassede (fold-out plate). Davanzati, p. 237, also recorded that the altar of S. Carlo had been restored in 1710. Were the historic “vestiges” in question observed at that time?

59 For the concept of the Memorialecheieufamille, so called, see Haussling.
moved the bodies of saints from cemeteries on every major road leading out from the city, often intervening in places where for hundreds of years previously worshipers had honored their memoriae. By gathering all these saints at S. Prassede and by installing their remains in reliquary altars at the focus of ceremonial spaces, Paschal I put them beyond the immediate reach of worshipers and thus made worshipers depend much more on priests for access to them. Paschal I, too, was using the burgeoning cult of the saints to bring more attention and luster to the Roman priesthood.

If by the second decade of the ninth century St. Peter's had made papal control of the sanctoral liturgy real and concrete for worshipers in Rome, why was Paschal putting this Petrine sacred machinery to work at S. Prassede? What was he trying to do besides control people's great interest in the cult of the saints? I will argue here that by shaping or designing S. Prassede as he did, Paschal I could effectively intervene in the city's monumental Christian topography to enhance his role as leader, and in effect, create a "papal city" all his own.

Paschal I's Rome: A City of Martyrs and Confessors

Paschal I translated the wide-flung, Roman, extramural memoriae dramatically inside the city, to S. Prassede, to make them a feature of regular worship there. But we should not consider this act an entirely new departure. Indeed, Paschal's gesture was the culmination of a process, underway since the seventh century, by which the temporal and sanctoral liturgies came to intertwine upon the menae of the intramural churches. This happened notably in the city's twenty plus tituli including S. Prassede (Fig. 1). By the early ninth century, these intramural churches had mostly taken over from the extramural memoriae as foci for the people's worship of the saints.

We do not usually view the Roman tituli in this way. Until a short while ago, scholars saw them principally as witnesses to the city's pre-Constantinian parochial system; they were thought to be Rome's earliest parish churches. But recently Federico Guidobaldi has argued cogently that the city's tituli came only very slowly to underpin the parochial organization of the Roman church, since 400 and 600, and furthermore that, between about 600 and 800, they took on a wholly new life in the city when their users dedicated them to Early Christian martyrs. We do well to heed these startling Roman Early Medieval developments. By Leo III's reign the tituli had eclipsed the ancient martyria outside the city's walls as the sites where Romans celebrated the saints' natalicia. Or all but all eclipsed them.

To be sure, the tituli never took over in this way from the extramural martyria of Peter, Paul, and Lawrence. Between 600 and 800, the latter became the leading Roman sanctuaries for the sanctoral liturgy, and St. Peter's chief among them. Moreover, during this time, owing to the rapid development of the papal stationary liturgy, St. Peter's, St. Paul's, and St. Lorenzo also became the prime foci, with S. Maria Maggiore and the Lateran, for the temporal liturgy. In other words, if the sanctuaries at the tombs of Peter, Paul, and Lawrence had started out as sites for the sanctoral liturgy and had also become, during the Early Middle Ages "regular churches," the tituli in their turn had stared out as regular churches and during the Early Middle Ages had become "martyria" of a sort.

As Johann Kirsch has explained, the city's titular priests led worship of the saints from the start both at their tituli and at the saints' tombs in the specific extramural cemeteries linked with their intramural tituli. The martyrs' shrines in the thirty-six cemeteries outside Rome's walls never had their own regular clergy: the titular priests administered them. As time went on, however, the titular priests lost their immediate links with the cemeteries. The Liber Pontificalis says that before his elevation as pope and while he was serving as

Münchkonv., 201–213, especially 213. For the idea of the Early Christian and Early Medieval Memorialkirchenfamilie, of which the Early Medieval Memorialkirchenfamilie is a variety, see the art historian Edgar Lehmah (extensive bibliography in Hüssling, Münchkonv., 201–202). The "perfect example" (Hüssling, ibid.) of the Memorialkirchenfamilie in the Latin West was St. Peter's. Some of the reliquary altars that focused worship there, it is true, featured members of an "actual" family, namely Peter and his brother Andrew, and his daughter Petronilla. But St. Peter's many altars also enshrined the relics of Peter's sainted papal successors, his Roman jniors (Processius and Martinianus), the Roman protomartyr Lawrence, and even "All the Saints" in the chapel dedicated by Gregory III (see my Fig. 10). The "Family" in question is more spiritual than anything else, something ad hoc at this special site.

Goodwin, "Relic Translations."

But of course they did not take over from the great extramural churches built in honor of Peter, Paul, or Lawrence. I speak more about this key issue just below.

