

Medieval wall painting in the church of Santa Maria in Pallara, Rome: the use of objective dating criteria

by Laura Marchiori

Early medieval wall paintings survive in abundant quantities in Rome, found in the dark corners and basements of the city's many churches, yet these monuments barely figure in English language survey texts of medieval art. A possible reason for the oversight is that many of these paintings were produced outside the realm of papal or clerical patronage, and thus were not documented by textual records, such as the *Liber Pontificalis*, which might offer secure dating criteria.¹ One of the most interesting of these medieval programmes to be overlooked is that of Santa Maria in Pallara, a monastic church more commonly known today as San Sebastiano al Palatino.² The paintings are substantial, but generally have been ignored, as some doubt has been expressed about their traditional tenth-century dating on account of the incorporation of a particular iconography, the depiction of Apostles on the shoulders of Prophets, which more commonly is found in the art of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.³ This article justifies the early dating of the Santa Maria in Pallara paintings following the methodology of John Osborne (see below, p. 232), who has made significant contributions to the study of early medieval wall painting in Rome. After briefly introducing the paintings, the historiography of the dating question and the visual and exegetical traditions behind the iconography, the dating evidence is presented and analyzed; this evidence is organized into five categories, which at times are interconnected: physical setting, function, subject-matter, inscriptions and pictorial practice. The article's greater message is that, when attempting to date early medieval painting in Rome, for which so

¹ The distorting effect of art history's dependence on the *Liber Pontificalis*, which essentially ends in the mid-ninth century and documents only the papal patronage of churches in early medieval Rome, has been noted by Robert Coates-Stephens, who has contributed to the recovery of the architectural history of the so-called 'dark ages' through examinations of early modern textual evidence and modern archaeology; see R. Coates-Stephens, 'Dark age architecture in Rome', *Papers of the British School at Rome* 65 (1997), 177–232, esp. pp. 179–81.

² L. Gigli, *S. Sebastiano al Palatino* (Rome, 1975).

³ For other versions of the iconography, see L. Marchiori, *Art and Reform in Tenth-century Rome — the Paintings of S. Maria in Pallara* (Queen's University, Ph.D. thesis, 2007), 130–53.

much comparative material survives, the visual evidence provided by the paintings themselves can offer valuable documentation in the absence of securely-dated textual confirmation, if analyzed objectively.

Located on the northeast ridge of the Palatine Hill, in the political heart of the ancient city, the church of Santa Maria in Pallara still stands, having been renovated in the seventeenth century by the Barberini family, during the reign of Pope Urban VIII (1623–44).⁴ The medieval wall paintings of the apse and of the apse arch were retained in the Barberini restoration, although they were somewhat hidden behind a high altar screen, making it difficult to photograph them today. The programme presents a three-tier heavenly hierarchy (PLATE 1). An eleventh-century martyrology that once pertained to this church and its attached monastery, now housed in the Vatican Library (Vat. Lat. 378), records that the monastery, and probably the church as well, was dedicated to the Virgin Mary and to Saints Zoticus and Sebastian. The manuscript also contains a marginal note recording that the monastery's founder was a man named 'Petrus Medicus', a physician named Peter, suggesting that the paintings formed part of the church's original decoration.⁵ A fragmentary inscription painted across the apse appears to confirm that information.⁶ Seventeenth-century drawings made by the artist Antonio Eclissi (fl. 1630s) record, too, that donor portraits of Peter and his wife, now lost, were once found at the base of the arch on either side of apse, suggesting that the two areas of painting were contemporary.⁷

⁴ For a summary of the main Barberini documents recording the renovation, see O. Pollak, *Die Kunsttätigkeit unter Urban VIII.*, 2 vols (Vienna, 1927), I, 193–5.

⁵ Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Vat. Lat. 378, 33v, 53r. The marginal notation records the founder's death; it reads: 'Vii kl oc[tob]er] ... Obiit Petrus laudabilis medicus, qui de sua ope construxit monasterium istud' (25 September ... The honourable physician Peter, who erected this monastery on his own property, died). For the dating of the manuscript, see P. Supino Martini, *Roma e l'area grafica romanesca (secoli X–XII)* (Alexandria, 1987), 136–40.

⁶ The inscription, which is now in a fragmentary state, was recorded by early modern authors, some of whose discussions were collected and published in the nineteenth century; see P.A. Uccelli, *La chiesa di S. Sebastiano martire sul Colle Palatino e Urbano VIII P.M. — memoria storica dell'Ab. P.A. Uccelli con scritture inedite del P. Orazio Giustiniani, indi Cardinale, di Antonio Bosio, del Lonigo, di Francesco Maria Torrigio e di Monsignor Antonio Riccioli, Vescovo di Belcastro e segretario della Congregazione della Sacra Visita* (Rome, 1876), 101, 106. It is thought to have read: 'VIRGO REDEMPTORIS GENITRIX ET SPLENDIDA MATER CHRISTI, ACCIPE CUM ZOTICO ET SEBASTIANO VOTA BEATA QUAE SOPHUS ILLUSTRIS MEDICUS QUOQUE PETRUS OFFERT UT PRECIBUS CAPIAT VESTRIS COELESTIA REGNA' (Virgin progenitor of the Saviour and noble mother of Christ, accept with Zoticus and Sebastian the blessed gifts that the wise and distinguished physician Peter offers so that by your prayers he may achieve the heavenly kingdom). The translation is my own. For further discussion of the inscription, see below, pp. 243–7.

⁷ Little is known about Eclissi, although his drawings generally have been praised as being accurate in detail, if not as to colour or style; see C.R. Morey, *Lost Mosaics and Frescoes of Rome of the Mediaeval Period* (Princeton, 1915), 19; J. Osborne and A. Claridge, *The Paper Museum of Cassiano dal Pozzo, Series A, Part II — Early Christian and Medieval Antiquities. Volume 1: Mosaics and Wallpaintings in Roman Churches* (London, 1996), 53–68; K. Noreen, 'Recording the past: seventeenth-century watercolor drawings of medieval monuments', *Visual Resources* 16 (1) (2000), 1–26. The drawings are preserved in Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Vat. Lat. 9071, 62, 234–50, esp. p. 243. See also S. Waetzoldt, *Die Kopien des 17. Jahrhunderts nach Mosaiken und Wandmalereien in Rom* (Vienna, 1917), 75–6.

The Santa Maria in Pallara paintings are interesting for what they reveal about Roman workshop traditions in the central Middle Ages; they both conform to and deviate from those traditions. The paintings of the apse conch were rendered following the medieval tradition of Roman apse decoration. The conch features a central standing Christ, who holds a scroll in his left hand and gestures with his right to a haloed bird, a phoenix, which is seated in the left of the two flanking palm trees.⁸ Christ is flanked by Saints Lawrence and Sebastian on the left and Saints Zoticus and Stephen on the right. While originally all the saints were identified by *tituli*, only portions of those for Saints Zoticus and Stephen survive.⁹ The bottom of the conch is bordered by a yellow band inhabited by a procession of lambs making their way from the lateral cities of Bethlehem and Jerusalem to a central Mount Zion, on which stands the Agnus Dei, the Lamb of God. Anyone familiar with Rome's churches will know that the Santa Maria in Pallara apse is a paraphrase of the ninth-century mosaic apse of Santa Prassede, which in turn is a reference to the sixth-century mosaic apse of Santi Cosma e Damiano.¹⁰

The major difference between the apses of the earlier churches and that in Santa Maria in Pallara is the addition of a lower register, which features a central image of the Virgin Mary standing on a *suppedaneum*, a platform or pedestal. The Virgin is commonly found in this subsidiary space in twelfth-century Roman churches, an example being the apse of the Basilica Sant'Elia near Nepi.¹¹ It is possible that the Virgin features here because the church was, in part, dedicated to her memory. However, what appears to be innovation in the lower portion of the apse of Santa Maria in Pallara may instead represent a tradition of funerary chapel decoration featuring the Virgin Mary in direct vertical placement with Christ, for whom she serves as primary intercessor. For example, an orans Virgin appears underneath a bust of Christ in the apse of the Lateran chapel of San Venanzio, created at the behest of Pope John IV (640–2), perhaps as a funerary chapel for his father, Venantius.¹² Another example is the eighth-century chapel of Saints Quiricus and Julitta in Santa Maria Antiqua, where the east wall features an

⁸ The iconography of Christ in a garden setting handing the scroll of the New Law to his Apostles, often symbolically represented only by Peter and Paul, is known as the *Traditio Legis* and is found in many apses of Rome's medieval churches; see C. Davis-Weyer, 'Das Traditio-Legis-Bild und seine Nachfolge', *Münchener Jahrbuch der Bildenden Kunst* ser. 3, 12 (1961), 7–45.

⁹ Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Vat. Lat. 9071, 62; Gigli, *S. Sebastiano al Palatino* (above, n. 2), fig. 30.

¹⁰ Richard Krautheimer generally characterized the ninth-century art of Rome as a renaissance, a rebirth of the early Christian city; see R. Krautheimer, 'Renewal and renaissance: the Carolingian age', in R. Krautheimer, *Rome: Profile of a City* (Princeton, 1980), 109–42, esp. pp. 123–34.

¹¹ P. Hocgger, *Die Fresken in der Ehemaligen Abteikirche S. Elia bei Nepi* (Frauenfeld, 1975), fig. 14. This is also the case with San Silvestro in Tivoli. Christa Ihm argued that the twin-tiered format developed in Egypt, as our earliest surviving evidence comes from the fifth- and sixth-century monastic chapels at Bawit, where the Ascension was a common apse composition; see C. Ihm, *Die Programme der Christlichen Apsismalerei vom Vierten Jahrhundert bis zur Mitte des Achten Jahrhunderts* (Wiesbaden, 1960), 95–100, plates 23, 25.

¹² G. Mackic, 'The San Venanzio chapel in Rome and the martyr shrine sequence', *Revue d'Art Canadienne/Canadian Art Review* 23 (1–2) (1996), 1–13, esp. pp. 4–5, 8.

enthroned Virgin and Child underneath a Crucifixion of Christ.¹³ While technically neither of these examples is a two-tier apse, certainly the primary function of Santa Maria in Pallara as a monastic church was to serve as a site for the commemoration of the dead.

In the lower register of the apse in Santa Maria in Pallara the Virgin is flanked by archangels and female saints. If the female saints were identified by inscriptions originally, no traces of those *tituli* now survive.¹⁴ A bright blue sky and green peaked background comprise the setting of both the conch and the lower register. A decorative border frames the apse, formed by a festoon that rises from the urn-like capitals of the columns at either end of the lower register. Completing the bottom edge of the border beneath the lower register is a multi-coloured band formed by a repeating key pattern. Subsequently a section of this band was cut away at the centre of the apse and replaced by a panel of painted plaster. The panel depicts the busts of Saints Sebastian, Benedict and Zoticus. The bottom of the apse is painted with a green fictive curtain covered with a guilloche pattern alternatively filled with duck silhouettes and lilies.

The paintings of the apse arch also correspond to Roman artistic traditions, although the relationship is somewhat obscured by the inclusion of innovative iconography. The arch programme originally comprised three horizontal registers of painted figures divided by ornamental borders; two irregular patches of plaster survive to the left of the apse and three patches to the right. A series of kneeling, white-haired men representing the 24 Elders of the Apocalypse (Revelation 4.4) appears in the upper register, four of whom survive on either side of the apse. According to the seventeenth-century drawings, an image of the Agnus Dei, to which the Elders offered their crowns, once figured at the apex of the apse.¹⁵ Although not recorded in the drawings, the four beasts of the Apocalypse (Revelation 4.6–7) — the lion, the calf, the man and the eagle — must have surrounded the Agnus Dei, since the previously unnoticed hoof of one of the creatures, probably the calf, survives in a small patch of plaster to the right of the top of the apse. This modified apocalyptic vision, with some variation, is the traditional subject-matter for Roman arch decoration from at least the fifth to the twelfth centuries, as seen at San Paolo fuori le mura, Santi Cosma e Damiano, Santa Prassede and San Giovanni in Porta Latina.¹⁶ Only in the latter

¹³ H. Belting, 'Eine Privatkapelle im frühmittelalterlichen Rom', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 41 (1987), 55–69.

¹⁴ Two inscriptions, 'SCA LUCIA' and 'SCA AGNES', were noted in the seventeenth-century drawing of the apse; Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Vat. Lat. 9071, 62; Gigli, *S. Sebastiano al Palatino* (above, n. 2), fig. 30.

