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From Shadow to Light

Inscriptions in Liminal Spaces of Roman Sacred Architecture (11th–12th Century)

In ecclesiastical buildings, the door and its decoration have a specific symbolic meaning as a threshold, a place of passage from the outside to the inside, from mundane to sacred space;¹ they thus reinforce the distinction of ecclesiastical spaces and act as a border between the sacred indoors and profane outdoors.² The inscriptions on the portals often emphasize this passage between the two dimensions;³ following St John, they refer to Christ,⁴ the door to salvation and, or more generally to the *porta coeli* (door of Heaven).⁵

Inscriptions, the so-called “public lettering”,⁶ were mostly placed inside churches, displayed on liturgical furniture or marking sacred spaces. In Italy, from the eleventh century onwards, they became increasingly common on liturgical furniture in churches and monuments, but also in open spaces. The so-called “Gregorian Reform”⁷ marks a turning point in this development. Especially in Rome, public lettering, with a specific script derived from manuscripts, moved from internal to external spaces. In doing so, such inscriptions became symbols of authority and were used to renew not only ancient objects, but also buildings and public places.⁸

Portals of Roman churches essentially started to repeat an “ancient” system, a rectangular structure consisting of two monolith door jambs and an architrave, as can be seen in public buildings of classical Rome.⁹ In this system of three blocks, however, writing is rarely used and only a few examples of inscribed doors can be found.

¹ Barral i Altet 2005.

² Debiais 2006; Debiais 2017a, 285.

³ Favreau 1995.

⁴ Ioh. 10, 9: *Ego sum ostium. Per me, si quis introerit, salvabitur, et ingredietur et egredietur et pascua inveniet.*

⁵ Favreau 2010, 170–172; Bawden 2014; more specifically on doors, see Verzar 2004.

⁶ For inscriptions executed with a refined calligraphy or on a monumental scale designed to be legible to a broad but targeted public, see Petrucci 1993. For a broad and recent discussion of inscriptions and images during the Middle Ages, see Debiais 2017b.

⁷ For a critical discussion of this term, see below.

⁸ Riccioni 2007.

⁹ Pace 1994; Barral i Altet 2015, 29.

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In Rome, no façade is decorated with sculptures, as is typical of the European Romanesque, but in the twelfth century, the porticoed atrium appears; as we shall see, it is a significant element for the artistic strategies of the reformed Church.

1 Inscriptions Inside Buildings

The first-century roman *ara*, reused as an altar in the church of Santa Maria in Portico during the first year of Gregory VII's pontificate (1073–1085), marks the starting point of this phenomenon (Fig. 1).¹⁰ The altar was adapted to its new use and setting through a sophisticated graphic project in which writing played the major part. The ancient inscriptions were replaced by a list of relics, with the addition of Gregory VII's dedication on three sides of the epistyle. The lettering of the two inscriptions displays notable affinities with captions on the front *folio* and *incipit* of the first Giant Bibles.¹¹ As is well known, the conception and execution of these manuscripts belongs to a real propaganda campaign, set in motion by ecclesiastical reformers.¹² A similar strategy was adopted shortly later by Pope Paschal II, who consecrated a Roman *ara*, reused as an altar in San Pantaleone.¹³

Rome flourished during the papacy of Paschal II. San Adriano al Foro, Santi Quattro Coronati, San Clemente, San Lorenzo in Lucina and San Bartolomeo all'Isola were all restored or entirely rebuilt under his reign.¹⁴ In San Lorenzo in Lucina the most important inscription is placed on the papal throne, situated in the centre of the apse wall (Fig. 2).¹⁵ The inscription on the front side of the backrest refers to the consecration of the church and the placing of relics in the main altar in 1112.¹⁶ A contem-

¹⁰ Giornata di studio su Santa Galla 1991; Riccioni 2005, with bibliography. The altar is now in the parish church of Santa Galla in Rome.

¹¹ In the Admont Bible, the inscription employs capitals which are well aligned and uniform in two *modules* (sizes), characterised by the letters *E*; *G*; *Q*; *R*; and *W*. The serifs of the letters are pronounced; “OR” is used as an abbreviation for *orum*; unions and ligatures are common, see Admont, Stiftsbibliothek, C-D, in Maniaci/Orofino 2000, 107–11. See also the Bible of Frederic of Geneva Genève, Bibliothèque publique et universitaire, lat. 1, in Maniaci/Orofino 2000, 111–114.

¹² Ayres 1991; Maniaci/Orofino 2000; Condello 2005; Riccioni 2011b, 325f.

¹³ Riccioni 2005, 195f. The altar is now in the Capitolini Museum, see Manacorda 1978/80.

¹⁴ Claussen 2002a, 157–159; Hamilton 2010; Claussen 2016, 277–281.

¹⁵ Riccioni 2006, 3f., note 23; Claussen/Mondini/Senekovic 2010, 290–295, with bibliography.

¹⁶ ((signum crucis)) TEMPO/RE DOMNI PAS/CALIS II PAPE ANNO / EIUS XIII MILLESIMO / CEN-
TESIMO XII INDICIONE / V VI KALENDAS FEBRUARII P(ER) / MANUS EIUSDEM PONTIFICIS / CRA-
TICULA SUPER QUAM PRO/CUL DUBIO BEATUS LAURENTI/US EMISIT SPIRITUM DE QUODA(M) /
ALTARI VETERI EDUCTA EST CU(M) / DUAB(US) AMPULLIS VITREIS ME/DIIS SANGUINE EIUSDEM /
MARTIRIS QUE CUM NON/NULLIS DIEB(US) VIDERETUR / A ROMANO POPULO CORAM / EIUS MUL-
TITUDINE P(ER) MA/NUS LEONIS HOSTIENSIS EP(ISCOP)I / SUB HOC NOVO ALTARI NONO / K(A)-
L(ENDAS) FEBRUARII RECONDITA EST. Translation: “At the time of Pope Paschal II, in the year thir-



Fig. 1: Santa Maria in Portico, Altar of Gregory VII.

porary inscription, which contains the same information, is now placed in the porch built by Leo of Ostia, but was originally situated close to the altar.¹⁷ The structure of the throne and the way the script on it is displayed are of particular interest. Two reused slabs, decorated with putti in tendrils of vine, which, according to Christian iconography, signify Jesus as a life-giving vine, serve as the arm rests.¹⁸ The script completely covers the graphic space offered by the backrest of the throne, making it invisible when the pope was seated on the throne. It was only visible in his absence, and likely only readable to those located close to the choir, i. e. the priests. From afar the text embodied a symbolic presence.¹⁹

teenth year of his (pontificate), (year) 1112, the sixth day before the calends of February, the grate on which St Lorenzo was martyred along with two ampules of his blood were taken from an old altar in San Lorenzo. After being on display to the Roman people for a few days, Leo, cardinal bishop of Ostia, placed these relics in public under this new altar on the ninth day before the calends of February.”

