

THE EXCAVATIONS UNDER SAINT PETER'S

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WE HAVE at last a work in English on the excavations under St. Peter's, which were commanded in 1939 by Pius XII, and published by the archaeologists immediately concerned in their *Esplorazioni sotto la Confessione di San Pietro in Vaticano* (1951).¹ Apart from this monumental report, from which serious authors must always draw, our new one, *The Shrine of St. Peter and the Vatican Excavations*, by Jocelyn Toynbee and John Ward Perkins, is the fullest and best account we have in any language.² Some of their opinions are open to discussion; further information on certain points, it may be expected, will be forthcoming; but, just as it is, their work is so sound and so thorough as to deserve the highest praise.

Before we enter into detail, let us define the question with which we shall be especially concerned, and our approach to it. What is the historical significance of the discoveries, pagan and Christian, at the site of the reputed burial place of the Prince of the Apostles? Theologians need not be told that no doctrine of divine faith could depend upon the unpredictable findings of the spade. It is highly satisfying to have this point clearly stated by the Holy Father: "As regards the Apostle Peter and his place in the Church of Christ, while the proof from monuments of the sojourn and death of Peter in Rome is not of essential importance for the Catholic faith, nevertheless We caused the well-known excavations to be made under the basilica."³ The archaeological evidence ought, therefore, to be interpreted according to sound archaeological principles and without embarrassment. Only then is there the possibility of its throwing valuable light upon the early history of the Christian community in Rome, on the beliefs of that community about Peter and his martyrdom and burial, and upon

¹ *Relazione a cura di B. M. Apollonj-Ghetti, A. Ferrua, S.J., E. Josi, E. Kirschbaum, S.J.* (Vatican City, 1951). 2 vols. Pp. xi + 277, 109 plates.

² London and New York: Longmans Green, 1956. Pp. xxii + 293, 32 plates, 25 figures in text. All page references below are to this title unless another is specified.

³ Allocution to the 10th International Congress of Historical Sciences, Rome, September 7, 1955, *AAS* 47 (1955) 672-82; see p. 675.

his influence in the subsequent life of the Church and the devotion of the faithful.

The archaeologist finds what he finds. He is then at liberty to make the most of it, in the light of all the relevant evidence, old and new, looking for the sufficient reason of things, and pressing on toward meaningful links with the great currents of history. He finds, however, what he finds—no more, no less; and the interpretation must faithfully follow the evidence. Once we shall have revisited the ground of the Vatican excavations under the guidance of our authors, we may return to the question: what positive contribution do the new finds make, above and beyond what we already knew, to the history of Rome and the Petrine tradition?

A due respect for that tradition is a valuable asset in the study of the Christian antiquities of Rome, just as a vivid sympathy for the culture of the classical world is desirable in studying the pagan monuments. Our authors combine with the requisite critical sense a genuine love for Christian and for pagan things. They have, besides, a high esteem for their fellow archaeologists, the excavators, to whom the book is dedicated. It redounds to the scientific profit of all concerned, and to the agreeableness of the book, that Professors Toynbee and Ward Perkins were in cordial and direct communication with their predecessors in the field.

The technical competence of the authors is established. One of them, Miss Toynbee, is Professor of Classical Archaeology at the University of Cambridge; the other is Director of the British School at Rome. The fact that their background of studies and experience is mainly classical is not without its advantages, for it is in the midst of the pagan Empire that the Vatican necropolis developed; and the authors are admirably well versed also in their Christian archaeology. We dwell a moment on their immediate preparation: "In the spring of 1953 the consent of the Vatican authorities was assured to the project of a joint work, which should be based (as any such work must be) on the findings of the official *Report*⁴ on the excavations, but which should at the same time present the results in the light of a critical and independent reading of the evidence."⁵

The authors' privilege of access to the site itself is of the greatest

⁴ *Esplorazioni*, as in n. 1.

⁵ P. [vii].

moment to their readers; for the excavations can never be thrown open to the general public. "The space among the ancient tombs is too confined, the paintings, the mosaics, and the stucco-work that decorate them are too delicate and easy to damage. Only small, organized parties and individual scholars are permitted to visit the pagan cemetery and the actual remains of the earliest Apostolic shrine."⁶

The Introduction, from which we have just quoted, is an extensive and valuable prologue to the reader, giving the history of the excavations, the architectural situation in which they lie, a first glimpse of the site itself, the stream of previous publications, the plan of the present work. The body of the book falls into two equal parts, "The Vatican Cemetery" and "The Shrine of St. Peter." Much of the material of the first part is not to be found in the *Esplorazioni*; it is a positive contribution of great value on its own account, and of luminous relevance to an understanding of the Roman world into which St. Peter came and of the setting of his shrine. Both parts deserve our full attention.

Our authors write readable prose, for which we may be thankful, with a full complement of notes, appendices, and index. We shall refer, on occasion, to the plates. They are of excellent quality, and fulfil their function of throwing light on the subject; so, too, the figures in the text. I think one will rarely see diagrams so skilfully adapted to the lay reader's understanding of archaeological intricacies. High praise is due to the collaborators who produced them.

PART ONE

An introductory chapter on the Vatican area in the pagan Empire is followed by three on the cemetery, covering first its general layout and chronology, with detailed description of representative tombs; second, a survey of the architecture and art of all the tombs; finally, an account of the owners and occupants, their social status and their religious beliefs.

The Vatican region and its landmarks in the pre-Constantinian era are described, as in the opening chapter of the *Esplorazioni*, on the basis of ancient texts and extant remains. Many questions, such as

⁶ P. xvii.

the exact course of the roads, remain open; and the reader will be well advised to leave them so until more evidence is available. The well-known failure of the excavations to reveal a vestige of the circus of Nero may serve as a typical example of the chastening power of archaeology. Happily, just at the limit beyond which investigation could not go, the Tomb of Popilius Heracla was discovered, inscribed with an extract from his will, ordering his burial *in Vatic(ano) ad circum*: the circus must be close by.⁷

Constantine was mainly responsible for transforming the earlier aspect of the Vatican landscape, hill and plain, with its monuments, into something totally new, stamped with a character which it was to bear forever. Roundly, this resulted from the erection of a great basilica, Old St. Peter's, on the spot where our St. Peter's stands; but it involved the extensive condemnation of a necropolis and the alteration on a large scale of the natural contours of a hillside. We shall have more to say of this later.

We focus our attention now on the segment, beneath the nave and the Confessio of the present church, which the excavators have explored. Its ground plan is that of an irregular strip, approximately seventy metres long and twenty wide, running east and west. Along the strip, and in double rows much of the way, stand twenty-two mausolea, facing south, mostly in continuous series, with a street between the rows. Soundings reported at various times, in the portico of St. Peter's and in the piazza, give reason to suppose that the procession of tombs, following no doubt the course of an ancient road, was very long. Perhaps most of it never can be excavated. In this most significant area, fortunately, the substructures of the church proved not impenetrable.

After a general survey of the excavated region, and a summary introduction to the individual mausolea, our authors take up the vital question of chronology.⁸ None of the monuments bears a precise date, and judgment must rest upon the concurrence of various indications, such as masonry, decoration and furniture, palaeography of inscriptions, their formularies and nomenclature. The ratio of cremations and inhumations is relevant, but only in the light of everything else.