¹⁵ Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Vat. Lat. 9071, 234–5; Gigli, *S. Sebastiano al Palatino* (above, n. 2), fig. 14a, b.

¹⁶ The first example, San Paolo fuori le mura, features a bust of Christ instead of the Agnus Dei as the focus of worship by the 24 Elders; although the composition is a modern rendition, it is thought to be a faithful copy of an early medieval original; see S. Waetzoldt, 'Zur Ikonographie des Triumphbogenmosaiks von St. Paul in Rom', in F. Graf, W. Metternich and L. Schudt (eds), *Miscellanea Bibliothecae Hertzianae zu Ehren von Leo Bruhns (Römische Forschungen der Bibliotheca Hertziana 16)* (Munich, 1961), 19–28. For other witnesses of the iconographic tradition featuring the Agnus Dei, see M. Manion, 'The frescoes of S. Giovanni a Porta Latina — the shape of a tradition', *Australian Journal of Art* 1 (1978), 93–110; U. Nilgen, 'Die Bilder über dem Altar. Triumph- und Apsisbogenprogramme in Rom und Mittelitalien und ihr Bezug zur Liturgie', in N. Bock, S. de Blaauw, C. Frommel and H. Kessler (eds), *Kunst und Liturgie im Mittelalter. Akten des Internationalen Kongresses der Bibliotheca Hertziana und des Nederlands Instituut te Rome* (Munich, 2000), 75–89.

monument do the Elders kneel, as they do in Santa Maria in Pallara, rather than stand, as they do in all earlier programmes.

Innovation is found in the middle register of the arch at Santa Maria in Pallara, which presents a procession of long-haired males carrying other figures on their shoulders; these are thought to represent a group of Prophets carrying the Apostles.¹⁷ Although fragments of five pairs survive on each side, for a total of ten, the evidence from the drawings suggests that twelve pairs were depicted originally.¹⁸ The lowest register of the apse arch presents a series of saints; the remains of two figures survive on the left side of the apse and the upper torsos of three figures survive on the right. According to the seventeenth-century drawings, the outside figures on either side were identified respectively as Saint Sebastian and Saint Zoticus, and they faced the lost donor portraits.¹⁹ With its combination of a modified Apocalyptic vision and the lost portraits on the arch, the programme is an individual and particular Last Judgement scene.

The exact date of the origin of the building is unknown. It has been conjectured that the church was constructed in the ninth century on account of the presence of sculptural *spolia* reminiscent of the Carolingian era.²⁰ However, the painted programme, implemented at the behest of the patron, the physician named Peter, is dated to the late tenth century.²¹ The evidence for this dating is provided by three documents containing references to land belonging to a monastery pertaining to a physician named Peter. The charters, all early modern copies of medieval originals, were published in the early twentieth century by Pietro Fedele, a pioneer of Roman medieval history, who pinpointed the patron's death between 973 and 999.²² The Benedictine historian Guy Ferrari located one other document containing a reference to a physician named Peter that was dated to 955, providing a possible *terminus post quem* for the monastery's foundation.²³ However, according to the social historian Étienne Hubert, 'Petrus' was one of the most common medieval names for Roman men, thus the

¹⁷ É. Mâle, *Rome et ses vieilles églises* (Paris, 1942), 151.

¹⁸ Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Vat. Lat. 9071, 234–5; Gigli, *S. Sebastiano al Palatino* (above, n. 2), fig. 14a, b.

¹⁹ Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Vat. Lat. 9071, 243; Gigli, *S. Sebastiano al Palatino* (above, n. 2), fig. 15.

²⁰ For a discussion of the church in the context of archaeological investigation of the Palatine, see A. Augenti, *Il Palatino nel medioevo: archeologia e topografia (secoli vi–xii)* (Rome, 1996), 65–6.

²¹ J. Wilpert, *Die Römischen Mosaiken und Malereien der Kirchlichen Bauten vom IV. bis XIII. Jahrhundert*, 4 vols (Freiburg, 1917), II, 1,075–81. G. Ladner, 'Die Italienische Malerei im XI. Jahrhundert', *Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen in Wien* N.F. 5 (1931), 33–160, esp. pp. 100–3; G. Matthiae, *Pittura romana del medioevo*, 2 vols with an *aggiornamento* by M. Andaloro (Rome, 1965; 1987), I, 196–204; Gigli, *S. Sebastiano al Palatino* (above, n. 2), 81–6.

²² P. Fedele, 'Una chiesa del Palatino', *Archivio della Società Romana di Storia Patria* 26 (1903), 343–80, esp. pp. 356–9. The copies are found in Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Vat. Lat. 7928, 178–180.

²³ G. Ferrari, *Early Roman Monasteries: Notes for the History of the Monasteries and Convents at Rome from the V through the X Century* (Vatican City, 1957), 215–24.

evidence is not secure by any means.²⁴ The textual record for Santa Maria in Pallara is plentiful from the eleventh century.²⁵

While most art historians studying Roman medieval art accept Santa Maria in Pallara's tenth-century dating, the analysis has not been accepted as widely outside Romanist circles.²⁶ In part, this is due to a particular iconography in the programme that is more common to northern European 'Gothic' art: the series of Apostles sitting on the shoulders of Prophets in the paintings of Santa Maria in Pallara's apse arch, a version of which is also found in the lancet windows of the south transept portal of Chartres Cathedral.²⁷ The problem is not so much iconographic, as textual; a famous twelfth-century saying with connections to Chartres has caused confusion about the iconography's origin. In his *Metalogicon*, a treatise in defence of the study of the Liberal Arts, John of Salisbury (ob. 1180) reported that the grammarian Bernard of Chartres was fond of saying: 'We are like dwarves sitting upon the shoulders of giants, as we are able to see more and see farther than they, not on account of the sharpness of our vision or physical stature, but rather because we are conveyed aloft and are elevated by their greatness'.²⁸ The giants were perceived to be the intellectual authorities of ancient Greece and Rome. A teacher of grammar, Bernard of Chartres was famed for his philosophical studies, and Chartres's cathedral school was known as a great centre of learning. The *dictum* was long-lived, and for centuries its meaning was polemically interpreted in intellectual debates about authorship, tradition and innovation.²⁹ In the light of this historiography, and also Chartres's prominent place in the study of the origins of 'Gothic' art, the saying became the battle-standard of scholars arguing for a twelfth-century renaissance of culture and

²⁴ É. Hubert, 'Évolution générale de l'anthroponymie masculine à Rome du Xe au XIIIe siècle', *Mélanges de l'École Française de Rome. Moyen Âge* 106 (2) (1994), 573–94. The difficulty in dealing with medieval single-name anthroponymy is evident in a recently-published catalogue of the onomastic data for medieval Rome, which includes discussion of the textual evidence for the existence of Petrus Medicus, the patron of Santa Maria in Pallara; see G. Savio, *Monumenta onomastica romana Medii Aevi (X–XII sec.)*, 5 vols (Rome, 1999), IV, 46–7, 53–7, nos. 099456, 099479, 099589, 099607, 099623, 099624.

²⁵ É. Hubert, '«In regione Pallarie», contribution à l'histoire du Palatin au Moyen Âge', in *La Vigna Barberini 1. Histoire d'un site — étude des sources et de la topographie (Roma antica 3)* (Rome, 1997), 89–140.

²⁶ For example, see R. Bergman, *The Salerno Ivories — 'Ars Sacra' from Medieval Amalfi* (Cambridge, 1980), 117.

²⁷ The four Evangelists sit on the shoulders of the four major Prophets at Chartres; see F. Perrot, 'Le vitrail, la croisade et la Champagne: réflexion sur les fenêtres hautes du chœur à la Cathédrale de Chartres', in Y. Bellenger and D. Quéruel (eds), *Les Champenois et la Croisade. Actes des quatrièmes journées rémoises 27–28 novembre 1987* (Paris, 1989), 109–30; B. Brenk, 'Bildprogramm und Geschichtsverständnis der Kapetinger im Querhaus der Kathedrale von Chartres', *Arte Medievale* 5 (2) (1991), 71–96. For other versions of the iconography, see Marchiori, *Art and Reform in Tenth-century Rome* (above, n. 3), 78–93.

²⁸ John of Salisbury, *Metalogicon* 3.4, edited by J.B. Hall (*Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis* 98) (Turnhout, 1991), 116. 'Dicebat Bernardus Camotensis nos esse quasi nanos, gigantum umeris insidentes, ut possimus plura eis et remotiora uidere, non utique proprii uisus acumine, aut eminentia corporis, sed quia in altum subuchimur et extollimur magnitudine gigantea'. The translation above is my own.

²⁹ R.K. Merton, *On the Shoulders of Giants: a Shandean Postscript* (New York, 1965); É. Jeanneau, 'Nani gigantum humeris insidentes'. Essai d'interprétation de Bernard de Chartres', *Vivarium* 5 (1967), 79–99.

learning.³⁰ One of these, the twentieth century's best known iconologist, Erwin Panofsky, suggested a close relationship between the iconography and the *dictum* at Chartres, thereby casting doubt on the dating of the Santa Maria in Pallara paintings.³¹ The unspoken assumption has been that if the saying inspired the iconography, then the Santa Maria in Pallara paintings could not possibly date to the tenth century.

An examination of the sources and meaning of both the Apostle-and-Prophet iconography and Bernard's *dictum* reveals that the two share a similar structure and are related in some way.³² The iconography may have developed out of a tradition of depictions of the Apocalypse of John featuring the 24 Elders, for which much visual evidence survives in Rome, deriving perhaps from a tradition of exegetical commentary on the Book of Revelation in which the 24 Elders were metaphorically equated with the Apostles and the Prophets; all are said to take part in the final judging.³³ The physical imposition of the Christian Apostles on the shoulders of the Hebrew Prophets embodies the relationship of two eras of religious history, perhaps as discussed by Gregory the Great in his exegesis of the Book of Job, the *Moralia in Iob*.³⁴ Gregory the Great was a favourite author of monastic scholars, and Santa Maria in Pallara was, after all, a monastic church.³⁵ Superimposed figures became a commonplace in art, especially monastic art, from the eleventh century. Thus, it is entirely plausible that the iconography preceded the *dictum* and that it served as a source for the saying.

Neither the early modern copies of the tenth-century charters nor the twelfth-century discussion of the dwarf-and-giant *dictum* has provided a secure dating for the Santa Maria in Pallara paintings to everyone's satisfaction, a situation that has hindered the broader study of the church as a monument of social significance. The wall paintings are historic records themselves deserving of independent analysis, but dating them by means of traditional art historical methods is not easy. The criteria that are commonly used to date and attribute paintings from the Late Middle Ages and beyond — the phenomena of style, artistic innovation and personal expression — developed only in the thirteenth century in response to professional competition in the developing art market. During the period from c. 600–1150 the production of art was driven less by commercial forces, than by the economy of salvation, which was its primary subject-matter. The practitioners of the visual arts were anonymous artisans, sometimes monks

³⁰ The concept was first proposed by Charles Haskins; see C.H. Haskins, *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge, 1927; 1979), 5.

³¹ E. Panofsky, *Renaissance and Resuscitations in Western Art* (Stockholm, 1960), 110.

³² Marchiori, *Art and Reform in Tenth-century Rome* (above, n. 3), 116–30.

³³ The tradition of such commentaries begins in the fourth century, but the earliest clear equation of the Elders with the Apostles and Prophets is found in the eighth-century exegesis of Ambrosius Autpertus (ob. 778), a Frankish monk at the monastery of San Vincenzo al Volturno; 'Expositionis in Apocalypsin', in R. Weber (ed.), *Ambrosii Autperti Opera*, 2 vols (*Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis* 28) (Turnhout, 1975), 4.3, II, 210–13.

³⁴ For a discussion of sources and meaning, see Marchiori, *Art and Reform in Tenth-century Rome* (above, n. 3), 130–53.

³⁵ J. LeClercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: a Study of Monastic Culture*, translated by C. Misrahi (New York, 1982), 25–36.

or nuns, supposedly working for the glorification of church or state, rather than personal fame, profit or professional distinction. Not without talent and training, these men and women produced art that can be described as both uniform and idiosyncratic at the same time, incorporating images that were simultaneously universal and personal visions of salvation. How does one undertake a material study of imagery meant to be representative of the non-material world?

