

## 5 Devotional Pathways and Urban Space Shaping Martyrial Memories, Relics and Icons in Rome in the Middle Ages

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**Summary** 5.1 Itineraries and Narratives *Per Loca*. – 5.2 Spatial Definition of Roman Liturgies. – 5.3 Use of the Images. – 5.4 Conclusions.

The history of Rome between the Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages provides a broad and extremely varied range of devotional and liturgical situations, partly fixed and codified, partly opened to be re-enacted and modified by worshippers.

Some case studies especially point out that the building of devotional pathways, consolidated by use and become *consuetudo*, has been crucial in the context of general process of Christianization of the urban space. The same happened to the social and cultural actions legitimating *élites* and religious institutions.

The holy bodies, the remains of Peter and Paul *in primis*, but also the relics of the martyrs, have polarized a rich and complex liturgical creativity.

That is not all: we have to consider the bodies of the Popes, alive and active in leading celebrations. Made solemn and depersonalized by more and more magnificent sacred vestments and holy garments, they appear as key elements of the hierophanic moments that mark rites and processions.

Liturgies took their multi-layered character also thanks to processes of symbolization and semantic shifting that moved some ritu-

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al actions onto objects and mobile elements. These latter became, in this way, active poles building meanings and narratives. Not mere depictions or objective correlatives of the liturgical narrative, but true semantic fulcrums, they played a precise role, inter-relating celebrants, participants, proclaimed words, evoked memories.

The unique urban space of Rome, permeated by martyrial memories, papal celebrations and imperial emblems, is an *exemplum* for the whole Latin Christianity modelling symbolic processes and defining narrative frameworks.

The institutional and hierarchical role of the pontiff, the images of the city spread worldwide by pilgrims, strangers and travellers allowed this achievement.

In a historical perspective, the goal is the analysis of the processes of symbolical sedimentation based on documental, liturgical and architectural sources, but it is equally as important to investigate the sequence of *caesurae*, breakups, movements of sense and meaning, semantic overlapping and changes.

In the face of such a relevant amount of data about historical and archaeological case studies and about relevant and complex phenomena, we need to define specific interpretative tools and paradigms.

In particular, the late antique and medieval city can be explored as an urban movement network.

Indeed, the origin of memorial, devotional and ecclesiastical poles as well as their further transformations were not dictated by a true unique program.

The analysis of the sources reveal rather a network of added-on pathways during a long period, then fixed in several durable meanings.

In addition, the popes waded in on this plot, with specific plans and interventions. They tried to give consistency and unity to such varied devotions and to orient the celebrations towards specific ecclesiological programs, funded on the central role of Peter, prince of Apostles, and on the role of his successors with the whole Christian *oicumene*.

Willingness to celebrate martyrs, saints and popes, cults, places of worship, memories of the origins, foundational and re-foundational events have been added on and finally unified, into the heart of a very lively urban community, resilient in front of the ravages, opened to integrate different groups and ready to accept and assimilate the changes.

In fact, a system of tight links between different elements was originated: semantic cores, buildings, memorial places, burial sites, privileged tombs.

If we want to investigate from a historical point of view such a complexity, we have to resort to interdisciplinary methods, together with anthropological and historical-religious interpretative frameworks.

The great tradition of studies on Christian archaeology and epigraphy carried out on the urban area of Rome provides a solid basis for further analysis.<sup>1</sup>

Most of the researches consider individual issues and specific places (or archaeological complexes), but it is harder to define how the whole city worked.

How do the settlement dynamics and poles and Christian devotional places relate with one another? How was the holy sites network added on to the system of pagan sanctuaries and public imperial spaces? In which forms did the Roman ecclesiastical institutions relate with space? How did they develop their process of territorialisation? Did Christian marks of space follow syntax? Which subjects interacted? What kind of role was played by local communities, clergy and popes in the urban space, both on institutional and symbolic sides? How did pilgrims and travellers interact with the city in Late Antiquity and Middle Ages?

If we want to come up with some possible answers, we have to provide an effective interpretative framework based on methodological frames not only oriented to urban history but also to anthropological criteria and to paradigms proper of the Religious Studies context.<sup>2</sup>

Although Pompei and Ostia have been extensively investigated, the overall urban reality of Rome poses challenging questions and still misses an adequate synthesis.<sup>3</sup>

In general, the historiography, even recently, appears oriented to consider ancient built nucleus as 'islands', stand-alone parts, and spatial marks hardly linked with one another.

