

Eastern Soldier-Saints in Early Medieval Rome*

Maya Maskarinec, *Institute for the Study of the Ancient World, New York University, USA*

In the late eighth century Pope Hadrian (772–795) had a new fresco added to the atrium of Sta. Maria Antiqua (**fig. 1**).¹ Here Pope Hadrian (on the far left) is presented entreating the Virgin and Child; four accompanying saints champion his case. Along with Rome’s renowned Pope Sylvester and another pope of uncertain identity, Sergius and Bacchus are in attendance, two soldiers who, according to their legend were buried in Resafa/Sergiopolis

* I would like to thank the organizers and participants of the Eighth Medieval History Seminar, German Historical Institute, London, 10–12 October 2013, where I received helpful feedback on a version of this paper. I am also grateful to Caroline Goodson and Robert Coates-Stephens for their comments and corrections. This article uses the following abbreviations:

- AASS *Acta Sanctorum*, ed. Bollandisti: Anversa (Ianuarii I–Octobris III) 1643–1770; Bruxelles (Octobris IV–V) 1780–1786; Tongerlo (Octobris VI) 1794; Bruxelles (Octobris VII–Novembris IV) 1845; 2nd ed. Venezia (Ianuarii I–Septembris V) 1734–1770; 3rd ed. Paris (Ianuarii I–Novembris I) 1863–1897.
- BHG *Bibliotheca hagiographica graeca*, ed. F. Halikin, 3rd ed., Subsidia hagiographica 8a, (Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes, 1957).
- BHL *Bibliotheca hagiographica latina: Antiquae et mediae aetatis*, 2 vols., Subsidia hagiographica 6 (Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes, 1898–1901).
- BS *Bibliotheca Sanctorum: Enciclopedia dei Santi*, 12 vols., ed. F. Caraffa (Roma: Società Grafica Romana, 1961–1970).
- CBCR *Corpus basilicarum christianarum Romae: The Early Christian Basilicas of Rome (IV–IX Cent.)*, 5 vols., ed. R. Krautheimer et al., Monumenti di antichità cristiana, 2a serie, 2 (Città del Vaticano: Pontificio Istituto di archeologia cristiana, 1937–1977).
- LP *Le Liber Pontificalis: Introduction, texte et commentaire*, 3 vols., ed. L. Duchesne (1886–1892; reprint, Paris: de Boccard, 1955), vol. 3 with additions and further commentary, ed. C. Vogel, 1957).
- LTUR *Lexicon topographicum urbis Romae*, 6 vols., ed. E.M. Steinby (Roma: Edizioni Quasar, 1993–2000).

¹ J. Osborne, “The Atrium of S. Maria Antiqua, Rome: A History in Art,” *Papers of the British School at Rome* 55 (1987): 194–96.

in Syria, after being martyred for refusing to sacrifice to the pagan gods under the emperor Maximian.² Also present is another saint dressed in a *chlamys* (a cloak pinned on one shoulder), the attire of soldiers and other Byzantine functionaries.³ Why such prominence of eastern soldier-saints in conjunction with a Roman pope?

Rather than an anomalous choice or a personal preference, Pope Hadrian's fresco represents a much wider process by which, in the sixth to eighth centuries, an influx of eastern soldier-saints into Rome endowed the city with new forms of protection and heavenly prestige. Soldier-saints were only one of the many types of new saints promoted in Rome in this period; yet the scale of the phenomenon and the impact of these saints on Rome warrants study in its own right.⁴ Supported by a wide range of individuals—from Byzantine soldiers and administrators to ecclesiastical officials, to more run-of-the-mill inhabitants of Rome—the cults of militant eastern soldier-saints imparted early medieval Rome's Christian topography and civic identity with a particular inflection of triumphal sanctity.⁵

² Although the saints' names do not survive, the *maniakion*, a torc worn around the neck of one of the pair, identifies them: C. Walter, *The Warrior Saints in Byzantine Art and Tradition* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 152–55.

³ G.M. Rushforth, "The Church of S. Maria Antiqua," *Papers of the British School at Rome* 1 (1902): 103–4, suggested that this figure was Pope Hadrian's name-saint, St. Hadrian, whose *diaconia* the pope renovated. Regarding the *chlamys* see K. Wessel, "Insignien, B. XI. Paludamentum-Chlamys," *Reallexikon zur byzantinischen Kunst* 3 (1972): 424–28; Walter, *Warrior Saints*, 270.

⁴ For a recent overview of the Christian transformations of Rome in this period see L. Pani Ermini, ed., *Christiana loca: Lo spazio cristiano nella Roma del primo millennio*, 2 vols. (Roma: Fratelli Palombi, 2000–2001). The present author is currently working on a larger study of the cults of saints from abroad promoted in sixth-ninth century Rome.

⁵ This process was by no means unique to Rome; a comparison is beyond the scope of this discussion, but for the situation in Ravenna compare D.M. Deliyannis, *Ravenna in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), for Constantinople F.A. Bauer, *Stadt, Platz und Denkmal in der Spätantike: Untersuchungen zur Ausstattung des öffentlichen Raums in den spätantiken Städten Rom, Konstantinopel und Ephesos* (Mainz am Rhein: P. von Zabern, 1996); C.A. Mango, *Le développement urbain de Constantinople, IVe–VIIe siècles*, Travaux et mémoires du Centre de recherche d'histoire et civilisation de Byzance, Monographies 2 (Paris: Diffusion de Boccard, 1985).

The Soldier-Saint

By “solider-saints,” I refer to saints who were believed to have lived, and died, as soldiers, never renouncing their military careers.⁶ Contemporaries did not regard these soldier-saints as a category per se, but the fusing of military and Christian virtue that these saints embodied and the analogous roles they took on as protective patrons justifies the term.

Early Christianity was ambivalent at best on military virtue as a Christian virtue; Tertullian (late second/early third century), denied that any soldier could be a Christian.⁷ By the later fourth century, in the context of a Christianized Roman Empire, military service was regarded with fewer reservations.⁸ Indeed, that a celestial soldier, a *miles Christi/miles Dei*, a term used to refer to any martyr, whatever his earthly career, had once been a terrestrial soldier, could underscore a martyr’s courageous spirit.⁹ Accordingly, the proliferating legends about Christian martyrs often portrayed their protagonists as soldiers. This was less a result of new saints,

⁶ For an overview of soldier-saints, see A.M. Orselli, *Santità militare e culto dei santi militari nell'impero dei romani (secoli VI–X)* (Bologna: Lo scarabeo, 1993). Regarding their individual cults in Byzantium, see Walter, *Warrior Saints*, who builds on the classic work by H. Delehaye, *Les légendes grecques des saints militaires* (Paris: Alphonse Picard, 1909). For the Constantinopolitan contexts of many of these saints, see also R. Janin, “Les églises byzantines des saints militaires (Constantinople et banlieue),” *Échos d'Orient* 33 (1934): 163–80; 331–42. Regarding attitudes in the West see F. Prinz, *Klerus und Krieg im früheren Mittelalter: Untersuchungen zur Rolle der Kirche beim Aufbau der Königsherrschaft* (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1971), esp. 37–72.