Following the analytical method of John Osborne, who has viewed medieval wall paintings as documents recording the history of Rome,³⁶ this essay aims to offer a dating of the Santa Maria in Pallara paintings based on a material examination alone. Convinced that attempts to use style as a dating criterion, following the practice for later periods, were misguided in early medieval contexts, Osborne has developed a methodology for studying early medieval wall paintings in Rome.³⁷ The wall paintings that formed the basis for this methodology were those for which there is little textual documentation or established contextual history, such as the paintings of the lower churches of San Clemente and San Crisogono, Santa Maria Antiqua, Sant'Urbano alla Caffarella and Santa Maria Egiziaca (or, as it was originally known, Santa Maria Secundicerio).³⁸ In studying these monuments, Osborne sought out details in wall paintings that could be pinpointed, classified and dated; these details included physical aspects of the paintings and their architectural support, characteristics of workshop practice and notions of thematic content. No doubt, Osborne was influenced by the work of Richard Krautheimer, who dated early medieval architecture in Rome through the examination and classification of masonry types.³⁹ Osborne organized his method into five categories of objective dating criteria and, indeed, the first one relies on Krautheimer's masonry typology. The five criteria are: 1. physical setting; 2. function; 3. subject-matter; 4. inscriptions; 5. pictorial practice.⁴⁰ The following analysis of the Santa Maria in Pallara paintings based on these criteria is by no means a complete description or iconographic examination of the monument; rather, it is an attempt to provide an independent dating based on their form and content alone.

³⁶ J. Osborne, 'Wall paintings as documents: an example from the atrium of S. Maria Antiqua, Rome', *Revue d'Art Canadienne/Canadian Art Review* 26 (1) (1989), 7–11.

³⁷ J. Osborne, 'The artistic culture of early medieval Rome: a research agenda for the 21st century', in *Roma nell'alto medioevo (Settimane di studio del Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo 48)* (Spoleto, 2001), 693–711, esp. pp. 702–6.

³⁸ J. Osborne, 'The 'Particular Judgment': an early medieval wall-painting in the lower church of San Clemente, Rome', *The Burlington Magazine* 123 (1981), 335–41; J. Osborne, 'Early medieval painting in San Clemente, Rome: the Madonna and Child in the niche', *Gesta* 20 (1981), 299–310; J. Osborne, 'The painting of the Anastasis in the lower church of San Clemente, Rome: a re-examination of the evidence for the location of the tomb of St Cyril', *Byzantion* 51 (1) (1981), 255–87; J. Osborne, 'The atrium of S. Maria Antiqua, Rome: a history in art', *Papers of the British School at Rome* 55 (1987), 186–223; J. Osborne, 'Textiles and their painted imitations in early medieval Rome', *Papers of the British School at Rome* 60 (1992), 309–52.

³⁹ R. Krautheimer, S. Corbett and W. Frankl, *Corpus Basilicarum Christianarum Romae, the Early Christian Basilicas of Rome (IV–IX Centuries)*, 5 vols (Vatican City, 1937–77).

⁴⁰ This methodology is presented formally in his recent paper dealing with the medieval wall paintings excavated in a small chapel near the apse at San Lorenzo fuori le mura; see J. Osborne, 'Dating medieval mural painting in Rome: a case study from S. Lorenzo fuori le mura', in É. Ó. Carragáin and C. Neuman de Vegvar (eds), *Roma Felix — Formations and Reflections of Medieval Rome* (Aldershot, 2007), 191–206.

PHYSICAL SETTING

In the case of Santa Maria in Pallara, the first criterion, physical setting, offers less help than might be expected, since the masonry of the apse wall is not presently visible. Those areas of the interior not covered by the early medieval paintings were replastered at an unknown date, presumably during the Barberini restoration of the church, with no prior photo documentation of the walls. Sections of reused tufa blocks, probably *spolia* from nearby classical buildings, are visible through minor breaks in the exterior plaster; while the reuse of such blocks has been dated tentatively to the eighth or ninth century, the visible sections are really too small to provide any certain analysis and dating.⁴¹ The masonry of the adjacent medieval structure on the west side of the church, probably a remnant of a monastic building, has been dated to the twelfth century.⁴² The latter, which now serves as the sacristy, was entirely redecorated in the modern era. How that structure and the church relate to each other is unclear, as there has been no investigation of the architectural juncture.

Another aspect of the physical setting that might provide dating information is the plaster support of the paintings and any later accretions to it that can be dated securely. Restoration reports do not claim that the Santa Maria in Pallara apse painting is a subsidiary layer of decoration. Writing in 1911, the restorer Domenico Brizzi suggested that there was only one layer of plaster in the apse in his discussion of the areas where the plaster had detached from the masonry and was in danger of falling from the wall; these he reintegrated with injections of adhesive and the application of thin metal pins; a similar process of reintegration was repeated in 1958.⁴³ Thus it is probable that the medieval paintings in the apse represent the first and original decoration that the church received.

The most recent restoration of the Santa Maria in Pallara paintings was carried out in 2002–3 under the auspices of the governing body in charge of monuments, the *Soprintendenza per i Beni Architettonici, il Paesaggio e il Patrimonio Storico Artistico ed Etnoantropologico di Roma*.⁴⁴ At this time, some analysis of the paintings was carried out by students of the Facoltà di Conservazione dei Beni Culturali at the Università degli Studi della Tuscia at Viterbo. The students, in conjunction with conservators, determined the chronological order of the *giornate*, the areas of plaster sequentially laid by the painters; generally, it is thought that the artists began

⁴¹ Augenti, *Il Palatino nel medioevo* (above, n. 20), 65–6; Coates-Stephens, 'Dark age architecture' (above, n. 1), 206–7.

⁴² Gigli, *S. Sebastiano al Palatino* (above, n. 2), 105–8.

⁴³ I am grateful to Dott.ssa Isabella del Frate for sharing her information on the paintings. Some summary of the earlier restorations is to be found in a thesis completed by students of the Istituto Centrale del Restauro, housed in the Institute's library in Rome; see L. Liquori and M. Segré, *L'abside affrescata di S. Sebastiano al Palatino, già S. Maria in Pallara: metodologie di studio ed ipotesi di restauro* (Rome, Istituto Centrale del Restauro, dissertation, 1987), 164–7, 180–1. I am also grateful to Dr Cathleen Hoeniger for explaining matters of painting technique and restoration to me.

⁴⁴ I am grateful to Dott.ssa del Frate for sharing the recent findings; see also A. Englen, 'Restauro degli affreschi del catino absidale e del presbiterio di S. Sebastiano al Palatino (secc. X–XI)', *Monumenti di Roma I* (1) (2003), 154.

with Christ in the conch and worked progressively outwards and downwards.⁴⁵ The arch paintings were begun after the apse was completed, with the artists likewise progressing from top to bottom. Further technical study of the Santa Maria in Pallara paintings will be beneficial to our understanding of medieval painting in Rome.

Two additions were implemented in the apse after the main programme of painting was rendered. First, a panel of plaster was cut out of the bottom of the apse; the section was replastered and painted with depictions of three saints: Saint Sebastian, Saint Benedict and Saint Zoticus (FIG. 1).⁴⁶ The panel's plaster edges overlap the original apse paintings and the pictorial rendering of the painting differs from that of the apse, seeming more naturalistic in figural rendering. An inscription formed by white letters appears at the base of the panel, partially hidden by overlapping plaster. In the seventeenth century the scholar and Benedictine monk Jean Mabillon (1632–1707) made a record of the inscription during a visit to the church; it read: 'EGO BENEDICT' PRB ET MONACHU' PINGERE FECI' (I Benedict, priest and monk, had this painted).⁴⁷ Next, the bottom of the apse was given a thin layer of plaster and painted with a fictive textile curtain formed by a repeating guilloche pattern filled with duck silhouettes and lilies. This repainting can be seen to overlap both the original layer of painted plaster in the apse and the central panel painted with saints, suggesting a late medieval or even early modern date for the alteration. A section of an earlier, similarly patterned fictive curtain is visible to the right of the inset panel underlying the later one, evidence that some attempt was made to copy in the curtain's rendering. Such patterns differ greatly from the simple motifs used to decorate fictive curtains in Roman paintings of the eighth and ninth centuries.⁴⁸

Although the fictive curtain offers no help in dating the original plaster layer in the apse, some dating clues can be found in the panel's subject-matter. While Saints Sebastian and Zoticus are two-thirds of the church's dedication, the representation of Saint Benedict is fairly novel in Roman painting, but not without justification in the church's history. The hagiographical biography of Saint Benedict was written in the late sixth century; however, evidence for his general veneration exists only from the eighth century, and only from the tenth century in Rome, after the reforms of monastic life carried out there by Cluniac monks.⁴⁹ The earliest representations of Benedict in monumental art around Rome show no consistency in the portrayal of the saint. They are to be found in the monastic cave chapel known as the Grotta

⁴⁵ Again, I am grateful to Dott.ssa del Frate for sharing the report prepared by Susanna De Cristofaro, Cristina Ranuci, Giulia Bordi, Stefania Pennesi, Simone Piazza and Manuela Visconti.

⁴⁶ Osborne and Claridge, *The Paper Museum* (above, n. 7), 320–1; J. Enckell Julliard, 'Il pannello con tre figure a mezzo busto nell'abside di Santa Maria in Pallara', in S. Romano (ed.), *Riforma e tradizione, 1050–1198* (Milan, 2006), 196–7.

⁴⁷ Osborne and Claridge, *The Paper Museum* (above, n. 7), 320–1; Uccelli, *La chiesa di S. Sebastiano martire* (above, n. 6), 101.

⁴⁸ Osborne, 'Textiles and their painted imitations' (above, n. 38), 321–49.

⁴⁹ Ferrari, *Early Roman Monasteries* (above, n. 23), 379–407; Osborne, 'Wall paintings as documents' (above, n. 36), 9–10; F. Clark, *The 'Gregorian' Dialogues and the Origins of Benedictine Monasticism* (Leiden, 2003), 279–91.



FIG. 1. Panel painted with images of Saints Sebastian, Benedict and Zoticus, Santa Maria in Pallara. (Photo: author.)

del Salvatore near Vallerano, in the church of Santa Maria Antiqua situated in the Roman Forum, and in the right aisle of the lower church of San Crisogono; the Vallerano paintings are dated to the tenth century, while the latter two images date to the eleventh century.⁵⁰ In 1061 control of Santa Maria in Pallara was given to the abbot of Montecassino, the latter being a foundation of Saint Benedict himself and the mother house of all Benedictines.⁵¹ Montecassino's reigning abbot was Desiderius of Montecassino, later Pope Victor III (1086–7), who did much to renew the cult of

⁵⁰ Osborne, 'Wall paintings as documents' (above, n. 36), 9–10; S. Piazza, 'Une communion des Apôtres en occident: le cycle pictural de la Grotta del Salvatore près de Vallerano', *Cahiers Archéologiques* 47 (1999), 137–58; B. Brenk, 'Die Benediktiszenen in S. Crisogono und Montecassino', *Arte Medievale* 2 (1984), 57–66; B. Brenk, 'Roma e Montecassino: gli affreschi della chiesa inferiore di S. Crisogono', *Revue d'Art Canadienne/Canadian Art Review* 12 (1985), 227–34.

⁵¹ P. Kehr, *Le bolle pontificie anteriori al 1198 che si conservano nell'Archivio di Montecassino* (extract from *Miscellanea Cassinese*) (Montecassino, 1899), 48–9. For the founding of Montecassino, see book 2 of the *Dialogues* of Gregory the Great: A. de Vogüé (ed.), *Dialogues de Grégoire le Grand*, 3 vols (Paris, 1978), II, 122–249.

Saint Benedict in his renovation of Montecassino.⁵² According to the chronicler Leo of Ostia (ob. 1117), the vigil of the feast of Saint Benedict at Montecassino involved the lighting of a lamp before an image of the saint.⁵³ The panel in Santa Maria in Pallara may have served the same function, having been located directly in front of its main altar, no longer extant, which was dedicated to Saint Benedict at about this time, as recorded in a marginal notation in the church's eleventh-century martyrology.⁵⁴ Significantly, the altar was dedicated on the same day as the consecration of Abbot Desiderius's new abbey-church at Montecassino, the *kalends* or first of October in 1071.⁵⁵ The most plausible time for the implementation of image and altar was not immediately after Montecassino took control of the church, but at the same time that renovations were taking place at the mother house. Thus, the subject-matter of the panel provides a *terminus ante quem* for the earlier layer. If the panel was implemented c. 1070, then the original paintings must be earlier.