The wealth and great variety of the new material, and the vast

⁷ P. 9. ⁸ Pp. 30-35.

abundance of Roman remains with which to compare it, offer ample means for dating within broad limits. Such technical criteria as the analysis of brickwork demand painstaking care, and special experience on the part of the archaeologist. Our authors take cognizance of certain objections directed against the *Esplorazioni* in this important matter, and firmly reject them. "Von Gerkan's assertion," they write, "that one cannot distinguish the brickwork of the second and fourth centuries is not borne out by the excavations, which have afforded a copious series of the brickwork techniques used in the Vatican area from the second century onwards."⁹

An essay in radical revision of the chronology of the necropolis, by Hjalmar Torp, is subjected to scrutiny in an appendix, and severely censured. "The last word has not been said on the chronology of the Vatican cemetery," conclude our authors, "but the problem is not to be solved by such methods."¹⁰ The discussion is supplemented by a table showing the types of brickwork, with detailed dimensions, for all the tombs.¹¹

Our authors' chronology, in the main, is that of the excavators, and appears to be secure. Most, if not all, of the mausolea were built between 125 A.D., or thereabouts, and the end of the century.¹² Within these limits, individual tombs may be ranged, with certainty or with probability, in their chronological relation to one another. The period as a whole is to be extended in two important ways. Before the costly mausolea began to rise, there were individual graves on this roadside ribbon of land, the ancient markers of which have usually disappeared.¹³ We shall see some of them in discussing the little open field before the shrine of St. Peter, and the shrine itself. Here it is appropriate to mention that one of the mausolea has attached to its outer wall, and of the same masonry and waterproofing with it, a chest filled with human bones. "The probable inference is that these are the remains of earlier burials, found and carefully reburied when the tomb was built."¹⁴ It would be arbitrary to set a positive date *ante quem non* to this period of sporadic interments on the roadside.¹⁵

By the end of the century, the ground would be occupied and new

⁹ P. 20, n. 30. ¹⁰ P. 269. ¹¹ Pp. 269-70.

¹² P. 30. ¹³ P. 36. ¹⁴ P. 53.

¹⁵ Cf. E. Kirschbaum, S.J., "Die Ausgrabungen unter der Peterskirche in Rom," *Stimmen der Zeit* 144 (1949) 293.

tombs would be erected elsewhere. Alterations, however, and fresh burials in the old mausolea would go on for another century. They did so into the early years of the reign of Constantine, a fact proved by the inscriptions, mosaics, and sarcophagi, by the general state of well-tended preservation, and in one instance by a Constantinian coin found in a funeral urn.¹⁶ Only the building of the basilica put an end to the care of the necropolis by those whose dead were buried here.

Throughout the description of "Three Representative Tombs" in this same chapter,¹⁷ our authors continue to call attention to the chronological evidence; so also in two chapters following, on the art of the tombs and on their occupants. The three tombs are revealing documents of the cultural history of Rome. That of Fannia Redempta underwent important alterations in the course of its use; and these synchronize roughly with the transition, which we find here and almost everywhere throughout the necropolis, from the rite of incineration to that of inhumation. The figure painting of the stuccoed walls and ceiling, which belongs to the earlier period of the mausoleum, includes flowers, garlands, chalices, birds, deer, and pure ornament of unusual delicacy. The Sun God and the Seasons appear in the medallions on the ceiling; but there is indication, curiously, that Helios was at a later stage eclipsed by a decorated disk, of which only the metal studs remain. The tomb gives one a vivid impression of the lively interest families took in the house of their departed. This one has almost an air of childlike gaiety about it.

The Tomb of the Caetennii was the first to be discovered and cleared, and it is one of the most widely illustrated. It seems best to confine our attention to a single and altogether exceptional feature, the "touching if illiterate epitaph" of a Christian woman, Aemilia Gorgonia, buried by her husband: *coniugi dulcissim(a)e feci*.¹⁸ This is well illustrated in Margherita Guarducci's monograph, to be considered more fully elsewhere, on the Tomb of the Valerii.¹⁹ Those who recall Perpetua's dream of her young brother at the well will note with special interest "the naive little portrait" of Gorgonia drawing water, which is incised on the slab, with the words near by: *anima*

¹⁶ P. 33. ¹⁷ Pp. 37-57. ¹⁸ P. 47.

¹⁹ *Cristo e San Pietro in un documento preconstantiniano della necropoli Vaticana* (Rome, 1953). Pp. 105, 45 plates. See p. 27, fig. 11.

dulcis Gorgonia. In this epitaph the decisively Christian words occur: *dormit in pace*.

The Tomb of the Egyptians takes its name from the painting, on each of three walls, of "a surprising figure, unique, so far as the present writers are aware, in west-Roman funerary archaeology—an Egyptian god: no Hellenized deity in western guise, such as Isis, Serapis, or Harpocrates, but a fully developed native divinity in national costume."²⁰ It would seem that the tomb belonged to an Egyptian family living in Rome; and this may be the reason, more than any other, that no cinerary urns were found in it. There is diversity, however, in its religious symbols. Two sarcophagi of Greek marble, rightly described as luxurious, were found here, as well as others of lesser pretensions. One needs the illustrations to appreciate these enthusiastically Dionysiac monuments.²¹ Their wonderful expressiveness seems to me to be excelled only by the relief of Dionysus and a satyr on a sarcophagus of the Tomb of the Marcii²²—a masterpiece of nature worship at its peak of intoxicating power. Yet another innovation marks the Tomb of the Egyptians, this one a plain sarcophagus of terra-cotta. Of the damaged epitaph above it, there remains the word *deposita*, a Christian formula, accompanied by a palm-branch and a dove.²³

The chapter devoted to the architecture and art of the necropolis is naturally most appealing. In it our authors bring together, under appropriate heads, notable features of all the tombs, beginning with the decorated façades and proceeding to the interior ornamentation, with special attention to mosaics, wall painting, stucco, and sculpture. We select a few striking traits, including some of Christian significance.

We neglect the façades, except to observe the contrast between their relative plainness and the exuberant embellishment within. This is immediately brought home by comparing the general view of the street, with its line of sober walls, and almost any of the interiors, however damaged by time and above all by the builders of the basilica.²⁴ We have noted this florescence of ornament in the Tomb of Fannia, and the place which wall-painting has in it.

The mosaics are of exceptional interest. One of them, of the Tomb

²⁰ P. 54 and pl. 8. ²¹ Pls. 22 and 28. ²² Pl. 27.

²³ P. 57. ²⁴ Pls. 4 and 5.

of the Marcii, is on the façade, for the passer-by to see.²⁶ It has been repeatedly published as a battle-scene of Amazons; but our authors are certainly right in recognizing Euripides' scene of the attack of the Bacchae, led by Agave, upon her son. This gives to the picture its full significance. We have referred to the Dionysiac sarcophagus in the mausoleum; and the episode of Ariadne, from the same cycle, is painted on the wall. Dionysus' terrifying power is announced by the mosaic: you had better not resist the god.