⁷ Tertullian, *De idolatria*, 19.1–3 [60–62 Waszink-van Winden]. The modern scholarly debate on this controversial topic began with A. von Harnack, *Militia Christi: Die christliche Religion und der Soldatenstand in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1905). For an overview of the state of the debate see D. Hunter, “The Church’s Peace Witness,” in *The Christian Church and the Roman Army in the First Three Centuries*, ed. M.E. Miller and B. N. Geringer (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1994), 161–81.

⁸ For this process see C. Odahl, “Constantine and the Militarization of Christianity: A Contribution to the Study of Christian Attitudes towards War and Military Service,” Ph.D. diss., University of California, San Diego, 1976; M. Whitby, “Deus Nobiscum: Christianity, Warfare, and Morale in Late Antiquity,” in *Modus Operandi: Essays in Honour of Geoffrey Rickman*, ed. G. Rickman et al. (London: Institute of Classical Studies, School of Advanced Study, University of London, 1998), 191–208.

⁹ Walter, *Warrior Saints*, 31. This term is derived from New Testament writers, especially St. Paul (Eph 6:10–17).

so much as new legends; most of the soldier-saints popular across the Mediterranean were believed to have been early Christian martyrs of Roman imperial persecutions—soldiers of the imperial army, who, as Christians, refused to sacrifice to the pagan gods and were correspondingly tortured and executed. Although the renunciation of a military life continued to be a hagiographical motif, the soldier-saint was there to stay.¹⁰

Soldier-Saints in Rome (Table 1)

In Rome, as throughout the rest of the Mediterranean world, there were few cults for soldier-saints prior to the sixth century. Among the epigrams that Pope Damasus wrote in the late fourth century in honor of Rome's martyrs, only one pair, Nereus and Achilleus, are described as soldiers.¹¹ Yet upon converting to Christianity, in Damasus' words, "they flee, they leave the impious camp of their general. They throw away shields, armaments and bloody weapons."¹² They are thus a model of the Christian rejection, not embrace, of military service.

Starting in the sixth century, concurrent with the increasing militarization of Roman society, we find a growing number of saints who died as soldiers, never renouncing their military careers.¹³ By far the majority of these saints

¹⁰ In particular St. Martin of Tours, whose biographer, Sulpicius Severus, presented his renunciation of his military career as a turning point in his Christian commitment, offered a different model of sanctity: *Vita S. Martini* 4 [260–62 Fontaine]; B.H. Rosenwein, "St. Odo's St. Martin: The Uses of a Model," *Journal of Medieval History* 4 (1978): 317–31. At least by the seventh century a monastery was dedicated to St. Martin in Rome; by the time of Pope Leo III there were also two *diaconiae*. Similar attitudes are also found in the *passiones* of eastern saints; for example Anastasius the Persian (whose relics arrived in Rome by the mid-seventh century at the so-called monastery of "S. Anastasius ad Aquas Salvias") abandoned the Persian army when he became a Christian (although his *passio* does not emphasize this): C.V. Franklin, *The Latin Dossier of Anastasius the Persian: Hagiographic Translations and Transformations* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2004).

¹¹ A. Ferrua, *Epigrammata Damasiana* (Città del Vaticano: Pontificio Istituto di archeologia cristiana, 1942), 103 no. 8, line 1: *Militiae nomen dederant . . .*

¹² *Ibid.* lines 6–7: *conversi fugiunt, ducis impia castra relinquunt, / prociunt clipeos faleras tela(ue) cruenta.*

¹³ For the rise of a military and ecclesiastical hierarchy in Rome, see T.F.X. Noble, "The Roman Elite from Constantine to Charlemagne," in *Rome AD 300–800: Power and Symbol, Image and Reality*, ed. J. Rasmus Brandt, Acta ad archaeologiam et artium historiam pertinentia 17 (Roma: Bardi, 2003), 13–24 and, more generally, T.S. Brown, *Gentlemen and Officers:*

Table 1.
Evidence for the Veneration of Eastern Soldier-Saints in Rome

<i>Saint</i>	<i>Site of Martyrdom</i>	<i>Evidence for Cult in Rome</i>	<i>BHL/BHG</i>
Theodore of Amasea†	Euchaita (Pontos)	early 6th century: mosaic in SS. Cosma e Damiano late 6th/early 7th century (?): <i>diaconia</i> at foot of Palatine Hill (S. Teodoro): <i>CBCR</i> 4:279–88 relics in Theodotus' list	<i>BHL</i> 8077f.; <i>BHG</i> 1761 (Siegmund)
George†	Lydda (Diospolis) in Palestine	6th century (?): Porta Appia inscription 7th century (?): <i>diaconia</i> (S. Giorgio al Velabro): <i>CBCR</i> 1:242–263 Pope Zacharias (740–752) discovers head in Lateran (<i>LP</i>) relics in Theodotus' list altar in St. Peter's (<i>Notitia Ecclesiarum</i>) 9th century: relics in <i>sancta sanctorum</i> Evidence for a Roman translation of Greek <i>passio</i> into Latin (Type "Y" was likely originally translated from Greek into Latin in Rome, as versions thereof are found in passionaries based on Roman models: Haubrichs)	<i>passio</i> "Y" (<i>BHL</i> 3369–71; 3378–82; 3383b; 3384–5; 3393); Haubrichs, 474–99 (Appendix 2)
Mennas*†	Cotyae (in Phrygia); Alexandrian cult	before late 6th century: church on via Ostiensis: Jost 2:82	<i>BHL</i> 5921f; <i>BHG</i> 1250ff. (Siegmund)
Demetrius*†	Thessalonica	late 6th to mid 7th century: fresco in Sta. Maria Antiqua relics in Theodotus' list	<i>BHL</i> 2122; <i>BHG</i> 496 (Anastasius); <i>BHL</i> 2124 (anonymous) (Siegmund)
Hadrian†	Nicomedia	Pope Honorius (625–638) dedicates church on <i>forum Romanum</i> (<i>LP</i>)	<i>BHL</i> 3744; <i>BHG</i> 27 (Siegmund)