FUNCTION

The second criterion, function, offers limited assistance in dating the paintings. Santa Maria in Pallara was a monastic chapel and it probably served as a burial site for the founder, his family and the monks who served there. No trace of a monastic cemetery has yet been found that might corroborate the tenth-century dating of the existence of the founder, Peter. During the excavations of the Palatine carried out in the 1990s by the *École Française de Rome*, graves were discovered in the field surrounding the church known as the *Vigna Barberini*. Although the graves were previously associated with the church, their analysis suggests that the connection cannot be sustained and instead they ought to be associated with some continued functioning of the palace complex; the simple tile-covered tombs contain the remains of a mixed group of individuals with jewellery finds dated to the sixth century.⁵⁶ A monastic cemetery must have

⁵² J.B. Wickstrom, 'Text and image in the making of a holy man: an illustrated life of Saint Maurus of Glanfeuil (Ms Vat. Lat. 1202)', *Studies in Iconography* 16 (1994), 53–82; J.B. Wickstrom, 'Gregory the Great's *Life of St. Benedict* and the illustrations of Abbot Desiderius II', *Studies in Iconography* 19 (1998), 31–73.

⁵³ H. Hoffman (ed.), *Chronica Monasterii Casinensis (Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores 34)* (Hannover, 1980), III, 38, 415. 'Nocte, qua precedebatur dies de transitu sancti patris nostri Benedicti festivus, dum ad vigiliis unus e custodibus lampadem ante imaginem eiusdem beati patris dependentem reficeret, ...' (During vigils on the eve of the feast day of the death of our holy father Benedict, one of the custodians refreshes a hanging lamp before the image of that same blessed father ...).

⁵⁴ Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Vat. Lat. 378, 53v–54r. 'Et hic Rome apud Pallariam dedicatio altaris eiusdem BENEDICTI ABBATIS' (And at Rome at [the monastery of Santa Maria in] Pallara, the dedication of the altar of the same Abbot Benedict). It should be noted that the martyrology is bound with a copy of the Rule of Saint Benedict.

⁵⁵ Hoffman (ed.), *Chronica Monasterii Casinensis* (above, n. 53), III, 29, 398.

⁵⁶ A. Augenti, 'Iacere in Palatio. Le sepolture altomedievali del Palatino', in G.P. Brogiolo and G. Cantino Wataghin (eds), *Sepolture tra IV e VIII secolo. Atti del 7° seminario sul tardo antico e l'alto medioevo in Italia centro settentrionale* (Mantua, 1998), 115–21; G. Rizzo, F. Villedieu and M. Vitale, 'Mobilier de tombes des VIe–VIIe siècles mises au jour sur le Palatin (Rome, Vigna Barberini)', *Mélanges de l'École Française de Rome. Antiquité* 111 (1) (1999), 351–403.

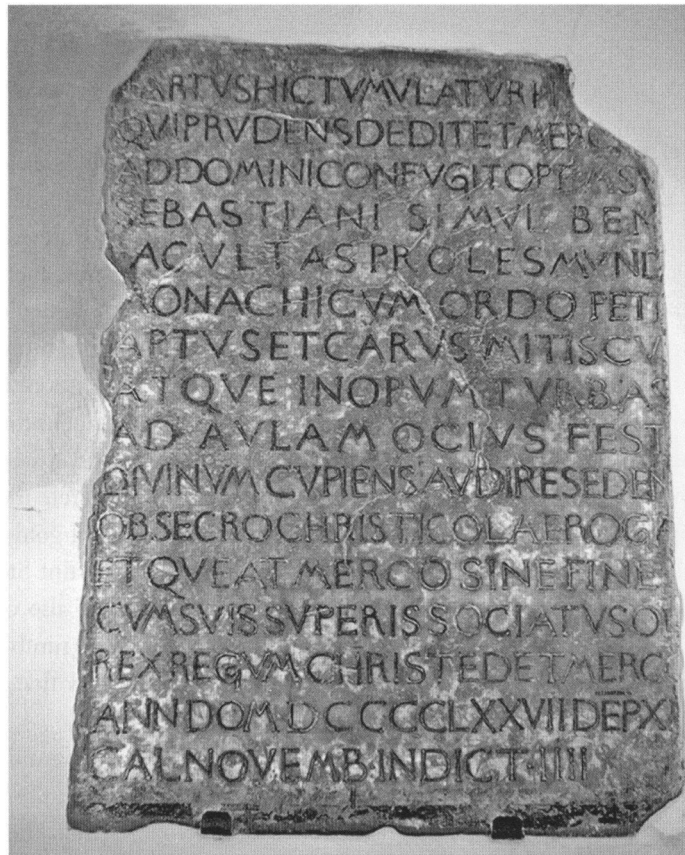


FIG. 2. Funerary inscription of Merco, Santa Maria in Pallara. (Photo: author.)

existed once at Santa Maria in Pallara, its presence borne out by at least one fragment of an inscribed funerary tablet that is dated to 977 and commemorates a monk named Merco (FIG. 2).⁵⁷ Discovered in the garden in the mid-nineteenth century, the inscription has hung on the right nave wall ever since.⁵⁸ That it must have pertained to Santa Maria in Pallara seems to be proven by the inclusion of the name of Saint Sebastian in the inscription.

SUBJECT-MATTER

The traditional nature of the paintings would seem to preclude a discussion of the third criterion, subject-matter. However, just as the image of Saint Benedict has implications for the

⁵⁷ N. Gray, 'The paleography of Latin inscriptions in the eighth, ninth and tenth centuries in Italy', *Papers of the British School at Rome* 16 (1948), 38–167, esp. p. 145.

⁵⁸ Gigli, *S. Sebastiano al Palatino* (above, n. 2), 77; Ferrari, *Early Roman Monasteries* (above, n. 23), 215–24.

dating of the subsidiary panel, some examination of the depictions of the saints in the apse is necessary for any attempt at dating. Saints are figures with definite histories, recognizable in art by means of their physiognomy, costume and attributes, even if these details might vary somewhat across geographical area and over time. The written history of a saint is the hagiographical biography of the saint's life, sometimes existing in several versions, every detail of which has moral implications. While the history of those texts is often well documented and dated, the history of a saint's cult can follow rather different time-lines, encapsulating all written and visual evidence for the veneration of the saint, such as liturgical and literary references, as well as images. As seen in the case of Saint Benedict above, the visual and cultic profile of any saint can develop rather independently from the saint's textual biography.

Saints Lawrence and Stephen appear at the outer edges of the apse conch at Santa Maria in Pallara. The cult of these deacon saints has a long history in Rome, where they were regularly paired in church decoration using a fairly standardized visual typology. For example, the two saints feature in the sixth-century triumphal arch mosaic in San Lorenzo fuori le mura.⁵⁹ Saint Lawrence is tonsured and bearded, wears a gold tunic and pallium or wrap-like cloak, and carries a cross-tipped staff and open codex; Saint Stephen has a youthful beardless face, is dressed in a similar white tunic and pallium and also carries an open codex. The two appear again with similar physiognomy and dress in the ninth-century paintings of the Crypt of Epyphanus at San Vincenzo al Volturmo, a monastery that always had close contacts with the papacy in Rome.⁶⁰

At Santa Maria in Pallara, the costume of Saints Lawrence and Stephen survives in poor condition, perhaps the focus of later overpainting or restoration; the two saints appear to have been depicted in the dress of contemporary deacons, rather than the ancient pallium. This is more evident in the image of Saint Stephen, whose dalmatic includes red and green *clavi*, stripes, from which hang flame-like red threads (FIG. 3). According to Roger E. Reynolds, the deacon's dalmatic included such ornament from the ninth century.⁶¹ For example, the unidentified saintly cleric in the ninth-century apse of Santa Prassede also bears similar fringes.⁶² Similar detail is found in representations of deacons in tenth-century manuscripts, such as the Landulf Pontifical (Rome, Biblioteca Casanatense MS 724), and in depictions of Saints Stephen and Lawrence in the tenth-century Prüm troper (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS lat.

⁵⁹ Osborne and Claridge, *The Paper Museum* (above, n. 7), 118–20.

⁶⁰ Saints Lawrence and Stephen flank Christ in a niche of the Crypt of Epyphanus and are depicted almost as twins, with similar tonsured heads, beardless faces, light-coloured tunics and pallia; see J. Mitchell, 'The Crypt reappraised', in R. Hodges (ed.), *San Vincenzo al Volturmo 1: the 1980–86 Excavations, Part I (Archaeological Monographs of the British School at Rome 7)* (London, 1993), 92–5, figs 7.24–7.25.

⁶¹ R.E. Reynolds, 'Clerical liturgical vestments and liturgical colors in the Middle Ages', in R.E. Reynolds, *Clerics in the Early Middle Ages* (Aldershot, 1999), VI, 1–16, esp. p. 5.

⁶² R. Wisskirchen, *Das Mosaikprogramm von S. Prassede in Rom: Ikonographie und Ikonologie (Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum, Ergänzungsband 17)* (Munster, 1990), 44, fig. 53. Although Wisskirchen did not venture an opinion on the saint's identity, she noted that Saint Stephen is a possible identification.



FIG. 3. Saint Stephen, apse conch, Santa Maria in Pallara. (Photo: author.)

9448).⁶³ The complexity and realism of the costume of these figures tend to increase over time. For example, Saint Lawrence is depicted in the twelfth-century mosaic apse arch of San Clemente dressed in a similar fringed dalmatic decorated with an ornate all-over pattern and embroidered slippers.⁶⁴ While not suggesting a specific dating, the costume detail in the images of Saints Lawrence and Stephen at Santa Maria in Pallara at least provides a general dating context, as it is closer to the simple examples from the ninth and tenth centuries, rather than the ornate twelfth-century example, implying chronological development.

The military Saints Sebastian and Zoticus appear next to Christ in the conch of Santa Maria in Pallara. While no other images of Saint Zoticus are known to exist outside of this church, the cult of Saint Sebastian in medieval Rome has a more ample history than is generally known, with

⁶³ R.E. Reynolds, 'Image and text: the liturgy of clerical ordination in early medieval art', *Gesta* 22 (1) (1983), 27–38, esp. fig. 13; S. Carletti, 'S. Lorenzo', *Bibliotheca Sanctorum*, 13 vols (Rome, 1961–70), VIII, cols 108–21, esp. col. 118; C. Höhl, *Ottotonische Buchmalerei* (Frankfurt am Main, 1996), 51–2, figs 56, 97.

⁶⁴ J. Croisier, 'I mosaici dell'abside e dell'arco absidale della chiesa superiore di San Clemente', in Romano (ed.), *Riforma e tradizione* (above, n. 46), 209–18, esp. p. 213.

a substantial body of surviving evidence for his visual typology.⁶⁵ The earliest surviving image of Saint Sebastian in Rome is found in the paintings of the crypt of Saint Cecilia at the Catacomb of Saint Callixtus on the Via Appia, thought to date to c. 500.⁶⁶ The grey-haired figure, identified by an inscription as 'SABASTIANUS', is depicted dressed in tunic and pallium. In all other medieval images of the saint he is portrayed as a soldier with a fairly stable physiognomy. For example, a mosaic representation identified by an inscription survives in the church of San Pietro in Vincoli, where the saint is depicted with grey curly hair, moustache and beard, wearing a white chlamys or military cloak.⁶⁷ An unidentified depiction of a similar male military saint was discovered during excavation at San Saba on the Aventine; dated to the late seventh century, it is generally accepted as a representation of Saint Sebastian based on physiognomy alone.⁶⁸ Another possible image of the saint, dated by its pictorial technique to the ninth century, is to be found in a niche in the atrium of Santa Maria Antiqua.⁶⁹ A peak in the age at which Saint Sebastian is portrayed is found in twelfth-century depictions. For example, an image of the saint identified by inscription wearing blue and red armour and an ochre cloak is included in the wall paintings removed from the Grotto degli Angeli at Magliano Romano, north of Rome; the saint's body is thin and frail, his hair is starkly white and his face is creased with age lines.⁷⁰ The representation of Saint Sebastian in the panel of saints added to the apse in Santa Maria in Pallara in c. 1070 appears of an equal age (FIG. 1). Significantly, the earlier image of Saint Sebastian in the conch is rendered with a somewhat younger mien than the latter two images, having grey rather than white hair and a more vigorous looking body (FIG. 4). Beginning in the fourteenth century, representations of Saint Sebastian showed increasingly younger and more virile features, as in the apse painting of San Giorgio in Velabro.⁷¹

⁶⁵ For analyses of the cults of Saints Sebastian and Zoticus in early medieval Rome, see Marchiori, *Art and Reform in Tenth-century Rome* (above, n. 3), 154–279.