In such a scenario a few exceptions are some wide-ranging surveys, including the works of Syble de Blaauw, the methodological hypothesis of Michael Mulryan and the texts of Enrico Parlato related to liturgical issues.<sup>4</sup> These authors connected liturgical texts, imag-

**1** Among the most recent general researches, see: Curran, *Pagan City and Christian Capital*; Salzman, *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy*; Fraschetti, *La conversione da Roma pagana a Roma cristiana*; Wharton, *Refiguring the Post Classical City*.

**2** See as reference studies: Rau, *Topographien des Sakralen*; Rau, Rüpke, Bernd, *History and Religion*; Rüpke, "Crafting complex place"; Meyer, Rau, Waldner, *SpaceTime of the Imperial*.

**3** See as example: Stoeger, "Clubs and Lounges in Roman Ostia". See also: Laurence, "The Organization of Space in Pompei".

**4** The Roman liturgical context and the relationships between liturgies and evergetism are the object of a relevant *corpus* of studies. We can consider some reference points: Geertman, *Il Liber Pontificalis*; Foletti, Gianandrea, *The Fifth Century in Rome*; Romano, *Liturgy and Society in Early Medieval Rome*; Reynolds, "The Liturgy of Rome in the Eleventh Century"; Chavasse, *La liturgie de la ville de Rome du 5me au 8me siècle*; de Blaauw, *Cultus et decor*; Geertman, de Blaauw, *Hic fecit basilicam*; de Blaauw, "Gerusalemmes a Roma e il culto delle croce". See in particular: Mulryan, "The Establishment of Urban Movement Networks"; Parlato, "La storia 'postuma' della processione dell'acheropita". See also: Foletti, Gianandrea, *The Fifth Century in Rome*. Consider in

es, architectural space and urban space with dynamic links, considered as a *unicum* vivified and animated in a perspective of deep meaning, thanks to the bodies of believers and celebrants, to their gestures and their perceptions.

In fact, the concept of network is a wider methodological tool, an effective way to interpret the general assets of the Roman society while engaged in the creation of their own symbolic Christian environment.

This kind of networks connects different semantic and built poles, including not only functional links. They are not only related to pilgrims' routes, but also originated from gestures and performative events around memorial elements and then stratified over time by use.

The idea of devotional path, oriented to historical implications is a further interpretative element.

The concept of devotional paths, with its historical implications, appears as an interpretative tool aimed to analyse the genesis itself of urban fabric together with its semantization and re-semantization in different periods and situations.

### 5.1 Itineraries and Narratives *Per Loca*

Some lines of process of the Christianization of Rome's urban space can be exemplified by some case studies based on archaeological, architectural and documental sources.

The linear symbolic connection between devotional architectural buildings and cemetery areas as ties of a network emerges if we consider the origins of the symbolical Christian fabric along the Via Appia Ardeatina and the Via Aurelia.

In these two cases, some existing roads and walk paths have been marked by new cult sites and new buildings and have become devotional paths featured in a Christian perspective.

This change process had as protagonists and recipients at first the local believers and worshippers and secondly only the pilgrims, attracted by the presence of holy bodies and relics and later more and more polarized around the major basilicas, Saint Peter in Vatican *in primis*.

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particular the essays: Foletti, "*Maranatha*", and de Blaauw, "Richard Krautheimer and the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore". The latter outlines trajectories of continuity in the historiographical tradition of the Christian archaeology in Rome.

### 5.1.1 The Complex of Via Appia and Via Ardeatina

The Appia, from the beginning just out of Porta Capena and from its passage close to the Circus Maximus, was not only the main road to southern east Italy, but was also established as highly frequented symbolical space since the Republican Age.

Roman *élites* used the road area as an element of self-legitimacy choosing to place there their tombs, *mausolea*, inscriptions, memorial marks of events and passages.

The imperial propaganda itself privileged its scenario for triumphal processions.

In the middle of the third century, when Aurelian walls were erected, the first part lost its cemetery function completely.

Some important thermal complexes were built instead and, between them, the most awesome were the Thermal Baths of Caracalla.

The part remaining out of the walls boosted a massive increase in tombs and burial places, both above and underground. Christian graves became numerous and relevant starting from the third century, when the followers of Jesus multiplied also between upper classes.

The waves of persecutions that succeeded until the beginning of the following century induced the community to bury the martyrs' into marked spaces attracting memories, devotions and further privileged tombs. These *memoriae* fostered the cult of witnesses of the new faith and the building of new devotional sites that were emphasized and monumentalized after 313.

