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THE BUILDING INSCRIPTIONS AND THE DATES  
OF CONSTRUCTION OF OLD ST. PETER'S:  
A RECONSIDERATION



Writing this paper has been tedious work, and it will make, I fear, tedious reading. Still I feel it had to be done. There has been so much discussion about the date of construction of Old St. Peter's as well as about the building inscriptions separately that I thought it might be helpful to make the two interlock. So here we go.

Only three or four *termini, ante, post* or *ad* for the construction of the building have been generally accepted: its foundation by Constantine in the pontificate of Sylvester, as reported by the *Liber Pontificalis*, hence after January 31, 314 and before December 31, 335, these being Sylvester's dates<sup>1</sup>; the building of the apse (or, in a mood of over-skepticism, a part thereof), as attested to by brick stamps bearing Constantine's name, hence antedating May 13, 337, and found when, between 1592 and 1594, that was torn down<sup>2</sup>; the use of the pagan cemetery buried below the basilica still between 317 and 320, as witness a coin minted only during these years and found sealed inside an urn in a pagan mausoleum close to the aedicula of the apostle<sup>3</sup>; the donations of landed property *per diocesim Orientis* listed in the *Liber Pontificalis* and made by Constantine after his conquest of the East decided on September 28, 324, by the battle of Chrysopolis<sup>4</sup>. Additional epigraphic and historical evidence has been used by some but questioned by other scholars: the closing of a pagan sanctuary, the *Phrygianum*, presumably located near St. Peter's, for twenty-eight years sometime between 319 and 350, has been linked tentatively to construction going on at the basilica<sup>5</sup>; a decree promulgated

in 349 threatening punishment of *violationes sepulchrorum* post-dating 333 and hence, by implication, suggesting a more permissive outlook antedating that year, has been interpreted as a *terminus ante* for the demolition of the pagan cemetery below the basilica<sup>6</sup>; an entry in the calendar of 354 marking St. Peter's feast day still *in catacumbas* at S. Sebastiano, rather than at the Vatican – provided that the entry is not mutilated and that indeed it dates as late as 354<sup>7</sup>; finally, and indeed primarily, four building inscriptions once read in the basilica.

Depending on the interpretation, acceptance or refutation of this evidence, two schools of thought have formed among scholars. One, the “early-daters”, maintains that construction started between 319 and 322 and was terminated between the late twenties and 333, with the decoration possibly dragging on some time beyond<sup>8</sup>. The “late-daters”, on the other hand, set the beginning of work after 324 and before 333 and its completion after 354, a long time – up to ten or twelve years – being spent on demolishing and filling in the pagan cemetery, securing the fill by retaining walls, building the foundations of the church and thus preparing the platform on which the building rises<sup>9</sup>.

Myself, I have held successively both positions. In 1965, a “late-dater”, I proposed a starting date after 324 and completion as late as 360, for the atrium possibly as late as 390<sup>10</sup>. In 1976, working on the Corpus with Alfred Frazer – but for the chronology I was and remain respon-

<sup>1</sup> *e San Pietro in un documento precostantiniano della Necropoli Vaticana*, Rome, 1953, 66 ff.; J. Toynbee and J. B. Ward-Perkins, *The Shrine of St. Peter*, London, 1956, 196 f.

<sup>2</sup> W. Seston, “Hypothèse sur la date ... de Saint-Pierre de Rome”, *CabArch* 2 (1947), 153 ff.

<sup>3</sup> J. P. Kirsch, *Der stadtrömische christliche Festkalender im Altertum (Liturgiegeschichtliche Quellen, 7/8)*, Münster, 1924, 20 f.; H. Lietzmann, *Petrus und Paulus in Rom*, 2nd ed., Berlin, Leipzig, 1927, 109 ff.; E. Kirschbaum, *Die Gräber der Apostelfürsten*, Frankfurt a. M., 1957, 153 ff., 222.

<sup>4</sup> E. Josi, *op. cit.*, J. H. Jongkees, *Studies on Old St. Peter's*, Groningen, 1966, M. Guarducci, *op. cit.*; J. Ruysschaert, “La mosaïque absidale de St. Pierre”, *AttiP AccRend* 40 (1967–1968), 171 ff.

<sup>5</sup> The great majority of scholars, in particular, F. W. Deichmann, *Frühchristliche Kirchen in Rom*, Basel, 1948, 21; E. Kirschbaum, *op. cit.*, 222 and *passim*; more recently, Ch. Piétri, *op. cit.*, 51 ff.; and H. Brandenburg, *Roms frühchristliche Basiliken*, Munich, 1979, 128. J. Carcopino, *Les fouilles de Saint-Pierre et la tradition*, Paris, 1953, 141 proposing a terminal date around 350.

<sup>6</sup> R. Krautheimer, *Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture*, Harmondsworth, 1965, 32 ff.

<sup>1</sup> *LP I*, 176. For the excavations below the present church and the resulting finds of the cemetery and parts of the Constantinian basilica, *Esplorazioni sotto la confessione di San Pietro in Vaticano, eseguite negli anni 1940–1949*, ed. B. M. Apollonj-Ghetti, A. Ferrua, E. Josi, E. Kirschbaum, Rome, 1959 (henceforth, *Esplorazioni*).

<sup>2</sup> J. Grimaldi, *Descrizione della Basilica Antica di San Pietro in Vaticano*, ed. R. Niggl, Rome, 1972, 243.

<sup>3</sup> M. Guarducci, “Un moneta nella necropoli vaticana”, *AttiP AccRend*, 39 (1966–1967), 135 ff., referring for the date to G. Dattari, “Contribuzioni al corpus delle monete romane dell'epoca Costantiniana”, *Rivista Italiana di Numismatica* 19 (1906), 486 ff., esp. 496 (317–320); J. Maurice, *Numismatique Constantinienne II*, Paris, 1911, 155 ff. (same dating); P. Bruun, *The Constantinian Coinage of Arelate*, New York, 1953, 26 f. and 74 (319–320); and *idem.*, *RIC VII*, 249, nos. 149 ff. (317–318). I see no reason to question the authenticity of the find, as Ch. Piétri, *Roma Christiana*, I, Rome, 1976, 61, note 2, seems to intimate.

<sup>4</sup> *LP I*, 177 f.

<sup>5</sup> E. Josi, *AttiP AccRend* 25–26 (1950–1951), 4; M. Guarducci, *Cristo*

sible – I had switched and upheld an early date: start of construction shortly after 317–319, completion, including part of the decoration, 329<sup>11</sup>.

There is no worse crime in scholarship than clinging to an opinion only because one has once pronounced it and held on to it for a long time. Alas, I have known far too many aging, and not a few younger scholars who were guilty of just that crime. I do not want to be one of them. Thus I propose to have another look at the evidence available for dating the progress of construction and the completion of Old St. Peter's – both the dates firmly established or seemingly so, and those still disputed. Among these latter, the building inscriptions just mentioned hold a key position. There were four of them: inside the apse; on the triumphal arch terminating the nave; on the arch of the apse; and on a gold cross placed on the shrine of the apostle.

I am not going to speak of the inscription inside the apse, the one starting *IUSTITIAE SEDIS*. It has been interpreted ever since the eighteenth century as a building inscription intimating that construction was begun by Constantine but completed by one of his sons. That view was upheld by DeRossi, and it survived on the master's authority. But for once DeRossi was wrong. Rather than to the construction of the building, the inscription, as has been recognized for some time, refers to the replacement of the original decoration of the apse vault by a mosaic donated by one of Constantine's sons, in my opinion Constantius between 352 and 361. Hence it does not belong in our context, the construction of the church, and we can safely disregard it<sup>12</sup>.

## I.

I start with the inscription on the gold cross. Its wording is transmitted only by the *Liber Pontificalis*. But there is no reason to doubt its authenticity since it appears as one item in a long inventory of excerpts from apparently genuine documents all listing donations made by Constantine to St. Peter's – lighting fixtures, altar vessels, landed property – and all used by the compiler of the

11 *Idem.*, *Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture*, Harmondsworth, 1972, 55 ff., and the following editions; *idem and others*, *Corpus Basilicarum Christianarum Romae V*, Vatican City, 1976 (henceforth *Corpus*), 171 f., 272 ff.

12 *ICUR* II, 1: 21, 47, 55, 145, 156, 341; J. Ruysschaert, as above note 8; M. Guarducci, "Gli avori erculei della cattedra di S. Pietro", *Atti della Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei*, 374 (1977), 193 ff. (henceforth Guarducci, 1977); R. Krautheimer, "A note on the Inscription in the Apse of Old St. Peter's" *DOP* 41 (1987) 317 ff.

biography of Pope Sylvester. This is the text: "... fecit crucem ex auro purissimo pens lib CL in mensurae locus ubi scriptum est hoc:

CONSTANTINUS AUGUSTUS ET HELENA  
AUGUSTA

HANC DOMUM REGALEM SIMILI FULGORE  
CORRUSCANS AULA CIRCUMDAT.

Scriptum ex litteris nigellis in cruce ipsa."<sup>13</sup> From the entry, it does not appear whether the cross was of solid gold, hence cast, or whether a wooden or leaden core was sheathed in hammered gold – it only says that the gold was of the purest, unalloyed, and weighed 150 lbs. Roman, 49 kg<sup>14</sup>. Given the high specific weight of gold, 19.24, a solid cast cross would not have been very large, a mere 2500 ccm. Thus assuming a thickness of only one uncia, 2.5 cm., and a width of stem and arms of 10 cm., four unciae, it could not have exceeded 60 cm. in height and 20 cm. in span for each cross arm. Indeed, these are the measurements roughly suggested by the cross as portrayed on the ivory casket from Samagher, the so-called Pola casket, now in Venice<sup>15</sup>. If of hammered gold over an indifferent core, the cross could obviously have been much larger and more conspicuous as one might be inclined to envisage any gift of Constantine's. But, then, nearly 50 kilos of gold, more than a normal man could lift, was impressive enough. Be that as it may, the lettering of the inscription was inlaid in niello, *in cruce ipsa*, on the cross itself, and more precisely, on the transverse arm, provided that is, Rudolf Egger was right in both emending "in mensura" (instead of "mensurae") and in interpreting *mensura* as the transverse arm of a balance or of a surveyor's transit, a *groma*<sup>16</sup>. The cross in any case still existed, or at least it was well remembered by the mid-fifth century, when it was depicted on the Pola casket. There it is shown standing on a shelf atop a kind of high chest closed by doors and against the background of an arched niche surmounting the chest. Shelf, upper niche and, enclosed inside the chest, its lower part, are the remains of the 'aedicula' of Saint Peter, the *tropaion*, erected in the second century over what was believed to

13 *LP* I, 176; *ICUR* II, 1: 199 f. and footnote.

14 J. Wilpert, "La tomba di S. Pietro", *RivArchCrist* 13 (1936), 27 ff., R. Egger, "Das Goldkreuz am Grabe Petri", *Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Phil.-Hist. Klasse, Anzeiger*, 22, Vienna, 1959; Pietri, *op. cit.*, 52.

15 T. Buddensieg, "Le Coffret en ivoire de Pola", *CabArch* 10 (1959), 157 ff., M. Guarducci, "La capsella eburnea di Samagher", *Atti e memorie soc. istriana di archeologia e storia patria* 78 (n. s. 26, 1978), 1 ff. (henceforth Guarducci, 1978).

16 Egger, *op. cit.*, referring to *ThLL* V, 1.2, 1979, and VI, 2335.

be his grave. They became the focus of Constantine's basilica, adjusted and encased in a shrine clad in precious pavonazetto marble and presumably open in front. That shrine on the Pola casket is shown surmounted by a canopy, or *fastigium*, projecting forward from the chord of the apse while linked in the rear to its corners, the whole resting on six vine-scroll columns. They too were a gift of Constantine's brought from the East, "ab Graecias", and listed among his donations in the Liber Pontificalis. Joined by a set of six more donated in the eighth century the majority survived through the building of New St. Peter's. Eight were re-used in the upper niches, designed by Bernini, of the crossing piers; and two sittings of Constantine's *fastigium* columns are marked in the original pavement. Two figures, a man and a woman, on the ivory casket seem to adore the cross or to set it in place. They have been interpreted to represent Constantine and Helena, but they may just as well be the fifth-century donors of the casket<sup>17</sup>.

The text of the inscription, to return to that, has been considered incomplete; to fill the gap DeRossi suggested inserting between *regalem* and *simili* the words *auro decorant quam*<sup>18</sup>. Both Egger and Charles Piétri, on the other hand, maintained there is no need for any interpolation and that the inscription as it stands makes sense – first the names of the donors, then a full sentence stating that a shimmering hall surrounds the *domus regalis* with similar radiance. I do not feel competent to suggest filling the lacuna, if any, in the wording. In my context, the dates of construction of Old St. Peter's, what matters is the date of the inscription and possibly the meaning of *domus regalis*.

Since *domus* not infrequently is used as an equivalent for tomb, general opinion has it that the *domus regalis* of the inscription refers to the tomb of the apostle surmounted as it was by his *tropaion*, the aedicula, its remains consolidated by Constantine and encased in its marble-covered shrine<sup>19</sup>. Against this, Rudolf Egger has proposed

17 Guarducci, 1978, 23, views the cross shown on the ivory casket as decorating the background niche flanked by angels; instead, she suggests that the cross bearing the inscription was placed atop the canopy on its vinescroll columns and that it had disappeared by the fifth century; *idem.*, *op. cit.*, 96ff., the identification of the couple as Constantine and Helena.

For the columns and their sittings, see *LP* I, 172 and 417; *Esplorazioni*, 167; and J. B. Ward Perkins, "The shrine of St. Peter and its twelve spiral columns", *JRS* 42 (1952), 21 ff.