⁶⁶ The crypt of Saint Cecilia is a roughly square chapel discovered in the late nineteenth century during excavations organized by Giovanni Battista De Rossi; see G.B. De Rossi, *La Roma sotterranea cristiana*, 3 vols (Rome, 1864–77), II, 113–31, pl. 7. More recently, see F. Bisconti, 'Il lucernario di S. Cecilia: recenti restauri e nuove acquisizioni nella cripta callistiana di S. Cecilia', *Rivista di Archeologia Cristiana* 73 (2) (1997), 307–39.

⁶⁷ Traditionally dated to the seventh century, the mosaic recently has been well compared with ninth-century material; see R. Flaminio, 'Il mosaico di San Sebastiano nella chiesa di San Pietro in Vincoli a Roma', in *Atti del VI colloquio dell'Associazione Italiana per lo Studio e la Conservazione del Mosaico* (Ravenna, 2000), 425–38.

⁶⁸ P. Styger, 'Die Malereien in der Basilika des hl. Sabas auf dem kl. Aventin in Rom', *Römische Quartalschrift für Christliche Altertumskunde und für Kirchengeschichte* 28 (2–3) (1914), 49–96, esp. pp. 54–5.

⁶⁹ Barely discernible at the time of excavation in 1900 and lacking any inscription, the three male military saints depicted were identified by Gordon Rushforth as Saints George, Sebastian and Theodore; see G. Rushforth, 'The church of S. Maria Antiqua', *Papers of the British School at Rome* 1 (1902), 1–123, esp. p. 94. For dating, see Osborne, 'The atrium of S. Maria Antiqua' (above, n. 38), 192–4.

⁷⁰ The paintings have been detached, restored and mounted in the cathedral of that city; see S. Moretti, 'Alle porte di Roma: un esempio pittorico e il suo contesto da ricostruire. La «Grotta degli Angeli» a Magliano Romano', *Rendiconti della Pontificia Accademia Romana di Archeologia* 76 (2003–4), 105–33.

⁷¹ Matthiae, *Pittura romana* (above, n. 21), II, 209–13.

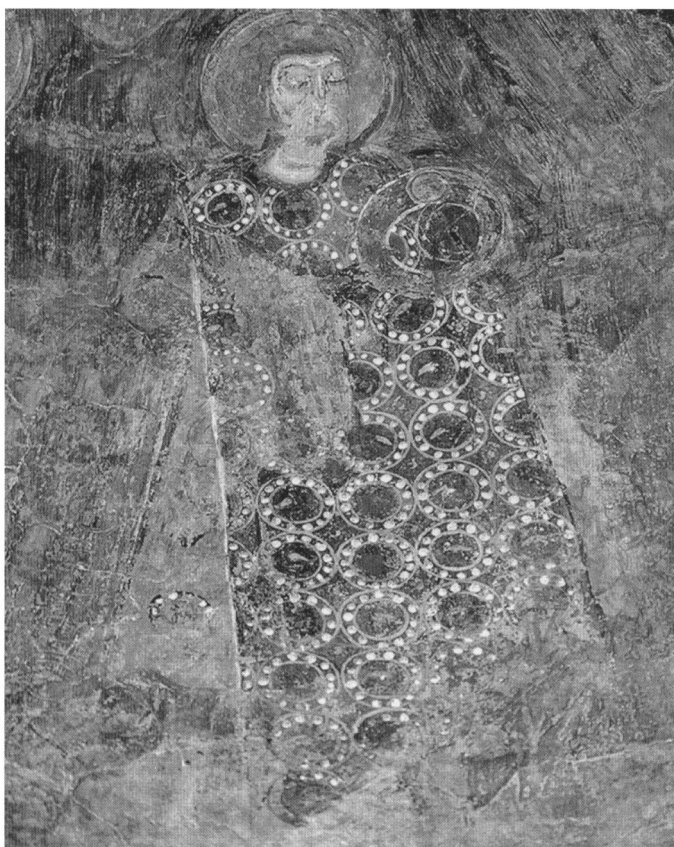


FIG. 4. Saint Sebastian, apse conch, Santa Maria in Pallara. (Photo: author.)

The closest parallel for the Santa Maria in Pallara image of Saint Sebastian is found in a votive painting to the left of the apse in Santa Maria in Cosmedin, a church on the bank of the Tiber to the north of the Aventine Hill. Discovered during a nineteenth-century restoration, the image originally was identified by an inscription, now lost.⁷² The grey-haired, bearded saint is depicted wearing an ornamented white chlamys, similar to the one found in Santa Maria in Pallara, and a yellow tunic trimmed with decorative borders. Significantly, the saint stands taller than the crowd of soldiers depicted next to him. Even without the inscription, it seems clear from the figure's mature physiognomy and tall stature that this is Saint Sebastian; the redactor of his Latin biography, the *Acta Sebastiani*, praised the saint, saying that all the soldiers venerated him as

⁷² H. Grisar, 'Sainte-Marie in Cosmedin à Rome', *Revue de l'Art Chrétien* 41 (1898), 181–97, esp. p. 191; G.-B. Giovenale, *La basilica di S. Maria in Cosmedin* (Rome, 1927), 125–7. The partial inscription was reconstructed to read: 'In honorEM DNI NOSTRI IESu Cristi pro animae meae redemTIONE ET SCI SEBAS...'. (In honour of Our Lord Jesus Christ for my redemption and [in honour] of Saint Sebastian...).

a father.⁷³ The Santa Maria in Cosmedin painting, largely unstudied, perhaps should be dated to the late ninth or early tenth century on account of the rendering of its figures, which are rather squat and are defined by heavy dark outlines, all characteristics of late ninth-century painting; the panel also features black-rimmed haloes decorated with white dots, which is a pictorial technique of some tenth-century painting in Rome.⁷⁴ Thus, both the clerical and military saints chosen for depiction in the Santa Maria in Pallara apse and the manner in which they were depicted are consonant with the paintings' traditional tenth-century dating.

Finally, knowing which female saints were depicted in the Santa Maria in Pallara paintings also lends dating information to this discussion of subject-matter. As noted, no traces of inscriptions survive for the female saints in the lower register. Evidence that inscriptions were once present is to be found in the seventeenth-century drawing of the apse, which includes the *tituli* 'S. LUCIA' to the right of the leftmost figure and 'SCA AGNES' to the left of the rightmost figure.⁷⁵ The author of the drawings, Antonio Eclissi, generally has been viewed as a reliable source; if other inscriptions had been visible to him in the seventeenth century, they would have been depicted.⁷⁶ The remaining two virgins have been identified as Saints Cecilia and Catherine.⁷⁷ The latter identification is attributed to the scholar and Benedictine monk Costantino Gaetani (1560–1650).⁷⁸ It should be noted that Gaetani erred in the identification of other matters of iconography in his discussion of these paintings, and thus his observations should be considered with caution.⁷⁹ While the history of the cults of Saints Lucy, Cecilia and Agnes were all well established in Rome prior to the tenth century, the cult of Saint Catherine does not seem to have manifested itself there until at least the late eleventh

⁷³ The *Acta Sebastiani* traditionally are ascribed to Saint Ambrose of Milan, but have been dated to the fifth century; see B. Pesci, 'Il culto di San Sebastiano a Roma nell'antichità e nel medioevo', *Antoniano* 20 (1945), 177–200, esp. pp. 183–4. For the Latin text, see *Acta Sanctorum quotquot Toto Orbe Coluntur, vel a Catholicis Scriptoribus Celebrantur quae ex Latinis et Graecis, aliarumque Gentium Antiquis Monumentis Collegit*, 68 vols (Antwerp, 1643–1794; Brussels/Paris, 1863–1940), January, II, 265–78.

⁷⁴ For a comparable figure style in securely dated ninth-century paintings, see J. Lafontaine, *Peintures médiévales dans le temple dit de la Fortune Virile à Rome* (Brussels, 1959), 56–8; Osborne, 'The painting of the Anastasis' (above, n. 38), 275–6. For a discussion of the jewelled haloes, see Osborne, 'The atrium of S. Maria Antiqua' (above, n. 38), 205–9; S. Romano, 'La Madonna con Bambino e donatrice nel battistero della chiesa inferiore di San Clemente', in Romano (ed.), *Riforma e tradizione* (above, n. 46), 66–7.

⁷⁵ Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Vat. Lat. 9071, 62; Gigli, *S. Sebastiano al Palatino* (above, n. 2), fig. 30.

⁷⁶ On the general reliability of the Eclissi drawings, see Osborne and Claridge, *The Paper Museum* (above, n. 7), 48–50, 63–4; Noreen, 'Recording the past' (above, n. 7), 6–15.

⁷⁷ Gigli, *S. Sebastiano al Palatino* (above, n. 2), 83.

⁷⁸ It should be noted, however, that the identification does not appear in Gaetani's discussion as transcribed by Uccelli; see Uccelli, *La chiesa di S. Sebastiano martire* (above, n. 6), 83–99, 108; cf. Rome, Biblioteca Casanatense MS 2119, 529–36.

⁷⁹ For example, Gaetani identified the figures flanking Saint Benedict in the panel inserted subsequently in the lower apse as Saints Peter and Paul, even though he recognized that the latter were depicted wearing military costume; see Uccelli, *La chiesa di S. Sebastiano martire* (above, n. 6), 83–8; cf. Rome, Biblioteca Casanatense MS 2119, 530–2.

century.⁸⁰ Thus the question of the identification of the last two female saints should remain open for now; other possibilities are Saints Agatha or Anastasia, whose cults also were present in Rome at an early date.⁸¹

INSCRIPTIONS

The fourth criterion, inscriptions, offers important dating information for the Santa Maria in Pallara paintings.⁸² The *tituli* and the dedication inscription across the centre of the apse are all in Latin, and include particular abbreviations and letterforms that can be paralleled by securely dated monuments. Only fragments of two saints' *tituli* survive, written in white upright capitals. The horizontally-placed letters 'TICUS' appear to the left of the feet of Saint Zoticus. The vertically-set inscription 'S. STEPHANUS' is visible to left of Saint Stephen, with 'STE' running horizontally and the 'A' nestled within the base of the 'H' (FIG. 5). There are two notable details in the latter inscription: the S-slash abbreviation 'S', which was used to signify 'saint', and the embedded letters 'H' and 'A'. Using similar script, the dedication inscription survives in part, the best record of which are photographs taken in the early twentieth century and housed at the Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo e la Documentazione in Rome (FIG. 6).⁸³ The visible portions are here noted in capitals: 'virgo redempTORIS GENITRIX et SPLeNDIDA Mater christi, accipe cum zotico et seBASTiano vota beata || quae sophus illUSTRIS MEDICUS QUOQUE petrus offert ut precibus CAPIAT VESTRIS COELEstia regna'. Credit for the complete inscription is given again to Costantino Gaetani, and while its accuracy must be gauged carefully, a considerable portion of the inscription can be confirmed.⁸⁴ There are no abbreviations in the visible remnants of the inscription and the only significant letterform is the G of 'GENITRIX', the lip of which is formed by a spiralling swirl. A similar swirling G is to be found in the word 'REGUM' in the third last line of the funerary inscription of Merco dated to 977 (FIG. 2).

⁸⁰ P. Jounel, *Le culte des saints dans les basiliques du Latran et du Vatican au douzième siècle* (Rome, 1977), 216, 313, 315–16, 324; E. Mazzocchi, 'Una parete dai molti misteri: alcuni precisazioni sugli affreschi della basilica inferiore di San Crisogono a Roma', *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa ser. IV*, 6 (1) (2001), 39–60, esp. pp. 42–3; Osborne, 'Dating medieval mural painting in Rome' (above, n. 40), 197–8, fig. 8.1.