Johann P. Kirsch, Die römischen Titelkirchen im Altremium (Paderborn: Verlag Schöningh, 1918), 127–137, esp. 133.


Joanne, La ruote dei santi, 398–399, concluded her study arguing that, already by the end of the eighth century, the popes had made St. Peter's into the "Roman center of the cult of the saints."

Fig. 11 Rome, S. Prassede, author's reconstruction of Pope Paschal I's choir and presbytery of 817-819 (isometric drawing adapted from R. Krautheimer, CBCR vol. III, 1968, fig. 226, by Johannes Knoop).
S. Susanna's titular priest, Sergius I (687–701) had celebrated mass energetically (impigro) in the different cemeteries (per cimiteria diversa), from which we may deduce that, around 700 in Rome, a titular priest had no regularly assigned duties in the cemeteries. Moreover, when Pope Gregory III (731–741) decreed that vigils and masses for the saints' natalicia be observed in the extramural cemeteries, he also had to appoint priests to these duties pro tempore. Ordinary or regular celebrations of the saints in the cemeteries had clearly lapsed. That the Lateran curia had to organize such worship ad hoc in the extramural cemeteries during the later seventh and early eighth centuries probably shows how serious was its (the curiae's) collapse following Rome's dereliction in the aftermath of Justinian's disastrous Reconquest of Italy.

Nevertheless, as the city recovered in the seventh century, and indeed, burgeoned as capital of the Republic of St. Peter in the eighth, the Lateran did not attempt to bring the extramural shrines into play liturgically in any ordinary way; that is, as they had been prior to the Reconquest. Hadrian I (772–795) and Leo III (795–816) might restore ruined cemetery basilicas, but they gave them few or no liturgical vessels. By the last third of the eighth century and the first decade of the ninth, any regular offices in honor of the saints took place either at the three great extramural basilicas (of Peter, Paul, and Lawrence) or in the intramural churches, especially the tituli. Pilgrims still visited the extramural shrines (that is, the other ones besides those of Peter, Paul, and Lawrence), but the translations of the bodies they had long venerated there into churches located inside the city's walls greatly lessened the appeal of these cemeteries for pious visitors. If the popes first undertook to mediate worshipers' access to the relics of the saints at St. Peter's in the seventh and eighth centuries by installing reliquary altars in chapels there, at the end of the eighth and in the early ninth centuries they decisively undertook to do the same in the tituli.

The Liber Pontificalis report that Pope Paul (757–767) removed the bodies of the saints from the ruined extramural cemeteries and buried them with all honor (cum condementi studiuii recordi honor) inside the city, some in the tituli and others in the diaconiae, monasteries, and other churches, helps show how the process started. Presumably the bodies in question went into the new reliquary altars. But it was under Leo III (795–816) that the Lateran curia seems to have fully understood how to use such altars to good effect in churches inside the city, especially in the tituli. That is how I would understand Pope Leo III's building of two imposing new churches at the ancient tituli of S. Susanna near the Baths of Diocletian and SS. Nereo e Achilleo near the Baths of Caracalla (Fig. 1). While it is true that only S. Susanna among these two sanctuaries retained its full titular status in Leo's day, the other having become, sometime between 600 and 776, a deaconry, and while it is also true that SS. Nereo e Achilleo had lost its place in the papal stational liturgy in the process, the new deaconry could not help but retain for ninth-century worshipers some aura of its old titular status.

Since ab origine neither titulus had a large meeting hall, both were soon eclipsed as places for regular worship by other nearby properties or tituli that did have that essential amenity and could serve efficiently as parish churches. S. Susanna languished over the centuries while the nearby titulus Cyriaci (later titulus S. Ciriacio in Thermis) thrived; SS. Nereo e Achilleo sank in importance as the nearby titulus Crescentiae (later titulus S. Xyst) took over. With Rome's depopulation in the mid-sixth century and slow recovery in the seventh and eighth, worshipers all but abandoned S. Susanna and SS. Nereo e Achilleo. Thus when Leo III rebuilt them, he did so not so much to house parishioners (S. Susanna) or provide charity (SS. Nereo e Achilleo) as to feature the altars inside dedicated to saints. The Liber Pontificalis records that at S. Susanna, Leo III "built the altar's confessio of fine silver, and that at SS. Nereo e Achilleo, he presented a "silver canopy." Clearly at both sanctuaries he set up imposing reliquary altars. In both Leo III worked to further the developing trend that saw important intramural churches and especially tituli in Rome take on more and more the aspect