18 *ICUR* II, 1, 1979, note; the emendation was accepted, *Corpus V*, 274 – erroneously as I now believe. Guarducci, 1978, 100, proposes, in analogy to the inscription of Theodosius and Honorius at S. Paolo f.l.m. (below, note 76), to complete the distich by adding the words "sacratam corpori Petri". In that case, why not "nomine Petri"?

to refer *domus regalis* rather than to the shrine, to the canopy, the *fastigium* on its six vinescroll columns surmounting the shrine; this with reference to the "domuncula in qua sedebatur (scil. Solomon) ad iudicandum" (Reg. III.7:7)<sup>20</sup>. To me, this seems an attractive suggestion: it explains the use of *regalis* in the inscription, the *fastigium* by the fourth century indeed being a royal, that is an imperial, attribute; and it justifies the term *fulgor* with its connotation of metallic radiance, since the ribs crowning the *fastigium* were presumably covered, if not with gold, then with some gilded material. Moreover, it reminds us that the *fastigium* need not be contemporary with the shrine but may have been set in place some years later.

The date as suggested by the inscription on the gold cross seems straightforward. The empress dowager Helena was raised to the rank of Augusta on November 8, 324, or perhaps the following year on the occasion of Constantine's vicennalia, July 25, 325<sup>21</sup>. Hence either November, 324, or July, 325, furnishes the *terminus ante quem non* for the inscription. The exact date of Helena's death, providing the *terminus post quem non*, is still under debate. It can be extrapolated only from Eusebius' Life of Constantine, Book III, the only source to record her death and burial, and from the sequence of events as recounted there. To be sure, ever since the days of Edward Gibbon and Jacob Burckhardt, Eusebius has been mistrusted because of the encomiatory tenor of his work. However, that does not mean that his chronology is not trustworthy. At least in Book III, it seems to me to make good sense. There, Eusebius places Helena's death after her visit to the Holy Land<sup>22</sup> and both visit and death between two datable pieces of evidence. The *terminus post* antedating Helena's visit is provided by Constantine's letter commanding Bishop Makarios of Jerusalem to erect the buildings at the Holy Sepulchre – and that letter is dated by the reference it makes to the term of office, 325–26, of Drakilianos as deputy *praefectus praetorio*<sup>23</sup>.

19 *TbLL* V, 1.2, 1979, quotes "domus" as frequently occurring in funeral inscriptions.

20 Egger, *op. cit.*, 190.

21 Bruun, *RIC* VII, 69, gives Nov. 8, 324, as the date of Helena's elevation to the rank of Augusta; *RE*, XIV, 2820ff., suggests the celebration of Constantine's vicennalia on July 25, 325, for that event; likewise, *The Prosopography of the Late Roman Empire*, ed. A. H. M. Jones and J. R. Martindale, Cambridge, 1971, I, 410, and M. Guarducci, 1978, 126, opt for that latter date.

22 Eusebius, *Über das Leben Konstantins* III, 42f., ed. F. Winkelmann (*GSC* I, 1), Berlin-Ost, 1975; also *PG* 20, 1102. Henceforth cited as *VC*.

23 *VC* III, 30–32.

(The description following that letter of the structures as completed by 336<sup>24</sup> falls outside the chronological pattern of the chapters in Book III.) All this precedes the lengthy account of Helena's stay and her church foundations in the Holy Land<sup>25</sup>. Right after that account, Eusebius reports her death and her burial in Rome<sup>26</sup>. The chapters following Eusebius' account of Helena's death and burial, as far as datable, all deal with events that started in 326 or 327<sup>27</sup> and found their climax in the unrest in the Church of Antioch<sup>28</sup>. This unrest began in 326, continued in 327 when a first local council tried in vain to mend the quarrel, and was concluded in 328 at a second council as witness Constantine's letters addressed to the leaders of that council and to Eusebius, who published them<sup>29</sup>. The last chapters of Book III are given over to an account of Constantine's fight against the heretics, but they provide no clue for a date.

The events of 327 and 328, as reported by Eusebius, would thus seem to provide a *terminus ad* or *ante* for Helena's death, just as Constantine's letter to Makarios furnishes a *terminus post*. Her visit to Palestine would have taken place from late in 326 into 327. Also, it is possible, as pagan gossip had it, that the pilgrimage was undertaken to expiate the rash execution, on Constantine's order or with his consent, of Crispus, his eldest son and Helena's favorite, and the subsequent elimination of Fausta, an act to which Helena seems not to have been extraneous. This quite aside, it has been plausibly suggested that the dowager died on her return trip late in 327 or in 328, presumably in Nicomedia. As Eusebius reports, she died in the presence of her son, and Constantine's stay at Nicomedia is attested to at least for March, 328. To be

24 *VC* III, 33–40.

25 *VC* III, 41–45.

26 *VC* III, 46 f. The editors of the Prosopography mistakenly locate Helena's burial in Constantinople. However, she was buried in Rome, inside the mausoleum attached to SS. Marcellino e Pietro, in the battle sarcophagus presumably intended originally for Constantine (see Deichmann-Tschira, "Das Mausoleum der . . . Helena und die Basilika der Heiligen Marcellinus und Petrus", *JDAI*, 72 (1957), 44 ff.). To Eusebius, speaking of the transfer of her body "ἐπὶ τὴν βασιλεῦσαν πόλιν" the "ruling city" is apparently still Rome. Constantinople, while started ever since 326 or even 324, was not yet considered an alternative Rome, when Eusebius made what may have been a first draft of Book III. At that time, it was apparently still a building site unfit for imperial burial. Anyhow, Helena had been residing in Rome since at least the twenties, if not before (A. M. Colini, "Horti Spei Veteris", *AttiP.AccMemorie*, VIII, 1978, 137 ff.

27 *VC* III, 48–53.

28 *VC* III, 59–63; T. D. Barnes, "Emperor and Bishops, A. D. 324–344", *AJAH* 3 (1948), 53 ff., on the complex question of the successive councils of Antioch.

29 *VC* III, 62 f.

sure, the date 327/328 for Helena's death remains conjectural; indeed, Patrick Bruun, on numismatic grounds, places her death late in 329<sup>30</sup>.

Whichever way the truth lies, her death, probably late in 327 or early in 328, or (if Bruun is right) at the latest in 329, establishes the *terminus post quem non* for the inscription on the gold cross at St. Peter's.

Possibly, but only possibly, the time span for the inscription on the gold cross, between November 8, 324, or perhaps July 325, and 327–28, or at the latest 329, can be narrowed down further. Fausta, Constantine's unfortunate wife, is not mentioned in the inscription. True, a twelfth-century tradition had it that she was pagan, but that statement refers to the years prior to 312; that, of course, is most plausible – at that time, Constantine himself was pagan<sup>31</sup>. That she remained pagan still after 324, on the other hand, is unlikely. By that time, Constantine's conviction of his Christian mission had fully consolidated. It is unlikely that he would have put up with pagans in his near family. He had converted his mother to Christianity<sup>32</sup>; his son Crispus by 317 had Lactantius for tutor; all Fausta's children were baptized; and Fausta's own mother Eutropia by 326–27, if not before was Christian<sup>33</sup>. Fausta, it seems to me, would have had no choice but to comply. If, however, she was Christian, though only *pro forma*, the omission of her name on the gold cross can only mean that the inscription dates after her death – execution or suicide under compulsion – in the late summer of 326.

To be sure, the cross need not have been made right at the time it was donated. However, there is no reason why its chasing, and even less the composition of the inscription, should have been delayed for any length of time. To me it seems unthinkable that it was postponed, as has been suggested, until after Helena's death<sup>34</sup>. That seems to me far-fetched. Had Helena been dead by the time the inscription was composed, the text would presumably have given some indication<sup>35</sup>. As I see it, she

30 On the date of Helena's death, T. D. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1981, 221 (winter 327–328); P. Bruun, *RIC* VII, 72 f., note 6 (329, which I accepted, *Corpus* V, 172); *The Prosopography of the Late Roman Empire*, *loc. cit.* (330, erroneously); *RE*, *loc. cit.* (likewise erroneously, 336).

31 J. Vogt, "Heiden und Christen in der Familie Constantins des Großen", in *Eranion, Festschrift H. Hommel*, Tübingen, 1961, 149 ff., based on Zonaras, XIII. 1, 5 (*Bonn Corpus*, 34.3, 2).

32 *VC* III, 47; Vogt, *op. cit.*

33 *VC* III, 51.

34 Kirschbaum, *op. cit.*, 153; Pietri, *op. cit.*, 52 f.

35 One is inclined to assume that, when deceased, Helena would have been styled *Diva* in the inscription on the gold cross. However, Alfred Frazer has put in a word of caution. The title *Diva*, while

was alive, and the date of her death establishes firmly the *terminus post quem non* for the references to the *aula corruscans* and the *domus regalis*. All attempts to get around that simple fact require, not to put too fine a point on it, disregarding or twisting what is plain evidence.

It has been suggested, in fact, that the date of donation of the gold cross can be pinned down with yet greater precision<sup>36</sup>. In July or August, 326, for the celebration of his vicennalia, Constantine and Helena met in Rome. Both were badly shaken by the fate of Crispus and Fausta and their own involvement<sup>37</sup>. It would have been an appropriate moment for depositing on the shrine of Saint Peter a precious *piaculum*. The late summer of 326 seems indeed a plausible date for the donation of the cross and the composition of its inscription. But such precision remains conjectural and in our context unnecessary.

In our attempt to assess progress of construction on the Constantinian basilica of St. Peter's, the date of the gold cross and its inscription, whether or not in 326, but in any case prior to Helena's death, obviously represents a key element. After all, the inscription states expressly that the *domus regalis*, whether that means the shrine or the *fastigium* on its vinescroll columns, rose by then in the midst of a shimmering hall. In the *Corpus*, ten odd years ago, I construed this to mean that the entire basilica had been built and in large part decorated by 329 (accepting, as I then did, Bruun's dating for Helena's death; today, I would have to move the date to 327–28). I still think it possible that by then the entire basilica had been built, but I would not represent it as a fact ascertained. Beyond any doubt, though, the parts of the structure that housed the shrine and its *fastigium*, that is apse and transept, were completed; the half dome of the apse radiant with gold, *ex trimma auri fulgentem*, to quote the *Liber Pontificalis*; the ceiling, presumably coffered and gilded, and the pave-

bestowed regularly on empresses after death in the first and second centuries (*CIL* VI, *Vocabularium*), was apparently no longer customary in late antiquity: posthumous coins of Helena and Theodora (the second wife of Constantius I) minted at Trier, Constantinople and Rome, 337–340, bear simply the inscription FL. IULIA HELENA AUG. and FL. MAX THEODORAE AUG. (J. Maurice, *Numismatique Constantinienne* I, Paris, 1908, 261, 495f.; II, Paris, 1911, 547; also *RIC* VIII, ed. J. Kent, *passim*); this notwithstanding the continued use of *Divus* for emperors, also Christian, for instance on Constantine's consecration coins (P. Bruun, "The Consecration Coins of Constantine the Great", *Arktos*, n.s. 1, 1954, 19ff.) and, *pace* M. R. Alfoeldi, *Die Constantinsche Goldprägung*, Mainz, 1965, 136, note 2, as late as 425, in the (lost) mosaic donated by Galla Placidia at S. Giovanni Evangelista at Ravenna (Diehl, *ILCV*, 20a).

<sup>36</sup> Guarducci, *op. cit.*, 1978, 23.

<sup>37</sup> Zosimus, *Nouvelle Histoire*, II.29, ed. F. Paschoud, I, Paris, 1971; also *New History*, trans. R. T. Ridley, Canberra, 1982.

ment shining with marble plaques<sup>38</sup>. Completing the transept, however, meant that also construction of the triumphal arch was finished and thus, in turn, also the abutting end walls of nave and aisles and their westernmost intercolumniations and arcades. Obviously construction and even decoration of transept and apse may have been in place for some time before the gold cross was donated and its inscription composed. When construction of these parts had been started, since when they had been finished, and how far eastward in the nave and toward the facade work had progressed by 327–28 at the latest, must be left open for the time being.

## II.

"In arcu maiori ac triumphali", Maffeo Vegio<sup>39</sup>, the humanist (1406–1458), around 1455 read the distich:

QUOD DUCE TE MUNDUS SURREXIT IN ASTRA  
TRIUMPHANS  
HANC CONSTANTINUS VICTOR TIBI CONDIDIT  
AULAM<sup>40</sup>.

"The letters", he adds, "were very old and almost gone and seemed to bear witness to Constantine's time." In fact, the verses had been read "in arcu sci Petri", already by the sixth century (?) source of the Einsidlensis sylloge. Their meaning seems straight-forward: Constantine has founded or built (*condidit*) this royal hall (*aula*) for Christ – only He, not Peter, can be the addressee – because the world has risen in triumph to the stars with Him as guide and leader – *Christus dux* being used time and again in biblical passages and patristic writings with the meaning of guide; but with equal frequency, it carries, both in the Bible and in the Fathers, the connotation of military leader – and that should be stressed in the context of the inscription<sup>41</sup>.

<sup>38</sup> M. Guarducci, "Camerae Fulgentes", in *Litterature Comparee in onore di Ettore Paratore*, Bologna, 1981, 199ff. interprets the term *trimita* (*trimma*) to denote gilded skins or cloth fastened to a vault. I still prefer (as *Corpus* V, 171) the term to mean gold foil; cf. the „cameram basilicae ex auro trimita in longum et in latum lib D“ donated to the Lateran church where *camera*, given the reference to length and width appears to denote the nave ceiling rather than a vault. A coffered ceiling (*lacunar*) for St Peter's seems attested to by Prudentius, *Peristephanon* XII, V. 42. The marble plaques of the pavement of the transept at St. Peter's have been found *in situ*.

<sup>39</sup> M. Vegio, *De Rebus Antiquis Memorabilibus Basilicae S. Petri Romae*, AASS, June VII, Paris and Rome, 1867 (reprint), Lib. II, Cap. 1, p. 56\*.

<sup>40</sup> *ICUR*, II.1, 20 and *passim*.