The excavators unearthed a treasure in the least of the mausolea, that of the Julii, built into the gap between the lateral walls of two larger tombs. Two cremation burials prove that the original owners were pagan, but in the third century the tomb was redecorated with themes of early Christian art, on the upper portion of three walls and the vault. These spaces "were covered with the polychrome figured mosaics, worked in tesserae of opaque glass paste, which are, perhaps, the most important artistic document yet yielded by the Vatican cemetery."²⁶

The walls and a third of the vault have lost their tesserae, but the designs, traced on plaster by the artist before they were set by the mosaicist, are visible still, while the portion preserved overhead startles the eye with its splendor.²⁷ The principal scene on the walls is a fisherman, standing alone by the sea, casting a line. The composition is spacious and graceful; it would invite contemplation even if one had no reason to attach a religious sense to it. The wall to the right of the fisherman has a classical theme of funerary art in the catacombs: Jonas tossed overboard into the jaws of a monster. The left-hand wall carries barely discernible vestiges of the Good Shepherd, with a lamb on His shoulders.²⁸

All these scenes are enclosed in a unifying arabesque of grape-vine, which flourishes vigorously wherever there is room, especially in the vault, leaving, however, an octagonal field in the center for the cli-

²⁶ Pp. 71-72 and pl. 19. ²⁶ P. 73.

²⁷ The vault mosaic is illustrated in pl. 32. *Life*, March 27, 1950, has a large and fine color photograph. The most splendid reproductions, also in color, are in *Esplorazioni* 1, pls. B and C (cf. 2, pl. 11).

²⁸ *Esplorazioni* 2, pl. 12, and, for the Good Shepherd, 1, 42, fig. 22. I am unable to identify this subject from the illustration. Cf. Perler (as in the following note), pp. 7-8, and 51, n. 10.

mactic theme. Here a majestic figure, standing in a chariot of which only a single wheel is visible, is drawn by galloping coursers up the sky. A perforation of the roof blanks out part of the design, leaving a minor question to intrigue our curiosity. Could there have been four horses abreast, as we should expect, or are the two we see all there ever were? It is a question of space, for a good draughtsman to decide.

The reader may well raise the more important question, whether a Christian interpretation of all these subjects is clearly justified. The demonstration would detain us here too long. Elsewhere, however, it has been made, with all desirable elaboration;²⁹ and briefly by our authors, with whom we conclude: "Since, then, the wall-mosaics are unequivocally Christian in content, the charioteer, framed in the vine-scroll of the vault, with nimbus and rays about his head, can be none other than Christus-Helios—Christ the Sun, *Sol Salutis* and *Sol Iustitiae*."³⁰

A pagan visitor would quite naturally have referred every one of these scenes, with the possible exception of Jonas, to his own repertory of myth and symbol, or simple entertainment. Only to Christian eyes would they have revealed the Christian mysteries. Yet there is no hint of constraint or artifice in the execution, but the fullest freedom. Only a culture in which nature and grace were finely blended could have produced this masterpiece. It was subjected by Constantine's builders to the same obliteration as the pagan tombs around it.

The figured stucco-work of the tombs is a revelation and an embarrassment, for it invites delay. "Of all the minor forms of sculpture practised in the Roman age," write our authors, "none is more attractive than the art of modelling, in relief and in the round, in fine, white stucco," which could be "equally elegant whether left white, or painted."³¹ By reason of its fragility, such work has largely perished; but ancient tombs have preserved a notable amount of it, and the Vatican necropolis, "both from the quantity and from the quality of the stucco-work represented . . . must now be reckoned a *locus classicus* for the study of this delightful and all too scantily represented art."³²

²⁹ Othmar Perler, *Die Mosaiken der Juliergruft im Vatikan*, Rektoratsrede zur feierlichen Eröffnung des Studienjahres am 15 November 1952 (Fribourg, 1953); Freiburger Universitäts Reden, n. F., Nr. 16. Pp. 74, 12 plates.

³⁰ P. 74. ³¹ P. 80. ³² P. 81.

The Tomb of the Valerii is the outstanding site for such a study, containing a wealth of figured white stucco "unparalleled for scale and complexity in any Roman tomb hitherto excavated."³³ Fortunately, Margherita Guarducci's monograph,³⁴ already mentioned, offers fine illustrations as well as valuable description and interpretation of the treasures of this tomb. Some of her conjectures, as the reader of Toynbee and Ward Perkins will observe, are subject to question.

Sculpture is represented in the Vatican necropolis especially by the carved sarcophagi, some of which we have already noticed. Besides these eloquent monuments of classical paganism, there are a number of Christian sarcophagi, let down from the pavement of the Constantinian basilica into the region below, sanctified by the vicinity of St. Peter's grave. Among these, now to be seen in the palaeo-Christian museum of the crypt, there is one whose main panel is a brilliant sequence of biblical episodes wherein, after Christ alone, St. Peter is the principal figure.³⁵ Another, in its formal pattern, follows a favorite traditional scheme, with figures at the center and usually at the corners of the main panel, and strigilations between.³⁶ A Dionysiac piece of this style in the Tomb of the Egyptians³⁷ offers striking contrast to the one now in the Christian museum, the central figure of which is a lady of gentleness and charm, tall and slender, with her hands extended in the orante's gesture, between palm trees to the right and left. The square chest at her feet would contain, as our authors remark, the Sacred Scriptures. Another of these Christian sarcophagi has "perhaps the earliest direct representation of the cross in Christian pictorial art so far known."³⁸ In arresting proximity to the scene of the adoration of the Magi, the cross stands just behind Mother and Child.

Valuable additions to the gallery of Roman portrait sculpture are provided by the sarcophagi and by two fragments, unearthed near the Tomb of the Valerii, of marble in the round. One of these, the head of a woman, of which our authors give a plate, they describe as

³³ P. 82. ³⁴ N. 19, above. ³⁵ P. 93. Cf. *Esplorazioni* 2, pls. 7-8.

³⁶ P. 90 and pl. 29. ³⁷ Pl. 28.

³⁸ P. 94. Illustration in L. Hertling, S.J., and E. Kirschbaum, S.J., *Le catacombe Romane e i loro martiri* (Rome, 1949), fig. 23, and in *Biblical Archaeologist* 12 (1949) 15.

"a lovely but somewhat baffling object."³⁹ It may not be mere fancy to find in it a poignant expression of a sensitive woman's disillusionment with the life and manners of her world.

What was the social position of these families whose tombs we have recovered? We have seen enough to have an opinion on certain points. The owners must have enjoyed a measure of affluence; they were people of education and taste; and their family ties were strong. Our authors have laid the way for further deductions by compiling a list of the names of all persons (105) mentioned in the inscriptions, with the available record for each of burial place, kinship, social class, and profession.⁴⁰ All the epigraphic texts are quoted, either in the course of the book or in a separate tabulation.⁴¹ Cross-references draw all the material together. "The general impression left by such a study," our authors observe, "is that few, if any, of the persons commemorated belonged to free families of genuinely Roman race."⁴² This conclusion is based upon many express mentions of the freedman's status and upon the frequency of Greek cognomens. It appears to be sound.

Indications of social function, found in the inscriptions, lead to the remark that "in the Vatican cemetery we are moving less in commercial and manufacturing circles than among the lower clerical and administrative grades of the public service."⁴³ We should bear in mind that our field of observation is a small segment of what must have been a very large necropolis. Ostorius Euhodanus was a consul designate; and his daughter, Ostorina Chelidon, was buried at great expense. "Inside her coffin her embalmed body was found intact, wrapped in purple, covered with a fine veil of gold, and adorned with a golden bracelet weighing seventy grammes."⁴⁴ Her husband, Vibius Iolaus, who describes her as a model of chastity and wifely love, was himself *a memoria imp(eratoris) Augusti*, a secretary of state.⁴⁵ This is the family of highest rank identified within the recovered area.