⁸¹ For example, the church of Sant'Agata dei Goti was dedicated to that saint in the late sixth century; a church located to the west of the Palatine Hill was dedicated to Saint Anastasia as early as the seventh century; see Krautheimer, Corbett and Frankl, *Corpus Basilicarum* (above, n. 39), I, 2–12, 42–61.

⁸² P.J. Nordhagen, 'The use of palaeography in the dating of early medieval frescoes', *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 32 (4) (1982), 167–73.

⁸³ The photos are E 12267 and E 12268 in the photographic archive.

⁸⁴ For a translation of the complete inscription, see note 6. Uccelli provided no citation for the inscription; Uccelli, *La chiesa di S. Sebastiano martire* (above, n. 6), 106. There is no mention of an inscription in Gaetani's discussion of the paintings of Santa Maria in Pallara transcribed by Uccelli; see Rome, Biblioteca Casanatense MS 2119, 529–36.

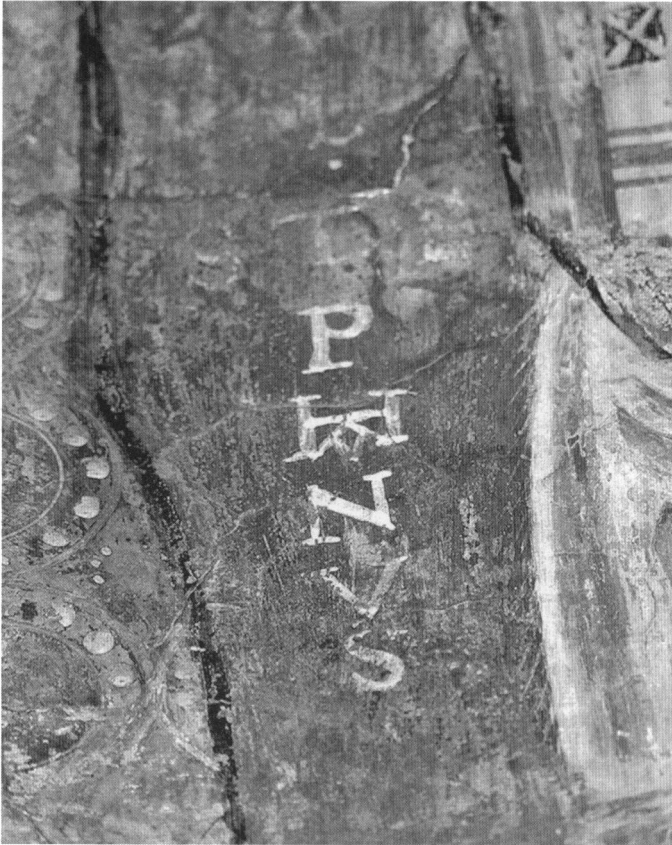


FIG. 5. Inscription identifying Saint Stephen, apse conch, Santa Maria in Pallara. (Photo: author.)

It should be noted that the dating of the Merco inscription in Santa Maria in Pallara was called into question by Carlo Cecchelli, who supposed that it was a *forgery of the 'Gothic' era* on account of the flourish given to some letterforms; in particular, the use of the swirling G appeared suspect to him.⁸⁵ That he would suggest such a late date implies that the author was cognisant of the debate about the origins of the Apostle-and-Prophet iconography and its suspected relationship with Bernard's dwarf-and-giant *dictum*. However, wall paintings recently excavated in Rome offer an early parallel for the letterform. The spiralling G is used in the word 'AGNUS' in a wall painting depicting the Virgin and Child with saints recently excavated in the church of Santa Susanna, and stylistically dated to the eighth or ninth century.⁸⁶ The letterform also is seen on

⁸⁵ C. Cecchelli, 'Alcune iscrizioni romane del secolo III–XI', *Archivio Paleografico Italiano*, V, fasc. 53 (Rome, 1932), viii, pl. 30.1; reprinted as *Archivio Paleografico Italiano, monumenti epigrafici: ristampa in eliotipia dell'edizione 1904–1949*, fasc. 66, 1967 (Rome, 1970), xv–xvi.

⁸⁶ U. Nilgen, 'Eine neu aufgefundene Maria Regina in Santa Susanna, Rom: ein Römisches Thema mit Variationen', in K. Möseneder and G. Schüssler (eds), *Bedeutung in den Bildern: Festschrift für Jörg Traeger zum 60. Geburtstag* (Regensburg, 2002), 231–45.

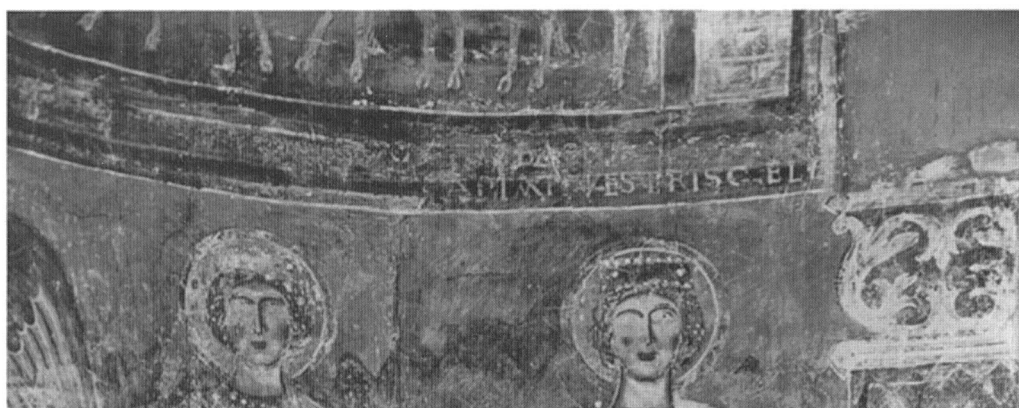


FIG. 6. Votive inscription across the apse, Santa Maria in Pallara. Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo e la Documentazione in Rome, F. 12267 and E. 12268. (Reproduced courtesy of Dott.ssa Paola Balduin, Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo e la Documentazione, Rome.)

the securely dated epitaph of Pope John XIII (965–72) in San Paolo fuori le mura.⁸⁷ It is again found in the word ‘EGO’ in an inscription beneath the painting depicting the translation of Saint Clement in the lower church of San Clemente, dated to the late eleventh century.⁸⁸

An earlier rather than later date for the paintings is suggested by the general lack of abbreviations in the inscriptions of the apse of Santa Maria in Pallara, the only abbreviation being the S-slash for the word *sanctus* in the *titulus* for Saint Stephen. The earliest appearance of this abbreviation in Rome is to be found in the wall paintings of Santa Maria Secundicerio,

⁸⁷ Gray, ‘The paleography of Latin inscriptions’ (above, n. 57), 144, pl. xxii.1.

⁸⁸ J. Osborne, ‘Proclamations of power and presence: the setting and function of two eleventh-century mural decorations in the lower church of San Clemente, Rome’, *Mediaeval Studies* 59 (1997), 155–72, esp. p. 162, fig. 2.

securely dated to the early 870s; thereafter it was used commonly in tenth- and eleventh-century wall painting.⁸⁹ The S-slash abbreviation was even taken up by scribes, appearing in eleventh-century liturgical manuscripts.⁹⁰ This almost total lack of recourse to abbreviations in the apse paintings of Santa Maria in Pallara can be contrasted with the number of abbreviations found in the short inscription of the panel added to the apse in 1070, painted with images of Saints Sebastian, Benedict and Zoticus: an apostrophic abbreviation symbol replaces the letters 'US' in both 'BENEDICT(us)' and 'MONACH(us)' and the contraction 'PRB' was used for 'PRESBYTER'. Abbreviations appear in both monumental inscriptions and manuscripts with increasing frequency in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.⁹¹ For example, several complex abbreviations occur in the twelfth-century paintings at Santa Maria Immacolata at Ceri.⁹²

Information about the date of manufacture of the Santa Maria in Pallara paintings is also offered by the layout of its *tituli*, which corresponds to early medieval practices in Rome. For example, the inscription identifying Saint Stephen extends vertically downward, with several letters grouped together on the horizontal axis; the S-slash abbreviation appears first alone, followed by the letters 'STE', which are arranged horizontally, with the remainder of the name extending vertically downward (FIG. 5). While the Saint Zoticus inscription is entirely horizontal in its placement, the seventeenth-century drawings suggest that the layout of other lost inscriptions was just as varied as that of Saint Stephen.⁹³ Parallels for this mixed horizontal/vertical placement are to be found in the eighth- and ninth-century paintings of the chapel of Saints Quiricus and Julitta at Santa Maria Antiqua and in the lower church of San Clemente.⁹⁴ A *terminus ante quem* is again provided by the presence of art and artists from the sphere of Montecassino within Rome from the mid-eleventh century. For example, *tituli* in the late eleventh-century paintings of the Saint Clement cycle in the lower church of San Clemente have a pronounced cross shape. Similar cross-shaped *tituli* appear in tenth- and eleventh-century Cassinese manuscripts, leading Hélène Toubert to posit that the distinctive

⁸⁹ Gray, 'The paleography of Latin inscriptions' (above, n. 57), 118–19, 129–30; Osborne, 'The "Particular Judgment"' (above, n. 38), 341; J. Osborne, 'The Roman catacombs in the Middle Ages', *Papers of the British School at Rome* 53 (1985), 278–328, esp. pp. 324–5. For the dating of the Santa Maria Secundicerio paintings, see J. Osborne, 'A note on the medieval name of the so-called "Temple of Fortuna Virilis" at Rome', *Papers of the British School at Rome* 56 (1988), 210–12.

⁹⁰ For example, it is found in the eleventh-century lectionary, Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Vat. Lat. 1189, 6r.

⁹¹ B. Bishoff, *Latin Palaeography: Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1989), 150–6.

⁹² N.M. Zchomelidse, *Santa Maria Immacolata in Ceri: pittura sacra al tempo della riforma gregoriana* (Rome, 1996), 90–100.

⁹³ Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Vat. Lat. 9071, 62; Gigli, *S. Sebastiano al Palatino* (above, n. 2), fig. 30. For example, Saint Lawrence's inscription, 'S. LAURENTIUS', was set vertically, with all letters descending singly, except for the 'TI'.

⁹⁴ The inscriptions for Saint Quiricus in the former and Pope Leo IV (847–55) in the latter were laid out in this way; see J. Osborne, 'The portrait of Pope Leo IV in San Clemente, Rome: a re-examination of the so-called "square" nimbus, in medieval art', *Papers of the British School at Rome* 47 (1979), 58–65; Belting, 'Eine Privatkapelle' (above n. 13), figs 1–2.

form was due to the influence of the abbey of Montecassino on Roman art.⁹⁵ Her argument is convincing so far. This once again confirms that the apse paintings were rendered before the arrival of monks from Montecassino at Santa Maria in Pallara.

One final important detail in the Santa Maria in Pallara inscriptions is the letter 'A' that is embedded within the bottom of the 'H' of the *titulus* for Saint Stephen (FIG. 5). While it might at first appear to be a space-saving technique, it should be noted that there is sufficient room at the end of the inscription for perhaps two other letters, thus the ligature is probably rather an aspect of workshop practice, the conceit of a literate artist or artisan-monk. A parallel for these letterforms is to be found in the ninth-century painting of the Crypt of Epyphanius at the monastery of San Vincenzo al Volturno; the same distinctive ligature of the letters 'H' and 'A' occurs in the inscription identifying the portrait of Abbot Epyphanius (824–42).⁹⁶ In the latter case, the ligature may have been used for space-saving reasons, perhaps because the kneeling figure of the abbot takes up about a third of the border where the inscription was placed; two other letters in that inscription are also rendered entwined, the 'US' at the end of Epyphanius. Thus, the inscriptions at Santa Maria in Pallara are very much a product of the literate monastic culture of the central Middle Ages. This brief examination illustrates that a 'Gothic' context for the paintings is unlikely; it also suggests that there are no epigraphic reasons to preclude a tenth-century date for the paintings.

