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Ritual, Space and Inscriptions in Medieval Rome

Contextualizing Papal Epitaphs in St. Peter's and St. John Lateran

Ever since the times of Giovanni Battista de Rossi (1822–1894) and his discovery of the *capella dei papi* in the so-called 'Catacomb of Callixtus', papal burial customs and funerary practices – both late antique and medieval – have received plenty of scholarly attention in various disciplines, not least because the notion of a systematic planning of an exclusively episcopal *memoria* touches on the ideological foundations of the Roman-Catholic church, chief among them the concept of the apostolic succession and Petrine primacy of the bishops of Rome.[1]

As far as the Middle Ages are concerned, the available information for each individual tomb monument, its location, layout and epigraphical furnishing has long been assembled in voluminous corpora.[2] What is largely missing, however, is a detailed topological and praxeological analysis of this data, i. e. a thorough reconstruction of not only the physical arrangement, but also the spatial, material and practical contexts that the written artefacts were situated in.[3] Within this interpretative framework, the aim of this article is to highlight the role of papal epitaphs in shaping commemorative and communicative spaces in early and high medieval Rome, with a special emphasis on the basilicas of St. Peter and St. John Lateran. Of particular interest and relevance to this study are the various ways in which inscriptions – on the basis of their material, graphical and semantic qualities – interacted with their architectural surrounding, their social environment as well as their supposed audience or actual readers and recipients. How were inscriptions integrated into the complex web of practices, rituals and performances enacted in their immediate vicinity and how are

1 Mann 1928; Vielliard 1929; Gregorovius/Hülsen 1932; Montini 1957, *passim*; Picard 1969; Herklotz 1985, 127–205 and, most importantly, Borgolte 1989 and Borgolte 1992 with critical remarks by Picard 1993; for the early modern period see Bredekamp/Reinhardt/Karsten 2004.

2 The most important arthistorical and epigraphical collections include De Rossi 1857–1888; Forcella 1869–1884; Krautheimer 1937–1977; Silvagni 1943; Gray 1948, 45–55, 97–105 and 139–149; Carletti 1986; Claussen/Jäggi/Mondini 2002–2020; Cascioli/Paolucci 2014; Andaloro/Romano 2006–2017; Annoscia 2017.

3 For the methodological basis of this approach see Meier/Ott/Sauer 2015 and for a comparative take on epigraphy Frese/Keil/Krüger 2014 and Berti/Bolle/Opdenhoff/Stroth 2017.

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we to understand and describe the contribution of epigraphical sources to the formation of church space and urban fabric in medieval Rome? Despite the most recent contributions by Sebastian Scholz, most of these issues have only ever been mentioned in passing, and from an epigraphic perspective a lot of problems remain unsolved.[4]

As is well known, the tradition, or fiction, rather, of a continuous line of papal burials in St. Peter's was formed at the turn of the sixth century in the wake of the schism between Symmachus and Laurentius, almost half a century after Leo I (440–461) had been the first bishop of Rome to be interred near the supposed tomb of the prince of the apostles.[5] His original funerary inscription has not survived, as it had apparently been replaced when Sergius I (678–701) transferred his corporal remains to a new grave where a new commemorative epitaph was erected on the spot.[6] This second funerary inscription has come down to us as part of many a Carolingian sylloge, and from one of these collections, the so-called *Sylloge Virdunensis*, dated by De Rossi to about 761 and contained in an 11th century manuscript from the monastery of St. Vanne de Verdun, we may infer that the translation took place on 28 June 688.[7]

Leo's second epitaph recalled that he had been the first pope to be buried in the sanctuary of St. Peter, or, more precisely, at the extreme end of the church below the marble floor, where he, as gate keeper of this stronghold, watched over the flock of believers to prevent them from falling prey to the wolf.[8] Leo I and, shortly after him, Anastasius II (496–498) were epigraphically proclaimed to be guarding the apostolic citadel or the *limina sedis* much the same way Peter was imagined to serve as keeper to the gates of heaven. The inscription in Leo's honour goes on to relate that many shepherds had followed his example, in fact so many that Sergius felt the urge to provide for a more prominent burial place for his revered predecessor, who, for the very first time, was called *magnus* in this same epigraphical context, in order to single out the great pontiff and thereby justify Sergius' architectural intervention.[9] In addition, Sergius' 'vita' in the *liber pontificalis*, reflecting on his renovation of the atrium in front of the basilica of St. Peter, recorded that, in the process, Leo's body was removed from a rather remote place located in the sacristy, a structure Leo himself had commissioned

4 Scholz 2005; Scholz 2006; Scholz 2009; Scholz 2016.

5 Borgolte 1989, 63–71; De Blaauw 2016, 95.

6 Borgolte 1989, 96; Bucarelli 2015, 58f.; De Blaauw 2016, 92–99.

7 Bibliothèque de Verdun, Ms. 45, fol. 212r–214v; De Rossi 1888, 131–141.

8 De Rossi/ Silvagni 1935, 22, no. 4148: *HVIVS APOSTOLICI PRIMVM EST HIC CORPVS HVMATVM / QVOD FORET ET TVMVLO DIGNVS IN ARCE PETRI / HINC VATVM PROCERVMQVE COHORS QVOS CERNIS ADESSE / MEMBRA SVB EGREGIA SVNT ADOPERTA DOMO / SED DVDVM VT PASTOR MAGNVS LEO SEPTA GREGEMQVE / CHRISTICOLAM SERVANS IANITOR ARCIS ERAT / COMMONET E TVMVLO QVOD GESSERAT IPSE SVPERSTES / INSIDIANS NE LVPVS VASTET OVILE DEI* [...] *HIC TAMEN EXTREMO SVB MARMORE TEMPLI / QVEM IAM PONTIFICVM PLVRA SEPVLCHRA CELANT / SERGIVS ANTISTES DIVINO IMPVLSVS AMORE / HVNC IN FRONTE SACRAE TRANSTVLIT INDE DOMVS* [...].