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Antiochianus, Gaianus, Paulinianus, Telius	Salonita	mid 7th-century mosaics in S. Venanzio oratory by Lateran: Mackie	
Forty Martyrs of Sebaste†	Sebaste (eastern Turkey)	7th/8th century: frescoes in Sta. Maria Antiqua	<i>BHL</i> 7537ff; <i>BHG</i> 1201 (Siegmund)
John (companion of Cyrus)†	Canope (near Alexandria)	7th century (?): translation of parts of Sophronius' hagiographical dossier by a certain <i>consilarius</i> Boniface at the request of Theodore, <i>primicerius defensorum ecclesiae Romanae</i> : Berschin early 8th century: fresco in Sta. Maria Antiqua relics in Theodotus' list	<i>BHL</i> 2079– 80; <i>BHG</i> 476–479 (Sophronian corpus); <i>BHL</i> 2077; <i>BHG</i> 469 (<i>passio</i>)
Sergius and Bacchus†	Resafa/ Sergiopolis (Syria)	early 8th century: relics in <i>sancta sanctorum</i> before mid 8th century: <i>diaconia</i> in <i>forum Romanum</i> : Jost 2:264 before mid 8th century: <i>diaconia</i> by Vatican: Jost 2:255–56 mid 8th century: frescoes in Sta. Maria Antiqua late 8th century: frescoes in Sta. Maria Antiqua Evidence for a Roman translation of Greek <i>passio</i> into Latin (<i>BHL</i> 7599 included in the Weißburger Legendar, Bruxelles 7984, was probably brought from Rome with the relics of Sergius and Bacchus that were translated there in the first half of the 9th century)	<i>BHL</i> 7599ff.; <i>BHG</i> 1624 (Siegmund)
Christopher†*	Antioch in Syria	relics in Theodotus' list	<i>BHL</i> 1764ff; <i>BHG</i> 309f (Siegmund)
Eustachius†	Rome	before late 8th century: <i>diaconia</i> in Campus Martius: Jost 2:316–17	<i>BHL</i> 2761; <i>BHG</i> 641 (Siegmund)
Isidore†	Chios	before late 8th century: church by <i>porta Tiburtina</i> : Jost 2:332	<i>BHL</i> 4478; <i>BHG</i> 960f (Siegmund)

† Latin *passio* translated from Greek.

* Some versions do not tell of saint as soldier.

Jost M. Jost, *Die Patrozinien der Kirchen der Stadt Rom vom Anfang bis in das 10. Jahrhundert*, 2 vols. (Neuried: Ars Una, 2000).

are of eastern origins: saints who were believed to have served in the Eastern Mediterranean, whose posthumous cults developed in Asia Minor, the Levant, or Egypt, and whose legends were originally written in Greek.

The cult for these saints took different forms. Most straightforwardly, churches, monasteries, or other ecclesiastical foundations were dedicated to eastern soldier-saints. By the later eighth century we find six dedications to such saints: St. Mennas, St. Theodore, St. George, Sts. Sergius and Bacchus, St. Hadrian, and St. Isidore of Chios. To these we may add St. Eustachius; although the legend of St. Eustachius describes him as a Roman general under Trajan martyred in Rome, the *passio* of Eustachius is a translation from the Greek.¹⁴ Relics of these saints were venerated even when this did not give rise to an ecclesiastical dedication; in particular, an extensive list of relics with which Theodotus, a Roman elite, dedicated a new church in 755 includes the relics of at least three soldier-saints: Theodore, George, and Christopher.¹⁵ Mosaics, frescoes and other representations also attest to an interest in these cults. Furthermore, the translation of cults was often accompanied by the translation of the texts that explained a saint and justified his veneration. Between roughly the seventh and ninth centuries, texts related to most of these saints were translated from Greek into Latin.¹⁶ In general it is difficult to pinpoint where and when these translations occurred, but there is evidence to point to the translation, in Rome, of texts

Imperial Administration and Aristocratic Power in Byzantine Italy, A.D. 554–800 (London: British School at Rome, 1984).

¹⁴ H. Delehaye, “La légende de Saint Eustache,” *Bulletins de la classe des lettres et des sciences morales et politiques de l’Académie royale de Belgique* 4 (1919): 175–210; A. Monteverdi, *I testi della leggenda di S. Eustachio* (Bergamo, 1910).

¹⁵ For a transcription and discussion see F. De Rubeis, “Epigrafi a Roma dall’età classica all’alto medioevo,” in *Roma dall’Antichità al Medioevo: archeologia e storia: Archeologia e storia nel Museo Nazionale Romano, Crypta Balbi*, ed. Maria Stella Arena et al. (Milano: Electa, 2001), 118–19 n. 110. Also included is Demetrius, who according to some versions of his *passio* was a soldier. The relic collection of the Lateran’s *sancta sanctorum* includes eighth/ninth-century authentics of George, Sergius and Bacchus, and the archangel Michael (see below): B. Galland and J. Vezin, *Les authentiques de reliques du Sancta Sanctorum* (Città del Vaticano: Biblioteca apostolica vaticana, 2004).

¹⁶ A. Siegmund, *Die Überlieferung der griechischen christlichen Literatur in der lateinischen Kirche bis zum zwölften Jahrhundert*, *Abhandlungen der Bayerischen Benediktinerakademie* (München-Pasing: Filser, 1949): see **Table 1**.

related to Cyrus, a monk, and his companion, the soldier, John, Sergius and Bacchus, and George.

Not all of Rome's early medieval soldier-saints were of eastern origin. One of Rome's most popular saints, St. Sebastian, was, according to his legend, one of Diocletian's personal guards.¹⁷ In contrast to the above-mentioned eastern saints, however, the legends and iconography associated with Rome's few "native" soldier-saints were generally much less focused on their identity as soldiers. According to one legend, the Roman saints John and Paul (believed to be buried in their former house on the Caelian) were soldiers, but other variants describe them as servants or private citizens.¹⁸ Also on the Caelian Hill was a church dedicated to the Quattro Coronati, whom later legend identified as military adjuncts (*cornicularii*) martyred under Diocletian, who, in a rather circuitous turn of events, were commemorated with the names of sculptors martyred in Pannonia under Diocletian.¹⁹ Yet the most "militant" of Rome's soldier-saints were, for the most part, imports from the east.