In general, one has the impression of a solid, middle-class society, built largely from the ranks of freedmen, of immigrant ancestry, yet thoroughly Roman, and deserving well of the Roman community.

Our authors complete their survey of the necropolis with an account

³⁹ P. 95 and pl. 30. ⁴⁰ Appendix A.

⁴¹ Pp. 118-19, n. 2; Index, s.v. "Inscriptions." ⁴² P. 106.

⁴³ P. 108. ⁴⁴ P. 106. ⁴⁵ P. 119, no. xx.

of the religious beliefs of the owners and occupants, as we may divine them from the monuments themselves, set in the full context of all we know, from other sources, of life and thought in the Roman Empire. During the early centuries of the Christian era, pagan views of death and survival were "undergoing something little short of a revolution"; and the movement was toward a "mainly optimistic attitude" in which individual immortality, reward of virtue, and real happiness might be hoped for. "It is to this rapidly changing climate of ideas that the Vatican tombs bear eloquent testimony."⁴⁶

Among the outward changes in this Roman period is the transition from the rite of cremation to that of inhumation. Both were long practised simultaneously, but in the Vatican necropolis, as elsewhere, cinerary urns tend to disappear; inhumation, sumptuous or simple, became the established use. "By the middle of the third century . . . if not earlier," our authors remark, it "had probably become the normal practice in Rome and Italy and other central areas." "The abandonment of cremation," they rightly add, "was too general to owe anything to Jewish habit and too early to be due to Christian influence."⁴⁷ It is far from easy to give an adequate explanation of this development. Our authors connect it unhesitatingly with a "growth of belief in individual survival." They recognize, of course, that these pagan Romans had no dogma of the resurrection of the body; yet, without motives of genuine and religious piety, so great a change could not have come about. Men must have come to feel that inhumation "is a gentler and more respectful way of laying to rest the mortal frame."⁴⁸

With the amplifications which our authors give, this is a strongly appealing view. One may subject it to astringent control by re-reading A. D. Nock's densely documented study of "Cremation and Burial in the Roman Empire,"⁴⁹ which our authors deprecate.⁵⁰ Summary judgment in a matter so complex and so delicate—at least on this writer's part—would not be justified. Ostentation was not the whole story. Religious sentiment may have been, in many cases, an adventitious factor; but not in all. It is a social force.

The contrast between the old myths and the Christian hope is

⁴⁶ P. 109. ⁴⁷ P. 112. ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Harvard Theological Review* 25 (1932) 321-59.

⁵⁰ Pp. 112 and 121, n. 16.

eloquently drawn, in the closing paragraphs of Part 1, with reference, on the one hand, to the pagan "saviours" as we meet them in the necropolis—Hermes, Hercules, Apollo, Isis, Horus, and especially Dionysus—and, on the other, to the central figure of the Tomb of the Julii, "the risen and ascending Christ, the new Sol Invictus, Christus-Helios, radiant with Easter light."⁵¹

PART TWO

The second part opens with a chapter on the tradition of St. Peter's presence and martyrdom in Rome, introductory to the archaeological discussion of the pre-Constantinian shrine. This is followed by an account of the Constantinian basilica, with an Epilogue on the influence of St. Peter's on the art and architecture of Europe.

Our authors skilfully disengage the historical question of St. Peter's presence in Rome from the field of conflicting forces that play upon it by reason of its proximity to questions of theology. What is necessary and sufficient for an unimpeded approach to the archaeological evidence is the recognition that the literary evidence for St. Peter's connection with Rome is very old, and of significant weight, and that positive evidence against it does not exist. The classical texts for the earliest period are again passed in review, in chronological regression from Gaius the Presbyter to the First Epistle of St. Peter. Our authors contribute a number of penetrating remarks, especially on points of philology. Throughout this delicate subject-matter they set their usual example of sober scholarship. Their conclusion, in accord with the main body of serious authorities,⁵² is that St. Peter's presence and martyrdom in Rome were already accepted in the Christian world of the late-first and second centuries.

A statement at the end of this preliminary chapter combines the

⁵¹ P. 117.

⁵² Oscar Cullmann, *Peter: Disciple-Apostle-Martyr*, trans. from the German by Floyd V. Filson (London and Philadelphia, 1953), has an extensive study of the question, with wide survey of the literature. His commentary on the First Epistle of Clement is especially valuable. Hans Lietzmann (†1944) enjoys eminent distinction among those who have cultivated this field. With the second edition of his *Petrus und Paulus in Rom* (Berlin and Leipzig, 1927) should be read his last word on the subject, "Petrus, römischer Märtyrer," *Sitzungsberichte der Berliner Akademie der Wissenschaften* 29 (1936) 392-410 (on which see Hippolyte] D[elehay], *Analecta Bollandiana* 55 [1937] 352-53).

literary argument with the archaeological, and throws light on the discussion to follow:

The evidence of the texts, taken in conjunction with the new discovery of the mid-second century Vatican shrine and with the absence of a rival tradition, justifies us in accepting the Roman tradition as being far more likely to be factual than legendary; and it offers a legitimate basis for discussing, without *petitio principii*, the archaeological problem of where on the outskirts of Rome the two Apostles could have been buried.⁵³

The question of the burial-place of St. Peter, it is to be noted, is regarded by our authors as by no means identical with that of the shrine. Their position is most clearly stated in a previous remark: "The word 'shrine' precisely expresses what has, in fact, been found—the place where St. Peter was venerated from at least the third quarter of the second century; and it does not exclude the possibility that that place was a 'tomb-shrine' marking the site of his burial."⁵⁴

We must return at this point to the subject of Constantine's building site, which our authors discuss in the chapter we have reviewed above on the Vatican area in classical times.⁵⁵ Why this paradoxical choice of a location so objectionable both on social and on technical grounds? There was one adequately sufficient reason for this, and it is unmistakable: the determination to keep one particular spot, marked by one particular monument, sacrosanct, and to make it the focal point around and over which the whole huge edifice must be constructed in architectonic harmony. There is no point in hyperbolizing the damage inflicted on property interests and on social and religious sentiment by the cropping and burying of the necropolis, or the magnitude of the cutting and filling required to establish a level field on the hillside. It is plain common sense to recognize that such difficulties would not have been incurred without reason: nearby, in the plain, the Emperor had other sites at his command. Our authors are in firm agreement with the excavators in recognizing that the builders believed in the paramount importance of a pre-existing structure, then standing under the open sky, to which the new basilica was to give a majestic setting. In that belief, Constantine applied an inexorable rule of *tantum quantum*, destroying and changing everything, including an

⁵³ P. 133. ⁵⁴ P. 127. ⁵⁵ Pp. 12–13.

exquisite Christian mausoleum, that stood in the way of his grand design.