Amongst them, Nereus and Achilleus were believed to be buried close to a branch of the Via Appia, the Via Ardeatina, in the area of the catacomb of Domitilla.

The position of the bodies was marked and celebrated with pope Damasus' captions (366-384), in the context of his larger and general action aimed to define a devotional and martyrial fabric superimposed on the urban Roman fabric.

In the same second half of the century, an ecclesiastical institution was created named *titulus fasciolae*, found along the Via Appia, in front of the Thermal Baths of Caracalla. This semantic fulcrum attracted various narratives, mixed and confused in further written versions, referred to Saint Peter and to the vision that he may have had there: Christ himself appeared to order him to go back to Rome to follow his example and to become a martyr.

Some bandages (*fasciolae*) the Apostle was wearing during that episode are variously referred to which fell in that prodigious circumstance.

The *titulus* was connected (may be also at an institutional level) to the basilica of Nereus and Achilleus. Some epigraphic inscriptions discovered in the cemetery of the catacomb of Domitilla tell of a cler-

ic and two *lectores de fasciola*.<sup>5</sup> Subsequently, the *titulus* was re-dedicated to the saints Nereus and Achilleus.

In a further later period, some of the relics of the two saints were located there, probably according to the general trend of moving the remains from suburban cemeteries to churches located next to inhabited areas originated between seventh and eighth centuries.

Based on this hypothetical reconstruction of a network of movements, in this case we witness the passage from an institutional connection between two Christian sites located along the same path to the creation of a devotional link featured as martyrial memory.

On the same Via Appia, some other elements can support the hypothesis of the origin of a devotional path focused on the figure of the martyr and bishop of Rome Sixtus II.

In the area of the underground cemetery of the catacombs of Saint Callixtus is the burial place of the popes of the third century, a site of crucial relevance for the Christians of the city, and beyond.

Pope Damasus embellished the crypt where the tombs are cut and marked with celebrative elements of the presence of the bodies of his predecessors, particularly of the martyr Sixtus.

At the beginning of the fifth century, another small Christian centre, the Basilica Crescentiana was created just outside the Thermal Baths of Caracalla, then still in use and were involved in deep changes of use.

According to archaeological evidences of these transformations, we can assume that some bathtubs became baptismal basins and that some enormous porches were used as shelters for poor people, pilgrims, travellers and refugees.

Around the sixth century, the Basilica Crescentiana was re-named and entitled to Sixtus II himself, becoming San Sisto Vecchio, with an evident connection between two devotional poles linked by the Via Appia thanks to countless passages and steps.

A unity in fact was established between these two points and the centres of assistance located along the Via Appia, according to the functional featuring of a busy street area until the High Middle Ages. This was the access point to the city from South and South West, a space of passage both for trade and for masses of people in need and for believers connected to memorial places of the origins of the Christian community who played a decisive role.

The building of another place of cult, just at the junction between Via Appia and the Via Ardeatina, is a part of the same genesis of meaning: the little church of *Domine quo vadis* (later Santa Maria *in Palmis*). This architecture is tied to the narrative of Saint Peter's resting place, who, initially determined to leave Rome, then turned

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5 De Rossi, "Continuation des découvertes du cimetière de Domitille".

back after accepting Jesus Christ's orders, intimating to give witness of faith until death.

This marker was able to connect the two pathways around a unifying meaning, founded on the devotion for the body of the Apostle, whose presence legitimated the role and the authority of the pontiffs concerning the whole Christianity.

Thus, starting from the ninth century, the Via Appia will result dotted with memorial and martyrial sites linked in a unified form by devotional movements.

Nevertheless, we can assume that this pathway originated thanks to some intervention dating back to the beginning of the fourth century, variously mixed with the actions of the popes. On this first network may be based further spontaneous developments of devotional pathways.