¹⁷ On the two inscriptions and their chronology, see Gandolfo 1974/1975, 212f.; Stroll 1991, 111f.; Riccioni 2006, 3f., note 23; Claussen/Mondini/Senekovic 2010, 278.

¹⁸ Ioh. 15, 1–8; Mt. 21, 33–41; Leonardi 1947.

¹⁹ For the discussion of a restricted presence of scripture and inscription see Frese / Keil / Krüger (2014).

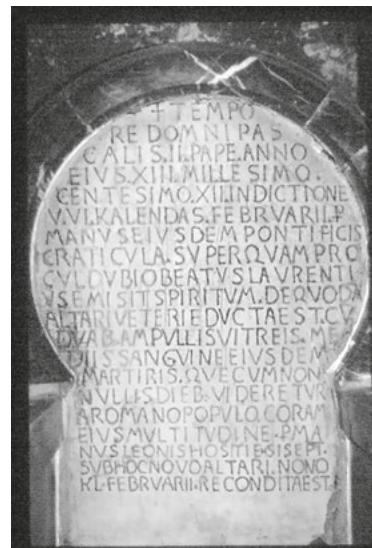


Fig. 2: San Lorenzo in Lucina.
Papal throne, backrest.

Fig. 3: San Clemente. Papal throne.

Quite the same strategy was carried out on the throne of San Clemente, commissioned by Anastasius, the cardinal who oversaw the building of the new church (1102–1125) (Fig. 3). However, instead of reusing images, the artist chose to reuse an inscribed stone slab. The dedication is displayed around the circular frame of the backrest (which has the same form as the throne of San Lorenzo in Lucina): ANASTASIUS PRESBITER CARDINALIS HUIUS TITULI HOC OPUS FECIT ET PERFECIT.²⁰ When the pope sat down, his back rested on the word MARTYR, a classical inscription, selected and reused on the back of the chair. The inscribed slab suggests a connection between Anastasius, the pope sitting on the throne, and the martyr, Clement, to whom the church was dedicated.

These inscriptions located in liturgical spaces inside dim, candlelit churches could only be seen by relatively few people. And they were most likely only read by members of the clergy.²¹ Twelfth century Roman mosaics show the same tendencies

20 Translation: “Anastasius, cardinal presbyter of this *titulus*, has begun and finished this work.” Riccioni 2006, 4 (note 25–27), 5, 8.

21 For building inscriptions with restricted presence in terms of space, time or person, see Keil 2014. For patron inscriptions, see Keil 2018.

to refer to antiquity and to use inscriptions to exalt the ideals of the church on a large scale.²² Here again it seems clear that ancient images were selected consciously, and inscriptions were used to give them new meaning and to provide new functions and references that directed the viewer/reader. At San Clemente, for instance, the papal throne was also connected to the meaning of the apse mosaic.²³

The majority of these texts were placed inside of the church, primarily in the choir or close to the sanctuary. They commemorated the consecration of the altar or the church, and sometimes referred to relics. In fact, throughout the city, the inscriptions seen most frequently were dedications of churches and lists of martyrs written on stones. These kinds of inscriptions increased significantly during the twelfth century.²⁴

In Santa Maria in Cosmedin, consecrated by Pope Callixtus II in 1123, all the inscriptions are located in the symbolic area of the apse, in the *presbyterium* and the sanctuary (Fig. 4).²⁵ They are clustered around the papal throne with script on its circular back, similar to the throne at San Clemente but honouring the patron: ALFANUS FIERI TIBI FECIT VIRGO MARIA.²⁶ Unlike the throne at San Clemente, however, the throne in Santa Maria in Cosmedin shows Roman imperial symbols. The back with the porphyry disc is typical of the *soliū*, and the leonine heads are from late antique Roman *sellae*. The altar consisted of a great marble stone posed on a *labrum*—a bath tub—of oriental granite, dated to the time of Hadrian I (772–795). The dedication of the altar, recording the consecration of the church, is written on the altar table's fillet.²⁷ Here the arrangement of the epigraphic texts is closely linked to the liturgical spaces that marked the separation between the laity and the clergy. As in San Clemente, these inscriptions were only accessible to a small number of people; the relationship between the distance at which they had to be viewed and the form of script makes them a sort of private prayer. Moreover, the exposure of these inscriptions perfectly corresponds with the conceptual paradigm of “restricted presence” as Keil has pointed out.²⁸

22 Riccioni 2011a.

23 The literature on the mosaic is vast. For a comprehensive bibliography, see Riccioni 2006; Croiser 2006; Riccioni 2011b, 341–344.

24 Favreau 1999. On lists, see the forthcoming publication of the first workshop of the project POLIMA (*Pouvoirs de la liste au moyen âge*), directed by Laurent Chastang and Laurent Feller, also containing Riccioni forthcoming.

25 Riccioni 2000.

26 Translation: “Alfanus did make (this work) for you, Virgin Mary.”

27 ((signum crucis)) ANNO ML C XX III INDICIONE I DEDICATUM EST HOC ALTARE PER MANUS DOMINI CALIXTI PAPAE II V SUI PONTIFICATUS ANNO MENSE / MAIO DIE VI ALFANO CAMERARIO EIUS DONA PLURIMA LARGIENTE. Translation: “In the year 1123, first indiction, this altar was dedicated by the hand of Callixtus II pope, the fifth year of his pontificate, on the sixth day of the month of May. The chamberlain Alfanus made many gifts.” See Riccioni 2000, 145f., with bibliography.