<sup>41</sup> Hilarius of Poitiers, *In Psalmum CXVIII*, V.8 (*PL* IX, 537); Augustine, *In Psalmum CXXIII* (*PL* 37, 1640). For the military

But what exactly is the meaning of these words, and what event precisely do they allude to? The text has been linked to Constantine's victory at the Milvian bridge and implicitly to the preceding vision of the cross<sup>42</sup>. To me, such allusion to that victory of October 312 seems questionable. To be sure, Ponte Milvio had been decisive for Constantine and his gradual conversion to Christianity; but after 317–320, the *terminus ante quem non*, one recalls, for the start of construction at St. Peter's, that victory had been readily overtaken by events of yet greater importance: the most incisive, in the summer and fall of 324, Constantine's conquest of the East and with it, as he understood it, the triumph of Christianity in the world; the world, that is the Roman Empire, which he ruled, but in the language of the court, as best reflected in Eusebius, the universe – *mundus*, κόσμος; to Eusebius, after all, Constantine was κοσμοκράτωρ, ruler of the universe – the intended parallel to Christ is evident. It is in this context, I feel, that the inscription on the triumphal arch wants to be read. "Mundus surrexit in astra" carries all the overtones of resurrection, rebirth, and renewal. Concepts familiar to antiquity, pagan and Christian, they were elaborated by Eusebius into a system of political theology, and after the events of 324, became integrated into and fundamental to Constantine's domestic and foreign policies: to resurrect and renew the world by establishing here on earth a Christian empire, a likeness of the heavenly kingdom<sup>43</sup>. The tenor of the verses inscribed at St. Peter's is that outlined by Eusebius when looking back in the *Vita Constantini* on the events of 324 and re-evoking the mood prevailing among Christians in the East in the fall of that year<sup>44</sup>: the tyrant has been overthrown; the empire, that is the Roman world, has been reunited; under one head its body has been set to order; the power of the monarch – the one and only ruler – extends to all; Christianity, suppressed heretofore, shines triumphant; and all sing praise to the victor and recognize his god, the Saviour. The last three months of 324 seem to me the *terminus ad*, and certainly *ante quem non*, for the composition of the distich.

meaning of *dux*, *TbLL* V, 2, 2323. For the term *te duce*, cf. also *VC* II, 55.

42 *ICUR* II.1, 341; so also Guarducci, 1977, esp. 197.

43 G. B. Ladner, *The Idea of Reform*, Cambridge, Mass., 1959, *passim*, especially 120f.; also F. Dvornik, *Early Christian and Byzantine Political Philosophy* (*Dumbarton Oaks Studies*, IX, Washington, D. C., 1966), *passim*, especially 611 ff.

I do not think it possible to interpret the *surrexit in astra* as referring to Constantine's having risen to heaven and to date therefore the distich after 337, as considered by Piétri, *op. cit.*, 51.

44 *VC* II, 19.

That date as a *terminus ad* or *post* is confirmed by an observation made already by DeRossi<sup>45</sup>, but which I had missed in the *Corpus*. In the same chapter of the *Vita Constantini*, II, 19, in which he sums up the mood of 324, Eusebius also remarks that, starting with the conquest of the East, Constantine "appropriately styled himself Νικητῆς" – *victor* in the inscription at St. Peter's – "since God had granted him victory over his adversaries and enemies". Νικητῆς indeed becomes and remains an integral part of his title, as used in the salutations of his letters and rescripts, starting presumably with the edict addressed probably in October 324 to the Palestinian and in general to the magistrates of the eastern provinces, but promulgated in the West as well; it was published in both Greek and Latin<sup>46</sup>.

September 28, 324, the day of the victory at Chryso-polis, is obviously also the *terminus post* for the list of Constantine's donations to St. Peter's incorporated into the *Liber Pontificalis*. As the transcription of that document expressly states, and as has been often pointed out, the properties listed were all located *per diocesim Orientis*: in and near Antioch and Alexandria, and in the provinces Egypt and Euphratensis. They appear to have been donations *ex manubiis*, spoils of war, as pointed out by Alfred Frazer, and they are described by the compiler of the *Liber Pontificalis* with a precision which guarantees the authenticity of the document which he copied<sup>47</sup>. The question is whether the donations were made before or after construction at St. Peter's started. The late-daters believe that the list antedates the beginning of work<sup>48</sup>. But this is not necessarily so. The donations were made not for the construction of the basilica, but, as specifically stated in the document, *in redditum*; for income, obviously to provide for the maintenance and presumably for the servicing of the church<sup>49</sup>. Such a donation could apparently be made while construction was in progress, or indeed, after it had been completed: the *Charta Cornutiana* made out in 471 for a country church near Tivoli<sup>50</sup> expressly states that the church had been built and founded by the donor: "... ecclesiae ... a me ... constitutae et fundatae ...;" that the clergy had been appointed – they act as witnesses – was the church then functioning al-

45 *ICUR* II.1, 345, n. 2 and note.

46 *VC* II, 23; also II, 46, 48, 64 – all 324; III, 30, 52, 60, 61, 62, 64 – all between 325–6 and 327–8.

47 *LP* I, 177 f.; for Alfred Frazer's remark, *Corpus* V, 274.

48 Kirschbaum, *op. cit.*, 151 f.; Piétri, *op. cit.*, 53 f. Kirschbaum's contention, *loc. cit.*, that Constantine's church buildings in the east antedate those in the west, is untenable.

49 So already Jongkees, *op. cit.*, 32; see also *Corpus* V, 274 ff.

50 *LP* I, CXLVII f.



ready?; and that the properties deeded were to provide for the lighting, *pro servitio luminum*, and for the maintenance of the building. Also in listing the gifts made of liturgical vessels, altar textiles, and curtains, it specifies precisely where the latter are to go: "... ante regias basilicae ... in porticis (the aisles) ... ante secretarium", thus intimating that construction had been, or was about to be completed. By analogy, the donations for St. Peter's might well have been made in or after the fall of 324, when construction had been underway possibly for some time.

The distich on the triumphal arch of St. Peter's was then, in all likelihood, likewise composed in or after the fall of 324. How much after, if at all, remains in dispute. In theory, of course, it might have been any time prior to Constantine's death in May 337; a date after his death, which has sometimes been suggested, seems to me implausible. The absence of *divus* preceding his name, if nothing else, speaks against it. Also, in that unlikely case, whoever put up the inscription, presumably one of Constantine's sons, would not have failed to include his own name – they did not suffer from undue modesty. I would date the inscription, if not indeed in the fall or winter of 324, very shortly thereafter. The overtones of recent military triumph and victory, of thanksgiving to Christ, the *dux* – both guide and military leader – are so prominent that the earliest possible date for composing the inscription seems to me the most acceptable.

A further question remains – why was the triumphal arch chosen to carry an inscription that important? Is it not, after all, an unusual place for a dedicatory building inscription in early Christian Rome? It is worth a detour to find the answer.

### III.

Little, if any, attention has been paid so far to the placing of dedicatory building inscriptions in Roman churches from the fourth to the ninth century; inscriptions given over to the building's and its donor's or the patron saint's praise or, as is often the case, to all three at once. To be sure, only a handful of such inscriptions are still in place, and while a far larger number once existing have been collected by the compilers of the *syllogai* beginning in the sixth century and copied many times, and by later visitors, the manuscripts do not always specify the exact position of the inscription in a given church. But enough evidence remains to arrive at a few conclusions.

One group that stands out are the inscriptions, often long dedicatory poems, on the inner entrance wall of the nave. The seven-line autobiographical text placed by Damasus in his title church, S. Lorenzo in Damaso<sup>51</sup>, occupied the entrance wall, as attested to by the *syllogai*. The inscription on the interior facade of Santa Sabina<sup>52</sup>, dated 422–432, also seven lines long, has survived. Nearly contemporary was another building inscription, once "in parte occidentali", in the western part, and thus presumably on the inner nave facade, of S. Pietro in Vincoli<sup>53</sup>. It praised, though not by name, the imperial donors, named the presbyter Philip in charge of building and financing, and acclaimed the ruling pope, Sixtus III (432–440) for having reconsecrated the church<sup>54</sup>. Pope Leo I (440–461), after repairing S. Paolo f.l.m., similarly placed his building inscription on the inner face of the facade, inscribed on a marble tablet, rather than in mosaic<sup>55</sup>. Possibly already the founder's inscription set up by Constantina, Constantine's daughter, in the *coemeterium subteglatum* at S. Agnese f.l.m. occupied the entrance wall – an acrostichon a full fourteen lines long. However, its original placing, whether above the entrance or on the wall of the apse, must be left in doubt<sup>56</sup>. Likewise, at S. Maria

51 "Hinc pater ..." *ICUR* II.1, 135.7 ("in introitu"); *ibid.*, 151.23. A. Ferrua, *Epigrammata Damasiana (Sussidi allo studio della Antichità Cristiana, 2)*, Vatican City, 1942, no. 57.

52 "Culmen apostolicum ...", *ICUR* II.1, 24.27; *Corpus* IV, 75.

53 "Cede prius nomen ..." *ICUR* II.1, 110.67 ("in occidentali parte ipsius ecclesiae").

54 Originally, it seems, dedicated to all the apostles, or to Peter alone, it now was dedicated to both Peter and Paul on equal terms.

55 "Exsultate pii lacrimos ...", *ICUR*, n. s. II, ed. A. Silvagni, Rome, 1935, no. 4783 ("supra ianuam templi a parte interiori", now museum of S. Paolo f.l.m.). In *Corpus* V, 99, I started the quotation with line 7 instead of with line 1 as I should have done.

56 "Constantina deum venerans ...", *ICUR* II. 44.12 ("supra archum qui basilicam contenet"; or "in absida"); Ferrua, *op. cit.*, no. 71; F.W. Deichmann, "Die Lage der Constantinischen Basilika der Heiligen Agnes ...", *Riv. Arch. Crist.* 22 (1946), 213 ff.

The siting of the inscription in the *coemeterium Agnetis* remains in doubt. One of the two sources, both according to DeRossi, *loc. cit.*, of sixth century date, to transmit the text places it "supra archum qui basilicam contenet", the other "in absida". Deichmann, *op. cit.*, 214, note 5, tentatively interprets both terms as referring to the entrance arch of the basilica. I remain much in doubt. The indication "in absida", after all, may simply mean "inside the apse". On the other hand, I cannot find a satisfactory explanation for "archum qui basilicam contenet": "the arch which encloses (holds together) the basilica" makes no sense. Should it have read "qui basilicae contenet" – "which is joined to the basilica", referring to the apse arch? But would there be room for that long poem above the apse arch? Or does it refer to the entrance arch – but in that case, what is the meaning of *contenere*? Given, on the other hand, the length of the inscription and the need of placing vertically the initial letters of all fourteen lines, the text could not have been executed in mosaic in the apse vault or along its rim. However,

Maggiore, a founder's inscription of Sixtus III seems to have occupied the inner entrance wall of the nave<sup>57</sup>. After the middle of the fifth century, the entrance wall as a favored site for building inscriptions seems to have gone out of fashion in Rome. The inscriptions of Pope John III (561–574) on the entrance wall of SS. Apostoli, recording that his predecessor, Pelagius I (556–61), started and he himself completed the structure, was but two lines long, and it may well have been carved on the architrave of the main portal, inside or outside<sup>58</sup>.

We are used to thinking, rather than of the inner facade, of the apse as a proper place for a founder's building inscription. Excepting the entrance wall of the nave, it is, after all, the only place spacious enough to receive an inscription of some length. Thus it is there, along the rim of the apse vault, that Carolingian church builders in Rome placed their dedicatory poems: at S. Prassede, S. Cecilia, S. Maria in Domnica, at S. Marco, and S. Martino ai Monti. In Christian antiquity, in the fourth and early fifth centuries, however, that location is but rarely chosen for building inscriptions in the proper sense. No example established beyond doubt comes to mind prior to the late sixth and early seventh centuries: the dodecastichon of Pelagius II (571–590), presumably once in the apse and restored by DeRossi, at S. Lorenzo f.l.m.<sup>59</sup>; the prose

Baronius (*Annales ecclesiastici*, XII, Rome, 1607, 905, appendix ad an. 324) saw three words of the penultimate verse inscribed on the fragment of a marble plaque re-used in the pavement laid 1600/1603 at the entrance of the "atrium" of the basilica *ad corpus*, be it in the narthex of the seventh-century church, or on the landing at the foot of the staircase. If that fragment was part of the original inscription rather than a copy, the tablet with the long acrostic poem might have been fastened either to the wall of the apse or to the interior facade of the nave, as proposed by Deichmann, *op. cit.*; also H. Stern, "Les mosaïques ... de Sainte-Constance ...", *DOP* 12 (1958), 157 ff., esp. 162.

57 "Virgo Maria tibi ...", *ICUR* II.2, 71.42; 98.6; 139.28 (no precise location given). Its first line was still read by Onofrio Panvinio in the 1560's (*De praecipuis Urbis ... basilicis*, Rome, 1570, 235: "musivi operis supra portam maiorem", giving only the first line). However, since the following six lines of the text as transmitted by the syllogai, but no longer legible by Panvinio's time, referred the reader to a mosaic showing the Virgin accompanied by three martyrs, presumably in the apse rather than on the entrance wall, it has been suggested (G. A. Weller, *Theotokos*, Utrecht and Antwerp, 1961, 127) that the apse was the original place also of the inscription and that its fragments only in the thirteenth century were transferred to, or copied on, the facade wall where Panvinio saw them. No doubt the mosaic of the Virgin flanked by martyrs to which the text refers must have occupied the apse vault. Does that mean that also the inscription had to be in the apse? Or could it have been on the entrance wall? Medieval transfers of inscriptions are otherwise unknown to me.

58 "Pelagius copeit ...", *ICUR* II.1, 139.27; 335 ("in maiori superliminari portae ecclesiae").

59 "Demovit dominus ...", *ICUR* II.1, 63.10; 106.46; 157.9 (no

inscription of Honorius I (625–38) at S. Pancrazio<sup>60</sup>; and, if DeRossi's conjecture is correct in assigning it to the apse of SS. Apostoli, Pope John III's ten-liner praising his achievement in building the church so as to rally the people despite the hard times<sup>61</sup>.