### 5.1.2 Via Aurelia and Saint Peter's Tomb

Another case highlights how an existing route, a consular road, can unite devotional paths around Christian meanings gradually built: it relates to the Via Aurelia, the main north and north west access axis and therefore the more direct access to the Vatican Hill, where Saint Peter's martyr place and tomb can be identified. The most interesting area describing the processes we are examining is located at the junction of the Via Aurelia and another urban way, the Via Septimiana. Here, two buildings in particular are linked by martyr cults: the present Saint Callistus and Saint Mary in Trastevere, the first one connected to the martyr pope's memory and the other one to the memory of his successor as well as the promoter of his celebration, Pope Julius. In the Middle Ages the street connecting the two churches and the Basilica of Saint Peter was given the name of Via Sancta Peregrinorum. Along the Via Aurelia other links may be identified referring to the catacomb dedicated to the local martyr Calepodius, where previously Callistus' and Julius' tombs were located.<sup>6</sup>

Therefore, also due to Pope Julius' evergetism, a linear system of meanings kept on appearing, which developed as the Via Aurelia was used and later polarized around Saint Peter's basilica.

### 5.1.3 Laurentian Hagiographical Paths

The genesis of devotional pathways inspired from the memory of martyr Lawrence is different. The process that aggregated movements and meanings recalls, in some ways, the origin of the mimetic devo-

<sup>6</sup> *Liber Pontificalis*, ed. Duchesne, 1: 56-7, 62-3, 82; ed. Raymon, 4-5, 7, 28-9.

tional pathways along the sites of Jerusalem connected with the memory of passion, death and resurrection of Jesus, later, during the Late Middle Ages, fixed in the Via Dolorosa.

The worship for Saint Lawrence, organized in the space of Rome in different phases, shows that a martyrial narrative, together with a liturgical memorial tradition, is able to unify in a sole building of meaning different places and different individual elements of the same hagiographical narrative.

In the seventh century, some architectures of cult have been erected and connected with one another to the story of the martyrdom of Deacon Lawrence: a memorial narrative has been at first spatialized and later followed on foot by devotees in a complete itinerary of meaning.

A text listing the sites was written in the sixth century,<sup>7</sup> to be later enriched with a series of elements coming from local traditions and specific topographic references.<sup>8</sup>

The building of churches and material structures appears as a subsequent spatial objectification of the memorial narrative, including, in its turn, urban reminiscences and traditional remembering.<sup>9</sup>

The topographical references include the site where Lawrence was held prisoner, that of the trial when he bore witness to Christ and, finally, the place where he was tortured to death.

All the elements were linked to the burial place, where his remains were venerated, in the basilica *extra muros*, a great palimpsest continuously overwritten by architectural and liturgical transformations, together with embellishing interventions.

The building of a Laurentine topography appears especially relevant because it contributes in a particular way to originate the imagined space of medieval Rome.

Indeed the steps regard also the area of the Fori, the large symbolic heart of the pagan city, that from the Constantine period onwards was not certainly abandoned but, on the contrary, was re-semanticized in a Christian perspective to become a place and a station along the most popular and busy liturgical and devotional pathways.

The first focus of this *narratio per loca* is the church of San Lorenzo in Panisperna, on the Viminale hill. Some pilgrimages' texts indicated that inside there was the *graticula* where Lawrence was horribly tortured.

Not too far from here, at San Lorenzo in Fonte the jail where the young Christian was detained was celebrated. Entering in a sort of cell, we can see still today a spring miraculously created by the saint.

<sup>7</sup> Ferrua, *Epigrammata Damasiana*, 33.

<sup>8</sup> *Acta Sanctorum*, Aug. 2.519, 3.13-14.

<sup>9</sup> The whole picture of the documental sources related to the lawrentian topography is in: Brandt, "San Lorenzo Outside the Walls".



In the area of the Fori another church was created, presumably active in seventh and eighth centuries, inside the Temple of Faustina and Antoninus: San Lorenzo in Miranda.

In this structure there was the place where he was sentenced, near the building of the actual seat of the Urban Prefect, deputed to impose the capital judgments.

The starting point of this pathway of imagination and mimesis on the footsteps of the martyr was, thus, in the Roman Forum, a memory loaded space deeply connected with the pagan city, something like a negative scenario that Christian new society could overcome just thanks to the sacrifice of Lawrence and his supreme witness. In other words, the martyrdom and its devotional memory became a mimetic and cathartic passage for the whole city.

From there, the devotional movement touched San Lorenzo in Fonte and later San Lorenzo in Panisperna.

A memorial and devotional itinerary could be completed by individual devotees in a relatively reduced space into the walls. The martyrial basilica outside the walls remained the liturgical fulcrum and could be linked to this memorial path with a further pilgrimage way.

These case studies result from processes of aggregation, partly spontaneous, partly inducted by popes or by private family evergetism.

The definition and codifying of liturgies is a more complex issue.