The motive for the location of the basilica would be directly confirmed by pre-Constantinian, epigraphic evidence, if it were possible to accept without reserve Professor Margherita Guarducci's reading of the graffiti in the Tomb of the Valerii, and her dating of them. The pertinent inscription is published as follows: *Petrus roga . . . /pro sanc[t]is /hom[ini]bus /Chrestianis [ad] /co[r]pus tuum sep[ult]is*.⁵⁶ In a note on the delicate problems involved, our authors recognize that "the word *Petrus* can still be clearly read, and it was almost certainly followed by the word *roga*."⁵⁷

No close student of Prof. Guarducci's work can fail to be impressed by her painstaking care, nor by her epigraphic skill. It is our misfortune that not all of the obscure and evanescent traces on an ancient wall, which she has made every effort to read, can be safely admitted in evidence. This must be said of the highly important ending of the text just quoted, *ad corpus tuum sepultis*. Our authors were unable to verify these words.⁵⁸ They differ positively with Prof. Guarducci's opinion that the graffito was traced before the Constantinian operations began.⁵⁹ There is, in fact, a whole complex of Christian graffiti, including this one, and including two rudely drawn heads, one above another, to be explained. The heads may well be, as Prof. Guarducci proposes, of Peter and of Christ. The crown of the higher one is quite eight feet above the floor. Physically, it is a simple matter to account for this if the graffiti were produced at various stages in the filling of the tomb by Constantine's workmen; and morally this hypothesis is preferable to one which assumes the defacement with impunity of the central niche of a richly decorated pagan tomb, still frequented by pagan owners, by these Christian pieties scribbled on the wall. They remain an important document, still to be adequately interpreted.

Before coming to the shrine itself, or, to speak accurately, to its vestigial remains, a preliminary step is to be taken, bearing on its chronology. For it is physically incorporated into a complex of struc-

⁵⁶ *Cristo e San Pietro* (as in n. 19), p. 18. ⁵⁷ P. 23, n. 39.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* See by all means the critical examination of Signora Guarducci's readings by R. North, S.J., in *Verbum Domini* 32 (1954) 244-47.

⁵⁹ Pp. 15-16.

tures which form the westernmost feature of the excavated necropolis. These are, first, the pagan Tomb R, which lies, largely demolished, beneath the southwest column of Bernini's great canopy of bronze over the papal altar. The pier supporting the column rests within the precincts of the tomb. Tomb R has a terrace (R¹), contiguous with it, to the north, on a higher level of the hillside. Farther to the north, adjacent to the terrace, lies Tomb Q, whose square ground plan projects to the east beyond the line of R and R¹. Enough remains of Tomb Q to define it as a peculiar, unroofed burial court, with recesses, now empty, for sarcophagi in its walls, none for cremation. The foundation of Bernini's northwest column falls within Tomb Q. An adjunct of great importance to these structures is a retaining wall of masonry, running north and south, to the east of R and R¹, leaving a passage between, and combining with Tomb Q as its eastern outer wall. This is the Red Wall, so called from the color of its outer coating where this is preserved. The passageway, finally, ascending from the south, between the Red Wall and Tomb R with its terrace, to Tomb Q, partly as a ramp, partly as a stairway, has its surviving masonry.

The excavators believed that all these components, Tomb R included, were built at the same time. The structural evidence in the case of R is perhaps inconclusive. Our authors, after direct investigation, incline to follow von Gerkan's earlier date for the tomb and the terrace. "The absolute chronology of Q and of the Red Wall," they are at pains to note, "is not affected."⁶⁰

These, with the Clivus—to adopt the conventional name for the passageway—are so related to one another that they must have been built together; and the date of one is necessarily the date of all. On this point our authors and the excavators are in accord.⁶¹ So are they in recognizing the evidential value of five stamped tiles discovered in the drain beneath the floor of the Clivus. All of them bear the same maker's stamp, dated by the title of Marcus Aurelius as Caesar, and of his wife Faustina as Augusta, to the period 147–61.⁶² At the latter date, on the death of Antoninus Pius, Marcus Aurelius became Augustus. "Since there is little likelihood of five identical tiles having been

⁶⁰ P. 59, n. 7. ⁶¹ P. 32.

⁶² *Esplorazioni* 1, 102 and n. 1. Four such tiles were found before publication, another in 1954.

reused from some earlier structure," write our authors, "we can be reasonably certain that this group of tombs was built very little, if at all, after the death of Antoninus Pius in 161."⁶³

If one enters St. Peter's from the piazza, by the central doors, and walks straight down the principal nave toward the papal altar, one must stop short of it at the balustrade surrounding the open Confessio, which is like a little stadium, sunk into the floor, convex at the end farthest from the altar, cut square where it meets the altar precincts. At the center of this base line, on the level of the sunken floor, is the entrance to the Niche of the Pallia, a richly adorned cell, directly under the altar, where the stole-like vestments from which it takes its name are laid in store for their distribution. In its back wall is a round-arched mural niche, now containing a mosaic of Christ. On either side are panel mosaics of SS. Peter and Paul. Back of the central mosaic lies a masonry wall, within which is cut the concave recess which gives this niche its form. The wall is the Red Wall; the niche within its structure is a constituent part of the shrine for the sake of which Constantine chose the site of the basilica.

It was not by dismantling the Niche of the Pallia, however, that the excavators made their discovery. Instead, they opened the sub-structures of the papal altar from behind, and wormed their way with incredible toil and ingenuity into an admirably full and accurate knowledge of what lay back of the Niche of the Pallia, and under its floor, and on either side of it.

The Red Wall, it must be understood, was treated with as little ceremony by the Constantinian builders as any other feature of the old necropolis, save in so far as it had been physically identified with the structure of the shrine. The original dimensions of the wall as a whole are deduced from its fragmentary remains. The section with the niche, however, was left standing. This niche was, in fact, but the middle one of three, in vertical alignment one above another. The one below it is in the foundation of the Red Wall, at the back of an earthen vault under the floor of the Niche of the Pallia. The highest, cut off at the top by medieval remodeling, formed part of the original monument above ground. The three niches are conveniently identified as 1, 2, and 3, from the lowest to the top.

⁶³ P. 32.

Further elements of the old structure were recovered in the flanks of the Niche of the Pallia, including notably two damaged marble columns, somewhat in front of the Red Wall, and fragments of travertine engaged in it, at the height of the columns, as well as two low walls at right angles to the Red Wall, containing the space between it and the columns. This is an oblong, about a metre broad from the Red Wall to the columns, and a little over a metre wide, from side to side.

Once these vestiges are identified, in the jumble of earth and rubble that invest them on every hand, it becomes easy to reconstruct the main lines of the simple portico, called by our authors quite aptly the Aedicula, comparable to tombs found elsewhere, which formed the pre-Constantinian shrine.⁶⁴ Over Niche², about 1.4 metres above the floor, a slab of travertine set in the Red Wall projected like a tabletop, its outer edge resting on the columns.⁶⁵ One can only conjecture the summit of the structure, above Niche²; there is evidence that in the recess was an open frame, through which one could overlook the shrine from the other side of the wall.

For reasons already indicated, the building of the Red Wall may be dated in the third quarter of the second century. What of the niched monument which "bites" into it, to use our authors' expression? Is it contemporary with the building of the Red Wall? The excavators examined the evidence on this point with particular care:

By opening the Red Wall from the back, *i.e.* from the Capella Clementina, the excavators were able to examine closely the structure of the surviving northern shoulder of the lower niche, N², and in their considered opinion the brickwork of the angle was not a later addition to the Red Wall, but was built with it; and they further state that the travertine slab separating N² from N³ . . . was similarly an original feature, not a later addition.⁶⁶

Since the excavators' "clear and factual account" has at this point been disputed, notably by von Gerkan, it is a pleasure to quote our authors' comment: "It is the great merit of the excavators that they

⁶⁴ P. 162 and figs. 17-18. Compare *Esplorazioni* 1, pl. G.