The majority of inscriptions, nearly all in verse, read in the apses of Roman churches – "in throno", "in apside", "in circulo throni", "circa chorum", – are linked, rather than to the foundation or building of the church, to the donation of a painting or mosaic placed in the half-dome of that very apse. Only a few such donor's laudatory inscriptions survive, and they date comparatively late, in the sixth and seventh centuries: the one of Felix IV below his mosaic at SS. Cosma e Damiano (526–530)<sup>62</sup>; the short distich of Pope Theodore in the apse he added to S. Stefano Rotondo (642–649)<sup>63</sup>; and the beautiful long poem which Honorius I (625–638) placed along the rim of the apse vault at S. Agnese f.l.m.<sup>64</sup>. All exalt, as customary, the splendor of the mosaic – the one at S. Agnese with a remarkably fine feeling for color and light – the saints represented, and the achievement of the donor. But a large number of such inscriptions pertaining to such apse decorations, mosaics or paintings, now lost, were read by the compilers of the early syllogai, and they start by the mid-fourth century. A mosaic in the apse of St. Peter's presented between 352 and 361 by Constantius II was accompanied by the tetrastichon "Justitiae sedis ..." <sup>65</sup>; one at S. Anastasia referred to a painting in the apse donated by Pope Damasus – both its theme and the pertinent Damasian inscription remain unknown<sup>66</sup>. An inscription at S. Lorenzo in Damaso seems to have accompanied a representation of the patron saint or perhaps of his martyrdom; no location is given by the compilers of the syllogai, but presumably it occupied the

location given). DeRossi (*Mosaici Cristiani*, text to pl. XVI) suggests, probably correctly, that the inscription ran along the rim of the apse vault.

60 "Ob insigne ...", *ICUR* II.1, 24.28 ("in absida sci Pancratii"); 156.5.

61 "Hic prior antistes ..." *ICUR* II.1, 63.18; 355 ("in abside basilicae").

62 "Aula dei claris ...", *ICUR* II.1, 71.41; 134.4; 152.28; 435 (still in place along rim of apse vault).

63 "Aspicias auratum ...", *ICUR* II.1, 152.31 (no location given, but in parts still in place prior to restoration); G. B. DeRossi, *Mosaici Cristiani*, text to plate XVII.

64 "Aura concisis surgit ...", *ICUR* II.1, 89.42; 104.36; 137.14; 249.19 ("in illo throno"; still in place).

65 R. Krautheimer, as above, note 12; Ruyschaert, *AttiPAccRend* 40 (1967/8), 171 ff.; M. Guarducci, 1977, as above, note 12.

66 "Antistes Damasus ...", *ICUR* II.1, 24.25 ("in absida"); 150; Ferrua, *op. cit.*, no. 45, p. 187 f., ad not.

67 "Non mirum est fallax ...", *ICUR* II.1, 151.24 (no location given).

apse<sup>67</sup>. Probably, the verses read in the apse, “circa chorum”, of the Constantinian *basilica maior* at S. Lorenzo f.l.m. also pointed to a painting in the apse vault donated about 400 by the presbyter Leopardus and representing, so the text seems to suggest, the hand of God bestowing a wreath on the martyr<sup>68</sup>. From the late fifth century on, such donors’ dedications running below paintings or mosaics in the halfdomes of apses become the rule: at S. Anastasia, a mosaic donated by a pious couple in memory of Pope Hilarus (461–468) in place of the older painted decoration of Damasus, as told by the pertinent hexastichon<sup>69</sup>; and the inscriptions once read below the apse mosaics placed in 471 at S. Agata dei Goti, and at nearly the same time at S. Andrea in Catabarbara<sup>70</sup>.

Where the inscription could be kept to one or two lines, the arch of the apse rather than the rim of the vault seems to have been a place as much favored for a founder’s inscription as the entrance wall. The surviving examples are few and comparatively late in date. In the *basilicae ad corpus* of S. Lorenzo f.l.m.<sup>71</sup> and of S. Agnese f.l.m.<sup>72</sup> distichs in praise of the martyr fill that place; since the founder’s portrait – Pelagius II and Honorius I respectively – appears in the mosaic running above the arch at S. Lorenzo, in the apse vault at S. Agnese, and moreover since he was named in the inscription inside the apse, there was no need to refer to him once more. Long before, at S. Maria Maggiore, the founding pope placed his lapidary XYSTUS EPS PLEBI DEI above the apex of the arch<sup>73</sup>. A distich giving the names of Popes John IV and Pelagius I as the builders of SS. Apostoli has been located tentatively but convincingly by DeRossi on the arch of the apse<sup>74</sup>. At S. Lorenzo in Damaso, too, the founder’s distich, located by the Verdun sylloge “in illo throno”<sup>75</sup>,

68 “Succedunt meliora tibi ...”, *ICUR* II.1, 155.3 (“circa chorum”).

69 See above, note 65.

70 “Fl. Ricimer v. i. ...”, *ICUR* II.1, 438.127 (“in apside”); “Haec tibi mens Valilae ...”, *ICUR* II.1, 436.115 (“in apside”).

Sometimes, though very rarely, an inscription in the apse, without naming the donor, alludes to the theme depicted in painting or mosaic in the vault – as at S. Eusebio (“Crimina qui tollit ...”, *ICUR* II.1, 436.117, “in apside”); and once, at S. Pietro in Vincoli an inscription in the apse referred in two lines to the main relics kept there from at least the early fifth century on: the chains of St. Peter (“Inlaesas olim ...”, *ICUR* II.1, 134.1; 157.10; 290.2, “sub tribuna”; 410.2, “in apside ... opere vermiculato legebantur”).

71 “Martirium flammis ...”, *ICUR* II.1, 63.9 (still exists *in situ*).

72 “Virginis aula micat ...”, *ICUR* II.1, 63.6 (“in arcu”); 89.43; 104.37; 137 (“in absida”).

73 “Xystus eps plebi Dei ...”, *ICUR* II.1, 435.111 (“supra fornicem maiorem”; still *in situ*).

74 “Hic prior antistes ...”, *ICUR* II.1, 65.18; 355.

75 “Haec Damasus tibi ...”, *ICUR* II.1, 134.5 (“in illo throno”); Ferrua, *op. cit.*, no. 58.

would in all likelihood have run along the arch rather than inside the apse; that place was given over, it seems, to a depiction of the martyr and a corresponding inscription<sup>76</sup>. The original founders’ inscription at S. Paolo f.l.m., naming Theodosius and Honorius – no location is given by the syllogai – might as well have been on the arch as inside the apse, where DeRossi placed it<sup>77</sup>. In S. Pietro in Vincoli, too, a distich naming the builder, Pope Sixtus III, ran in all likelihood along the apse arch; its wording suggests that, on either side and above, the Four-and-Twenty Elders were represented in painting or mosaic<sup>78</sup>. Similarly, a donors’ inscription of Valentinian III, his mother Placidia, and his sister Honoria, accompanying a representation of that same theme at S. Croce in Gerusalemme, would probably have been placed on the apse arch<sup>79</sup>. Lastly, at Old St. Peter’s, a Constantinian founder’s or donor’s inscription was displayed on the apse arch – more of it anon<sup>80</sup>.

There is, finally, one more location where dedicatory inscriptions were read by the compilers of the syllogai – the triumphal arch. To be sure, given the rarity of transept basilicas in Early Christian, pre-Carolingian Rome – there are but four, St. Peter’s, S. Paolo f.l.m., S. Pietro in Vincoli, S. Anastasia – the evidence is tenuous. But three did, it appears, carry inscriptions prominently on their triumphal arches facing the nave. At S. Paolo this was where, in the 440’s, Galla Placidia placed the inscription expressing her joy to see the work of her father and brother restored to new splendor by the efforts of Pope Leo I<sup>81</sup>. Clearly no other prominent place was left for a significant statement – the apse, whether its arch or vault, having been pre-empted by the inscription of the original founders, Theodosius I and Honorius. Correspondingly, at S. Pietro in Vincoli, by the mid-fifth century, the triumphal arch was the only place left for Eudoxia, daughter of Theodosius II and his wife Eudokia, to set up her inscription proclaiming to have completed the rebuilding of the church, begun with her parents’ support; that,

76 See above and note 67.

77 “Theodosius coepit ...”, *ICUR* II.1, 28.52; 81.17; 98.5; 254.6. No location given; there is no proof that it was read inside the apse, as proposed by DeRossi, *loc. cit.*

78 “In medio regum ...”, *ICUR* II.1, 134.2 (“in altera absida”). Since, contrary to DeRossi’s belief, *ibid.*, note, there was no other apse in the fifth-century church, I have proposed, *Corpus* III, 227, to read instead of “in altera absida”, “in arcu abside”.

79 “Reges terrae ...”, *ICUR* II.1, 435.107 (“in templo sa(n)ctae Crucis”; no specific location given).

80 See below and note 84.

81 “Placidie pia mens ...”, *ICUR* II.1, 68.32; 81.17; 98.5 (until 1823, while damaged, still *in situ*; P. Ugonio, *Historia delle Stazioni di Roma*, Rome, 1588, 136.

incidentally, she refers to them by name may well have been done to correct that omission – rather inexcusable – in the several inscriptions put up twenty years before by Pope Sixtus III<sup>82</sup>. All other locations of prominence in the church were, after all, occupied by older inscriptions – the entrance wall and the arch of the apse by those of Sixtus, the apse vault by another, short inscription, perhaps antedating the fifth century and referring to the church's main relics, Saint Peter's chains<sup>83</sup>.

Could then a comparable situation have led Constantine to choose the triumphal arch at St. Peter's for his triumphant dedicatory inscription?

#### IV.

"In arcu absidæ", on the arch of the apse above the high altar which surmounted the shrine of the apostle, Maffeo Vegio, around 1455, read the words:

CONSTANTINI EXPIATA HOSTILI INCURSIONE<sup>84</sup>.

Vegio is our only source, and he had a hard time making out these four words – "litterae negligentius habitae maiori ex parte corruerunt sed ex paucis earum quae vix adhuc vidi possunt deprehenduntur licet non integra verba haec." The term *corruerunt*, to collapse, to fall down, suggests that the inscription was probably done in mosaic. Had it been painted, Vegio would have used *exolescere*, to fade. Whether his observation regarding the rather careless handling of the letters – *litterae negligentius habitae* – refers to their shape or to their technique, must be left open<sup>85</sup>. The four words Vegio could decipher of the inscription are written without breaks between words or letters in the surviving manuscripts, none of fifteenth century date, of his work, as far as I have been able to sample them in the Vatican Library; they include the carefully written Vat. Lat. 3750, a presentation copy intended presumably for Paul III, whose coat of arms it bears.

Neither Vegio nor, for that matter, DeRossi ever doubted that the Constantine of the inscription was *the* Constantine, Constantine the Great. Nor is there any reason to

do so<sup>86</sup>. Obviously, too, as Vegio likewise recognized, the words he read were but the scant remnants of an inscription badly mutilated. DeRossi attempted to emend the fragment and to complete the text. He convincingly proposed to have Vegio's fragment preceded and followed by a few words and to insert some more between those deciphered and obviously, when Vegio copied them, separated by gaps<sup>87</sup>. Hence he reconstructed: ... CONSTANTINI EXPIATA ... HOSTILI INCURSIONE ..., remarking that he was uncertain whether or not a lacuna had existed between EXPIATA and HOSTILI. To complete the text, he linked the fragment to the tetrastichon IUSTITIAE SEDIS once read inside the apse, which he interpreted, as was generally done until a short while ago, to mean that construction of St. Peter's, while begun by Constantine, was completed by one of his sons. DeRossi identified this son as Constans, the Augustus of the West from 340 to 350<sup>88</sup>. On this basis, he tentatively reconstructed the mutilated inscription on the arch. The genitive CONSTANTINI he proposed to complete by one or two preceding and two subsequent words, such as: (*Constans Aug*) CONSTANTINI (*Aug Patris Filius*) EXPIATA HOSTILI INCURSIONE. After INCURSIONE, he added *depulsa*, but otherwise made no proposal to supply a verb so as to denote what the donor of the inscription, Constans as he thought, had done after defeating the invasion. Given the links postulated to the supposed completion of construction by one of Constantine's sons, DeRossi

82 "Theodosius pater ...", *ICUR* II.1, 110.66.

83 See above and notes 53, 70, 78.

84 M. Vegio, *De Rebus Memorabilibus Basilicae Sancti Petri Romae*, Vat. Lat. 3750; for further copies in the Vatican Library (Vat. Lat. 5702; Vat. Lat. 8266; Reg. 794; Ottob. 1863; Archivio Capitolare Vaticano G. 12) and other libraries, see P. O. Kristeller, *Iter Italicum*, London, 1967, *passim*.

85 The version published by Jannings has "non certius habitae" instead of "negligentius habitae", as all manuscripts in the Vatican have it, obviously making quite a difference in meaning. Did the editor use a copy derived from a different archetype, or did he alter the text?

86 The consecutive writing of the four words in all the manuscripts has led to the proposal (A. Weis, "Ein Petruszyklus des 7. Jahrhunderts im Querschiff der Vatikanischen Basilika", *RömQs* 58, 1963, *Festschrift E. Kirschbaum*, 2, 230 ff.) to read the four words as part of a sentence complete in itself: "... after the expiation of a hostile raid undertaken by Constantine ..." (italics are mine). In this view, the Constantine referred to would be, of course, not the Great Constantine, but Constans II (641–668), also called Constantine (*LP* I, 341); the hostile incursion becomes identified with the arrest and abduction of Pope Martin I in 653 – if so, why not rather the imperial visit and looting raid in 667?; the expiation is explained as an accommodation reached between the pope and Constans' son, Constantine IV and is linked to the creation of a Petrus cycle on the transept walls of the basilica. Except for the late seventh century date assigned convincingly to that cycle, the thesis seems to me wholly untenable. No emperor from antiquity to the end of Byzantine times is ever named in an inscription without titles, at least Augustus; no seventh-century pope would have dreamt of branding in public the Byzantine emperor, his sovereign, as a hostile invader; and nobody would have used the term expiation, with its ritual overtones, for an accommodation reached.