It comes as a connective fabric to unify urban processes based on devotions and it allows the ritual Roman heritage to become an *exemplum*, a reference model for the celebration enacted in the whole Christianity.

## 5.2 Spatial Definition of Roman Liturgies

Roman liturgies have proper features marking and facilitating the Christianization processes of the urban space: their most solemn celebrations are essentially processional and stational.

Structured in a sequence of movements establishing precise pathways into the city, they are repeated passages creating some itineraries almost unaltered for centuries.

The *stationes* are marks in the space/landmarks, where the memory of the event is fixed by the worshippers' stopovers, together with the celebrant's gestures and the Word proclaimed aloud. They evoke the presence of the sacred, originating a sort of hierophany, a manifestation of the Divine that, right there, can enter the life of individuals and community.

Therefore streets, squares, fountains, open places, courtyards before basilicas, *sacella* play a particular role in the liturgical performance, interacting with the general meaning of the liturgical pathways, in a complex syntax given by the bodies of the participants.

The latter are active elements in the creation of the sacred liturgical space, but at the same time, they receive perceptions, narratives and memories from outside.

Year by year, according to the liturgical calendar, the repeated rites would continue to scan mental images and contents, impressing meanings upon the people's collective memory.

Even when celebrations finished, the living urban space would continue to echo the liturgical being: toponymy, architectures, sign impressed in stones and popular counts would perpetuate and expand the same embodied narrative, enriching it with countless particulars and rooting it in the local society life more and more.

In the case of Rome, the passage of pilgrims has further broadened the spread of these memorial narratives *per res et per loca*.

Their words, the diaries, the homilies held in their homeland, the creation of a wealth of information to be addressed to new travelers contributed both to define the sacred space of the city and to transmit its meanings outside.

In his turn, the pilgrim who received these narratives would search in the physical space of the city not only the relics of the Apostles, but also a whole complex of symbols and marks. Further semantic values have been added to the liturgical Roman space by the pontiffs, thanks to their leading role during the celebrations and to their eminent position in the processions for major celebrations. Papal gestures, positions and vestments would gradually increase in relevance, to become pre-eminent from the Renaissance onwards.

The function of relics and images will be emphasized in the urban ritual performances just related with the Pope's gestures. Starting from the eighth century, the body of the pontiff, the bodies of the participants and the holy remains of the martyrs would bond in a precise theological and symbolic dialogue ever more closely.

The same liturgical sources describe in detailed and explicit ways the relics, their entrance in the celebrations, the position in the corteges, together with the movements from a devotional site to another.

The images also, lived and perceived as projections of the bodies or as prodigious embodiment of the sacred, would get a proper role, taking on even greater significance.

Such a liturgical creativity found a form of codifying into the complex genesis of the *Ordines Romani*, in the context of a more general process of sedimentation and transformation of the ritual being in written texts. This went hand in hand with the institutional organization of the Roman Papal Curia.

The liturgies of the *Urbs* assumed a modelling function just thanks to the *Ordines Romani*, widespread in a binding manner in the Latin Christianity: sequences, gestures, times and symbols have been spread maintaining precise ideal and spatial references.

However, the Roman community lived changes, divisions, traumas due to events and social phenomena. The transformations were symbolically transferred in the space and there registered, orienting, in turn, the same general mutations as well as the adaptation to new situations.

This happened, for instance, in the eighth and ninth centuries, when a relevant number of relics was moved from suburban cemeteries to intra mennial sites: the passages were made solemn as acts of re-foundation (both of the churches and of the whole community). The same is true for the Christian and papal re-semantization of the Roman Fori, between the eighth and tenth centuries;<sup>10</sup> as well as for the intersections between religious liturgies and public rituals connected with the *comune* (*administrative centre*) and with the *populus romanus* during the Low Middle Ages.

The so-called Avignon Captivity was a true caesura, which required a further re-introduction and transformation of celebrations and processional pathways.

Space and objects, be they relics or icons, have been the focus of these change processes.

The relics of martyrs and saints, themselves parts of holy bodies, were in dialogue with the bodies of celebrants and believers, into the same theological and memorial narratives.

Exposed to veneration and led in procession, they were semantic mobile poles, orienting in various ways the Christian sacralisation of the city. Their impact was relevant on the network of a plurality of devotional places, on the location of cult architectures, on the toponymy.