⁶⁵ P. 141. See also p. 183, n. 4, in which our authors give reasons for rejecting another reconstruction proposed by Henri Marrou, art. "Vaticanum," *DACL* 15/2 (Paris, 1953) 3342.

⁶⁶ P. 140.

have presented their conclusions and the facts on which they are based in a form which allows their conclusions to be examined critically; but unless one is prepared to rely on their statements of observed fact (and in the writers' experience their observations are very reliable), further discussion would seem to be useless."⁶⁷

Before turning our attention to the vault beneath the monument, we must take cognizance of the importance of the superstructure. That it was understood to be the tomb of St. Peter, in the early fourth century, is proved by the basilica itself. It would not have been built where it was, or built at all, on a frivolous pretext. That it was the memorial of St. Peter known to Gaius the Presbyter, about the year 200, as the "trophy" on Vatican Hill, seems equally certain.⁶⁸ Our authors pay due respect to Christine Mohrmann's valuable word-study of this term (*τρόπαιον*, *tropaeum*), a study rich in material and acute in reasoning;⁶⁹ but they are obliged to decline her suggestion that it would be preferable not to apply the word to the monument we know. For Gaius describes the trophies of the Apostles as "objects that could be 'shown to' and 'found by' visitors to Rome. Such phraseology is not applicable to buried relics, and the identification of the Vatican Aedicula with Gaius's 'trophy' holds."⁷⁰ It is an outstanding case of the contribution an archaeological discovery can make to the interpretation of a text.

All this would be true even if there were no Wall of the Graffiti to identify the niched monument as a Christian shrine, around the year 300, when these homely, private invocations were scratched into the masonry. We must defer discussion of this feature, still in need of exhaustive publication, except to risk a suggestion which no one else seems willing to make on the well-known fact that the name of Peter is nowhere in evidence. Fr. Kirschbaum's argument that the name was not needed just because one was at the martyr's tomb may have a sufficient basis in sound psychology and in parallel cases;⁷¹ yet it re-

⁶⁷ P. 183, n. 3. For a collection of pertinent texts, see J. Ruyschaert, "Réflexions sur les fouilles vaticanes," *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* 48 (1953) 587, n. 1.

⁶⁸ Pp. 154-55.

⁶⁹ "A propos de deux mots controversés de la latinité chrétienne: Tropaeum-Nomen," *Vigiliae christianae* 8 (1954) 154-73.

⁷⁰ Appendix C (p. 267).

⁷¹ E. Kirschbaum, "Das Petrusgrab," *Stimmen der Zeit* 150 (1952) 330-31.

mains negative and would admit of possible, if not probable, exception. The total absence of the name, in such a multitude of invocations, remains, as our authors put it, an "unexpected fact."⁷² Is it inconceivable that, in times of sharp persecution, the Christians learned to omit the name of Peter by design, when they traced their prayers in public view at a spot at once so cherished and so exposed to profanation? At all events, the Wall of the Graffiti bears mutely eloquent witness to the veneration paid at St. Peter's shrine in the last generation of the pagan Empire.

Fr. Kirschbaum has made a suggestion too valuable to be overlooked, even though it cannot be proved, that the shrine may have been erected by Anicetus, bishop of Rome shortly after the middle of the second century (*ca.* 154-55). This would explain a surprising notice in the *Liber pontificalis*, ascribing to Anacletus (*ca.* 76-88) the building of a *memoria beati Petri*. A confusion of names would be easy; the later date would seem more probable; and it would accord well with the archaeological indications of the age of the shrine.⁷³

What of the cavity beneath the shrine? What of the subterranean niche in the Red Wall? What of the pocket of bones found under it? It is within the radius of these questions that the great problems of interpretation still lie. Their solution may eventually be advanced by further information. In the meantime, various theories have been proposed, with greater or lesser claim to serious attention. Lying, as it does, directly beneath the embossed bronze floor of the Niche of the Pallia, and actually communicating with it, when a little hinged panel in the floor is opened,⁷⁴ this cavity was already vaguely known to us, especially through the investigations of Hartmann Grisar in the nineteenth century.⁷⁵ We know much more about it now, thanks to the excavators, and in spite of the extraordinary difficulties of exploring it, as they had to do, from the side and from below. Saddest of all, the vault is in a state of ruin. The northern side is completely wrecked and the vestiges of structure discoverable elsewhere are few and fragmentary. How much of the damage was done in antiquity, we do not

⁷² P. 166.

⁷³ *Op. cit.* (n. 71), p. 331. Toynbee and Ward Perkins, p. 155.

⁷⁴ See fig. 23.

⁷⁵ *Analecta Romana* 1 (1899) 274-97 (cited from Toynbee and Ward Perkins, p. 184, n. 11).

know; it was consummated, most probably, by the Saracens in the year 846, when they sacked St. Peter's.⁷⁶

To mention the features of indispensable importance, we recall that the oldest known covering of the vault was a slab set in the floor of the Aedicula, and that it lay obliquely across the floor, from front to back, before the niche. "The difference [of angle], which is as much as 10 degrees, cannot possibly be accidental, and it shows that, in at least one important respect, the builders of the Aedicula were concerned to present a visible record of a state of affairs that had otherwise been altogether suppressed, even at the expense of the obvious requirements of monumental symmetry."⁷⁷ Some initial clue to the sense of this anomaly is found in the fact that other ancient inhumations very near the shrine have the same orientation as the slab. It, too, may mark the position of a grave.

A general description of the vault itself may be given in our authors' words:

We have to envisage a small, approximately rectangular space, measuring about 1.20 metres from north to south, and reaching down to a level . . . of between 60 and 80 centimetres below the level of the travertine sill of the Aedicula; and below the floor of this 'little chamber' there was an unspecified depth of what the excavators describe as filled-in or accumulated earth . . . containing innumerable coins of all ages and countries.⁷⁸

The presence of the coins, and their dates, ranging from the early Empire to the fourteenth century,⁷⁹ prove that some kind of aperture, covered with a grating or a removable lid, communicating with the vault, existed from the beginning.

Of special interest is a ruinous section of masonry, in place of earthen wall, on the south side of the vault. A second fragment of masonry wall lies above it; but this is of later date. The lower one is older than the Aedicula, and is interpreted by the excavators as the vestige of a structure once lining the entire vault.⁸⁰ Our authors believe this may be so, but that it is not certain; for another grave, very close to the vault, once had a superstructure of which this fragment may be a remnant.

⁷⁶ Pp. 227-28.

⁷⁷ P. 153. *Esplorazioni* 1, 127 and fig. 92; p. 137 and fig. 88.

⁷⁸ P. 152. ⁷⁹ *Esplorazioni* 1, 121-22. ⁸⁰ P. 153.

The most important side of the vault is to the west, and is formed by the foundation of the Red Wall, in which the subterranean niche is recessed. This latter is a rough-hewn affair, evidently not fashioned to be seen. Unlike the upper niches, it is not of one build with the Red Wall, but a forcible alteration of it.⁸¹ The foundation itself, however, was altered even in its original structure, and just at this point, lifting its skirt, so to speak, to a level above its depth on either side of the vault.⁸² In this lifted and weakened part of the foundation, at the bottom of the niche, is a fissure; and in the pocket of earth beneath were found the bones.