87 *ICUR* II.1, 346, note to 345.2: "Itaque huius tituli fragmenta ab uno Vegio tradita videntur distribuenda esse in hunc fere modum: ... CONSTANTINI ... EXPIATA ... HOSTILI INCURSIONE ... lacuna post EXPIATA incerta est."

88 *Ibid.*

may have thought of something like *vota solvit* at the end of the inscription. The hostile incursion referred to and its defeat he tentatively identified with that inflicted in 342 by Constans on the Franks. Meanwhile, of course, it has been recognized that the inscription in the apse, rather than referring to the completion of construction at St. Peter's, should be linked to the replacement by a mosaic decoration in the apse vault of the previous covering *ex trimma auri*. Consequently, Margherita Guarducci, in taking up DeRossi's suggestion, has modified it by assigning to Constans the donation of the apse mosaic – this rather than the completion of construction of the basilica – and to link the mutilated inscription on the arch of the apse to the donation of that mosaic and to his victory of 342<sup>89</sup>.

DeRossi's proposal for complementing the fragment of the inscription on the arch of the apse was plausible as long as the fragment could be linked to the tetrastichon inside the apse "Iustitiae Sedes" and to the interpretation of that latter as referring to the completion of construction or to the donation of the mosaic. Nor does it matter in that context whether that mosaic was given by Constans or, as I believe, in the late fifties' by Constantius<sup>90</sup>. However, such linkage of the two inscriptions, the one *in arcu abside*, the other *in absida* or *in throno*, must not be postulated. They may as well, and in my opinion, they do, date from different times and refer to different events. Let me then try out an hypothesis on that basis.

The fragment read *in arcu abside* could well refer to a hostile incursion which took place under Constantine himself, and he, rather than one of his sons, would be the subject of the inscription. In that case, the genitive CONSTANTINI must have been preceded by a formula such as *iussu*, or better *ex voto*, and would then have been followed obviously by *Aug* or *Augusti*. Regarding the end of the inscription, it seems to me that *depulsa* as supplied by DeRossi is unnecessary; EXPIATA by itself expresses, after all, not only expiation, but vengeance by defeat of the aggressor. Instead, the fragment obviously cries out for a statement as to what was done or happened on Constantine's behest, or in fulfillment of his vow. But let me postpone my proposal for a short while and consider what hostile incursion the inscription might have referred to.

In the Corpus, I linked the fragment on the arch of the apse to the events of 324 and suggested that in it, Licinius was branded as the aggressor<sup>91</sup>. I did so on the assump-

tion that Constantine's contemporaries under a barrage of powerful propaganda would swallow that version notwithstanding the facts to the contrary: that Constantine had carefully prepared the war, had started it and never concealed that *he* rather than Licinius was the aggressor<sup>92</sup>. After all, we have seen in our own time the effects of a consistent campaign of the media.

But this is a side issue. It is more important and indeed decisive for interpreting the fragmentary inscription to be aware of the precise meaning of the words used. This I failed to do in the Corpus. In fact, both *incursio* and *expiare* have their very precise meanings in Roman legal and religious terminology. *Incursio* in constitutional law signifies primarily an invasion, a looting raid by barbarians breaking into Roman territory; hence, a criminal, sinful violation of the sacred soil of the Empire.

Likewise, in Roman religious law, *expiare* designates the ritual act by which a sinful defilement is annulled and a person or object purified and reconsecrated – be it a temple or house, a site, a country or the earth. This act of reconciliation comprised the offering to the godhead of a sacrifice or in lieu thereof, of a gift, a *piaculum*; at times circus games were part of or indeed they constituted the *piaculum*<sup>93</sup>.

The exact meaning of *expiare* and *incursio* was obviously known to Constantine's chancellery or whoever composed the inscription for the apse arch of St. Peter's. Imperial inscriptions did not use terms lightly. Their authors were aware of the meaning of the terms used and their implications.

In Constantine's reign, to be sure, several such incursions took place, followed by Roman punitive expeditions into barbarian territory, or indeed undercut by preventive strikes: against the Alemans defeated in 320 by the Caesar Crispus; against the Sarmatians in 332, across the Danube, led nominally by the Caesar Constantine, then age fifteen; against the Goths, in 334 under the Emperor's personal command. All are commented upon at some length by contemporary historians – Aurelius Victor and the Anonymous Valesianus<sup>94</sup>. However, none of these were incursions by barbarians into the Empire. On the contrary, it

92 Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* (as above, note 30), 76, with reference to the sources.

93 *TbLL* V, 1703 ff. (*expiare*); *ibid.*, VII, 1089 ff. (*incursio*); *RE* XX 1, 1179 ff. (*piaculum*).

94 Sextus Aurelius Victor, *Liber de Caesaribus*, ed. F. Pichlmayr and R. Gruendel, Leipzig, 1970, 125; Anonymous Valesianus 6.31 (*LCL*, *Amianus Marcellinus* III, 526); also J. Maurice, *Numismatique Constantinienne*, Paris, 1911, CLVII, CLXIII, 458 f.; R. MacMullen, *Constantine*, London, 1969, 146 f.; and Barnes, as above, note 92, and p. 250.

89 Guarducci, as above, note 12.

90 *Corpus* V, 171 and 274.

91 Krautheimer, as above, note 12.

was the Romans who invaded barbarian territory to quell unrest and to prevent aggression. It seems to me anyway that the raid alluded to on the apse arch of Old St. Peter's would have taken place long before the thirties. It would have fallen, needless to say, after 317–320, when the pagan mausolea near the apostle's aedicula were still in use, but I would date it before the inscription QUOD DUCE TE was set in place on the triumphal arch in or after the late fall of 324. The apse – given its function to shelter the shrine of St. Peter, the *raison d'être* and focus of the basilica would have been the first element of the church to be built, given also the eastward slope of the hill and the resulting advantages of starting construction there and continuing downhill. It would have been ready to receive an inscription, presumably dedicatory, and its decoration while the eastern parts of the building, nave, aisles, and facade were still under construction. Located, as it was, over the shrine, it was also the most prestigious place available for such an inscription. It could not well have been left empty. If, in or after 324, Constantine placed the distich UOD DUCE on the triumphal arch rather than on the arch of the apse, he did so, it seems reasonable to suggest, on the same grounds on which Galla Placidia at S. Paolo f.l.m. and Eudoxia at S. Pietro in Vincoli placed their inscriptions on the triumphal arch: the apse arch was preempted by an earlier inscription. At St. Peter's, that earlier inscription was, I propose, the one, a last fragment of which Vegio read: "... CONSTANTINI ... EXPIATA ... HOSTILI INCURSIONE ..."

As it happens, there falls between 317–320 and 324 a hostile incursion by barbarians into the Empire as much commented upon by contemporaries as the campaigns of 332 and 334, and avenged by Constantine in person through the annihilation of the invaders. In the fall of 322, the Sarmatians sailed across the Danube, broke into the Balkan provinces, looted the countryside, and laid siege to the fortified town of Campona. Constantine, then residing at Sirmium, moved against them, threw them back, pursued them across the river and, in a decisive battle in their own territory, defeated them and killed their king, Raisamund. The victory was celebrated by circus games, as recorded in the Calendar of Filocalus under the dates of November 28 to December 1, and coins were struck bearing the legend SARMATIA DEVICTA and showing on the reverse a figure of Victory spurning a captive seated on the ground<sup>95</sup>.

95 Zosimus, *New History*, 2.21; Maurice, *op. cit.*, CXX ff. and *passim*; *RIC* VII, 135 (the coins were issued only in Western mints, hence before 324); for the Chronograph of 354, see *MGH AA*, IX.1 (*Chronica Minora*, ed. Th. Mommsen), 13, and *CIL* I, 3 (where the

If then, the HOSTILIS INCURSIO commemorated in the apse arch was that of the Sarmatians in 322–23, perhaps followed by the Goths early in 323, work in that part of the church should have been underway and well advanced in, or shortly after, the winter of that year. To expiate for the sacrilegious invasion of the soil of the Empire, Constantine dedicated a *piaculum*. What that *piaculum* was, had best be left open. It might have been the church and the recipient of the offering would have been Christ. The distich on the triumphal arch QUOD DUCE TE which in the context of the victory over Licinius expressly names Him as the one to whom the church is consecrated would have but superseded and reiterated the earlier dedication recorded on the apse arch; just as the events of 324 had superseded the by now in retrospect quite insignificant defeat of the Sarmatians in 322–323. After all, in Constantine's days churches were customarily consecrated to Christ; only by ellipsis, as it were, did the martyr whose resting place or memoria it sheltered, give the church his name, and that, in turn, gave rise to the common belief that the building, rather than the memoria, had been dedicated to him<sup>96</sup>.

festival state calendar is listed); and especially for the days of the *ludi Sarmatici*, November 24 to December 1, *ibid.*, 354. See also MacMullen, *op. cit.*, 146 f.; and Barnes, *op. cit.*, 76.

Another raid by the Transdanubian Goths in February, 323 – was that but an aftermath of the Sarmatian campaign? or did the Anonymous Valesianus (I.5.21; Ammianus Marcellinus, *LCL*, III, 521), the only source reporting that raid, perchance confuse the Goths with the Sarmatians? No coins were ever struck for that victory, in any case. Maurice, *loc. cit.*, suggests that it was played down perhaps because in that campaign, Constantine trespassed on territory under the jurisdiction of Licinius. The *ludi Gothici* listed in the Chronograph of 354 (*CIL* I.1, 336) under February 4 to 9 might well refer, as Mommsen suggested, *loc. cit.*, to the defeat of the Goths, nominally by Constantine II as Caesar, in 332; so would, it seems, the coins with the legend VICTORIA GOTHICA, minted in Rome some time between 327 and 333 (*RIC* VII, 333). On the other hand, the inscription (*CIL* VI, 2, 6159) from one of the Danube forts which styles Constantine I VICTOR MAXIMUS TRIUMPATOR (sic.) ... VICTIS SUPERRATISQUE GOTHIS ... and by its reference to the emperor's three *quinquennalia* to 320–321, seems to allude to a defeat of the Goths antedating the events of 322–323.

96 The formula employed in the Liber Pontificalis, "fecit basilicam beato Petro apostolo" and the corresponding ones, "beato Paulo", "beato Laurentio", and so forth, at first glance seem to contradict the original dedication of these churches to Christ. However, the sixth-century compiler of the text of the Liber Pontificalis clearly used a shortcut instead of the legal dedicatory formula, "do, dico, dedico" (L. Voelkl, *Die Kirchenstiftungen des Kaisers Konstantin im Lichte des römischen Sakralrechts, Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Forschung des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen, Geisteswissenschaften*, 117, Cologne und Opladen, 1964, 22 f., note 53), which presumably would have been contained in Constantine's original document of dedication. That shortcut is linked, I think, to the concept (or misconception) as it

However, it is equally possible that Constantine's *piaculum* of 322–323, rather than the church, was the *aedicula* of Saint Peter and was offered to him, after having been restored, adjusted and encased in its marble shrine. The *fastigium*, the *domus regalis* over the shrine would have followed a few years later, but certainly before Helena's death. Could then, if I may risk a hypothesis, the inscription on the apse arch above the shrine have read roughly as follows: (*ex voto*) CONSTANTINI (*Augusti*) EXPIATA HOSTILI INCURSIONE (*haec aula* [or *memoria*<sup>97</sup>, or *aedi-*

had developed by the compiler's time that the church was actually consecrated to the saint whose body or relics it sheltered. To me, it seems very doubtful that this concept can be applied without reservations to Constantinian times. Popular belief may have held early, and probably did, that the martyr was the actual patron of the church and that it was he or she to whom the church was dedicated. Inscriptions and literary sources of an official character, on the other hand, throughout the fourth century, appear to differentiate quite clearly between the *memoria* of the saint and the dedication of the church to Christ, as witness Paulinus of Nola, Ep. 32, paragraph 10: "Basilica . . . illa quae ad dominaedium nostrum communem patronum in nomine domini Christi dei iam dedicata", *Epistulae*, ed. Hartel, *CSEL* 29, Part I, Vienna, 1894, 286; also *ILCV*, no. 1830: "... H[ae]c domus d[omin]i nos[tri] Christ ... h[ae]c memoria beati martiris ..." and *ibid.*, note: "hic e[st] dom[us] [dei hic] memo[ria] apostol[orum] ...". To be sure, the belief in the intercession of the martyr was bound to lead to ambiguities in the situation. Constantina – or better her court poet, author of the acrostichon and presumably theologically schooled – makes her say that she consecrates the basilica of the martyr Agnes: "sacravi templum victricis virginis Agnae"; that she asks her to accept it as a worthy present, "dignum igitur munus ... per saecula longa tenebis"; but she stresses that it is Christ's name that is celebrated there, "nomen enim Christi celebratur aedibus istis". It is equally striking that the *Liber Pontificalis*, in nearly all cases in the Sylvester biography, either in the text as generally given by the manuscripts, or in variants, replaces the dative by the genitive – "martyris Agnae", "Beati Petri" for "beato Petro", "beati Laurentii" (only for the basilica of SS. Marcellinus and Petrus does Duchesne give no genitive variant); in short, the martyr is not the recipient of the church, rather it is named after him because he rests there and because it is hallowed by his presence – "sacratam corpore Pauli" says the inscription at S. Paolo f.l.m. Given the faith in the martyr's intercession, it was almost inevitable that the church was believed to be dedicated to him. See also R. Herzog, "Zwei griechische Gedichte des 4. Jahrhunderts ... in Trier: II, Gedicht auf die hl. Agnes", *Trierer Zeitschrift* 18 (1938), 79 ff.

A.M. Schneider many years ago (*Die altchristliche Bischofs- und Gemeindekirche und ihre Benennung, Nachrichten der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen, Phil.-hist. Klasse.*, 1952, 157) maintained that regular churches were never dedicated to Christ; he even doubted the authenticity of the inscription QUOD DUCE TE at Old St. Peter's, *ibid.*, note 18. This is plainly erroneous, as witness, to quote just one example, Damasus' dedicatory verses at S. Lorenzo in Damaso: "tibi Christe Deus nova templa dicavi", or, though a century later, the inscription of Valila at S. Andrea in Catabarbara.