They entered on the symbolic level of the hierarchical relationships system between different ecclesiastical institutions; dealt with the body of the Pope, as central guide leading liturgical celebrations. They attracted the movements of the pilgrims, inspiring countless individual acts of devotions, even out of codified liturgical setting.

### 5.3 Use of the Images

The Roman Church, on formal and magisterial level, recognized the catechetical value of images, but some of them went far beyond and were considered almost as supernatural elements.

Considered as *acheropitae*, or miraculously arrived in the city, they were associated with specific anthropological concerns, which subsequently were joined with doctrinal and dogmatic items.

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**10** See Delogu, “The Popes and Their Town in the Time of Charlemagne”. See also: Geertman, *Il Liber Pontificalis*, in particular Bauer, “Il rinnovamento di Roma sotto Adriano I alla luce del Liber Pontificalis”, and Bellardini, Delogu, “Il Liber Pontificalis e altre fonti”.

The same location into churches or cemeteries enriched the urban syntax of the sacred with further elements, adding passages, devotional pathways, prayers, feasts included in the local calendars.

Starting from the fourth century, their vicissitudes were interwoven with the creation of local powers, both lay and ecclesiastical, with forms of evergetism and patronage. Rarely involved in ransacks, destructions, buildings and re-buildings, they demonstrated a capacity of such powerful persistence that it could shape the structure itself of devotional paths and memorial, hagiographic and liturgical sequences.<sup>11</sup>

### 5.3.1 The Icon of the Sancta Sanctorum at the Lateran

The icon of the Holy Saviour of the Lateran, venerated as an *achero-pita*, was the focus of some of these processes, which heavy significance is relevant enough to influence the semantic assets of the whole Urbs and the pathways of the *peregrinationes* to the major basilicas.

The phenomenon had two main features: a long-term duration and the overlapping of different liturgical uses.

We are faced with a unified nucleus composed by five elements: the space of the Sessorium Palace and of the Lateran, with their large external pertinencies; the architectures (the inside spaces where the Sancta Sanctorum was preserved together with the Lateran basilica); the liturgical station fixed there in different liturgical pathways; the icon itself; the object associated with the sacred image (both relics and liturgical objects).

This polysemous complex interacted with the elaboration of the Roman papal liturgies, with their set of words, gestures and symbols enacted in a precise time, separated from daytime activities, reserved to the *hyerophany* in the being of the celebration.

In general, from the first codified forms, they took on an emblematic value and a modelling function for the whole Latin Christianity, which would receive from Rome some elements, which were the most general and suitable to different spatial contexts.

In this case, on the contrary, the indissoluble bond unifying rites and spatial nucleus anchors the Roman liturgies to their original *milieu*.

For this reason, in the economy of our discourse, the analysis of the genesis of rites bound around the icon of the Holy Saviour is a challenging point.

In particular, two solemn processions had the Lateran complex and the icon as an active element. Both have been received into the *Ordines Romani* and are testified by a plurality of papal sources, chronicles and documents.

<sup>11</sup> See the historical artistic analysis: Parlato, "Le icone in processione".

The first is the anticipation of the *Resurrexit* celebration on Easter Sunday, the second is the Eve of the Feast of the Assumption of the Virgin, on fifteenth of August.

### 5.3.2 The Anticipation of the Rite of *Resurrexit* on Easter Sunday

In Rome, in the Middle Ages, the Easter Mass had a solemn prelude in the chapel of Saint Lawrence at Lateran (coinciding with the present sanctuary of the Holy Stairs).

The oratory, today still called *Sancta Sanctorum*, was considered one of the most sacred places in the city.

Inside, together with a precious relic of the Cross, was kept the acheropita of the Holy Saviour, whose first mention is in the *Liber Pontificalis*, in the biography of Stephen II (752-757) (the Pope carried it on his shoulders during a procession to ward off the danger posed by the military oppression of the Longobard king Astulf, in the first period of his pontificate). It represents the whole figure of the Saviour, life size dimension and sat on a throne, depicted on a fabric applied over a wooden table measuring 150 × 70 centimetres.

According to an ancient tradition that already Yeronymus referred to in the first centuries of Christianity, the announcement of the Resurrection of Christ was given in this site by the Pope, before he went to chant the Easter Mass at Santa Maria Maggiore, stational basilica at Easter.

This is testified in the *Ordo Romanus XI*,<sup>12</sup> in the *Liber politicus*,<sup>13</sup> a ceremonial dating to 1143-1144, and in the *Liber Censuum Romanae Ecclesiae*,<sup>14</sup> written around 1192 by Cencius Camerarius, the future Pope Onorius III.