Soldier-Saints for Soldiers: The Byzantine Presence in Rome

Although the surviving sources present the formation of Christian Rome as a feat of the Roman popes, there is no doubt that the Byzantine presence in Rome and Byzantine cultural influences helped shape Rome's sacred topography.²⁰ In the mid-sixth century, under the emperor Justinian,

¹⁷ Although the cult of St. Sebastian dates at least to the later fourth century, the *passio* describing him as one of the personal guards of Diocletian dates to the fifth or sixth century: W. Berschin, *Biographie und Epochenstil im lateinischen Mittelalter. Vol. I Von der Passio Perpetuae zu den Dialogi Gregors des Großen* (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1986), 74–82; Gian Domenico Gordini, "Sebastiano di Roma," *BS* 11:766–790.

¹⁸ Gioacchino De Sanctis, "Giovanni e Paolo," *BS* 6:1046–49. The *passio* of Gallicanus (*BHL* 3236–37; *AASS* Jun. V. 37C–39F) which accompanies that of John and Paul in many versions, tells of him as a retired general; however there is no material evidence for his cult in Rome.

¹⁹ J. Guyon, "Les Quatre Couronnés et l'histoire de leur culte des origines au milieu du IXe siècle," *Mélangés de l'École française de Rome. Antiquité* 87 (1975): 505–61. Regarding the *passio* see also Berschin, *Biographie*, 66–74.

²⁰ The bibliography is vast; for an introduction see: J. Herrin, "Constantinople, Rome and the Franks in the Seventh and Eighth Centuries," in *Byzantine Diplomacy: Papers from the Twenty-fourth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Cambridge, March 1990*, ed. J. Shepard and S. Franklin (Aldershot, Hampshire: Variorum 1992). Especially helpful for my

Byzantine forces set out to conquer the Italian peninsula from the Ostrogothic kings. Although much of their conquests were rapidly swept away during the Lombard invasions of the late sixth century, Rome and the exarchate of Ravenna remained part of the Byzantine Empire.

With Byzantine soldiers came their saints. This process is most evident in a Greek inscription from the Porta Appia, one of the primary gates leading into Rome. Inscribed on the interior archway of the gate is a cross (fig. 2). Above the cross is written, in Greek “God’s Grace” (ΘΕΟΥ ΧΑΡΙΣ); below is an invocation, also in Greek, to Sts. George and Conon (ΑΓΙΕ ΚΩΝΟΝ, ΑΓΙΕ ΓΕΩΡΓΙ).²¹ This inscription likely dates from the sixth century and may be reasonably associated with the restorations of the walls undertaken by one of the Byzantine commanders, Belisarius or Narses, during or immediately after the Gothic Wars. As such we may see it as the expression of Byzantine soldiers from the East, Greek-speaking Romans or other Italians serving in the Byzantine army, who sought divine assistance in their task of restoring and defending Rome.

George, as a soldier himself whose *passio* told of his heroic fortitude in the face of horrific tortures, was well-suited for the soldiers entrusted with protecting Rome’s walls.²² His cult was well-known throughout the

purposes is J.-M. Sansterre, *Les moines grecs et orientaux à Rome aux époques byzantine et carolingienne: milieu du VIème s.–fin du IXème s.* (Bruxelles: Palais des Académies, 1983), and many of the contributions to *Roma fra Oriente e Occidente: 19–24 aprile 2001*, Settimane di studio del Centro italiano di studi sull’alto medioevo 49 (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull’alto medioevo, 2002). Regarding the continued impact of the Byzantine administration see R. Coates-Stephens, “The Forum Romanum in the Byzantine Period,” in *Marmoribus vestita: Miscellanea in onore di Federico Guiobaldi*, ed. O. Brandt and P. Pergola, *Studi di antichità cristiana* 63 (Città del Vaticano: Pontificio Istituto di archeologia cristiana, 2011) and especially R. Coates-Stephens, “Byzantine Building Patronage in Post-reconquest Rome,” in *Les cités de l’Italie tardo-antique, IV–VI siècle: Institutions, économie, société, culture et religion*, ed. M. Ghilardi et al., *Collection de l’École française de Rome* 369 (Roma: École française de Rome, 2006), 160–64, discussing ecclesiastical dedications to soldier-saints that may be associated with the Byzantine administration.

²¹ I.A. Richmond, *The City Wall of Imperial Rome: An Account of Its Architectural Development from Aurelian to Narses* (College Park, Md.: McGrath, 1971), 107–8; H.W. Dey, *The Aurelian wall and the refashioning of Imperial Rome, A.D. 271–855* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 295–97.

²² Originally written in Greek, George’s *passio* survives in countless versions; for an introduction to the Latin texts, see W. Haubrichs, *Georgslied und Georgslegende im frühen Mittelalter: Text und Rekonstruktion*, *Theorie, Kritik, Geschichte* 13 (Königstein/Ts.: Scriptor,

Byzantine Empire and from an early date he seems to have developed a reputation for protecting soldiers.²³ Meanwhile, St. Conon “the gardener,” martyred in Pamphilia, or in other versions, Cyprus, was an eastern saint particularly noted for his thaumaturgical powers over demons.²⁴ Together the eastern saints George and Conon thus offered protection over natural and supernatural dangers.

Similarly, fresco evidence from Sta. Maria Antiqua at the foot of the Palatine Hill points to the involvement of Byzantine administrators in introducing soldier-saints to Rome.²⁵ Probably converted into a church around the mid-sixth century, Sta. Maria Antiqua seems initially to have been associated with the imperial palaces on the Palatine Hill.²⁶ The church is filled with frescoes which show close affinity to contemporaneous Byzantine art and are labeled with Greek inscriptions. Two separate fresco cycles in Sta. Maria Antiqua depict scenes of the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste, a set of saints popular throughout Byzantium, who were sentenced to freeze to death in an icy lake on account of their refusal to sacrifice (**fig. 3**).²⁷ Both fresco cycles are located in side-chapels where devotional images sponsored by private donors were customary. In the so-called Oratory of the Forty Martyrs, an exterior chapel, located by the entrance to the church, a seventh-century fresco in the apse shows the saints standing semi-nude in a lake.²⁸ This scene was likewise depicted in a side chapel on the left aisle of the

1979), 205–305. For the Greek development, still foundational is K. Krumbacher, *Der heilige Georg in der griechischen Überlieferung*, Abhandlungen der Königlich Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch-philologische und historische Klasse 25.3 (München: Verlag der Königlich Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1911).

²³ D. Balboni, “Giorgio, santo matire,” *BS* 6:511–525; Walter, *Warrior Saints*, 109–44.

²⁴ J.-M. Sauget, “San Conone l’ortolano,” *BS* 4:152–154.