<sup>97</sup> *TbLL* VII, 681 f., frequently designating the burial place of a martyr or a small building sheltering that place.

*cula*<sup>98</sup>, or possibly even *hoc tropaeum*<sup>99</sup> *dicata[um] deo [or beato Petro]]?*

This, to be sure, is a conjecture, but it seems to me more solidly based than those proposed heretofore.

## V.

So far then, a very few data throw light on the start and progress of construction at Old St. Peter's. But these are established beyond doubt. Archaeological evidence – the coin find in a sealed urn inside a pagan mausoleum close to the apostle's *aedicula* and the Constantinian brick-stamps found in the apse wall in 1598 – fix, the first, a *terminus ante quem non* of 317–320 for the beginning of work, the second, an all-too wide *terminus ad* for the construction of the apse, prior to 337. Documentary evidence, provided by the building inscriptions, narrows that broad span. The inscription on the gold cross firmly establishes the date of Helena's death, be it the winter 327–328 or, less likely, 329, as the *terminus post quem non* for the completion of construction and of at least part of the decoration of transept and apse, the latter radiant *ex trimma auri*. Likewise by that time, the *fastigium* on its vinescroll columns and surmounted by presumably gilded ribs would have been set up, if indeed that *fastigium* is the *domus regalis* mentioned in the inscription. That the *aula simili fulgore corruscans*, then apparently finished or about to be finished, refers to the entire basilica is possible, but not solidly proven. On the other hand, the inscription does provide a firm *terminus ante quem non* by the elevation of Helena to the rank of Augusta, whether on November 8, 324, or July 25, 325, at least for the completion of transept and apse.

The inscription QUOD DUCE TE MUNDUS facing the nave on the triumphal arch, presumably along its rim, has a secure *terminus ante quem non* in Constantine's conquest of the East, decided by the battle of Chrysopolis on September 28, 324. My proposal to date shortly afterwards the inscription set up by CONSTANTINUS VICTOR, his title assumed at that time, is based, to be sure, on its tenor and mood and hence subjective. Under no circumstances, however, must the donation to the basilica of large landed properties *per diocesim Orientis*, and hence in or after the late fall of 324, be construed to mean that it antedates the start of construction; it was given for annual income, not for building expenses. On the other hand, the inscription is unlikely to date after that on the

<sup>98</sup> *TbLL* I, 916, s.v. *memoria*, "frequently used for a mausoleum"; also *aedicula larum*.

<sup>99</sup> J. Carcopino, *Les fouilles de Saint-Pierre*, Paris, 1963, 256 ff.

gold cross. By the time that latter was composed, at least transept and apse were completed; therefore the triumphal arch must have been built and with it, for static reasons, at least the end walls, if not more, of nave and aisles. At the same time, while the scaffolding was still up, the inscription, presumably in mosaic, would have in all likelihood be set in place.

A start of construction early in the twenties thus seems to be indicated by the two uncontested inscriptions, that on the triumphal arch and the one on the gold cross. Moreover, it seems to be supported by the inscription on the apse arch EXPIATA HOSTILI INCURSIONE, provided my proposal is accepted to link that fragment to the incursion and defeat by Constantine of the Sarmatians in the winter of 322–323. I sum up once more the arguments for that conjecture of mine: the inscription, like the others at St. Peter's, must be Constantine's own, whose name it prominently displays. It is likely to have preceded the one on the triumphal arch; for, that latter's unusual location is best explained, in analogy to similar dedicatory inscriptions on the triumphal arches of other early churches in Rome, by an earlier inscription's having pre-empted the prestigious place on the arch or inside the apse. Also, in the twenties, the Sarmatian incursion was the only noteworthy barbarian raid demanding expiation and followed by a victory of Constantine's much celebrated. That expiation, I submit, was commemorated by the dedication of the shrine, restored and encased in its marble-clad envelope. The apse sheltering the shrine therefore had been built presumably by 323; and the inscription was set in place on its arch certainly before the fall of 324, which saw the conquest of the East and what to Constantine was the final victory of Christianity in the world. In short, the dates of construction of Old St. Peter's, if not of the whole basilica – though that remains possible – all crowd into the twenties prior to Helena's death.

One argument available for dating the construction of St. Peter's, accepted by some and rejected by other scholars would seem to buttress further a date at the very beginning of the 320's for the start of building operations. An inscription, now in the Vatican Museum (ex-Lateran Collection) records an interruption of twenty-eight years in the offerings of taurobolia in the Phrygianum, a sanctuary of the Great Mother, located in all likelihood near the south end of Maderno's facade of New St. Peter's<sup>100</sup>. Moreover, a series of taurobolia altars have been found,

100 M. Marucchi in *AttiP AccDissertazioni* XV (1921), 271, correctly interpreted by P. Fabre, "Un autel du culte phrygien", *MelArch-Hist* 40 (1923), 3ff.

some below that very spot underneath Maderno's facade, others scattered through the Borgo, all inscribed and dated, but none between 319 and 350<sup>101</sup>. Thus it has been concluded that at some time between 319 and 322 the pagan sanctuary was closed down "temporarily," presumably because of the bustle on the nearby building site<sup>102</sup>. That the sanctuary remained closed for a full twenty-eight years, seems to favor, to be sure, the contention of the "late-daters" that construction at St. Peter's continued until the mid-century or beyond. That argument, however, is fallacious. The lengthy closing of the Phrygianum can be explained as well by assuming that the suspension, intended to be or presented as temporary at the start, was extended as an anti-pagan measure under Constantine and his son Constans, to be lifted only in 350 by the pagan usurper Magnentius; from then on the taurobolia did continue until as late as 390, protected by pagan aristocratic-senatorial circles<sup>103</sup>. However, there remain some obstacles to accepting unreservedly the testimony of the Phrygianum closure for the date of construction at St. Peter's: one, the ex-Lateran inscription is undated and may, but need not be, of fourth century origin; two, the taurobolia inscriptions number but nine, ranging from 319 to 390, too few to draw a safe conclusion; three, the location of the pagan sanctuary remains unknown<sup>104</sup>. I am inclined to accept the hypothesis of the closing's being linked to the start of work on the basilica, but hypothesis it remains.

The beginning of construction at Old St. Peter's very early in the 320's thus seems to be fairly well-documented. So is the progress of work to a certain point. By the time of Helena's death, at least the transept and apse were completed and their decoration had been started or perhaps even completed. What remains uncertain is the date by which construction of also the eastern parts of the church was terminated, the nave and aisles, the atrium in its first Constantinian form and the flight of steps ascending from the piazza. Explicitly or by implication, the late-daters insist on the length of time which would be required for the construction of a building as large as Old St. Peter's on a terrain as difficult as the slope of the Vatican Hill and over the remains of a cemetery crowded with dozens of mausolea all to be filled in and secured by retaining walls<sup>105</sup>. That argument, however, carries no

101 The taurobolia altars excavated under the facade or scattered through the Borgo are referred to by Fabre, *op. cit.*, 5, 16.

102 See above, note 5.

103 Toynbee-Ward-Perkins, see above, note 5, p. 196.

104 *Ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

105 E. Kirschbaum, *op. cit.*, 1957, 146f.; Ch. Pietri, *op. cit.*



weight on two grounds, particular and general. In the particular case of St. Peter's, the mausolea and their retaining walls built by Constantine's masons, rather than hampering building operations, served to create a splendid grid to hold the fill and to provide the platform on which to set the basilica. Also, when in the late first and the early second century the cemetery was laid out, the hill had been graded; thus Constantine's masons could build the long longitudinal foundation walls of aisle and nave, at least to the south, freestanding rather than in trenches, and hence far more speedily<sup>106</sup>. Quite apart from these local conditions facilitating speedy construction, one wants to remember the remarkable speed with which buildings commanded by an emperor rose in Rome in the third and the early fourth centuries<sup>107</sup>. The Thermae of Caracalla were built within four years, but that was a century before Constantine. Closer to his time were the Aurelian Walls, 18 kilometers long and 8.50 meters high at that first stage, built within from two to seven years. The Thermae of Diocletian covering some 11,000 square meters, with their complicated vaulting systems and their richly decorated interiors, were built and finished between 298 and 305–306<sup>108</sup>. The raising of the city walls to nearly double their height by Maxentius was completed within the short six years of his reign, 306–312. Moreover, within these same six years, Maxentius built the Basilica Nova in the Forum, with its huge walls and vaults – Constantine's was only the interior decoration and the building of the second, northward, apse; the villa and circus on the Via Appia and the nearby mausoleum of his son Romulus; not to mention the almost total rebuilding of the Temple of Venus and Rome. It was a remarkable building program<sup>109</sup>. The time it took to build the Thermae of Constantine, raised on a platform longer than that of St. Peter's remains unknown, but they too seem to have been built within a few years; begun prior to 315, perhaps as early as 313, construction may have been terminated by 315, and that included demolishing a dozen luxurious mansions and numerous ordinary houses to erect the platform. Unlimited funds and huge numbers of

slave laborers, both skilled and unskilled, made possible such speedy construction. There is no reason on earth why Constantine could not have built St. Peter's, so much simpler in construction, its columns and architraves spoils, within a decade or less. To be sure, when, at the end of the fourth century, S. Paolo f. l. m. was built, speed of construction may have slowed down somewhat, but even there construction including the decoration, started in 384, was completed, if not within seven or eight, then within eleven years or a trifle more<sup>110</sup>.

To support the thesis of construction at Old St. Peter's having dragged on a long time, it has been maintained that the masonry technique of the foundation walls changes from West to East. I have gone over the notes taken years ago by myself and my collaborators, Wolfgang Frankl and Alfred Frazer, and compared them with those reported in the forties by the excavators<sup>111</sup>. Where the foundation walls are brick-faced, the excavators, taking their measurements in line with the fifth to seventh nave columns, counting from the transept (that is, at the present entrance to the excavations), reported a modulus ranging from 31 to as much as 34 cm. for five brick and five mortar courses; our own measurements taken at that same point ranged from 31.5 to 32.7 cm., while another

110 A. Chastagnol ("Sur quelques documents relatifs à la basilique de Saint-Paul hors-les-murs", *Mélanges ... André Piganiol*, I, Paris, 1966, 421) places the start of construction in 383, one or possibly as much as three years too early, in my opinion. Completion of construction he places in 391, based on his interpretation of the inscriptions engraved on shaft and base of the first column (counting from the transept) of the arcades separating the aisles to the north. The inscription on the shaft gives the name of pope Siricius (384–389). The one on the base is badly mutilated – the best readings and the most convincing fillings of the *lacunae* seem to be De Rossi's (*Mosaici Cristiani*, Rome, 1899, no. 15, p. 38; following him, Diehl, *ILCV*, no. 1857, and H. Lietzmann, *Petrus und Paulus in Rom*, 2nd ed. Leipzig, 1927, 213 ff.). But notwithstanding its poor state of preservation, it provides the consular date 390 (Chastagnol's proposal, *op. cit.*, to shift it to 391 has been refuted – Alan Cameron, letter, December, 1985) and what seems to be a date of dedication or foundation (*natale*), apparently November 18; this being the traditional date of dedication of the basilica, attested to since the eleventh century. However, the inscription refers, rather than to the completion of the basilica, only to the columna, *column Paul(i) A(postoli)*, presumably to its being set in place. But was it the first or the last column to be erected? If the latter, it would indeed mark the completion of construction; if the former, only the transept might have been completed by 390 (*Corpus V*, 162) and terminating the construction of the nave would have taken a few more years. Certainly the decoration would have been completed only under Honorius, after 395, as witness the inscription "... HONORIUS PERFECIT AULAM ...", whether in the apse on its arch (above note 76), but before 402–03, when Prudentius saw the ceilings in place and gilded (*Peristephanon XII*, 49 ff.).

111 *Esplorazioni*, 150, 155.

106 *Esplorazioni*, 150 f.

107 Alfred Frazer many years ago pointed out to me the remarkable speed in constructing Imperial buildings in third and fourth century Rome.

108 A. Frazer, "The Iconography of the Emperor Maxentius' Buildings in Via Appia", *Art Bull* 48 (1966), 385, with reference to the Calendar of 354.

109 G. Lugli, *I monumenti antichi di Roma e suburbio*, Rome, I (1930), 414; II (1938), 360; A. Nibby, *Roma nel anno MDCCCXXXVIII*, Rome, 1839, II, 777 ff. and 799 ff. For the Thermae of Constantine, M. Santangelo, "Il Quirinale nell'antichità", *AttiPAccMemorie V* (1941), 77 ff.

independent observer found at the same point of the nave foundation a modulus fluctuating between 30.5 and 32 cm.<sup>112</sup> In the foundation wall of the south transept, we noted a modulus around 30–31 cm.; in the rising wall of the south aisle, the modulus ranged from a low of 28.5 to a high of 32.7 cm., whereas the excavators, obviously rounding off the figures, reported a modulus of 29–30 cm. for the rising walls of both south transept and apse<sup>113</sup>. The brickwork, then, does not change essentially, as far as can be checked, from the apse to the nave and aisles. What minor differences there are would be due to individual masons' or workshops' customs<sup>114</sup>. Similarly, other features, as far as ascertainable from archaeological evidence or old graphic surveys, remain the same throughout the building, except that the walls of apse and transept, having to withstand the pressure from the slope of the hill, are stronger (2.00 and 1.80 m. respectively) than those of the aisles (1.49 m.) and of the facade (1.41 m.)<sup>115</sup>. Old St. Peter's, to sum it up, is of one build, erected, it appears, over a short span of time<sup>116</sup>.