This is the description included in the *Ordo Romanus XII*:

On Easter Sunday morning, the Roman Pontiff, dressed in a white cope, with the Cardinal deacons wearing the *dalmatica* and the *mitra*, the suddeacons with a *tunicella* and the other inferior orders of clerics, and with his chaplains, he goes to the chapel of Saint Lawrence [...]. Here, the Pope, completed the *oratio*, wears the vestments up to the *dalmatica* and then he goes to adore the Saviour. He opens the [cover of] the icon, kisses the feet of the Saviour saying for three times: *Surrexit Dominus de sepulchro*. Eve-

<sup>12</sup> Mabillon, Germain, *Museum Italicum*, (PL 78) 1042.

<sup>13</sup> Fabre, Duchesne, "*Benedicti beati Petri Canonici Liber Politicus*", 141-77, in particular 152.

<sup>14</sup> Fabre, Duchesne, "*Gesta Pauperis Scolaris Albini*", 87-137, in particular 131; Mabillon, Germain, *Museum Italicum*, (PL 78) 1077.

rybody answers: *Qui pro nobis pependit in ligno. Alleluia*. After kissing the Saviour, he moves to the throne and gives peace to the archdeacon, who after him kisses the foot of the image, saying to him: *surrexit Dominus vere*. He answers: *Et apparuit Simoni*. The second deacon, after kissing the feet of the Saviour, approaches to receive peace from the Pontiff and from the archdeacon and gets in line. The other Cardinals do the same [...]. Meanwhile the schola chants: *Crucifixum in carne* and *Ego sum alpha et omega*. Fulfilled the rite of the peace, the Pontiff wears the white *pianeta*, the *pallium* and the solemn *mitra*.<sup>15</sup>

Subsequently the cortege goes in procession to Santa Maria Maggiore for the Pontifical Mass.

Such a liturgy, in its spatial displacement, had a long lasting life. Nevertheless, actually, it was because of its solemnity and its structure openly embodied in the urban space that was exposed to the deep changes of the pontifical siege.

Indeed, when the pope moved to Avignon, the celebration of the *Resurrexit* before the acheropita ceased and when the pontiff went back to Rome, the Pascal station was moved to Saint Peter's Basilica.

Only on the Easter Sunday of 2000 the *Resurrexit*, the ancient rite of the Pope's witness of faith in front of the icon of the Holy Saviour, started to be celebrated again.<sup>16</sup>

### 5.3.3 Procession of the Eve of the Feast of the Assumption of the Virgin

The rites of the vigil of the Feast of Assumption of Mary has been more permanent.

They exemplify several aspects featuring the genesis of the symbolic Roman space, specifically showing how theological and devotional meanings can be polarized around an image. This nucleus of liturgical heritage lasted for an extraordinarily long time: at least from ninth century until 1566, when the procession was suppressed by pope Pius V, in the context of a general liturgical re-assessment.

Due to its long lifespan, the rite has been one of the most relevant and dynamic elements creating the fabric of sense of the whole city.

The procession performed in the night between fourteenth and fifteenth of August involved the urban Roman community as a whole and was marked by a sequence of gestures that made Christian theological and religious contents visible and, at the same time, placed

<sup>15</sup> Schuster, *Liber Sacramentorum I*, 379.

<sup>16</sup> Marini, "La nuova icona acheropita".

each individual and each group in his proper position in the society. Relationships, hierarchies, differences, *discrimina* became evident and were highlighted.

The acheropita of the Holy Saviour preserved into the Sancta Sanctorum was the real focus of the performative event.<sup>17</sup>

The icon was moved during the night from the Lateran firstly across the Forum and secondly, from there, to Santa Maria Maggiore.

Here, partly inside the basilica and partly outside, the worshippers stood until sunrise chanting and praying. Subsequently, the image was carried in the Sancta Sanctorum with another procession.

The path linked the cathedral of Rome, seat of the pontiff, with the main site dedicated to Saint Mary, Mother of God, to the Incarnation, crossing the pagan symbolic places of the city, which far from losing their meaning, were Christianized and included in a new urban semantization.

The origins of this rite date back to the seventh and eighth century, to the pontificates of Sergius I (687-701) and of Stephen II (752-757). The former instituted the feast of Saint Mary connected with processions going from the church of Saint Adrian to Santa Maria Maggiore. The latter probably carried the acheropita for the first time along the street praying for the assistance of the Virgin in a situation of extreme danger.