²⁵ The scholarship on this church is extensive; fundamental are W. de Grüneisen et al., *Sainte Marie Antique* (Rome: M. Bretschneider, 1911); Rushforth, “Church,” 1–119; P. Romanelli and P.J. Nordhagen, *S. Maria Antiqua* (Roma: Istituto poligraphico dello Stato, Libreria dello Stato, 1964); E. Tea, *La Basilica di Santa Maria Antiqua*, Pubblicazioni della Università Cattolica del Sacre Cuore 5.14 (Milano: Società Editrice “Vita e Pensiero,” 1937).

²⁶ R. Krautheimer, W. Frankl, S. Corbett, “S. Maria Antiqua,” *CBCR* 2.3:249–68; Coates-Stephens, “Byzantine Building Patronage,” 155–58.

²⁷ AASS Mar. II. 19D–21F

²⁸ J. Nordhagen, “S. Maria Antiqua: The Frescoes of the Seventh Century,” *Acta ad archaeologiam et artium historiam pertinentia* 8 (1978): 131–35.

church, dated to the mid-seventh to mid-eighth century.²⁹ The popularity of these saints among the Constantinopolitan elite suggests that their presence in Sta. Maria Antiqua may be traced to Byzantine officials in Rome.³⁰

Charitable Patrons for Roman *Diaconiae*

Yet we should not think of eastern saints as obscure or exotic figures in Rome or their cults as the preserves of isolated groups of Byzantine soldiers or administrators. There is no evidence in Rome for resistance toward these new cults. Quite the contrary, the cults of many soldier-saints became familiar presences in Rome and came to be recognized as the heavenly protectors and providers of the Roman people. This is most apparent with regard to the role of soldier-saints in underpinning a new Christian charitable institution, the *diaconiae*.

The early history of Rome's *diaconiae* is shrouded in mystery: what is clear is that these were charitable institutions, initially associated with Rome's Greek-speaking community, which nourished and assisted the poor and travelers.³¹ The model of the *diaconia* first developed in the eastern Mediterranean and spread to Rome by way of Constantinople and/or

²⁹ L. Jessop, "Pictorial Cycles of Non-Biblical Saints: The Seventh- and Eighth-Century Mural Cycles in Rome and Contexts for Their Use," *Papers of the British School at Rome* 67 (1999): 255–59. Fragmentary remains of a Greek inscription suggest that the fresco was a votive image. See also K. Gulowsen, "Some Iconographic Aspects of the Relationship between Santa Maria Antiqua and the Oratory of the Forty Martyrs," in *Santa Maria Antiqua al Foro Romano: Cento anni dopo. Atti del Colloquio Internazionale Roma, 5–6 maggio 2000*, ed. J. Osborne et al. (Roma: Campisano, 2005), 187–97, regarding the relationship between the two frescos.

³⁰ R. Janin, "Les églises byzantines des saints militaires (Constantinople et banlieue)," *Échos d'Orient* 34 (1935): 64–70.

³¹ The foundational work on Rome's *diaconiae* remains O. Bertolini, "Per la storia delle diaconie romane nell'alto medio evo sino alla fine del secolo VIII," *Archivio della Società Romana di Storia Patria* 70 (1947): 1–145, following on that of L. Duchesne, "Notes sur la topographie de Rome au moyen-âge: II. Les titres presbytéraux et les diaconies," *Mélanges de l'École Française de Rome* 7 (1887): 236–43 and J. Lestocquoy, "Administration de Rome et Diaconies du VIIe au IXe siècle," *Rivista di archeologia cristiana* 7 (1930): 261–98. A helpful overview is provided by R. Hermes, "Die stadtrömischen Diakonien," *Römische Quartalschrift für christliche Altertumskunde und Kirchengeschichte* 91 (1996): 1–120. Most recently see H.W. Dey, "Diaconiae, Xenodochia, Hospitalia and Monasteries: 'Social Security' and the Meaning of Monasticism in Early Medieval Rome," *Early Medieval Europe* 16 (2008): 398–422.

southern Italy, probably sometime in the seventh century. Their particularity as ecclesiastical institutions was underpinned by their distinctive dedications. Of the 22 *diaconiae* that existed by the end of the eighth century, almost all were dedicated either to the Virgin Mary or to “foreign saints.”³²

Five of these *diaconiae* are dedicated to soldier-saints: Hadrian, Eustachius, George, Sergius and Bacchus, and Theodore.³³ Little is known about the origins of these *diaconiae*, with the exception of Sant’Adriano (discussed below). In the case of S. Teodoro and SS. Sergio e Baccho, their locations suggest that their communities were associated to some degree with the Byzantine administration (fig. 4).³⁴ SS. Sergio e Baccho is located on the *forum Romanum* where construction would have required imperial permission³⁵; S. Teodoro was located near to the Palatine area. Meanwhile S. Giorgio was located in Rome’s “Greek” quarter.³⁶ The choice of soldier-saints likely reflected these communities—including diverse groups of current or erstwhile Byzantine functionaries—who had chosen to devote themselves to Christian charity. More generally, however, soldier-saints provided these *diaconiae* with saints who buttressed the ideals of their communities and assisted them in their tasks.

All of these saints were early Christian martyrs; successful soldiers until martyred for their Christianity by pagan emperors. They provided role-models of charitable giving and patient fortitude, suitable for both the administrators and clientele of the *diaconiae*. For example, Eustachius, although a pagan, devoted himself to charitable deeds—clothing the naked, feeding the hungry and providing justice to the oppressed; so bountiful was his charity that God decided to reveal Christianity to him; his good works paved the way for his Christian conversion and salvation.³⁷

³² Exceptions: Sant’Angelo in Pescheria and Sant’Eustachio.

³³ A *diaconia* was also dedicated to Nereus and Achilleus (see above n. 12), but their later *passio* tells of them as eunuchs of the imperial family; absent is any reference to their rejection of military service: AASS May III. 6E–13B (*BHL* 6058, 6059, 6061, 6062, 6063, 6064, 6066).

³⁴ Coates-Stephens, “Byzantine Building Patronage,” 160–61.

³⁵ M. Bonfioli, “La diaconia dei SS. Sergio e Baccho nel Foro Romano. Fonti e problemi,” *Rivista di archeologia cristiana* 50 (1974): 55–85.

³⁶ R. Krautheimer, *Rome, Profile of a City, 312–1308* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 76.

³⁷ AASS Sep. VI. 123B–137B (this is *BHL* 2760, not *BHL* 2761, which Siegmund judges to be the older version); Walter, *Warrior Saints*, 163–69.