68 LP 86 (V. Sergii I), c. 1.
69 LP 92 (V. Gregorii III), c. 17.
70 For analysis of both passages in the LP, see Duchesne in LP, I, 373, n. 3 (citing G. B. De Rossi); also Kirsch, Die römischen Titelkirchen, 211, 218–219.
73 LP 95 (V. Paulu), c. 4.
74 LP 98 (V. Leonis III), c. 9. CBCR, vol. IV (1970), pp. 254–278. S. Susanna = the former titulus Geai; see Kirsch, Die römischen Titelkirchen, 70–74. Leo had been titular priest here before his elevation as pope.
75 LP 98 (V. Leonis III), c. 111. CBCR vol. III (1967), 135–152. S. Nereo e Achilleo = the former titulus Fusciloris; see Kirsch, Die römischen Titelkirchen, 95–94.
76 Called dianissa in LP 98 (V. Leonis III), cc. 29, 75, and 112; see Geermann, More veternum, 64, 69, and 106.
77 The papal station for mass on Monday of Holy Week each year, which had long occurred at the titulus SS. Nerei e Achilles moved to the titulus Prasaeo on the Esquiline sometime during the eighth century; see Geermann, More veternum, 164; also Saxer, "L’utilizzazione," 1001 and n. 58 os 1004.
78 The redactors of Leo III' life in the Liber Pontificalis credit the pope with various donations to the 'deacncy' of SS. Nereo e Achilleo (cc. 25, 75, 112), but when they record Leo's reconstruction of the sanctuary (cc. 111, they call it a 'church.' Did they do so intentionally? To enhance Leo's credit by acknowledging SS. Nereo e Achilleo's ancient role in the city? See Raymond Davies, The Lives of the Eighth-Century Popes (Liber Pontificalis) (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1992), p. 230. SS. Nereo e Achilleo was the only titular church in Rome ever to be transformed into a deacncy; Geermann, More veternum, 164, n. 2.
80 LP 98 (V. Leonis III), c. 29.
81 Ibid., c. 111.
82 With either actual saints' bodies, or parts of their bodies, or with contact relics.
of martyria. By treating altars as supremely holy objects,\textsuperscript{61} by treating them as personifications of the saints,\textsuperscript{82} and by enshrining them in “regular churches” inside the city’s walls, Leo III hoped to frame, organize, and mediate the sanctoral liturgy in the city.

Paschal took over this project in 817 where Leo III left off and heightened it in every way he could. By rebuilding another of the little-used and minor tituli, S. Prassede,\textsuperscript{83} in the image of the city’s greatest papal shrine to the saints, and filling its multiple memorial altars with thousands of holy bodies, he found an even more effective way to take control of and mediate the Roman people’s engagement with the cult of the saints. Like Sixtus III or Symmachus before him, Paschal hoped to conjure with St. Peter’s image in Rome. But now the game had become more complex, with much more at stake for those who knew how to manipulate the religious stage machinery. By building S. Prassede, Paschal now appears to have been trying to blur the distinctions Romans usually made between the great patriarchal basilica at the Vatican (the main place where the popes mediated the Roman people’s access to the saints) and the city’s “regular churches,” especially the tituli (where Paschal was hoping he might also appear effectively as such a mediator). This is, strikingly, how Leo III had acted just previously when he both enhanced the altar-grave of Peter at the Vatican and set up prominent reliquary altars at the titulus of S. Susanna and the former titulus, then deaconry of SS. Nereo e Achilleo. Paschal, Leo III’s protégé,\textsuperscript{84} must have learned early on how the intertwining of the temporal and sanctoral liturgies upon the altars inside the city offered new opportunities for creating architectural images.

Federico Marazzi has argued that Paschal’s building program all but constituted an attempt to set up a “new papal city” much as Gregory IV would do in the early 840s when he founded Gregoriopolis at the mouth of the Tiber, or as Leo IV would do in the early 850s when he set up Civitas Lœnana at the Vatican.\textsuperscript{85} Indeed, such ambition, even megalomania, seems to be an earmark of the “Carolingian popes.” That Paschal’s predecessors Leo III and Hadrian I might seek to put their stamp on the city much as Gregory IV and Leo IV put their names on Roman satellite cities, seems to be the message of the famous Einsiedeln Itinerary, which recent study shows was no pilgrim’s guide, but a more curious and subtle monument — a kind of literary portrait of the city concocted during the reign Leo III.\textsuperscript{86} By giving equal weight to the pagan, Antique monuments and the Christian ones, early and late, the Itinerary “re-wrote” the city as an integral Christian whole. It pictured a “papal city,” an entity that in just these years had taken shape politically as well. During the eighth century an autonomous state under papal rule had emerged from the old Byzantine duchy of Rome.\textsuperscript{87} Thus I see Paschal’s building program as an effort by the ruler of this new theocracy, the Republic of St. Peter, to make “his city” viable, to use the cult of the saints to give it a shape, and in the process, to establish his control over Peter’s people there.