PICTORIAL PRACTICE

The fifth criterion, pictorial practice, is the most important for the objective analysis of the Santa Maria in Pallara paintings. Pictorial practice is defined by Osborne as the non-iconographic element of medieval wall painting, the visual vocabulary utilized by painters that may be specific to particular workshops or used during a certain era, as found in securely-dated monuments.⁹⁷ The visual elements from which we may glean dating information include aspects of figural rendering, as well as details of colour and layout. A challenge for the analysis of the Santa Maria in Pallara paintings is the complete absence of securely-dated tenth-century wall paintings in Rome to offer certain parallels.⁹⁸ Monuments for comparison with the Santa Maria in Pallara

⁹⁵ H. Toubert, 'Rome et le Mont-Cassin: nouvelles remarques sur les fresques de l'église inférieure de Saint-Clément de Rome', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 30 (1976), 1–33, esp. pp. 24–6.

⁹⁶ On the epigraphic traditions at San Vincenzo, see F. De Rubeis, 'La scrittura a San Vincenzo al Volturno fra manoscritti ed epigrafi', in F. Marazzi (ed.), *San Vincenzo al Volturno. Cultura, istituzioni, economia* (Monteroduni, 1996), 21–40.

⁹⁷ Osborne, 'Dating medieval mural paintings in Rome' (above, n. 40), 202–3.

⁹⁸ The paintings of the Tempio della Tosse near Tivoli are supposedly securely dated to the tenth-century by inscription; however, the inscription does not contain a year, only the consecration date of 14 December and an indiction year of fourteen. The paintings seem to have great affinity with securely-dated monuments of the mid- to late ninth century; see B. Brenk, 'Die Wandmalereien im Tempio della Tosse bei Tivoli', *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 5 (1971), 401–12.



FIG. 7. Christ, apse conch, Santa Maria in Pallara. (Photo: author.)

paintings fall into two groups: those securely dated to the ninth century and those classified as belonging to the eleventh and twelfth centuries that in most cases are dated without the benefit of certain documentation. While there is a greater affinity between the Santa Maria in Pallara wall paintings and the earlier monuments, there is enough correspondence with the 'Romanesque' group to suggest that the Santa Maria in Pallara apse programme is correctly characterized as a transition monument.⁹⁹

The visual rendering of figures such as Christ or the Virgin Mary, which are profuse in Roman church decoration, offer an appropriate starting-point for any such pictorial analysis. The figure of Christ in the Santa Maria in Pallara conch is easily paralleled in the art of Rome (FIG. 7), the best comparison for which is found in the ninth-century mosaic apse of San Marco, a product of the patronage of Pope Gregory IV (827–44).¹⁰⁰ The two images share the same severe and

⁹⁹ In his classic survey of Roman medieval painting, Guglielmo Matthiae expressed the opinion that the Santa Maria in Pallara paintings harked back to earlier art and introduced a new forward-looking stylistic ethos; Matthiae, *Pittura romana* (above, n. 21), I, 196–204, esp. p. 196.

¹⁰⁰ C. Bolgia, 'The mosaics of Gregory IV at San Marco, Rome. Papal response to Venice, Byzantium, and the Carolingians', *Speculum* (2005), 1–34.

angular facial type, with a short stern forehead, over-large eyes and an angular beard; both faces are rendered with red and white linear highlights and olive shadows. Both figures bear cruciform haloes, the bars of which are formed by simple coloured bands. Such coloured bands are the norm in eighth- and ninth-century images of Christ, whereas they began to be jewelled in eleventh-century art.¹⁰¹ The facial rendering of the ninth-century paintings of Santa Maria Secundicerio also provides a decent parallel for the Santa Maria in Pallara paintings; the two programmes present figures with stern physiognomies, incorporating large eyes set beneath thick brows and a shallow forehead; both workshops also rendered ears using distinctive flesh-coloured narrow loops.¹⁰² It should be noted that the facial colouring of figures in Santa Maria in Pallara is more dramatic than that of the earlier paintings, more akin to that of eleventh- and twelfth-century monuments, using a vivid olive-green for shadows and bright red blush spots to colour the cheeks. Significantly, an even more dramatic colouring is to be found in the eleventh-century narrative cycle in the lower church of San Crisogono, which is thought to number among the few artistic commissions of the abbots of Montecassino in Rome.¹⁰³

The San Marco figure of Christ wearing dark purple robes also provides a parallel for the Santa Maria in Pallara image, standing in contrast to the earlier depictions of Christ in the apse mosaics of Santa Cecilia in Trastevere and Santa Prassede, where he is robed in gold.¹⁰⁴ Generally Christ also is depicted in richer, more elaborate costume in twelfth-century Roman art, as in the apse of Santa Maria in Trastevere, where he wears a jewelled white tunic and gold pallium.¹⁰⁵ The drapery of Christ's garments is also chronologically specific; the double-line fold that is characteristic of ninth-century figural church decoration is used in Santa Maria in Pallara to define Christ's thigh and those of the female saints in the lower register.¹⁰⁶ The motif is absent from eleventh- and twelfth-century programmes, which display a stiff linearity in the rendition of drapery; for example, the double-line fold is not found in the paintings of the Basilica Sant'Elia near Nepi.¹⁰⁷ The ornament on Christ's tunic is also distinctive; the hem of his tunic is decorated with a triple-dot motif. A similar repeating quadruple-dot pattern occurs in the tunic of Saint Cyril in his funerary portrait in the lower church of San Clemente; the painting is dated to

¹⁰¹ Osborne, 'The 'Particular Judgment'' (above, n. 38), 341. While the rays in Christ's halo in the ninth-century apse of Santa Cecilia in Trastevere are jewelled, these were likely added in an early modern restoration, as proved by seventeenth-century drawings; see Osborne and Claridge, *The Paper Museum* (above, n. 7), 78–81.

¹⁰² Lafontaine, *Peintures médiévales* (above, n. 74), pl. 8.

¹⁰³ The programme is thought to have been commissioned by Abbot Frederic of Montecassino, later Pope Stephen IX (ob. 1058); see S. Romano, 'Storie di San Benedetto e altri santi', in Romano (ed.), *Riforma e tradizione* (above, n. 46), 79–87; Brenk, 'Die Benediktizenen in S. Crisogono und Montecassino' (above, n. 50); Brenk, 'Roma e Montecassino' (above, n. 50).

¹⁰⁴ Osborne and Claridge, *The Paper Museum* (above, n. 7), 78–9, 282–3.

¹⁰⁵ Osborne and Claridge, *The Paper Museum* (above, n. 7), 238–9.

¹⁰⁶ On the double-line fold motif, see C. Davis-Weyer, 'The mosaics of Leo III and the beginning of the Carolingian renaissance in Rome', *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 29 (2) (1966), 111–32; K. Weitzmann, 'The ivories of the so-called Grado chair', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 26 (1972), 43–91, esp. pp. 74–7.

¹⁰⁷ Hoegger, *Die Fresken in der Ehemaligen Abteikirche* (above, n. 11), 124–6, fig. 3.

869.¹⁰⁸ The same triple-dot motif is to be found in the eleventh-century votive painting known as the Particular Judgement in the lower church of San Clemente, decorating the red chasuble of the figure identified as Saint Clement.¹⁰⁹

The rendering of the Virgin Mary in the lower register of the apse has no single parallel in medieval Rome, but can be seen to have grown out of earlier traditions. The Virgin is depicted standing on a red and white platform or pedestal, her hands held in front of her chest in the orans or prayer gesture, which is common to some eighth- and ninth-century votive or funerary images (FIG. 8). For example, a similar orans, platform-mounted Virgin Mary was the central focus of the mosaic cycle in the funerary chapel of Pope John VII (705–7) in the northeast aisle of Old Saint Peter's basilica.¹¹⁰ In Santa Maria in Pallara, the Virgin stands amidst her heavenly entourage in the lower register, where she is flanked by archangels and female saints bearing crosses and crowns. The Virgin is commonly flanked by female saints in subsidiary areas of decoration in early medieval churches. For example, this composition is to be found in the paintings of the lower church of San Clemente, the lower church of San Martino ai Monti and those found in recent excavations of Santa Susanna.¹¹¹ Courtly archangels come to be incorporated in such groupings from the ninth century, as seen in the paintings of the Crypt of Epyphanus at San Vincenzo al Volturno, having been adapted perhaps from early Christian models.¹¹²

Chronologically significant details are found in the depiction of female costume in the Santa Maria in Pallara paintings, which appear highly ornamented. For example, the Virgin's head-dress in Santa Maria in Pallara is distinctive (FIG. 8). Over a hairnet decorated with clusters of white dots, the Virgin wears a white veil and a shallow jewelled crown adorned with purple tri-lobed motifs at the front and sides. The veil is perhaps modestly appropriate for a monastic setting. A decent parallel for the veil and crown is to be found in the ninth-century Crypt of Epyphanus at San Vincenzo al Volturno, where the Virgin is depicted in the vault of the chapel's west arm.¹¹³ The hairnet, also worn by the female saints in Santa Maria in Pallara, is less common in early medieval art. The Virgin is depicted wearing a similar head covering in the Stuttgart Psalter (Stuttgart, Württembergische Landesbibliothek, Biblia Folio 23, 84r), a manuscript

¹⁰⁸ Osborne, 'The painting of the Anastasis' (above, n. 38), 257.

¹⁰⁹ Osborne, 'The "Particular Judgment"' (above, n. 38), 336.

¹¹⁰ A. van Dijk, 'The angelic salutation in early Byzantine and medieval Annunciation imagery', *Art Bulletin* 81 (3) (1999), 420–36, esp. p. 426. A similar depiction of Mary is in the Theodotus chapel at Santa Maria Antiqua, where she is portrayed standing on a platform holding the Christ Child in her arms; see Matthiae, *Pittura romana* (above, n. 21), I, 144, fig. 114.

¹¹¹ C. Davis-Weyer and J. Emerick, 'The early sixth-century frescoes at S. Martino ai Monti in Rome', *Römisches Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte* 21 (1984), 3–60, esp. pp. 26–8; Osborne, 'Early medieval painting in San Clemente' (above, n. 38), 300–1, 307; Nilgen, 'Eine neu aufgefundene Maria Regina' (above, n. 86), 232–3, fig. 1.

¹¹² Mitchell, 'The Crypt reappraised' (above, n. 60), fig. 7.5. On the evolution of the iconography, see J. Barclay Lloyd, 'Mary, Queen of the Angels: Byzantine and Roman images of the Virgin and Child enthroned with attendant angels', *Melbourne Art Journal* 5 (2001), 5–24.

¹¹³ Mitchell, 'The Crypt reappraised' (above, n. 60), 83, fig. 7.10. The female saints in this chapel bear similar headgear; see also p. 96, fig. 7.30.



FIG. 8. Virgin Mary and archangels, lower register of the apse, Santa Maria in Pallara. (Photo: author.)

thought to have originated at the monastery of St-Germain-des-Prés, Paris in the 820s.¹¹⁴ It would appear that the paintings of Santa Maria in Pallara introduced the fashion into Rome. Thereafter the accessory is found on female figures in 'Romanesque' painting around Rome, as in the twelfth-century paintings from the Grotta degli Angeli at Magliano Romano.¹¹⁵ The interest in ornament in Santa Maria in Pallara also extends to the depiction of textiles. Over her red tunic, the Virgin is depicted wearing a floral-patterned yellow stola or apron-like scarf, which is just visible under the asymmetrical hem of her jewel-trimmed, floral-patterned, short-sleeved blue gown. The female saints were rendered wearing variations of the same costume, with the addition of yellow floral-patterned pallia. This ornamental quality is increasingly prevalent in twelfth-century Roman art, as seen in both paintings and mosaics.¹¹⁶ Finally, the female saints

¹¹⁴ E.T. De Wald, *The Stuttgart Psalter, Biblia Folio 23*, *Württembergische Landesbibliothek* (Princeton, 1932), 65.

¹¹⁵ Moretti, 'Alle porte di Roma' (above, n. 70), 122. The hairnet is seen again in the eleventh-century image of a female saint excavated at Sant'Agnese fuori le mura and now in the Vatican Museums; see G. Bordi, 'I pannelli staccati con due figure di sante già in Sant'Agnese fuori le mura (Pinacoteca Vaticana)', in Romano (ed.), *Riforma e tradizione* (above, n. 46), 63–5.

¹¹⁶ This evaluation of ornamentation applies to both saintly costume and clerical costume. For twelfth-century examples, see Hoegger, *Die Fresken in der Ehemaligen Abteikirche* (above, n. 11), fig. 14; Croisier, 'I mosaici dell'abside e dell'arco trionfale di Santa Maria in Trastevere' (above, n. 64), 305–11.