All these features, taken together with the oblique slab in the pavement of the shrine, may reasonably be taken to indicate the antecedent existence of a full-length grave, parallel to the oldest grave near it, and extending westward beyond the cross-line which the Red Wall was eventually to draw. When the Red Wall was built, this grave was respected so far as it could be; and its memorial above ground was built right into the face of the Wall.⁸³

There is a satisfying coherence about this account of the matter. Competing theories are not lacking. The original shrine would have been merely a monument, erected at or near the reputed site of St. Peter's martyrdom. The tomb idea would come later, under the influence of Christian afterthought, desirous of gratifying devotion and of exalting the prestige of the bishop of Rome by finding or creating on this spot something that would pass as the burial place of the Prince of the Apostles.

If there were traces of positive evidence for these ingenious constructions, or if at least they had their pertinent parallels in the period of history concerned, it would be much easier to respect them as highly as one respects some of their sponsors.⁸⁴ Our authors do not brush them aside, but they point out various difficulties which they raise. If there were only question of a honorific shrine, of an accepted site of the martyrdom (usually laid in the Vatican plain, not on the hillside), of a tomb that could pass well enough as the martyr's own, it

⁸¹ Pp. 140, 152, 158, 221; *Esplorazioni* 1, 120, 137.

⁸² P. 154.

⁸³ P. 158. *Esplorazioni* 1, 133-35 and figs. 97-98.

⁸⁴ Oscar Cullmann grants that the monument may be the Trophy of Gaius, but contends against the pre-existence of the grave; *op. cit.* supra n. 52, pp. 137-52.

would have been simpler to arrange all this a few feet to the east, against the Red Wall if the owners agreed, but without invading, so to speak, its vitals.⁸⁵ There must have been strong motive for clinging so pertinaciously to this precise spot, such for example as a pre-existing grave, with established title to possession and to veneration.

Two important observations, however, are here to be made. With the disputed exception of the fragment of wall mentioned above, no structural remains of an ancient grave or coffin have been found at the place indicated by the vault, the niche, the bones. The builders must have found something to account for their unusual procedure; and nothing, in the circumstances, would be so probable as the remains of a body, laid to rest in the earth, with perhaps a few protecting tiles to cover it, a body which the Christians would unhesitatingly identify as the one they had always known was buried there. Secondly, we must take note of the fact, sorely lamented by our authors, that we still await an adequate description of the bones which were actually found by the excavators beneath the fissure. A signed and detailed report from the anatomists would be welcome.⁸⁶

Archaeologically, we have reached the last link in the chain of direct evidence. There remains the indirect evidence, of essential importance, afforded by the relation of the focal site to the graves in its vicinity. We are familiar with the little field, Campo P of the excavators, which lay in front of the memorial, bounded on the west by the Red Wall, on the east, in part, by the Tomb of the Matuccii, on the south by Tomb S, on the north by an enclosure of which only the faintest traces remain. The area measures some eight metres by four, the long axis running with the Red Wall. It was eventually paved with mosaic, but at least in the early second century it appears to have been unpaved.⁸⁷

Beneath the surface lie a number of burials, of which eleven were excavated. There were certainly markers above ground for some of these, but none have been found. They lie at various depths, corre-

⁸⁵ Pp. 158-60.

⁸⁶ Pp. 159 and 184, n. 16. *Esplorazioni* 1, 120 and fig. 87. See L. Hertling, S.J., and E. Kirschbaum, S.J., *Die römische Katakomben und ihre Märtyrer* (Vienna, 1955; an enlarged edition of the book mentioned in n. 38), p. 108: "Die anatomische Untersuchung hat ergeben, dass sie von einem zusammengehörenden Skelett stammen und die Knochen eines kräftigen alten Mannes sind."

⁸⁷ P. 164.

sponding to their age, in a period of rising ground level. Only the oldest, a child's grave, appears to be older than the burial beneath the shrine.⁸⁸ It lies near and parallel to the latter, so deep that it actually passes undisturbed beneath the foundations of the Red Wall. Another of the old group has in its structure a marked tile of the age of Ves-pasian (69-79). Two more graves belong to the earlier period.⁸⁹ It is striking that none of these, and none of the later interments, encroach on the place beneath the shrine as they do on one another; and it is striking also that none of those excavated contains a cremation. The thought that this may have been, practically from the beginning, a Christian cemetery is suggested by the sum total of the circumstances.

Our authors insist, however, on two points. None of the graves bears a positively Christian sign. The oldest, mentioned above, has a libation tube in it, which is definitely a pagan trait.⁹⁰ Later, with the multiplication of Christian graves, it is possible to find examples with the tube, but it is an anomaly. Whatever the case of this one grave, the plot may have been Christian from an early moment in its history.

More important than the religion represented by these graves would be the question of their age, if only we had the means of answering it. The excavators interpreted the rising ground-level above them as an effect of sliding earth from the hillside, and believed that the oldest graves, from the depth at which they lie, should be dated in the first century.⁹¹ This would therefore be the date of the burial beneath the shrine. In our authors' opinion, the dumping operations connected with trenching for the nearby mausolea would have produced the accumulation of earth over the vacant area, and no reliable inference for the chronology of the graves can be drawn from it.⁹² This is the most significant difference of opinion between our authors and the excavators. It is to be hoped that it will be resolved beyond all doubt, possibly by further investigation of the site.

Our authors summarize their conclusions on the age of the oldest graves in Campo P as follows: "There are four graves that certainly antedate the building of the Red Wall and of P [the Aedicula] and of these two . . . may be as early as the second half of the first century

⁸⁸ Pp. 145-46.

⁹⁰ Pp. 148 and 184, n. 10.

⁹² P. 147.

⁸⁹ Pp. 146 and 183, n. 7.

⁹¹ *Esplorazioni* 1, 133-34.

A.D., but could equally well be of any date down to about 140; the other two . . . must have been dug within a decade or two of the middle of the second century."⁹³ Combining this estimate of the chronology of the site with that of the monument, our authors sum up the whole matter thus: "Although it is not certain that the Aedicula marks the site of an earlier grave, the hypothesis that it did so explains much that is otherwise obscure; and although there is nothing to prove that this grave was that of St. Peter, nothing in the archaeological evidence is inconsistent with such an identification."⁹⁴

This seems to the reviewer an overguarded statement. On the evidence which our authors have themselves presented with admirable lucidity, I find it paradoxical to doubt the fact of a burial underneath the shrine, or to doubt that it was venerated by Christians as the grave of St. Peter before the Red Wall was built. How far back must this have been the case? Archaeology alone cannot give a positive answer; but it carries us well toward the middle of the second century, within a hundred years of the persecution of Nero. By that time we are in the midst of a Christian community at Rome to which survivors of that grievous trial would have bequeathed authentic memories.

A difficulty is raised, to be sure, that would cut the root of any tradition about St. Peter's grave. How could the body have been recovered in the Neronian persecution? How could it have been buried in even the poorest grave, under the simplest marker? Our authors do not grant the peremptory force of these speculations.⁹⁵ We have in this matter no positive clue to guide us. We do have, I should say, knowledge enough of the derogations and evasions in the history of penal process not to find the case incredible. We have no reason to assume that the discipline of Nero's police was flawless, or that there was no sympathy whatever in popular and in official circles for the bereaved survivors of his victims, and no devotion among the Christians to their dead. The Emperor Julian (361-63) should have had some appreciation of the possibilities involved. He thought he knew that the veneration of the tombs of Peter and Paul existed clandestinely in the lifetime of John the Evangelist.⁹⁶

As a necessary supplement to the discussion of the Vatican shrine,

⁹³ Pp. 148-50. ⁹⁴ P. 161. ⁹⁵ Pp. 155-56.