A hallmark of all of these saints' *passiones* is their patient endurance and resilience in the face of countless tortures. Theodore, when imprisoned for his refusal to sacrifice, even refuses to accept bread from his pagan guards.³⁸ Sergius, after his companion Bacchus has been martyred, runs miles with nails in his shoes, but does not desist from praising God.³⁹ Meanwhile the *passio* of Eustachius, a successful general, vividly testifies to how God rewards his followers for their tenacity. After he converts to Christianity, many trials befall Eustachius, in the manner of Job: his servants and livestock perish, and robbers take his wealth. Eustachius then travels with his wife and children to Egypt, but a sea captain seizes his wife and a lion and wolf snatch his sons. Nonetheless Eustachius perseveres—and he is rewarded by God. The emperor calls him back to lead troops to victory against the barbarians and Eustachius regains his wealth and family—before he suffers martyrdom. Thus the *passiones* of these saints hold out the hope of salvation—and even material success—against all odds. Most distinctive about these saints, however, is their active military service in the context of these ideals and aspirations: a model of active Christianity in the world that sharply contrasts with late antique models of ascetic withdrawal.

Further evidence of the appeal of soldier-saints as patrons for *diaconiae* is found in the dedicatory inscription of the *diaconia* which would become Sant'Angelo in Pescheria.⁴⁰ Prominently included in this inscription, immediately after Christ and the Virgin Mary, are the archangels Michael and Gabriel.⁴¹ Their prominent placement explains how the *diaconia*, which, according to the inscription, was dedicated to St. Paul, very quickly came to be known as the *diaconia sancti Archangeli*.⁴² Although strictly speaking not a soldier-saint, Michael, as the commander of the celestial army, who, with his invincible sword had conquered the dragon, Satan, was in many ways the ideal figure of militant Christian goodness.⁴³

³⁸ AASS Nov. IV. 29F–39D, here 5, 34D–35D.

³⁹ AASS Oct. III. 863D–870E, here 23–24, 868A–868D.

⁴⁰ See above n. 15.

⁴¹ The archangels are included on line 5, immediately after Christ and the Virgin Mary and before the apostles.

⁴² Already in the *Liber Pontificalis*' Catalogue of 806/7, that is, about fifty years after its foundation, the church is referred to as the *diaconia sancti Archangeli*.

⁴³ Rev 12:7–9.

Their role as patrons of charitable institutions helped naturalize the cults of these eastern saints, propelling them to greater popularity in Rome. Rome's *diaconiae* increasingly came under papal supervision, and by the ninth century the "eastern" character of these institutions and their communities had dwindled.⁴⁴ Eventually, by the eleventh century, the *diaconiae* lost all traces of their earlier charitable functions; they became parish churches assigned to cardinals; their position was one of prestigious power. Nonetheless they retained their dedications, which are, with a few exceptions, still found today, perpetuating the cults of these soldier-saints in Rome.

Civic Support

Thus far we have seen how eastern soldier-saints could offer physical protection to soldiers, such as those guarding Rome's walls, or act as role-models of charity and patient fortitude for a *diaconia*'s community. Finally, let us turn from these more personalized forms of assistance to the civic implications of soldier-saints. As these eastern cults were imported and appropriated to Rome, many came to serve as integral nodes in the Christianization of Rome's monumental past.⁴⁵ Soldier-saints provided one way for Christian Rome to tackle spaces, such as the *forum Romanum*, saturated with memories of the pagan gods and imperial glory.

In the early sixth century, in the context of closer relations between Constantinople and Ostrogothic Rome, Pope Felix dedicated a church to Cosmas and Damian, located in the *forum Pacis*, but facing out to the *via Sacra* (figs. 4–5).⁴⁶ As the first church to occupy a site within the *forum Romanum*, SS. Cosma e Damiano involved a particularly delicate renegotiation of contested space—and the spectacle which the church offered its viewers further emphasized its juxtaposition of pagan past and Christian present.⁴⁷ From the *via Sacra* the exterior of the church seems to have maintained its pre-Christian appearance; the round vestibule was

⁴⁴ See the works cited in n. 31, esp. Frutaz.

⁴⁵ Regarding this process see generally Pani Ermini, ed., *Christiana loca*; R. Meneghini and R. Santangeli Valenzani, eds., *Roma nell'altomedioevo: Topografia e urbanistica della città dal V al X secolo* (Roma: Libreria dello Stato, Istituto poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 2004).

⁴⁶ B. Brenk, "Zur Einführung des Kultes der heiligen Kosmas und Damian in Rom," *Theologische Zeitschrift* 62 (2006): 303–20.

⁴⁷ *CBCR* 1:137–143; S. Episcopo, "SS. Cosmas et Damianus, Basilica," in *LTUR* 1:324–25.

entered through a bronze door flanked by two porphyry columns topped by an entablature, an entrance that gave no indication of the building's Christian content.⁴⁸ Entering the vestibule, located at an angle to the main hall of the church, visitors would have begun to glimpse the mosaic that dominated the hall.⁴⁹

Against a shimmering blue background with reddish clouds stands an enormous golden Christ. To his right and left stand Peter and Paul, introducing the thaumaturgical saints Cosmas and Damian, holding their crowns, into his presence. Accompanying the healing connotations of Cosmas and Damian is St. Theodore, portrayed on the far end of the mosaic and even labeled. Theodore's presence adds a more pugnacious anti-pagan spirit to the *forum* dedication.⁵⁰ According to his *passio*, when Theodore was given time to reconsider his refusal to sacrifice he took the opportunity to burn down the temple of the mother of the gods during the night.⁵¹ Christian healing is complemented by the eradication of the pagan past. Together these saints cleansed the *forum* and introduced the "certain hope of health/salvation (*spes certa salutis*)," as proclaimed by the mosaic's inscription.⁵²

By the late sixth or early seventh century a *diaconia* at the foot of the Palatine Hill had also been dedicated specifically to Theodore—further embedding his cult as a potent force for combating the pagan past in the *forum* (figs. 4, 6). All that survives of this church is its heavily restored apse mosaic, which presents Christ enthroned with Peter and Paul introducing two saints.⁵³ Most likely these are St. Theodore of Amasea, depicted in SS. Cosma e Damiano, and the closely related St. Theodore of Tiron.

In contrast to the blunt appraisal of Christianization offered by the cult of Theodore, the later churches for Sergius and Bacchus and Hadrian offer more nuanced reflections on the inversion of the past achieved by Christianity. At the west end of the *forum Romanum* along the *via Sacra* stood the Roman senate house—once the administrative hub of the expansive

⁴⁸ E. Papi, "Tempio di Romolo," *LTUR* 4:210–212.