FIG. 9. Female saint, lower register of the apse, Santa Maria in Pallara. (Photo: author.)

in the Santa Maria in Pallara painting carry distinctive crowns that consist of a circlet perpendicularly spanned by an arching band (FIG. 9). The crown's form is perhaps chronologically significant, since the only parallel in the corpus of medieval painting in Rome is to be found in an image of a lone standing female saint in the late ninth-century paintings of Santa Maria Secundicerio.¹¹⁷

Two aspects of the depiction of the archangels in Santa Maria in Pallara are also chronologically significant (FIG. 8). First, the archangels wear the *loros*, a scarf-like garment of imperial dress that passed into Roman artistic contexts via ninth-century Byzantine art.¹¹⁸ Many 'Romanesque' representations of archangels in and around Rome feature the garment, such as is found in the Particular Judgement panel in the lower church of San Clemente, the votive panel in Santi Giovanni e Paolo, as well as the apses of the catacomb chapel of Sant'Ermete and the Basilica

¹¹⁷ Lafontaine, *Peintures médiévales* (above, n. 74), pls 7, 13.

¹¹⁸ C. Lamy-Lassalle, 'Les archanges en costume impérial dans la peinture murale italienne', in A. Grabar and J. Hubert (eds), *Synthronon — Art et archéologie de la fin de l'antiquité et du Moyen Age* (*Bibliothèque des Cahiers Archéologiques* 2) (Paris, 1968), 189–98.

Sant'Elia near Nepi.¹¹⁹ While the *loros* is correctly and naturalistically draped around the archangels in Santa Maria in Pallara, all later examples of the garment are rendered stiffly, as if it was misunderstood to be a series of ornamental bands. Further, the colour of the archangels' haloes is chronologically relevant; in Santa Maria in Pallara they are blue–green, rimmed with a white line and marked with three parallel notches at equidistant points along the outer edge. This blue colouring is consistent with angelic depictions in Rome from the sixth to the ninth centuries. For example, this is the case in the sixth- or seventh-century mosaics of the arch of Santi Cosma e Damiano, in the eighth-century paintings of the apse arch in Santa Maria Antiqua and in the ninth-century mosaics of the San Zeno chapel at Santa Prassede.¹²⁰ From the eleventh century, archangels were usually depicted bearing yellow halos, as they do in the Particular Judgement panel at San Clemente and the apse of Sant'Ermete.¹²¹

The setting and background in the Santa Maria in Pallara paintings also offer details of chronological import to this analysis of pictorial practice. For example, the columns flanking the lower register of the apse are ornamented with an overlapping diamond pattern, each scale-like element of which bears a vegetal motif (FIG. 10). The rows of diamonds alternate in colour in the repeating sequence of light blue, white, pink, light blue, brown and black. A parallel for the columns can be found in the late ninth-century paintings at Santa Maria Secundicerio, where a column is depicted with a repeating diaper pattern formed by red, white, blue and brown squares.¹²² Another notable aspect of the background is the green backdrop that fills each register almost entirely, its zigzagged upper edges giving way to blue. These backdrops were originally outlined in yellow ochre and were decorated with yellow window-like squares, traces of which are still visible between the figures of Saints Zoticus and Stephen in the conch (FIG. 3). The markings suggest that the green areas were architectural forms simulating stage-set backgrounds, rather than some garden landscape. A ninth-century parallel may be found in the full-length images of Saints John and Paul from Santa Maria in Via Lata, now in the Crypta Balbi Museum, that have chest-high, stage-set architectural backgrounds.¹²³ Another distinct detail of the setting is the red grass-like hatching on the yellow ground of the top two

¹¹⁹ Hoegger, *Die Fresken in der Ehemaligen Abteikirche* (above, n. 11), 47–51; Osborne, 'The 'Particular Judgement'' (above, n. 38), 335; F. Dos Santos, 'Il Cristo e Arcangeli dall'oratorio del Salvatore sotto Santi Giovanni e Paolo', in Romano (ed.), *Riforma e tradizione* (above, n. 46), 95–6; F. Dos Santos, 'La decorazione pittorica in una nicchia della Catacomba di Sant'Ermete', in Romano (ed.), *Riforma e tradizione* (above, n. 46), 97–101.

¹²⁰ G. Mackie, 'The Zeno chapel: a prayer for salvation', *Papers of the British School at Rome* 57 (1989), 172–99; R. Wisskirchen, 'Zur Apsisstimwand von SS. Cosma e Damiano/Rom', *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 42 (1999), 169–83; M. Andaloro, 'La parete palinsesto: 1900, 2000', in J. Osborne, J. Rasmus Brandt and G. Morganti (eds), *Santa Maria Antiqua al Foro Romano cento anni dopo. Atti del colloquio internazionale Roma, 5–6 maggio 2000* (Rome, 2004), 97–112, esp. p. 112.

¹²¹ Osborne, 'The 'Particular Judgement'' (above, n. 38), 335; Dos Santos, 'La decorazione pittorica in una nicchia della Catacomba di Sant'Ermete' (above, n. 119). These paintings seem to copy the practice from early Christian art.

¹²² Lafontaine, *Peintures médiévales* (above, n. 74), pl. 14.

¹²³ Matthiae, *Pittura romana* (above, n. 21), I, 182, 284. The paintings should probably be dated to the ninth century.



FIG. 10. Column, lower register of the apse, Santa Maria in Pallara. (Photo: author.)

registers of the apse arch (PLATE 1). While no securely-dated parallel can be offered, the detail will be of interest in future studies of under-studied paintings where the motif is also found. For example, it appears in the votive painting of Saint Sebastian at Santa Maria in Cosmedin discussed above and in an unpublished painting of the crucifixion of Saint Peter at Santa Balbina.

Significantly, the green stage-set backdrops appear in all of the Santa Maria in Pallara paintings — those of the apse and the apse arch — suggesting that they are coeval, belonging to the same campaign. This appears true, despite there being minor differences in the pictorial practice used in each area of the programme. For example, the figures on the apse arch appear taller than those of the apse, having longer proportions in general. Further, the saints in the lower register of the apse arch were rendered wearing gowns decorated with all-over diaper patterns and carrying crowns that are broader and flatter than those in the apse, more akin to costume and crowns in eleventh- and twelfth-century paintings in Rome.¹²⁴ However,

¹²⁴ For example, the gowns are very similar to those depicted on the female saints in the Marian oratory in Santa Pudenziana, as are the flat crowns they carry; see J. Croisier, 'La decorazione pittorica dell'oratorio mariano di Santa Pudenziana', in Romano (ed.), *Riforma e tradizione* (above, n. 46), 199–206, esp. p. 200.

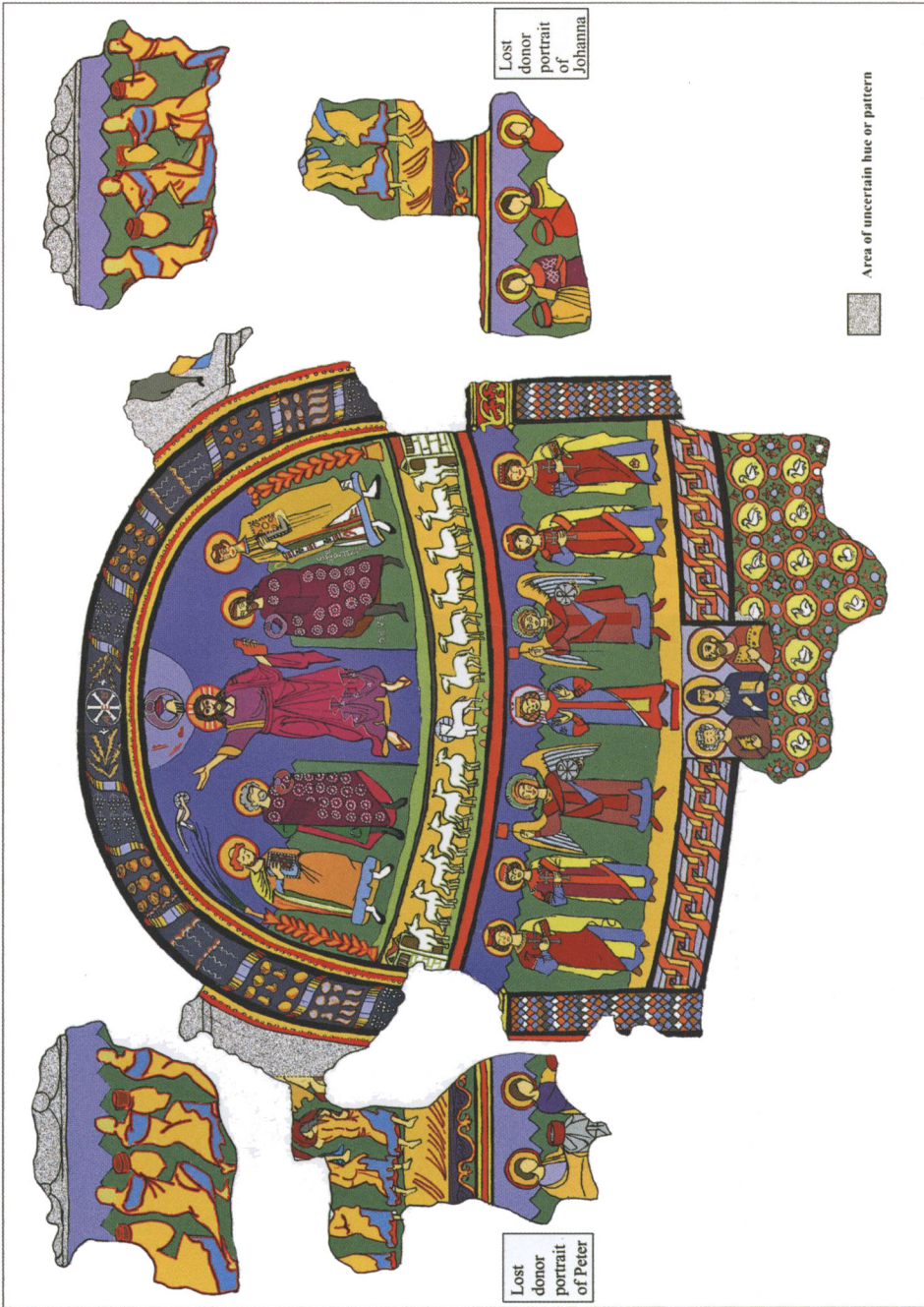
other details shared by the paintings of the apse and the apse arch suggest that the two are coeval. This is the case with the flying hems that are seen on many figures in the programme. For example, the hem on the left side of Christ's tunic extends outwards by about ten centimetres, as if blown upwards by a gust of wind (FIG. 7). The same detail is to be found on the figures of Saints Lawrence and Stephen in the conch, the archangels in the lower register and the Apostle-carrying Prophets in the middle register of the arch. Such details as architectural backdrops and flying hems would not have been synchronized if the arch paintings were a later addition to the programme, as there is no evidence that medieval workshops attempted to blend subsequent paintings with earlier ones; the lower churches of San Clemente and San Crisogono are evidence that they did not. Thus, it is possible that different artists were responsible for the different areas of painting in the programme.¹²⁵ Of course, the final evidence that the paintings of the apse and apse arch are coeval are the references to the patron 'Petrus medicus', who is mentioned in the inscription across the apse and whose portrait once decorated the lower register of the apse arch.

This analysis of the objective dating criteria of the Santa Maria in Pallara paintings suggests that their traditional tenth-century dating is correct, as they are well categorized in the history of Roman pictorial technique between securely-dated ninth-century monuments and those dated less precisely to the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Such an analysis is possible only due to the survival of substantial and well-documented monuments of medieval art in Rome. Future study and technical analysis of the Santa Maria in Pallara paintings will facilitate greatly our understanding of medieval workshop practices. This church is a unique transitional monument that bears witness to artistic and social phenomena at the turn of the millennium in Rome, and has much to offer as a document in the period's history.

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¹²⁵ The suggestion is not unusual, as two different workshops have been detected in the sixth-century paintings of the lower church of San Martino ai Monti, which all lie on the same masonry piers; see Davis-Weyer and Emerick, 'The early sixth-century frescoes at S. Martino ai Monti' (above, n. 111), 33–54.



Marchiori — PLATE 1. Schematic diagram of the apse and apse arch paintings of Santa Maria in Pallara. (Drawing: author.)