28 Keil 2014. More exactly, this case corresponds with the concept of “restricted presence in term of person”.

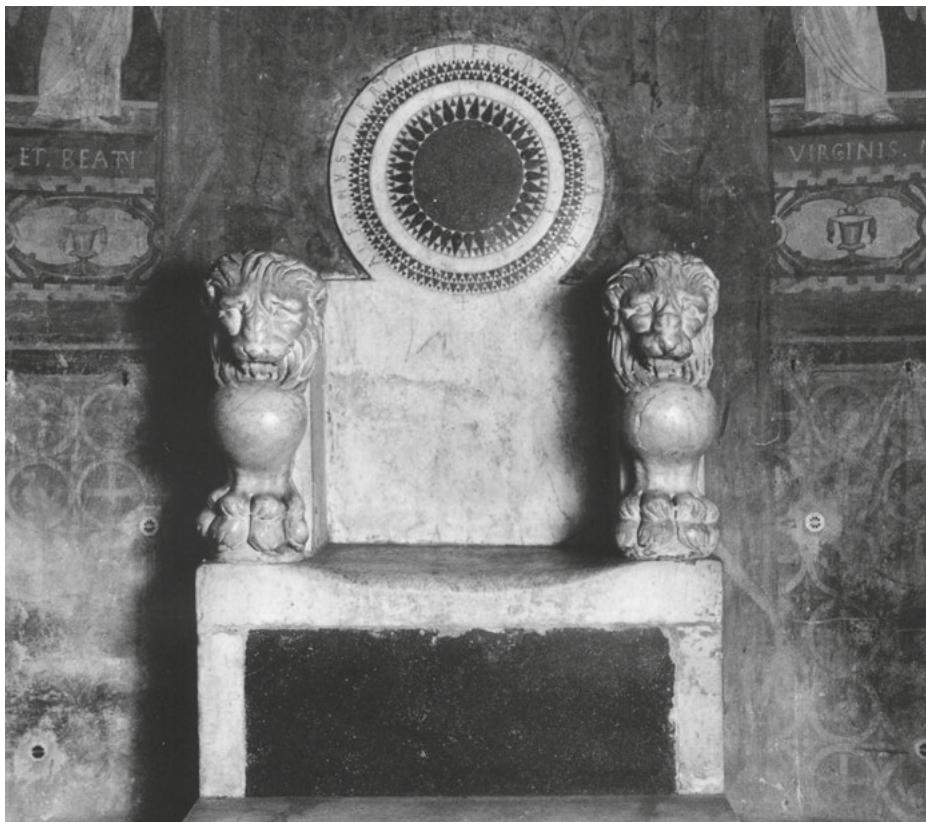


Fig. 4: Santa Maria in Cosmedin. Papal throne.

2 Inscriptions on the Architrave: Santa Pudenziana and Sant'Apollinare

In Rome, the first inscribed doors, more precisely the door frames of Santa Pudenziana and Sant'Apollinare (now in the Vatican Grottoes), display a sophisticated visual language. These are works that can only be compared to one another and manifest an evident renewal of antiquity. Shortly thereafter, the doors of San Bartolomeo all'Isola and San Lorenzo in Lucina are already devoid of figurative elements. The first two examples are the most discussed, as their decoration has given rise to different hypotheses.

The marble frieze belonging to the entrance of the medieval church of Santa Pudenziana is today located on the architrave above the main entrance, as a result of a reworking by Francesco da Volterra in the sixteenth century, and was again modified

during the restorations of the nineteenth century.²⁹ The portal frame is surrounded by vine scrolls and displays the images of St Pastor, St Pudentiana, the cross-bearing Lamb, St Praxedis and St Pudens, each inserted in a *clipeus*. The *imagines clipeatae* of Pudentiana, Praxedis and the Lamb have been placed above the door, in a position not too different from the original disposition, while Pastor and Pudens, as indicated by the direction of the flower clusters, were placed on the jambs on either side of the door. The border of each *clipeus* contains a rich epigraphic commentary in leonine hexameters.

In the border of the *clipeus* of St Pastor:

((signum crucis)) S(AN)C(T)E PRECOR PASTOR P(RO) NOBIS ESTO ROGATOR.
 ((signum crucis)) HIC CUNCTIS VITE PASTOR DAT DOGMATE S(AN)C(T)E.³⁰ (Fig. 5)

In the border of the *clipeus* of St Pudentiana:

((signum crucis)) P(RO)TEGE PRECLARA NOS VIRGO PUDENQ(UE)TIANA.
 ((signum crucis)) VIRGO PUDENQ(UE)TIANA CORA(M) STAT LA(M)PADE PLENA.³¹ (Fig. 6)

In the border of the *clipeus* of the Lamb:

((signum crucis)) MORTUUS ET VIVUS IDEM SU(M) PASTOR ET AGNUS.
 ((signum crucis)) HIC AGNUS MUNDU(M) RESTAURAT SANGUINE LAPSUM.³² (Fig. 7)

In the border of the *clipeus* of St Praxedis:

((signum crucis)) NOS PIA PRAXEDIS PRECE SA(N)C(TA) S(AN)C(T)FERA DEDIS.
 ((signum crucis)) OCCURRIT SPONSO PRAXEDIS LUMINE CLARO.³³ (Fig. 8)

In the border of the *clipeus* of St Pudens:

((signum crucis)) TE ROGO PUDENS S(AN)C(T)E NO(S) PURGA CRIMINA TRUDENS.
 ((signum crucis)) ALMUS ET ISTE DOCET PUDENS AD SIDERA CAELES.³⁴ (Fig. 9)

²⁹ Parlato/Romano 2001, 125f.

³⁰ Translation: “We pray to St Pastor, that he be intercessor in our favour. This Pastor/Shepherd (of life) give to everyone his holy precepts of life.”

³¹ Translation: “Protect us, eminent Pudentiana. The virgin Pudentiana stands before us with a full lamp.”

³² Translation: “Dead and alive I am at the same time Pastor/Shepherd and Lamb. This Lamb redeems the world fallen (in sin) with his blood.”

³³ Translation: “Pious Praxedis, bearer of holiness, through your holy prayer give us (salvation). Praxedis goes to receive the groom with the lamp on.”

³⁴ Translation: “Please, St Pudens, purify us by removing the sins. This magnificent Pudens teaches the route to heaven.”



Fig. 5: Santa Pudenziana. Architrave.
St Pastor.



Fig. 6: Santa Pudenziana. Architrave. St Pudentiana.



Fig. 7: Santa Pudenziana. Architrave. Lamb.



Fig. 8: Santa Pudenziana. Architrave. St Praxedis.



Fig. 9: Santa Pudenziana. Architrave. St Pudente.