The complete performance of the procession is documented only in 847, in the first year of the pontificate of Leo IV. The *Liber pontificalis* testifies that, at the Eve of the Feast, the pope went with a long cortege following the icon from the Lateran to Santa Maria Maggiore touching the *Forum* and proceeding along the *Via Sacra*, stopping at Saint Adrian and later touching Santa Lucia in Selci.

However the ceremony must be much older and had already become customary in the local Roman use if the text notes 'ut mos est'.

Reading the *Ordo Romanus L*, written around the middle of the ninth century, we get a richer and more detailed description, which makes a reconstruction of the gestures and of the performance sequences possible.

The same is for the *Liber politicus* of Benedetto Canonico (about 1143).

The ceremony started at midnight outside the Basilica Lateranensis. Previously, the streets and the squares along the pathway had been ritually carefully cleaned.

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<sup>17</sup> About the history of the icon: Romano, "L'acheropita lateranense"; Andaloro, "L'acheropita in ombra del Laterano". About the architectural context of the icon: de Blaauw, "Il Patriarchio"; Cempanari, *Sancta Santorum lateranense*; Cempanari, Amodei, "Scala Santa e Sancta Sanctorum".

Torches and lanterns were hanged on the facades of palaces and houses.

At midnight, the icon of the Saviour was brought out of the Sancta Sanctorum and hoisted upon a sedan, preceded and followed by clerics holding torches.

This processional liturgy is based on the idea of the 'visit' of Christ *in effigie* to his Mother in the time of her *transitus*, the *Dormitio Virginis*. In this mystical time, Christ acts the Assumption of Mary's body and soul, the *animula* in the iconography of the period.

The face to face between the two icons - that of the Holy Saviour and that of the *Salus Populi Romani* preserved in the basilica - made the mystery visible.

The nocturnal rites were concluded with the celebration of the Mass and the sun rising at Santa Maria Maggiore, marking the fulfilment of the sacred mystery.

The *Dormitio Virginis* on a liturgical level took place and was completed.

Sunrise, the spread of the light corresponds to the Assumption: a new day began and the dogma was completely enacted.

It is relevant that the same theme were described in the apsidal mosaic of Jacopo Torriti (dating around 1296) according to a perfect union of theological contents, composition of gestures and images.

Some gestures, specifically demonstrate the reification of the icon.

During the procession, the painted wooden plate was honoured with acts of homage.

The Saviour's feet were washed and sprinkled with unguents and essences of basil, a reference to the sacredness and sovereignty of Christ the Saviour, assimilated to the byzantine *basileus*, whose body was the object of similar rituals.

The gesture was repeated many more times, during the stopovers of the icons along the pathway.

The icon, indeed, was a sort of embodiment and reification making the divine present amongst men. This nature is confirmed by the further transformations of the object itself.

The face of Christ, originally painted on wood, was covered with veils, depicted in turn with new pigments.

Innocent III ordered to close the whole wooden board with an embossed silver and golden plate, (opened on Christ's right knee to allow the ritual unction).

Only the upper part of the face and the feet remained visible.

The procession was transformed several times in the Late Middle Ages until its suppression: gradually were included city magistrates, corporations, representatives of different strangers' *nationes* and various religious groups composing the Roman society (religious orders, confraternities).



Also the city Hebrews had their own position, openly subordinated, in the general network of the urban celebrations, which became a true unifying fabric elaborating symbolic identities, forms of coexistence, differences and relationships.<sup>18</sup>

#### 5.4 Conclusions

These case studies, based on documental and archaeological reconstructions, show how important and necessary is the definition of a complete methodology capable of highlighting and interpreting along continuity lines the phenomena of spazializing the cults together with the processes of legitimacy based on public celebrations regarding religious groups located in urban contexts.

In other words, the origin of the Christian space of Rome doesn't appear as a mere flowering of churches and places of assistance, but establishes itself as a living fabric of meanings and liturgical echoes: the sacred permeates daily life and shapes the whole urban society thanks to the centrality of the body and to the dogma of the Incarnation. Hypothetically, such an interpretative key can be applied also in other different contexts.

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**18** About the general argument: Caffiero, "Spazi urbani e scene rituali dell'ebraismo romano in età moderna"; Esposito, "Una minoranza nella *Descriptio Urbis*". See also: Champagne, Boustan, "Walking in the Shadows of the Past".