Among the arguments brought forward in favor of a late date for the completion of construction of the Vatican basilica, an entry in the Chronograph of 354 has always held pride of place. The Chronograph is a calendar for that year written by the calligrapher Filocalus for a wealthy Roman Christian, Valentinus. Incorporated in it is the *depositio martyrum*, a catalogue of Christian festivals celebrated in Rome – the majority martyrs' commemorations, giving day and month (and sometimes year) of death

and location of burial; Christmas, December 25, and the *Natale Petri de cathedra*, February 22, are added so as to complete a calendar of non-movable Christian feasts. The entry which concerns us is found under June 29, and it runs: "III Kal. Julii Petri in catacumbas et Pauli Ostense Tusco et Basso cons." The consular date, corresponding to 258, presumably marks the year when, for reasons still much disputed but of no concern to us here, the commemorative festival of the two apostles was instituted *ad catacumbas*, that is at S. Sebastiano. Consequently, the text of the entry has led to the conjecture that by 354 Saint Paul was commemorated at his grave site on the Via Ostiensis, possibly in the small church built either by Constantine or his son Constantius, while, on the other hand, Saint Peter was commemorated still at that date *ad catacumbas*, because, so the reasoning goes, the Vatican basilica was not yet ready for liturgical use<sup>117</sup>.

To get around that inconvenient *terminus ad* for the continued celebration of St. Peter's festival at S. Sebastiano on the Via Appia rather than at the Vatican, and for the concomitant supposedly incomplete state of construction at Old St. Peter's, it has been proposed to consider the entry as mutilated and to complete it based on later Roman martyrologia. Originally, according to this proposal, the entry would have run: "III Kal. Julii Romae Natale sanctorum Petri et Pauli apostolorum Petri in Vaticano Pauli vero in Via Ostiense utriusque in Catacumbas Basso et Tusco consulibus." This is how it was reconstructed by DeRossi and Duchesne for the Martyrologium Hieronymianum and the hypothetical early fifth century Roman church calendar incorporated therein<sup>118</sup>. To be sure by 400 or shortly thereafter, the entry may have run just like that. But that does not explain the very different version as it appears in the Chronograph of 354; a scribe's dropping that large and important a section of the original text is not very plausible. It just seems safer to accept the version as transmitted by the Calendar as it stands.

It has long been recognized, however, that the Chronograph of 354 is compiled of elements widely heterogeneous

112 T. H. L. Heres, *Paries*, Ph.D. Thesis, Amsterdam, 1982, 320 ff., catalogue number 33.

113 *Esplosioni*, 155 f.

114 Needless to say, one wants to recall that the foundations of the eastern, that is the front part of the basilica, have never been excavated.

115 Peruzzi, Florence, Uffizi, UA 11 r. See *Corpus V*, 216 f.

116 The two Christian sarcophagi, found in the area excavated, confirm, if only generally, the Constantinian date for the completion of apse and transept. Both were lowered down from the Constantinian level into the area of the mausolea already demolished. One (*Esplosioni*, I, 37 f., Pl. VII f., *Repertorium der christlich-antiken Sarkophage*, ed. F. W. Deichmann, Wiesbaden, I, 1967, no. 674, pl. 102) came to rest above the door lintel of the Arbutii mausoleum, N, well within the transept area. Both its figural decoration, displaying in two registers and rather disorderly, scenes from the New Testament and from the life of St. Peter, and its style have suggested a date certainly within Constantine's reign and perhaps as early as 325 (*Esplosioni*, I, 79, Pl. XXVIII: *Repertorium*, "Constantinian"; M. Sotomayor, *San Pedro en la iconografía paleocristiana*, *Biblioteca teológica granadina*, 5, Granada, 1962, 182, "ca. 325"). The second Christian sarcophagus, strigillated and flanked by Peter and Paul, was inserted in the remains of the mausoleum R', and has been assigned to the second third of the century (*Repertorium* ..., I, no. 681, Plate 108).

117 The calendar survives only in sixteenth and seventeenth century copies based in turn on a Carolingian copy of the lost original. For the text, see *MGH AAIX.1 (Chronica Minora*, ed. Th. Mommsen), 13 ff. and *CIL I. H. Stern, Le Calendrier de 354*, Paris, 1961.

For the *depositio episcoporum* and the *depositio martyrum*, see conveniently also H. Lietzmann, *Die Ältesten Martyrologien (Kleine Texte)*, Berlin, 1911. See also R. Krautheimer, "Intorno alla fondazione di San Paolo fuori le mura", *AttiPAccRend* 53–54 (1980–1982), 207 ff.

118 *AASS*, Novembris II.2, ed. G. B. DeRossi and E. Duchesne, Brussels, 1894, 334; see also above, note 7.

ous in origin, character and date: lists and images of the planets and zodiacal signs, hence pagan and timeless within antiquity, as are the pertinent images of the gods; lists of the emperors, of the *fasti consulares* and of the *praefecti urbi*, all of long standing, but updated to 354 for insertion into the calendar; the Roman state calendar marking the official festivals, pagan without exception, hence presumably pre-Constantinian in origin; the anniversaries of the emperors including Constantius II but neither his two brothers and therefore updated to after 350; an Easter cycle, listing the Easter dates from 312 to 352 and those precalculated from 343 to 411, hence written in 342<sup>119</sup>; a list of the Roman bishops from Peter to Liberius, the *Catalogus Liberianus*, originally compiled since 235, and brought up to date by 354<sup>120</sup>; the *depositio episcoporum*, a catalogue of the anniversaries of death and the burial places of the Roman bishops, consecutively listed through the year, from 255 to the death of Sylvester, December 31, 335, with those of Mark, October 7, 336, and of Julius I, April 12, 352, added out of order at the end of the list – hence compiled in the first eight months of 336 and brought up to date twice, late in 336 and in or after the late spring of 352. There follow: the *depositio martyrum*; a world chronicle, the *Liber generationis*, ending 334; a Roman chronicle terminating with the death of Licinius, late in 324; and the *Notitia regionum Urbis Romae*, a gazetteer of the city districts listing private and public buildings, but no churches, possibly pre-Constantinian, but adjusted in or after 334 by including some monuments of Constantine's, among them his equestrian statue on the Forum dedicated that year<sup>121</sup>.

Given the date established for the original compilation of the *depositio episcoporum*, 336, Duchesne a century ago suggested that probably (*vraisemblablement*) the same *terminus ad* applied to the *depositio martyrum* in its present form which contains the entry for June 29<sup>122</sup>. However, as I see it, and with all respect to that great church historian, there are no grounds on which to build that supposition. To be sure, the two lists are linked to another in that the martyr and confessor popes listed in the *depositio martyrum* are omitted from the *depositio episcoporum*: Fabian, Pontianus, Calixtus – but they don't count since their pontifica-

tes antedate the start of the *depositio episcoporum* and possibly were inserted *ex post facto* – and Sixtus II. Hence, the lists *may* carry the same date. But they might just as well have been compiled at different times with the *depositio episcoporum* omitting the name of pope Sixtus because he already appeared in the earlier martyrs' list, as did the names of the martyr and confessor popes antedating 250. In short, while the *depositio episcoporum* in its original version is firmly dated between December 31, 335, and October 7, 336, the *depositio martyrum* provides no *terminus ad* or *post quem non*. Compiled presumably in a first version in the course of the first half of the third century, and updated as time went on, it carries, as it stands now, only a *terminus ante quem non*, namely the anniversaries of the martyrs put to death in Rome in 304 in Diocletian's persecution<sup>123</sup>. But it provides no *terminus ante* except the date of the Chronograph of 354, and since the *depositio martyrum* is an insert, the date of the former must not be applied to the latter. Nor need its date be linked to that of the *depositio episcoporum*. As I see it, the martyrs' list, in the version in which it has come down to us, may have been compiled, as well as in 336, in the twenties of the century or even a few years before<sup>124</sup>. At that time, the

123 H. Achelis, *Die Martyrologien* (*Abh. der Kgl. Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen, Phil.-hist. Kl.*, N.F. III, 8), Berlin, 1900, 6 ff., suggests for a first version of the *depositio martyrum* a date in the first half of the third century. That first version was gradually brought up to date after the persecutions under Valerian, 258, and Diocletian, 304. In the course of these revisions, the entries for December 25, Christmas, and February 22, *Cathedra Petri*, were likewise inserted. Nothing suggests, however, that this happened as late as around 336, as proposed by J. Ruyschaert, "Les deux fêtes de Pierre dans la *depositio martyrum* de 354", *AttiP AccRend* 38 (1965/66), 173 ff.

The listing of the Nativity on December 25 was formerly believed to constitute a *terminus ante quem* for the *depositio martyrum* in its final, present form; the assumption being that in Rome, Christmas until 352 was celebrated on January 6 (H. Usener, *Das Weihnachtsfest*, 2nd ed., Bonn, 1911, 281; H. Lietzmann, as above note 110, 103 ff.). Recent scholarship, on the contrary, is inclined to believe that as early as the third century, December 25 was celebrated in Rome as the Nativity of Christ. See *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* X, Freiburg, 1965, 984 ff. (H. Frank).

Similarly, the feast of the *cathedra Petri* was celebrated in Rome "perhaps as early as the end of the third century" (Th. Klauser, *Die Cathedra im Totenkult der heidnischen und christlichen Antike*<sup>2</sup> (*Liturgie-wissenschaftliche Quellen und Forschungen*, 21), Münster, 1971, 183; Lietzmann, *op. cit.*, 18, suggests a date around 306.

124 Deichmann (F.W. Deichmann and A. von Tschira, "Das Mausoleum der Kaiserin Helena ...", *JDAI* 72, 1957, 76, note 92) has pointed out that the *depositio martyrum*, as transmitted by the calendar of 354, is incomplete anyhow, since Marcellinus and his fellow martyr the exorcist Peter are not listed, although both died in the persecution under Diocletian, and the *coemeterium subteglatum* on the Via Labicana was built in their honor (*LP I*, 182) over their resting place as early as the teens of the fourth century, with the mausoleum of Helena added and completed around 325

119 Duchesne, *LP I*, VI: *ICUR* I.LXXXV.

120 *LP I*, VII ff., 1 ff.

121 A. Nordh, *Libellus de Regionibus Urbis Romae*, Lund, 1949; *Codice topografica della Città di Roma*, ed. R. Valentini, G. Zucchetti, I, Rome, 1940, 63 ff. Despite some differences of opinion, Nordh as well as Valentini-Zucchetti arrive at the same date.

122 *LP I*, VI f.; Stern, *op. cit.*, 44, somewhat less tentatively feels "... on est en droit de penser".

festival of Saint Paul on June 29 could well have been celebrated on the Via Ostensis, either at his grave under the open sky; or, if indeed that was built by Constantine, in the small basilica preceding that of the Three Emperors begun in 384 or 385. On the Vatican Hill, on the other hand, in the twenties construction was still underway and hence the festival of Saint Peter had to be celebrated still *in catacumbas*, at S. Sebastiano. In no case, it appears to me, does the entry for June 29, as listed in the *depositio martyrum* and incorporated *tale quale* into the Chronograph of Filocalus, suggest that construction at St. Peter's was still continuing in 354 or, for that matter, as Duchesne's supposition would suggest, in 336. The *terminus ad* for the much-discussed entry for June 29 might just as well fall in the twenties.

None of the arguments brought forward in favor of a late date for the completion of the construction of Old St. Peter's appears to hold. On the other hand, there is some evidence in support of an early date, in the late twenties or early thirties.

Forty years ago, William Seston, called attention to a decree issued in 349 by the emperor Constans; a clause buried therein suggested to him the possibility of certain legal-religious provisions having been taken in 333 in view of the impending destruction of the cemetery below St. Peter's<sup>125</sup>. The decree of Constans reminds the authorities of the fines to be imposed for despoiling or destroying tombs<sup>126</sup>: removing marble or columns; selling or buying building materials taken from tombs; levelling them and hiding the evidence; demolishing them under the pretext of using the materials for public buildings; all offenses, listed with other similar ones ever since Republican times and punishable under the heading of *violatio sepulchri*. Only for the sake of repairs, so the decree of 349, and with the permission of the *pontifices*, pagan except the emperor in his capacity as *pontifex maximus*, may a tomb structure be taken down; a committee headed by the *praefectus urbi* is to decide on the need for repairs and to set a time limit for carrying them out. The decree is addressed to Limenius, *praefectus praetorio Italiae* and concomitantly *praefectus urbi*<sup>127</sup>. Hence it probably refers primarily to Rome, but it specifies expressly that it applies to the provinces as well.

(Deichmann and von Tschira, as above, 72 ff.; J. Guyon, *Le Cimetière aux deux lauriers [Roma sotterranea, VII]*, Vatican City, 1987, 261). This, too, suggests an early date for the *depositio martyrum*, as incorporated in the Calendar of 354.

125 W. Seston, as above note 6.

126 *Codex Theodosianus*, VIII.17.2, March 28, 349, ed. Th. Mommsen and P. Krüger, Zürich, 1904 (reprinted 1971).

127 *RE* XIII, 2, 571 (Seeck).

The decree of 349 is made retroactive, but its retroactivity is limited to the period after 333. From this, Seston drew the conclusion that in that year Constantine, in his capacity as *pontifex maximus*, made arrangements for invalidating temporarily the laws concerning *violaciones sepulchri* for the sake of removing the cemetery below St. Peter's. But, as pointed out long ago<sup>128</sup> and reiterated ever since, construction of the basilica had started long before that date. Indeed, in the *Corpus I* reversed Seston's hypothesis<sup>129</sup> and proposed that by 333 the demolition of the cemetery under St. Peter's had been terminated, including the easternmost end below the atrium of the basilica and the preceding flight of stairs.