Pudentiana and Praxedis are portrayed as the wise virgins of the Gospel of St Matthew,³⁵ who maintain full lamps. The allusion to the parable also extends to the symbolic meaning of the doors that remain open only to the virgins with lighted lamps, but closed to the foolish virgins, that is, the faithful who have not been diligent.

Bruno of Segni quoted the parable in his commentary on the Gospel of St Matthew,³⁶ connecting the virgins to the Kingdom of Heaven but also to *Ecclesia*. He considers the lighted lamps as *bona opera*, because in the Church the wise virgins mean *prudentes et iustos*, but the foolish virgins mean *vanos et fatuos*.³⁷

³⁵ Mt 25,1-13.

³⁶ Bruno Signinus, *Commentaria in Matthaeum*, CI, Patrologia Latina 165, cc.277A-279B; Bruno Signinus, *Sententiae*, II, *De ornamentis ecclesiae*, c. III, s. IV, *De virginibus*, Patrologia Latina 165, cc.1073B-1075B; Bruno Signinus, *Expositio de muliere forte*, Patrologia Latina 164, 1231B.

³⁷ Bruno Signinus, *Commentaria in Matthaeum*, CI, Patrologia Latina 165, c. 277C.

A marble strip below the upper frame of the architrave contains the inscription:

AD REQUIE(M) VIT(A)E CUPIS O TU Q(UO)Q(UE) VENIRE
 EN PATET INGRESSU(S) FUERIS SI RITE REVERSU(S)
 ADVOCAT IPSE Q(UI)DE(M) VIA DUX ET IANITOR IDE(M)
 GAUDIA P(RO)MITTENS ET CRIMINAQUE Q(UI) REMI(T)TENS.³⁸

The text is a learned and sophisticated composition, inspired by the example of the classics, as is also evident from the use of the leonine hexameter. Moreover, and not marginal for the historical artistic issues, here we find the use of metaplasms, not the *tmesis* (parts of a compound word separated by another word) that Ferrua noted.³⁹ In the classical conception of the figures of discourse, the application domain of metaplasms is above all the poetic one: metric needs or poetic license motivate such phonological graphic transformations to which the lexical unit could be submitted in the literary code.⁴⁰

In the case of the second verse, metaplasms are used to isolate the present participle *pudens* within the name Pudentiana, which is an epithet perfectly matching the noun *virgo*, referring to the Madonna. The Madonna is *virgo preclara*, Pudentiana is *virgo pudens*. The metaplasms are also used to allegorize the name of Pudentiana as used in classical and medieval literature.⁴¹

The metaplasms occur twice: *cardiq(ue)nalis*; *Marcelliq(ue)ani*, on the inscription mentioning the consecration of the Chapel of St Pastore (Fig. 10).⁴² The epigraph refers

³⁸ Translation: “Even you, who wants to come to the peace of life, enter here, the door is open if you return ritually. The one who calls is himself the way, the guide and the guardian who promises joys and forgives sins.” *Crinina qui(que)* instead of *criminaque q(ui)*.

³⁹ Ferrua 1996, 494, 499.

⁴⁰ Giannini 1994.

⁴¹ Curtius 1953, 459–500; Mastandrea (2011), 147–156. Thanks to Claudio Mastandrea for his suggestions on this topic.

⁴² TEMPORE GREGORII SEPTENI PRAESULIS ALMI, / PRAESBITER EXIMIUS PRAECLARIS VIR BE-
 NEDICTUS / MORIB(US) AECCLESIAM RENOVAVIT FUNDITUS ISTAM / QUAM CONSECRARI SACER
 IDEM CARDIQ(UE)NALIS / EIUSDEM SAN<CT>AE FECIT SUB TEMPORE PAPAE / AUGUSTI MENSIS
 SEPTENO NEMPE KALENDIS / NOMINE PASTORIS PRECURSORISQ(UE) IOHANNIS. / {F} DE CRUCE
 VESTE DEI LOCUS HIC EST S(AN)C(TU)S HABERI / CUI PARS DE SANCTI SOCIATUR VESTE IO-
 H(ANN)IS EV(AN)G(E)L(ISTAE) / MARTYRIS ET STEPHANI PAPALI NOMINE PRIMI / MARTYRIS ET
 PAPAE FELICIS HONORE SECUNDI / NEC MINUS HERMETIS PREFECTI MARTIRIS URBIS / ET TRAN-
 QUILLINI, MARCI, MARCELLINI MARCELLIQ(UE)ANI / vac. 2.r / HORU(M) RELIQUIS CONSTAT
 LOCUS ISTE CELEBRIS HINC ET MULTOR(UM) POSSEMUS NOTA QUOR(UM) / DICERE SI TABULA
 LOCUS ILLIS ESSET IN ISTA. NOS MERITIS HOR(UM) REDEAMUS AD ALTA POLOR(UM). See Riccioni
 2008. Translation: “At the time of benign Bishop Gregory VII, Benedict, distinguished priest, excellent
 man, has renewed this church from its foundations. (Benedict) himself, a consecrated cardinal, made
 the church consecrated, at the time of the same holy pope, the seventh day before the first of August,
 in the name of Pastor and of the precursor John. Because of the cross and the garment of God, this
 place must be considered holy; united with them in this place are also part of the garment of St. John



Fig. 10: Santa Pudenziana. Consacration inscription of S. Pastore Chapel.

to the reconstruction of the *ecclesia* and its consecration by Benedict (cardinal presbyter from 1077 on), during the pontificate of Gregory VII (1073–1085), on the “seventh day before the calends of the month of August” (23 July). Relics are remembered in the central part of the text. The final formula exalts the place’s sanctity effected by the relics, also referring to those not mentioned due to the lack of space, and brings an invocation to be able to ascend to heaven through the merits of the saints kept in the church. The first part of the text is in hexametric verse while the invocation of the last two lines is in prose.

The use of metaplasms in epigraphy is very unusual, not only for inscriptions executed in Rome, and allows us to hypothesise that the author of the text was the same person as the author of the slab and the architrave and by that measure means that these works were executed during the same period.⁴³

This hypothesis is confirmed by palaeographic evidence. The graphic style of the inscriptions on the slab and the architrave could be defined as “Gregorian” or “reformed”, since they have numerous stylistic features in common and, moreover, reveal graphic similarities to other coeval epigraphs, produced above all (but not exclusively) during the pontificate of Gregory VII: squared *E*; *G* with broken and

the Evangelist martyr, and of Stephen, the first martyr (worthy) of the name of pope, and by honour of Pope Felix II, and also of Hermes prefect, martyr of Rome, and of Tranquillinus, Mark, Marcellinus and Marcellianus. This place is famous for the saints’ relics. Were there space on this stone, we could list say the names of many of them. Through their merits, may we reach the summit of the heavens.”