But the control that Paschal sought in this way looks now to have also comprised a specific, Christian, dogmatic claim — no less than a claim to papal primacy. Here I would argue we might extend to Paschal’s building program the assessment that Erik Thune has made of Paschal’s political imagery in two elaborate cross reliquaries that the pope gave to the Lateran and stashed inside a cypress wood box commissioned by Leo III.\textsuperscript{88} Although the reliquaries were hidden away and seen by very few, Thune found them fascinating nevertheless for the light they threw on the iconography of Paschal’s great public art commissions, namely the mosaics in the chancels of S. Prassede, S. Maria in Domnica, and S. Cecilia. All these, he argued, implicated a papal doctrine on the role of images in human salvation that Leo III, Paschal’s old protector and papal forbear, had first promoted.

Thune noted that when the Byzantine Emperor Leo V reinstated Iconoclasm in 815, Pope Leo III (795–816) seized the chance to magnify himself by castigating the emperor as a heretic and presenting himself as Christendom’s one true orthodox leader, that is, as an iconodule. The Danish scholar deduced this mainly from study of the iconography of the mosaics that Leo installed in his new church, SS. Nereo e Achilleo, a project datable to about 815 and thus framed by the reopening of the image controversy.\textsuperscript{89} The decoration, now lost, can be reconstructed from old records: a gennim cross loomed in the apse, Christ Transfigured appeared on the apsidal arch directly above the cross, and two icons of the Virgin enthroned bracketed the composition in the spandrels. Not only did it explore “issues of God’s visibility” as the Greek iconodules propounded them, said Thune, it also summed up a papal doctrine on images. Leo claimed to play a role in God’s plan to save humankind, that is, to mediate between the terrestrial and the heavenly, the material

\textsuperscript{61} De Blauwe, “L’altare,” 988, observed that from the via of Leo III (c. 4) onward in the LP, the compilers called altars “sacred” or “sacrosanct.”


\textsuperscript{63} From the start, the titulus S. Prassedi was eclipsed by the better equipped, nearby titulus Equitii (later titulus sancti Silvester et Martini, then S. Martino ai Monti); see Guidobaldi, “L’organizzazione dei tituli.”

\textsuperscript{64} LP 100 (V. Paschali II, c. 2: Leo III early noticed the priest Paschal and made him abbot of a monastery at the Vatican near St. Peter’s.

\textsuperscript{65} Federico Marazzi, “Le ‘città nuove’ pontificie e l’insediamento laziale nel IX secolo” in La storia dell’Alto Medioevo italiano (VI-VIII secolo) alla luce dell’archeologia — xere del Convegno Internazionale a Siena, 2 –6 dicembre 1992, ed. Riccardo Franchovich and Ghilaine Nyul (Florence: Edizioni all’Insegna del Giglio, 1994), 251–277, esp. 264–265. For Gregoriopolis, see LP 103 (V. Gregorii IV), c. 39–40; for the Leonine City, see LP 105 (V. Leonis IV), c. 38–40 and 68–74.


\textsuperscript{68} Erik Thune, Image and Relic, Mediating the Sacred in Early Medieval Rome (Rome: “L’Erma” di Bresciani, 2002), 166–171.

\textsuperscript{69} Ibid. chap. 6.
and the immaterial, as high priest, indeed as Peter's successor, the Christ-appointed binder and looser of matters spiritual on earth. Thus Leo posed, to be sure, as offerer of the eucharist at mass, but also as the main and most efficient provider of other salvific objects, namely the relics of the saints (including the wood of the cross) and images (of Christ and Mary). Thunó concluded that Paschal, Leo's most assiduous successor, restated this theme emphatically in his Lateran cross reliquaries and great public mosaic decorations. As Leo III had done before him, Paschal I sought to display himself as pope as the primary (priestly) mediator of a worshiper's access to sacred objects.

Paschal I did not just find new ways to illustrate this papal dogma (in mosaics, say), he found new ways, first at S. Prassede, to stage it architecturally as well. In this instance too Paschal developed and magnified initiatives of his predecessor, Leo III.

90 Ibid., 148-149, for a pithy summary. The way, during the Early Middle Ages, that the priest took the leading role in eucharistic celebration as the celebrant among celebrants, already discussed, resonates here; see n. 38 above.
91 Ibid., chap. 7.