On the whole, I think that proposal was right, but I have had second thoughts about the finer points. Clearly the decree of 349 was aimed at halting widespread infractions of the legislation regarding *violaciones sepulchri*. The need for combatting such offenses – demolition, robbing, abuses of tombs as dwellings or stables – was not new. The *Digesta*<sup>130</sup> deals with cases going back to early Imperial days, and the *Corpus iuris* records a pertinent law dated 240. Constans himself, as early as 340, had issued a decree threatening severe punishment for robbery of materials from graves for use in private buildings, addressed to the then *praefectus urbi*<sup>131</sup>. Offenses apparently were widespread in the thirties and forties. Such disregard for the law among the general public and the corresponding laxity of the magistrates, ever-present, would have been increased, if during or shortly before the thirties the strict laws against *violatio sepulchri* were disregarded with official consent or had indeed been suspended by an imperial decree. Such invalidating action, if indeed it was taken, might well – though there is no proof – have been linked, as suggested by Seston, to the wholesale demolition, underway or planned, of graveyards outside the walls of Rome to make room for the huge *coemeteria subteglata* built by Constantine: SS. Marcellino e Pietro, S. Lorenzo f.l.m., S. Sebastiano (though that may have been pre-Constantinian in origin); probably S. Agnese, and of course St. Peter's. In short, the measure, whatever it was, that suspended legislation re: *violaciones sepulchri*, would have been aimed, not at St. Peter's alone, but at the whole string of Constantine's buildings on and in graveyards,

128 Toynbee and Ward-Perkins, as above, note 104, p. 197.

129 So already J. Carcopino, *Les fouilles de Saint-Pierre et la tradition*, Paris, 1953, 141, a passus which had escaped my attention when preparing *Corpus V*.

130 *Digesta Iustiniani Augusti* XXXVII.12, ed. Th. Mommsen, II, Berlin, 1870 (reprint 1963), 735; *Corpus Iuris Civilis* VIII.19, ed. P. Krüger, II, Berlin, 1877 (reprint 1954), 380.

131 *Codex Theodosianus* VIII.17.1, June 25, 340.

above and below ground. Also, such a measure would presumably have preceded planned demolition; and since the *coemeterium subteglatum* of SS. Marcellino e Pietro dates from the late teens of the century, the suspending measure should be that early<sup>132</sup>.

<sup>132</sup> SS. Marcellino e Pietro was begun sometime in the teens of the century (as above, note 125). S. Sebastiano is undated, but since it is not mentioned in the *LP*, the possibility of a pre-Constantinian foundation has been entertained; however, construction seems to have dragged on into the thirties. The *basilica maior* on the Verano, S. Lorenzo, while founded and funded by Constantine, is otherwise undated. The date suggested in *Corpus* II, 133, about 330, is unfounded and, I now think, erroneous.

Dating the construction of Constantina's church of S. Agnese, the *coemeterium subteglatum* on the Via Nomentana (F.W. Deichmann, "Die Lage der Constantinischen Basilika der Heiligen Agnes", *Riv. Arch. Crist.* 22, 1946, 213 ff.) presents a major problem. General opinion has it that it was built between 337 and 350, when the princess, Constantine's oldest daughter, was in residence at her suburban villa on the Nomentana after the death of her first husband Hannibalianus early in 338 and before her second marriage to Gallus in 350 (Deichmann, as cited above, based on Herzog, as above, note 96; H. Stern, "Les mosaïques de l'église de Ste. Constance à Rome", *DOP* 12, 1958, 157 ff.; for the data of Constantina's life and the sources, see *RE* IV, 1, 958 f., O. Seeck, erroneously under Constantia). With Hannibalianus, to whom she was married by her father in 335, she would presumably have resided in the East, since he was appointed by Constantine *rex regum* of Pontus; with Gallus, her second husband, she *did* reside in Antioch. Indeed, it is quite possible that she spent the years of her widowhood in Rome, and it is most likely that the mausoleum, where she was buried in 355, having died in 354 in Bithynia on her way from Antioch to Milan, was built during these years (H. Stern, *op. cit.*). Her younger sister Helena, the wife of Julian Apostata, was likewise buried there, in 360 (Ammianus Marcellinus, *Rerum gestarum quae supersunt*, XXI.1, 5; *LCL*, ed. J. C. Rolfe, II, 92).

On the other hand, that date of 337–350 for the construction of the mausoleum need not coincide with that of the basilica. For one, the mausoleum was apparently built against the side wall of the latter's narthex (A. Desgodetz, G. Valadier, L. Canina, *Sugli Edifici antichi di Roma*, I, Rome, 1843, pl. 7); hence it seems to be later. Moreover, a date of construction for the *coemeterium* after 337 and thus after Constantine's death, runs, counter to the statement of the *Liber Pontificalis* (*LP* I, 180) that Constantine built the church upon the behest of his daughter, the Augusta Constantina, therefor before 337, or, given that the *passus* appears in the biography of Sylvester, before December 31, 336. It is naturally possible that the construction of S. Agnese was attributed to the emperor by the compiler of the *Liber Pontificalis* since he was known as the great church builder. Great names attract attributions. However, building of the *coemeterium subteglatum* seems to have been financed by the princess herself, "ex opibus nostris", says the dedicatory inscription (above, note 56). Even so she was obviously helped by her father: the landed properties donated *in redditum* would have been part of the emperor's *res privata*. In any event, construction, though financed by his daughter, still might have taken place in his lifetime. The mausoleum, one wants to recall, was attached to the narthex of the church as an afterthought, and the latter might thus well antedate Constantina's widowhood, or indeed her marriage to Hannibalianus.

As to when Constantina might have approached her father with a

On the other hand, Seston was certainly right in insisting that the date of 333 so prominently cited in the 349 decree must refer to a specific legal act dated that year. That act, rather than a decree legalizing such demolitions impending (as Seston has it) would have been, on the contrary, a decree revalidating the old legislation. Such re-instatement was called for at that point: on the one hand, demolition work on graveyards as ordered by Constantine, and presumably sanctioned by a decree of suspension, had been terminated by 333; on the other hand, abuse for private ends of the suspension sanctioned for Constantine's specific aims was to be stopped. That revalidating decree of 333, if ever issued, would thus indicate that by then the demolition of graveyards was terminated and no further one contemplated in the near future. It thus would constitute a *terminus post quem non* for Constantine's building activity as far as it involved the demolition of graveyards. Rather than concerning only St. Peter's, it comprises as well the other *coemeteria subteglata* founded by him, all naturally outside the walls of Rome, some datable as early as the teens of the fourth century. Hence, the suspension of the legislation regarding *violatio sepulchri* would have covered a period of fifteen-odd years, starting, of course, after October 312, but decidedly still in the second decade of the century, and terminated by the time the revalidating decree was issued in 333.

Some time within these fifteen-odd years, though obviously after 318–320 and before 333, the graveyard on the Vatican Hill was demolished. However, when demolition started, when it was terminated and how it interlocked with the building of St. Peter's remains open. Possibly the pagan mausolea were demolished all at once, before construction of the basilica was begun. But it is equally possible that demolition and construction interlocked, as the church rose, starting with the aedicula, restored and

request to build the church, only a guess is possible, hopefully an informed guess. Given the dates of her mother, born in or around 298 and deceased in 326, and the birthdates of her two full brothers Constantius, August 7, 317, and Constans in 323, she might have been born sometime between 314 and 316, provided she was the eldest child. But we know only that she was the oldest (not the elder) sister of Constantius and Constans. Thus her birthdate might fall as well between 318 and 322 (hardly after 323, since there must be room for the birth of her younger sister Helena). She might well have resided in Rome, possibly with her grandmother Helena. After the death in disgrace of her mother Fausta, that is indeed most likely. Was it also then that she was raised by her father to the rank of Augusta? (Philostorgius, *Epitome* III.22 and 28; *PG* LXV, 510 f., 515.) As a well brought up Christian child in her early teens, she might well, by the late twenties and, in any event, long before 333, have asked her father to build the church in memory of the teenage martyr Agnes.

In short, start of construction on the *coemeterium subteglatum* of S. Agnese may well fall in the late twenties.

re-adjusted, the apse and the transept. In that case, the mausolea would have been destroyed, filled in and secured section-wise, and the builders would have come in right after, to sink down the foundations and raise the walls of the church. Presumably they were followed after a short interval by the decorators' crews to gild ceilings and vaults. Scaffoldings could remain in place, and time would be saved – an essential element, as I see it, in all of Constantine's activity as a church builder. Anyway, completion of the structure, if not of its interior decoration, need not have followed the demolition of the cemetery by more than a very few years. The year 333, indeed, may well mark a *terminus ad quem* as well as one *post quem non* for the termination of building operations at Old St. Peter's. Ever since the eleventh century, the dedication of both St. Peter's and S. Paolo f. l. m. has been celebrated in Rome on November 18. For S. Paolo, that date appears to be confirmed eight hundred years earlier by the inscription engraved on the base of the first column between the left-hand aisles and the transept and dated 390<sup>133</sup>. Thus it is not unlikely that the dedication of Old St. Peter's in fact took place on an 18th of November. That day falls on a Sunday within the period 318 to 350 only in 333; and since it is Sundays, or other feast days, that appear to have been chosen in the fourth and fifth centuries for church dedications, November 18, 333 offers itself readily as the date for the dedication of Constantine's Vatican basilica<sup>134</sup>.

Having gone again over all the evidence, I arrive by and large at the dates proposed twenty years ago, if with slight modifications: start of demolition work in the cemetery and of building operations after 317–320, possibly in 321–322; aedicula adjusted and apse completed after 322, but possibly in 323 or a few months later; after November, 324 and at the latest after juli 325, and prior to 328, construction of apse and transept terminated and decoration, that is gilding of apse vault and possibly ceiling at least underway; at the same time, triumphal arch built and ready to receive its inscription, and westernmost bays of nave and aisles under construction; before 333 –

133 Above, note 110; also P. Jounel, *Le culte des saints dans les basiliques du Latran et du Vatican au douzième siècle*, Rome, 1977, 204, 311.

134 J. Ruyschaert, as above, note 12, 187f. However, caution seems to be indicated as regards the *communis opinio* that church dedications always fell on a Sunday or on another feast day. The churches at the Holy Sepulchre were consecrated September 13, 336, a Monday (*VC* IV, 45), but that was the feast of the *exaltatio crucis* (Etheria-Silvia, *Peregrinatio*, in: *Itinera Hierosolymitana*, ed. P. Geyer, *CSEL* 29, Vienna, 1889, 100). On the other hand, the first H. Sophia in Constantinople was consecrated on February 15, 360, a Tuesday, and no great feast day either (*Chronicon Paschale*, Ol. 285, 1, 360; see *PG* XCII, 736f.).

but how long before? – both demolition of cemetery and construction of basilica terminated; dedication possibly November 18, 333. In short, I remain an unreconstructed early-dater.

In reading over this paper I have been wondering again, as I did while writing, whether it was worthwhile spending so much time and effort on establishing whether or not planning and construction of a building took place within the twenties and early thirties of the fourth century or ten and twenty years later, dragging on into the fifties or later. However, that building happens to be Old St. Peter's. Its place in the history of church building in the West hardly needs stressing. After all, it became the fountainhead to which architects and their patrons, beginning with the builders of S. Paolo fuori le mura, returned time and again from Carolingian times through the Middle Ages: the tall, well-lit nave, the twin aisles on either side, the transept at the west end, the single half-cylinder of the apse. However, that normative church type was established, as witness S. Paolo from the late fourth century, by eliminating the very traits which made St. Peter's a key monument specifically of Constantinian church planning. The transept of St. Peter's, ever so much lower than the nave, is made to equal it in height at S. Paolo and in later filiations. Transept and apse at St. Peter's jointly form a 'martyrium' designed to shelter far back on the chord of the apse the grave of the apostle-martyr, this rather than an altar; whereas later on, starting with S. Paolo, the remains of the martyr surmounted by the altar rest way in front of the transept close to the nave, where the faithful were congregated. Also, at St. Peter's that 'martyrium' was separated from nave and aisles visually as well as functionally by column screens placed in the openings of the aisles towards the transept – screens that were dropped from the plan of S. Paolo. In short, Old St. Peter's reflected that earliest experimental phase of monumental Christian architecture which marks the last twenty-five years of Constantine's reign – and those years only: the period which also produces such 'anomalous' church plans as the circus-shaped *coemeteria subteglata* around Rome, and in the Holy Land the joining of a central-plan martyrium to a basilical nave, such as the first church of the Nativity at Bethlehem – types all which appear to have been abandoned starting in the forties. In light of that situation, it does seem worthwhile after all to re-examine painstakingly and tediously the evidence for the actual chronology of construction at Old St. Peter's and to pin down the dates – solidly, as I believe, within the context of a period of trial and error of large-scale church building during Constantine's reign.

ABBREVIATIONS of frequently quoted bibliography\*:

<i>AASS</i>	Acta Sanctorum quotquot toto orbe coluntur ..., 67 Vol., Paris, 1863–1931	<i>ILCV</i>	Inscriptiones Christianae Latinis Veteres, ed. E. Diehl, Berlin, 1925
<i>AJAH</i>	American Journal of Ancient History	<i>JDAI</i>	Jahrbuch des Deutschen Archäologischen In- stituts
<i>AttiP AccDissertazioni</i>	Atti della Pontificia Accademia Romana di Archeologia. Dissertazioni	<i>JRS</i>	Journal of Roman Studies
<i>AttiP AccMemorie</i>	Atti della Pontificia Accademia Romana di Archeologia. Memorie	<i>LCL</i>	Loeb Classical Library
<i>Bonn Corpus</i>	Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae, Bonn, 1828 ff.	<i>LP</i>	Le Liber Pontificalis, ed. L. Duchesne, Paris <sup>1</sup> 1886–92, <sup>2</sup> 1955
<i>CIL</i>	Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum	<i>MGHAA</i>	Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Auctores Antiquissimi
<i>De Rossi, Mosaici Cristiani</i>	G. B. De Rossi, Mosaici Cristiane e saggi dei pavimenti delle chiese di Roma anteriori al secolo XV, Rome, 1899	<i>RE</i>	Paulys Realencyclopädie der classischen Alter- tumswissenschaft
<i>GSC</i>	Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte, Leipzig, 1897 ff.	<i>RIC</i>	The Roman Imperial Coinage in the British Museum
<i>ICUR</i>	Inscriptiones Christianae Urbis Romae ..., ed. G. B. De Rossi, Rome, 1857–1861	<i>TbLL</i>	Thesaurus Linguae Latinae

\* for further abbreviations see general list at the end of this volume