⁴³ For this hypothesis, see also Fratini 1996, 62, 64.

squared internal curl; *O* and *Q* in the shape of a drop; *V* = *U*; the use of small letters.⁴⁴ Moreover the portals of Santa Pudenziana and of Sant'Apollinare are the only ones that use two successive and intertwined *Vs*, in the form of *W*, as in the inscription on the altar of Santa Galla.

The elegant square capital script with its geometric and monumental graphic forms creates a continuity with the classical tradition, as suggested by the ideological orientation of the Roman Church during Gregory VII's papacy. The portal of Santa Pudenziana, therefore, can be plausibly anchored in the eleventh century.⁴⁵

As mentioned, for palaeographical and art-historical reasons, the portal of Santa Pudenziana has been associated with that of Sant'Apollinare, probably used in San Pietro in the Vatican,⁴⁶ built in the trilithon system, consisting of two monolith door jambs and an architrave.

The inscriptions are displayed on frames circulating the saints and Christ in Majesty:

((signum crucis)) AD ME PONDERIBUS PRESS[I REC]REABO VENITE. SUM REQUIES TRAN-
[QUIL]LA DEUS SUM VITA BEATA.⁴⁷ (Fig. 11)

On the right jamb, around St Peter, also in a circular frame, the epigraph:

[((signum crucis))] CHR(IST)I IAM FIDEI DOCTO SATIS APOLENA[RI SUME RAV]ENN[ATUM
PETRUS INQUIT P]ON[TIFICATUM].⁴⁸ (Fig. 12)

On the left jamb around St Apollinare, according to the layout identical to the previous ones:

[((signum crucis))] TU QUI CUM PETRO DEUS OMNIPOTENS OPERARIS] PRECEPTORE MEO
MECUM NEC NON OPERARE.⁴⁹ (Fig. 13)

44 See for example: the altar of Santa Galla—the use of double *V* = *W*; the *chartae lapidariae* of San Saba and of Santi Giovanni e Paolo; the list of relics of San Biagio della Pagnotta; the architrave of Sant'Apollinare.

45 This chronology has been suggested more recently by Angelelli 2010, 166–167, 306.

46 Gandolfo 1985, 534, according to Grimaldi/Niggli 1972, 50, suggests Vatican Basilica's Porta Ravenniana, on the left side, introducing to the central nave and dedicated to the people of Ravenna; Bottari 1988, 10f., suggests Porta Guidonia, on the right side of the Vatican Basilica; Fratini 1996, 64.

47 Translation: “You who are oppressed by burdens come to me, I will refresh you. I am the quiet rest, I am God, life and salvation.”

48 Translation: “Peter, expert enough of the faith of Christ, says to Apollinare: take the pontificate of the Ravenna people.”

49 Translation: “Almighty God, you who act with Peter, my guide, act also with me.”



Fig. 11: Sant'Apollinare. Architrave. Christ in majesty.



Fig. 12: Sant'Apollinare. Right jamb. St Peter.



Fig. 13: Sant'Apollinare. Left jamb. St Apollinare.

The account of a final inscription on the architrave, handed down by Ugonio, is not considered reliable.

According to Francesca Bottari's studies, the inscriptions refer to a dispute between the Church of Ravenna and the Roman Church, which was being concluded in the early years of the twelfth century, the same time period in which Bottari places the execution of the frame.⁵⁰ The conflict can be found in the inscription in which

50 Bottari 1988, 12.

Peter orders (*inquit*) Apollinare to take the pontificate of Ravenna, thus evoking the third proposition of *Dictatus Papae* in which Gregory VII affirms the superiority of the successor of Peter on the ministers of the dioceses.⁵¹ But in this case the text of the inscription goes beyond the theocratic authority affirmation of the Roman church over the dioceses.⁵² In fact, the recipient of the lintel's political message can be identified with Wibertus, archbishop of Ravenna, elected antipope with the name Clement III (1080/84–1100) during the papacy of Gregory VII.⁵³ The first archbishop of Ravenna (Apollinare / Wibertus / Clement III) must be subject to the first bishop of Rome (Peter / Gregory VII).⁵⁴ The architrave must therefore date back to 1084, the year in which Gregory VII definitively abandoned Rome.

A further element that connects these architraves to the Roman artistic production of the eleventh century is the image inserted in the *clipaeus* (*imago clipeata*), used in the representation of St Clement, below the scene of the miracle of Chersone-sus in the lower church of San Clemente⁵⁵ and also in the image of Christ on the apse mosaic of the upper church (Fig. 14). These portraits refer to the papal portraits that once adorned the early Christian basilicas of San Pietro in the Vatican and San Paolo fuori le mura,⁵⁶ but they can also be related to the specific funerary use of the *imago clipeata*.⁵⁷

According to Fratini, it is possible to associate the figurative decoration of these architraves with a series of spurious works dating from the second half of the eleventh century to the beginning of the twelfth century recalling Early Christian models: the columns of Cave and Trinità dei Monti, the portal of Santa Maria in Cosmedin, the *hagiasma* of Grottaferrata, the oldest parts of the portal of San Domenico in Narni, the *gradino* ("step") signed by Uvo in San Cosimato di Vicovaro, the *gradino* ("step") of San Giovanni a Porta Latina and, according to Claussen's recent studies, the altar of Santa Maria in Cappella.⁵⁸

Claussen identifies a common culture as the base of all these works—inspired by Roman classicism—and a common type of relief, characterized by the graphic sign, although there is a notable contrast between the plasticity of the Roman portals and the flat relief of the other artefacts. Moreover, considering the fact that, in Rome, figurative sculpture made of marble disappears around 1100 and is replaced by Cosmatis'

⁵¹ *Quod ille solus possit deponere episcopos vel reconciliare*, see Henderson 1910, 366.

⁵² Bottari 1988, 12.

⁵³ Longo/Yawn 2012.

⁵⁴ Fratini 1996, 64.