⁴⁹ This observation is made by Brenk, "Zur Einführung," 312.

⁵⁰ Walter, *Warrior Saints*, 44–66.

⁵¹ AASS Nov. IV. 29F–39D, here 3, 32D–32E.

⁵² E. Thunø, "Inscription and Divine Presence: Golden Letters in the Early Medieval Apse Mosaic," *Word & Image* 27 (2011): 289–90.

⁵³ C. Bolgia, "Il mosaico absidale di San Teodoro a Roma: Problemi storici e restauri attraverso disegni e documenti inediti," *Papers of the British School at Rome* 69 (2001): 317–51.

Roman Empire (figs. 4, 7). In the early seventh century Pope Honorius (625–638) had this building converted, with minimal changes, into a church.⁵⁴ It was dedicated to St. Hadrian of Nicomedia, an army officer and pagan convert whose *passio* reflects on the futility of material rewards and noble birth⁵⁵—attributes whose temporal meaning was still readily legible in the interior of the church, where the walls and floor retained their Diocletianic marble revetment and even the benches where the Roman senators had sat remained *in situ*.⁵⁶ Rather than erase the senate house’s past, the cult of St. Hadrian infused it with Christian significance.

Similarly the *diaconia* dedicated to Sergius and Bacchus, located at the other side of the Arch of Septimius Severus from the church for Hadrian, positioned Christian soldier-saints at a site saturated with the pre-Christian Roman past (fig. 4). The *diaconia* was located at the end of the *via Sacra*, famed for its triumphal processions, and right next to the *umbilicus Romae*, a complicated tangle of poorly understood monuments which had visually represented the center of Rome and Rome’s centrality in the world.⁵⁷ As soldiers who had refused to sacrifice at the temple of Jupiter—in Rome the ruins of a temple of Jupiter remained visible and recognized as such throughout the Middle Ages on the Capitoline above the new *diaconia*⁵⁸—Sergius and Bacchus confidently asserted the Christian triumph over pagan traditions.⁵⁹ Furthermore, these saints had acquired a reputation as urban protectors, having miraculously protected the city of Sergiopolis

⁵⁴ LP 72.6 [1:324.10 Duschene].

⁵⁵ Boninus Mombritius, *Sanctuarium seu vitae sanctorum*, 2 vols. (Milano: Mombritius, ca. 1477–1478), 1:7–12; 2nd ed. (Paris: Fontemoing, 1910), 1:22–30.

⁵⁶ S. Episcopo, “S. Hadrianus, ecclesia,” *LTUR* 3:8–9; A. Mancini, “La chiesa medioevale di S. Adriano nel foro romano,” *Atti della Pontificia Accademia Romana di Archeologia, Rendiconti*, serie 3, 40 (1967–1968): 191–245.

⁵⁷ F. Coarelli, “Umbilicus Romae,” *LTUR* 5:95–96; Z. Mari, “Miliarium Aureum,” *LTUR* 3:250–51.

⁵⁸ S. De Angeli, “Iuppiter Optimus Maximus Capitolinus, Aedes (Fasi Tardo-Rep. e Imp.),” *LTUR* 3:148–153, here 153.

⁵⁹ AASS Oct. III. 863D–870F; Walter, *Warrior Saints*, 146–62; E.K. Fowden, *The Barbarian Plain: Saint Sergius between Rome and Iran*, Transformation of the Classical Heritage 28 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

from Persian attack.⁶⁰ Their presence provided Rome with a new source of heavenly protection in its ancient core.

Nor did this distinctive Christian topography disappear with the increasing “papalization” of the *forum Romanum*. In the late eighth century, Pope Hadrian, with whose fresco of soldier-saints in Sta. Maria Antiqua I began, claimed to have extensively renovated many of the churches in the *forum*.⁶¹ In doing so he maintained their preexisting dedications, further consolidating the cults of these eastern saints as integral parts of Roman Christianity—and appropriating them for a papal Rome. Numerous liturgical processions further knitted the *forum* to Rome’s growing Christian topography.⁶²

Individually, each of these soldier-saints helped renegotiate the *forum*’s pagan past in Christian terms; altogether they furnished Rome with a constellation of triumphal militant sanctity. This effect may be appreciated in the so-called “Einsiedeln itinerary,” which provides us with a snapshot of Rome in the latter half of the eighth century.⁶³

The “Einsiedeln itinerary” lays out sites in Rome, according to itineraries leading through the city. Four of the ten itineraries pass through the *forum Romanum*, indicating that the space was by no means forgotten. One such example, leading from St. Peter’s to the Porta Asinaria, by the

⁶⁰ Evagrius, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 4.28 [ed. A. Hübner; transl. M. Whitby, 228–29]. That a version of the legend travelled west already in the sixth century is indicated by Gregory of Tours, *Historia Francorum*, VII.31 [ed. B. Krusch and W. Levison].

⁶¹ Sant’Adriano: . . . *et basilicae sancti Adriani a noviter simili renovavit aedes* (LP 97.73 [1:508.1 Duschene]); SS. Cosma e Damiano: *Pariter et basilicam beati Cosme et Damiani . . . noviter renovavit totam* (LP 97.76 [1:508.21–23 Duschene]); SS. Sergio e Baccho: . . . *a fundamentis in ampliorem restauravit decore nimio statum* (LP 97.90 [1.512.22–23 Duschene]).

⁶² V. Saxer, “L’utilisation par la liturgie de l’espace urbain et suburbain: L’exemple de Rome dans l’Antiquité et le Haut Moyen Âge,” in *Actes du XIe Congrès international d’archéologie chrétienne: Lyon, Vienne, Grenoble, Genève et Aoste (21–28 Septembre 1986)*, 3 vols., ed. N. Duval, Studi di antichità cristiana 41 (Roma: Pontificio Istituto di archeologia cristiana, 1989), 2:1000–1008 (Appendix VI–VII), 2:1016–19 (Appendix IX). For example the processions of the Marian feast days of the Purification (February 2) or the nativity of Mary began at Sant’Adriano.

⁶³ Codex Einsidlensis 326: FA. Bauer, “Das Bild der Stadt Rom in karolingischer Zeit: Der Anonymus Einsidlensis,” *Römische Quartalschrift für christliche Altertumskunde und Kirchengeschichte* 92 (1997): 190–228.

Lateran, provides a representative example of how profoundly soldier-saints had come to define the area (**fig. 8**).⁶⁴ Included in this itinerary is S. Sergio, identified as “where the umbilicus of Rome is” and shortly thereafter towards the right, S. Giorgio. Then, after passing through the Arch of Septimius Severus, we find Sant’Adriano, Sta. Maria Antiqua, SS. Cosma e Damiano and towards the right, S. Teodoro.