⁹⁶ *Contra Galilaeos*, Sp. 327B (*LCL, Julian*, ed. W. C. Wright, 3 [1923] 412).

our authors consider the cult-center of SS. Peter and Paul underneath the Church of St. Sebastian, with closely packed description of the total archaeological situation, followed by summaries and criticism of interpretations, old and new, of this unsolved riddle.⁹⁷ No flood of light is thrown either way by comparing the memorial *ad catacumbas* and the new evidence at St. Peter's. Our authors make the important point that the graffiti on the north wall of the Vatican shrine prove continuity of popular veneration there, however striking the contrast between the absence of the name of Peter, and the frequency of it, with that of Paul, in the graffiti at St. Sebastian's.⁹⁸ They discuss, not without respect, the hypothesis of a translation of part of the relics only of each of the Apostles to the latter center, but this, too, is speculative. "Perhaps excavations beneath the high altar of St. Paul's-without-the-Walls will one day furnish the conclusive answer that still eludes us."⁹⁹

The chapter on Constantine's church, Old St. Peter's, and the evolution within its walls of the shrine must be very welcome to the reader who would understand how, through all the changing history of Christendom, the living past of St. Peter's is preserved in the living present. The excavators have made one of their major contributions precisely in recovering vestiges of the Constantinian structures at and around the shrine. In reconstructing the monument, as it stood in the old basilica, at the head of the nave, with the apse beyond and the arms of the transept on either side, they were able to supplement their own discoveries with a fifth-century ivory already known and recognized as representing this very scene.¹⁰⁰ The niched portico of the Red Wall was now overlaid with marble, adorned with silver and gold, and surrounded by a canopied arcade of delicate design.

A striking fact brought home by the excavations is that originally the shrine was not an altar.¹⁰¹ The solemnities of the Mass, on great festival days, would have been celebrated, presumably, on an altar erected in front of it. Not until the beginning of the seventh century, by order of St. Gregory the Great, was a higher pavement level established behind the shrine and above it, so that the altar could be placed directly overhead. Henceforth, at the old level, the shrine was acces-

⁹⁷ Pp. 167-82. ⁹⁸ Pp. 181-82. ⁹⁹ P. 182.

¹⁰⁰ On the Pola casket, see pp. 203-4 and fig. 21; 231, n. 17.

¹⁰¹ P. 208.

sible only from the Confessio in front of it.¹⁰² The altar of St. Gregory was subsequently encased in that of Callixtus II (1119–24)¹⁰³; and the high altar of the present church was built almost two-and-a-half metres above the latter by Clement VIII (1592–1605).¹⁰⁴ The Niche of the Pallia remains our nearest approach to the surviving core of the pre-Constantinian shrine,¹⁰⁵ and our open Confessio lies over the greater part of the little cemetery in front of it, once under the open sky.¹⁰⁶

The earthen vault facing the niche in the foundation of the Red Wall was buried from sight beneath the pavement of the Constantinian shrine; and, except for the little vertical shaft in the floor, still accessible from the Niche of the Pallia, human senses had no lawful communication with it until our time. Yet it “was found by the excavators smashed and ransacked, empty save for the coins dropped in by generations of pilgrims and for the enigmatic heap of human bones.”¹⁰⁷ The robbers, most probably the Saracens, must have entered not from the floor above, but from the pavement in front of the shrine. “Who knows the fate of his bones, or how often he is to be buried? Who hath the Oracle of his ashes, or whither they are to be scattered?”

The Epilogue on St. Peter's and its influence in the art and architecture of Western Europe ranges far beyond the excavations, but it takes its point of departure in them. The history of the basilical form, combined with the transept, in ecclesiastical architecture is now illuminated at its origin by the fuller knowledge we have of Constantine's edifice on the Vatican.¹⁰⁸ Even an incidental feature of the shrine itself, the spiral columns of marble, richly carved, which the Emperor sent from Greece, created not only a legend but also a style of surprising fecundity in the history of art. “In the story of these columns we have, in microcosm, the story of St. Peter's itself—venerable, but ever vital, something which every age has interpreted in its own way, yet which reaches back without a break to the twin roots of our civilization, Classical Antiquity, and Christianity.”¹⁰⁹

¹⁰² Pp. 215–20. ¹⁰³ Pp. 223–24. ¹⁰⁴ Pp. 225.

¹⁰⁵ Pp. 221–24. ¹⁰⁶ P. 225. ¹⁰⁷ P. 226.

¹⁰⁸ See especially pp. 245–46.

¹⁰⁹ For a full and delightful account of these columns, see J. Ward Perkins, “The Shrine of St. Peter and its Twelve Spiral Columns,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 42 (1952) 21–33, with 7 plates.

CONCLUSION

The answer to our opening question about the historical significance of the excavations under St. Peter's is a matter now of summarizing what we already know—of summarizing a summary which has its considerable lacunae. These are to be laid not to our authors' but to the reviewer's account.

Evidently the history of Roman culture in the early Empire has been enriched by the recovery of the necropolis. There is an element of not ungracious irony in the turn of events. So much of pagan piety and art was buried under the triumphal arch of the Christian basilica; yet it is by that circumstance that we possess so much of it today. When Old St. Peter's was itself condemned to make way for the modern church, again the loss is now in notable part retrieved.

Great as are these gains, they are secondary. The purpose of the excavators was to examine the pre-Constantinian archaeology of the reputed burial-place of St. Peter; and, in the minds of all, it is with respect to that purpose that their success is to be measured. Their outstanding achievement is the discovery of the niched monument of the Red Wall, a visible, pre-Constantinian shrine of St. Peter, identical with the Trophy of Gaius, of mid-second-century origin. For the history of the early Church, it is an achievement of the first magnitude.

Complementing this discovery is the evidence which, to the reviewer's mind, is adequate for the pre-existing grave, and the further evidence for the antiquity of the site. A more assured and precise chronology on these points is much to be desired, and will, perhaps, be forthcoming. Eventually we shall even know more about the bones.¹¹⁰

Writing over a decade before the reign of Pius XII on *Petrus und Paulus in Rom*, Hans Lietzmann concluded his maturely critical study with an opinion on the question of the graves. We quote the closing words:

One who set out around 170 in search of the unknown graves of Peter and Paul would without a doubt have sought and found the two apostolic founders of the

¹¹⁰ Hertling and Kirschbaum (*op. et loc. cit.* supra n. 86) are of the opinion that the nature of the bones, and the place where they were found, together make it highly probable (*höchst wahrscheinlich*) that they are the bones of the Apostle.

Roman community not only in a Christian cemetery, but lying like brothers side by side. No, the factual situation in both cases speaks against belated discovery. Every difficulty is solved if Peter was really buried where now Bramante's dome bends over it, and Paul found his last rest where the hall of the three Emperors looms large.¹¹¹

The excavations have given us far greater reason to agree with the final judgment of Lietzmann than we ever had before. They have produced nothing that makes it more difficult, on any point, to hold the tradition of the Roman Christian community about its founder, and they have added positive elements of inestimable value to reenforce it.

¹¹¹ *Op. cit.* supra n. 52, p. 247. The "hall of the three Emperors" is St. Paul's-outside-the-Walls.