⁵⁵ Filippini 1999, 193; Filippini 2002, 113f.; Filippini 2006, 246. Gerhard Wolf suggested an interesting comparison between the portrait of Pope Clement and the lost clipeate image of John XIII (972 d.), once in his tomb in San Paolo fuori le mura, now known through a seventeenth-century copy, see Wolf 1993, 331–333.

⁵⁶ On papal portraits in both basilicas, see De Bruyne 1934.

⁵⁷ Herklotz 1990, 149–151.

⁵⁸ Claussen 2007; Claussen 2014, 59f.



Fig. 14: San Clemente, lower church. Miracle of Chersonesus. Image of Saint Clement.

aniconic production, Claussen hypothesizes the existence of an art form linked to Clement III, suddenly interrupted after the antipope's death, and replaced by aniconic art during the papacy of Paschal II (1099–1118).⁵⁹ Gandolfo has rejected this hypothesis.⁶⁰

The univocal term “Gregorian”, meaning the movement that led to the ecclesiastical reform, has long been rejected by historiography.⁶¹ It is impossible to identify a unitary mark, converging into action within the various components of the Church. The Reform consisted of a series of reforms of ecclesiastical structures that were dialectically combined, producing a radical change, which was not the result of a pre-established project and had no single root. Likewise, Church Reform art, if understood as a pre-established artistic project, inspired and managed by the Pope (Gregory VII),

⁵⁹ Claussen 2007, 62–66.

⁶⁰ Gandolfo 2007; Gandolfo 2016, 261f. See also Riccioni 2011b, 323f.

⁶¹ The univocal reading of the Church Reform under Gregory VII is due to Fliche 1940. Corrections to this hypothesis, among others, by Violante 1959; Capitani 1965; Capitani 1990; Cantarella 2006; D'Acunto 2006.

has never existed.⁶² In fact, the Reform art also consisted of a series of events dialectically combined, which produced a unitary result in the renewal of visual language.

During the reforms of the Church, particularly in Rome, numerous ecclesiastical buildings were restored and / or rebuilt and some of them were also provided with new decorations. In these cases, artistic forms were commonly characterized by: the recovery of models inspired by antiquity (without particular distinctions between Roman classicism, Carolingian and / or Ottonian renewals);⁶³ the narration through images and writings organized according to rhetorical rules and oriented toward educational use;⁶⁴ the graphic elaboration of a writing that formally refers to the classical capital.⁶⁵

Thus, figurative sculpture in Rome existed during the papacy of Gregory VII when art and script (text and image), and, of course, also sculpture (and selected *spolia*) were used to affirm spiritual and political messages connected to the Church Reform. However, the same artistic forms were probably also used by Antipope Clement III after the death of Gregory VII, maintaining continuity with the past. In fact, even though Gregory VII and Clement III expressed different political positions and beliefs, they spoke the same language. This language was adopted until the end of the eleventh century, which was probably connected with the Antipope's policy. Figurative art was thus replaced by aniconic decoration created by the Cosmati, linked to the affirmation of the Church Reform during the papacy of Paschal II.

3 Inscriptions Above the Doors

In San Lorenzo in Lucina and in San Bartolomeo all'Isola, both inscriptions were renewed during the papacy of Paschal II. Noticeably, decoration is absent, and the inscriptions are written directly on the lintel over the door. In S. Lorenzo in Lucina the inscription reads:

62 Having posed the question in these terms, the recent historiography is unanimous in recognizing that is not possible to speak of the art of the Church Reform, see Gandolfo 1989; Sukale 2002; Pace 2007; Kessler 2007, with a different approach; Barral i Altet 2010; Gandolfo 2016, 261–268; Claussen 2016, 276.

63 Toubert 1970; Kitzinger 1972a; Kitzinger 1972b; Claussen 1992. For an overview of this topic, see Riccioni 2011b, 321–324.

64 According to Kessler 2007, 36: “Gregorian theory of art [...] is based firmly on traditional, indeed banal, discussions of images, it accepted church decoration as an instrument of pedagogy, conversion, and spiritual elevation.” On the art production during Church Reform based on rhetorical rules, see Riccioni 2006; Riccioni 2011b, 328.

65 On capital letters in the Giant Bible, see Supino Martini 1988; Larocca 2011, 62–64; on capital letters in public lettering Petrucci 1993, 7–9; Supino Martini 2001; Riccioni 2007.



Fig. 15: San Lorenzo in lucina. Door. Inscription.



Fig. 16: San Bartolomeo all'isola. Door. Inscription.

((signum crucis)) PORTE QUAS CERNIS FACTE DE REBUS ADEPTIS
PRE(S)BITERI PETRI CONSTANT CU(M) POSTIB(US) IPSIS
QUEM DIGNARE TUIS DEUS ASSOCIARE BEATIS.⁶⁶ (Fig. 15)

The inscription, which long remained hidden by dirt, appeared after cleaning. The text, in leonine hexameters, commemorates a certain Peter *presbiterus* (priest) responsible for the execution of the portal, probably dating to the same time as the altar consecration.⁶⁷ The verses are an example of erudite poetry, as is confirmed by the expression *postibus ipsis* used by Lucretius and Valerius Flaccus.⁶⁸

Palaeographic analysis reveals a chronological proximity to the epigraphs of Leo and Paschal II, now located in the portico. The capital script is carried out in square shapes and slightly elongated, the incision is executed with a thin groove. The executions of *B*, *P*, and the curvatures of the letters as they approach the arc of a circle are also related.

The inscription of San Bartolomeo all'Isola has a similar presentation (Fig. 16).⁶⁹ The first part of the text is carved into the upper strip of the main portal. It recalls the donation of the relics by Otto III and the consecration of the church in 1113 by Paschal II:

TERTIUS ISTORUM REX TRANSTULIT OTTO PIORUM CORPORA QUIS DOMUS HAEC SIC REDIMITA VIGET. ANNO D(OMI)NIC(I) INC(ARNATIONIS) MILL(ENO) C(ENTENO) XIII IND(ICTI-
ONE) VII M(ENSIS) AP(RI)L(US) D(IE) IIII T(EM)P(O)RE P(A)SC(A)L(US) II P(A)P(AE).⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Translation: “The door you see is made with materials collected by the priest Peter. It is strong in its jambs. God consider him worthy to be joined to your saints.”

⁶⁷ Claussen/Mondini/Senekovic 2010, 283f.

⁶⁸ Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, 3, 369; Valerius Flaccus, *Argonautica*, 2, 168, see *Musisque Deoque. Un'archivio digitale di poesia latina*. <http://www.mqdq.it/public/index>.