Embedded among Rome’s ancient monuments, these eastern saints had come to define Rome’s sacred topography. Furthermore, as the itinerary demonstrates, this Roman appropriation had ramifications far beyond Rome. Although based on materials that must have been written in Rome, the “Einsiedeln itinerary” was copied north of the Alps, in Fulda.⁶⁵ It was made for armchair travelers, most of whom would never set foot in Rome. The itineraries allowed them to visit the *urbs sacra* in the mind’s eye. Moreover, the Carolingian fascination with Rome entailed not only studying the city’s sacred topography, but even creating miniature Romes across Europe—and thus the cults of George, Sergius and Bacchus, Hadrian, and other eastern soldier-saints proliferated across Western Europe

⁶⁴ ff. 82v–84r; G. Walser, *Die Einsiedler Inschriftensammlung durch Rom (Codex Einsidlensis 326)*, *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 53 (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1987), 189–96 (Route no. 8).

⁶⁵ K. Gugel, *Welche erhaltenen mittelalterlichen Handschriften dürfen der Bibliothek des Klosters Fulda zugerechnet werden? Teil I: Die Handschriften*, *Fuldaer Hochschulschriften* 23a (Frankfurt am Main: Knecht, 1995), 60–61 (no. 326).

Fig. 1. Virgin Mary surrounded by saints and Pope Hadrian, Sta. Maria Antiqua, Rome, atrium (photo after Wilpert, 1917, fig. 195)



Fig. 2. Porta Appia, Rome (photo by author)



Fig. 3. Map of Sta. Maria Antiqua (after Rushforth, 1902, p. 18); Forty Martyrs, side aisle (photo after Wilpert, 1917, fig. 177.4); Oratory of the Forty Martyrs (photo after Wilpert, 1917, fig. 199)

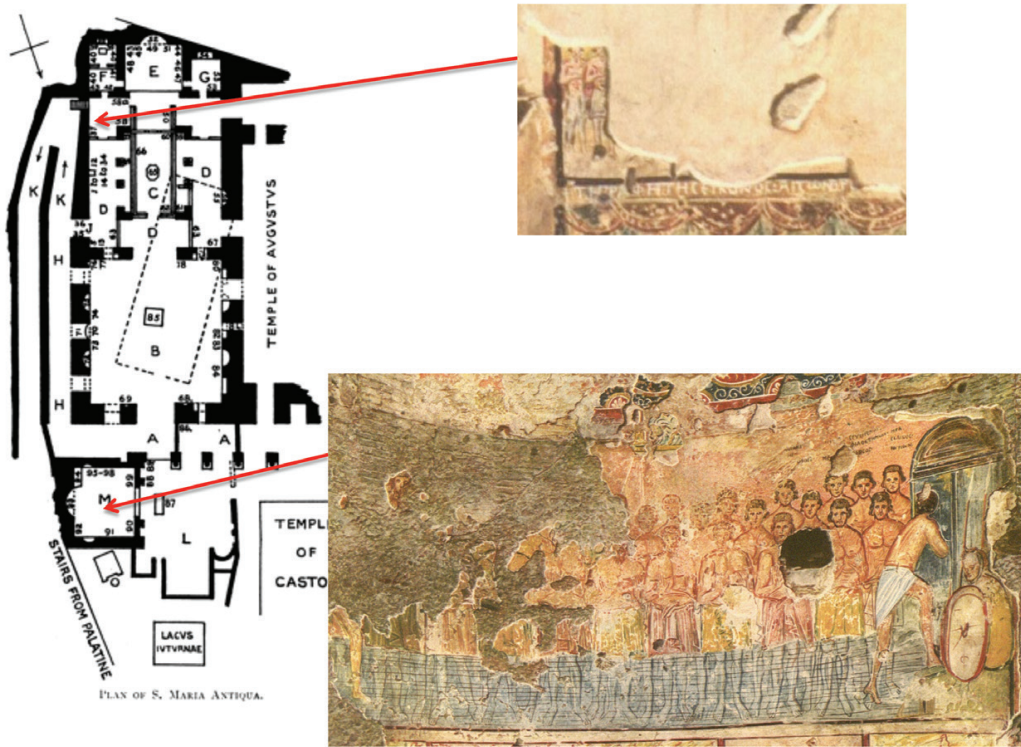


Fig. 4. Churches in forum Romanum (map after Nordisk familjebok, 1916, band 23, artikeln "Rom")

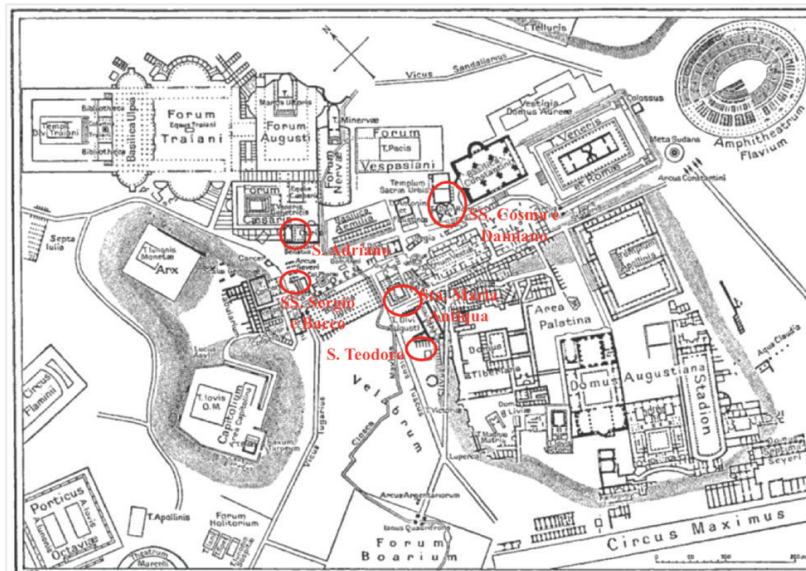


Fig. 5. SS. Cosma e Damiano, Rome, apse mosaic (photo by author)



Fig. 6. S. Teodoro, Rome, apse mosaic (photo from Jim Forest)



Fig. 7. Roman Senate House (Sant'Adriano), Rome, exterior (photo by author); reconstruction of interior (photo from ULCA Digital Forum)



Fig. 8. Codex Einsidlensis 326, fols. 82v–84r (photo from e-codices: <http://www.e-codices.unifr.ch/de/list/one/sbe/0326>)