⁶⁹ Claussen 2002b, 135f, with bibliography.

⁷⁰ Translation: “King Otto III, transferred the bodies of these pious (men) into this house which, embellished, flourishes again. Year 1113, seventh indiction, fourth day of the month of April, at the time of pope Paschal II.”

The inscription is displayed horizontally and shortly vertically along the architrave. The letters are written in Romanesque majuscule; as they are small, they are difficult to read from afar. Some letters are clearly influenced by manuscript writing: the increasing circulation of books even at the time of Paschal II is especially evident in the letter *A* with the left slash undulated and ending with a curl, in the uncial letter *M* (similar to a reversed omega), and in the uncial letter *U*.

The second part of the text continues on the door frame, written in larger letters: *QUE DOMUS ISTA GERIT SI PIGNERA NOSCERE QUERIS CORPORA PAULINI SINT CREDAS BARTHOLOMEI.*⁷¹

The palaeographic features are the same as in the architrave inscription: librarian *A*; *O* and *Q* close to the shape of a drop; uncial *U*.⁷² In this case the text renders the meaning of the upper inscription more precisely. The text produces further evidence of the presence of both Saint Paulinus and Saint Bartholomew in the church.

The inscription on the upper lintel of the door has not been added to an older door in order to confirm the presence of the relics in the church, as has been suggested.⁷³ In fact the door is similar to other works made by *marmorarii romani*, dating back to the first half of the twelfth century;⁷⁴ and the inscription has a layout similar to that of the door of San Lorenzo in Lucina, also consecrated during Paschal II's papacy. Moreover, the inscription's layout seems to have been conceived in relation to the lintel's graphic space. The first part of the inscription is arranged symmetrically on the upper frame,⁷⁵ with small letters, and corresponds with the intention to affirm the presence of the relics. Therefore, it is possible that it was carried out in response to the beginning of the construction of the new cathedral of Benevento in 1112, which claimed possession of the relics of the apostle Bartholomew,⁷⁶ thus denying that they had been transported to Rome by Otto III.⁷⁷

Even though these inscriptions are placed outside the church and were potentially accessible to a wider audience, they can hardly be read from a distance. The text is not only closely linked to the monument, but also does not seem intended to reach out to a wider public. The “exposed” text remains incorporated by the monument.

⁷¹ Translation: “If you want to know which relics are preserved in this church, believe that they are the bodies of Paolinus and Bartholomew.”

⁷² Letter *A* written under the letter *T*; links: *ME, NE, EU*.

⁷³ Hypothesis suggested by Gandolfo 2007, 167f.

⁷⁴ Claussen 2002b, 146–149.

⁷⁵ The beginning and the end of the text are at exactly the same height on the two jambs.

⁷⁶ Falcone di Benevento 1998, 5; Bove 1999, 31.

⁷⁷ Gandolfo 2007, 167f. Otto of Freising reports that the relics of Saint Bartholomew were brought to Rome by Otto II (not Otto III), Otto Frisingensis 1961, VI, 25, 470; on the contrary, the *Chronicle of Montecassino Abbey* reports that Otto III was deceived by the Beneventans because they gave him the relics of Paolinus of Nola and not those of the apostle, see *Chronica Monasterii Casinensis* 1981, II, 24, 208–209.

The choice not to create a dedicated graphic area for the text emphasizes this strong connection, subordinating the text to the monument and conditioning the letters' small size with the result of showing and hiding the text. The larger letters of the second inscription seem to be directed to a broader public.

4 Inscriptions on the Porticoed Atriums

After the Concordat of Worms (1122), the official script of the Roman Church changed from classicizing capitals to Romanesque majuscules.⁷⁸ During the papacy of Callixtus II, imperial manifestation of the triumphant Church replaced the Benedictine *restauratio*.⁷⁹ In the same years, porticoed atriums appeared as a feature of new churches, but were also added to older foundations.⁸⁰ In front of each important church, a portico was added with an architrave modelled on that of San Crisogono. Porticoes were mostly built to showcase the reformed Roman Church and the architrave served as the space where the assertion was explicitly expressed in writing.⁸¹

This is important: the porticoes extended ecclesiastical space into the urban fabric of the city. The new constructions adopted the ionic colonnade and the architrave used in Late Antiquity for the interior of Early Christian basilicas, among which Santa Maria Maggiore formed a model of particular symbolic significance.⁸² Just as the reuse of older architectural fragments or *spolia* characterized the liturgical furnishings in the interiors of these buildings, the new portico form, often displaying a monumental public inscription, marked their exteriors. This was the case with the reconstruction of the basilica of San Crisogono in Trastevere, which was a Romanesque model of the triumphant Church.⁸³ The plan follows the scheme of the great basilicas of Rome: St Peter and San Giovanni in Laterano, with the apse at the west, the transept intervening between the apse and the longitudinal block of nave and aisles, and the central nave separated from the aisles by columns.⁸⁴

The porticoes provided new spaces for public lettering. Moreover, these inscriptions were large and contained complex, sophisticated and political texts, not exclu-

⁷⁸ Riccioni 2007.

⁷⁹ Claussen 2016, 282–284.

⁸⁰ This practice was also adopted in civic buildings, with a specific interest in reusing *spolia*. See Pensabene (2008), 72.

⁸¹ Claussen 2002, 161–163.

⁸² Pensabene/Pomponi 1991/1992, 342.

⁸³ A list of porticoes built after the example of San Crisogono is given in Claussen 2002a, 214, note 51; Claussen 2002b, 394–404. For an overview of Cosmatesque porticoes, see Pensabene/Pomponi 1991/1992.

⁸⁴ Claussen 2002a, 162f.

sively related to the monument. Instead they focused more on the sacralisation of urban space, one of the features of medieval art in Rome.

At Santa Maria Maggiore itself, Eugenius III (1145–1153) had a dedicatory inscription placed on the architrave of the narthex with an invocation to Mary, who is celebrated as *via, vita e salus*.

TERTIUS EUGENIUS ROMANUS P(A)P(A) BENIGNUS OPTULIT HOC MUNUS VIRGO MARIA TIBI
QUE MATER CHRISTI FIERI MERITO MERUISTI SALVA PERPETUA VIRGINITATE TIBI ES VIA
VITA SALUS TOTIUS GL(ORI)A MUNDI DA VENIA(M) CULPIS VIRGINITATIS HONO[s].⁸⁵ (Fig. 17)



Fig. 17: Santa Maria Maggiore. Inscription from porticoed atrium.

In this way, the pope established a direct link between his restoration works, the Virgin, and an important icon kept in the basilica.⁸⁶ The inscription ran along the trabeation of the portico until Gregory XIII had the ambulatory built in 1575. Once again, the font was an elegant library majuscule that can be defined as an epigraphic display script taken from the models of the Giant Bibles.

This type of elegant library majuscule that reproduces the display majuscule of contemporary liturgical manuscripts, in particular the script of the frontispieces of the Giant Bibles, is also found on the trabeation of the portico of the church of Santi Giovanni e Paolo al Celio,⁸⁷ where the text in leonine hexameters commemorates Car-

⁸⁵ Translation: “Eugenius III, the Roman pope, willingly brings this gift to you, Virgin Mary, you who truly deserved to be the Mother of Christ and perpetually preserved your virginity. You are the way, the life, the salvation, and the glory of the entire world. Oh honor of virginity, grant forgiveness for sin”, see Kessler/Zacharias 2000, 132.

⁸⁶ On the icon of Santa Maria Maggiore and the inscription, see Wolf 1990, 173f.

⁸⁷ The letters *D*, *P*, and *R* look like the ones from the famous Bible maintained in the Medici collection in the Laurentian Library in Florence, Laur. Plut. 15.19, f. 1v, see Riccioni 2007, 146.

dinal Presbyter Giovanni dei Conti di Sutri (1151–1180), who dedicated the church to the holy martyrs John and Paul (Fig. 18).

PRESBITER ECCLESIE ROMANE RITE IOHANNES
HEC ANIMI VOTO DONA VOVENDO DEDIT
MARTIRIBUS CHRISTI PAULO PARITERQUE IOHANNI
PASSIO QUOS EADEM CONTULIT ESSE PARES.⁸⁸



Fig. 18: Santi Giovanni e Paolo al Celio. Trabeation of the portico with dedicatory inscription.

It seems clear that the display of these inscriptions was as important as the porticoes they graced. Writing in the scripts used in the most sumptuous Bibles and liturgical manuscripts was like displaying a kind of “banner” of the Church of Rome for those who might recognize the link to manuscript culture.⁸⁹

The most striking example was the inscription on San Giovanni in Laterano, now in fragments on the wall of the cloister, and recorded in an engraving of 1693.⁹⁰ The

⁸⁸ Translation: “Presbyter Giovanni, consecrating these gifts to the soul’s prayer according to the rite of the Roman Church, dedicated to the martyrs of Christ, Paul and John, which the same suffering made equal.” On the inscription, see Forcella, 1869–1884, vol. 10, 5, no. 1; Claussen 1987, 32, note 182. The portico is dated at 1180, see Claussen/Mondini/Senekovic 2010, 91.

⁸⁹ For the relationship between book, handwriting and epigraphy, see Debiais 2013.

⁹⁰ Ciampini 1693, 10–13, tavv. I–II.

dating of the inscription has been contested, but it is likely to have been produced at the end of the twelfth century (Fig. 19).⁹¹

DOGIMATE PAPALI DATUR AC SIMUL IMPERALI
 QUOD SIM CUNCTARUM MATER CAPUT ECCLESiarum
 HIC SALVATORIS CELESTIA REGNA DATORIS
 NOMINE SANXERUNT CUM CUNCTA PERACTA FUERUNT
 QUESUMUS EX TOTO CONVERSI SUPPLICE VOTO
 NOSTRA QUOD HEC AEDES TIBI CHRISTE SIT INCLITA SEDES.⁹²



Fig. 19: San Giovanni in Laterano. Inscription from porticoed atrium.

The inscription was done in a particularly elegant library majuscule, with squared-off modules; of all the inscriptions treated here, it is the closest in form and disposition to the scripts and incipits of luxury liturgical manuscripts.

91 For a thirteenth-century dating, see Gandolfo 1983, 73f.; Pomarici 1990, 64f. For a twelfth-century dating, see Claussen 1987, 22–26; Herklotz 1989, 38, 45f.; De Blaauw 1994, 207; Paravicini Bagliani 1998, 32–68; Herklotz 2000, 161. For a recent interpretation of the inscription, dated at the end of twelfth century, see Claussen 2008, 84–88; Riccioni 2011c, 453–455.

92 Translation: “By the will of the emperor and the pope, I am to be the mother and head of all churches. In Christ’s name, He who gives all the kingdoms of heaven. This they decreed once all was brought to completion. Now truly converted, we humbly pray, that this our house, Oh Christ, may be your fitting seat.” Transcription from De Rossi 1861–1888, 2, 322; Herklotz 2000, 193; Claussen 2008, 84.

The text refers to the pope, *vicarius Christi*, linking him explicitly to both imperial and Christian Antiquity through the evocation of the Donation of Constantine. The inscription refers to the church as *cunctarum mater caput ecclesiarum*, suggesting its primacy even over San Pietro itself.

If we move from the porticoes towards the city, it is clear that sacred authorities also worked to lay claim to major ancient monuments, and perhaps especially to the two surviving ancient triumphal columns.

5 Conclusions

During restorations of ancient buildings and objects, but also in new constructions, script was used to upgrade *spolia* as meaningful objects: Rome was renewed by bringing ancient materials together to create new forms and new meanings. In doing so, the Church moved texts from the shadows inside buildings to the bright open spaces for a larger public. Inscriptions in liminal spaces such as on doors, portals and porticoed atriums helped to transform the image of Rome. After a long struggle with the Empire, the Church finally affirmed its supremacy through a visual strategy strongly linked to the written word and its circulation in manuscripts. Thus, public lettering throughout Rome relied on graphic forms derived from clerical scripts, used layouts that recalled book practice, and carefully distinguished among “reading” publics. This can be considered one of the most significant expressions of the art of the reformed Church, consisting of a series of events dialectically combined, which have produced a unitary result in the new visual language.

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Fig. 10: A. Silvagni, *Monumenta epigraphica Christiana saeculo XIII antiquiora quae in Italiae finibus adhuc extant*, I, Roma, Città del Vaticano, 1938–1943, tav. XXI, 3.

Fig. 11: Fratini, p. 63, fig. 37.

Fig. 12: Fratini, p. 56, fig. 14.

Fig. 13: Fratini, p. 62, fig. 33.

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