9 Bucarelli 2015, 59.

mostly for liturgical reasons, but possibly also as a space dedicated to his own posthumous remembrance.[10] Writing in the 870s, John the Deacon (Hymmonides) reports that his hero Gregory I (590–604) had been laid to rest in that same general area *in extrema porticu ante secretarium antiquissimum*, where, according to him, both Leo I, Simplicius, Gelasius I and Symmachus had been buried.[11]

Since the beginning of the 6th century, practically every pope had been interred in the narthex of the *basilica vaticana* and the *secretarium* adjacent to it.[12] This hallway effectively constituted the very first funerary hotspot of the medieval basilica – long before the southern aisle and transept of the church proper came to be dubbed as *porticus pontificum* by the local canon Petrus Mallius in the second half of the twelfth century.[13] There are several theories that have been advanced to explain the notable preference for the portico of St. Peter's. Canonical prohibitions of church burials hardly represented a serious obstacle, as bishops had already been interred in consecrated spaces all over the Latin West, including Milan, Ravenna, Clermont, Tours, Canterbury and even Rome itself, in the case of St. Paul's outside the walls.[14] Imperial mausolea, which functioned as church annexes, for example in Constantinople, but also in Rome, possibly served as points of reference, especially for the *secretarium* of Leo the Great.[15] Finally, theological overtones may have equally played a prominent role, for the narthex, in Rome and elsewhere, was commonly called *paradisus*, a heavenly place, where the deceased waited for their final resurrection at the end of times.[16]

Little wonder then that another great pope, this one by the name of Gregory, was equally buried in this part of the atrium, probably between the columns of the porchway leading up to the entrance of the church.[17] It was not until the second quarter of the ninth century that his eponymous successor Gregory IV (827–841) transferred his remains into the basilica itself, where they were laid to rest in a special oratory, partly to prevent the theft of relics.[18] Petrus Mallius would later report that Pelagius I (556–561), John III (561–574), Boniface III (607) and Boniface IV (609–615) were all buried in close proximity to this chapel.[19] Most likely, their bodies were moved to this spot as part of or in connection with the construction of a new tomb monument for Gregory

10 *Le Liber pontificalis*, 375: *Hic corpus beati Leoni probatissimi patris ac pontificis, quod in abdito inferioribus secretarii praedictae basilicae positum fuerat, facta diligentibus tumba, in denominata basilica publico loco, ut sibi fuerat revelatum, reposuit ac locum ornavit*. *The Book of Pontiffs*, 84; De Blaauw 2016, 93–95.

11 Migne 1862, col. 221.

12 Picard 1969, 756; De Blaauw 1994, vol. 2, 497, 579.

13 Valentini/Zucchetti 1943, 369f.; on Petrus Mallius see Johrend 2011, 405f, no. 58.

14 Borgolte 1989, 53–55, 80–84.

15 Borgolte 1989, 85–88.

16 De Blaauw 1994, 524; Angenendt 1994.

17 See the discussion in Picard 1969, 762.

18 Blaauw 1994, 574.

19 Valentini/Zucchetti 1943, 400–402; Borgolte 1989, 77.

the Great, since there is an inscription still extant today which commemorates how Gregory IV secured the bones of his saintly predecessor Boniface IV.[20]

A similar argument could be made with respect to the translocation of the *memoria* of Leo the Great. Already in the 19th century, Louis Duchesne indicated that the pope's second epitaph is quite explicit in commemorating how Sergius I had transferred his predecessor to a place situated *in fronte sacrae domus*.[21] Even by early medieval standards this would be a rather unusual way of denoting any sort of location inside the church, so the inscription might actually imply that Sergius I initially moved Leo's body from the *secretarium* to a spot near the church portals.[22] On these grounds, it seems at least possible that Leo I had not been translocated into the interior of the basilica of St. Peter straight away. Yet, scholars have traditionally followed the account of the 'vita' of pope Paul I (757–756) and one late eighth-century *notitia ecclesiarum urbis Romae*, according to which the oratories of Leo I and Paul I were located right next to each other in the church's southern transept.[23]

But no matter how far Leo's new repose was removed from his initial place of rest, it was certainly conceived of and depicted in an altogether different manner by both the available epigraphical and literary sources. To Sergius I and the contemporary clerical elite the topological and praxeological make-up of Leo's abode, the way it was constructed as a social space, represented the single most important factor which ultimately determined their choice. According to the *liber pontificalis*, Sergius I transferred the body of Leo the Great to an open, a freely accessible, a public area of the basilica – *reposuit in denominata basilica publico loco*.[24] The latter's previous burial place is rhetorically contrasted with his new eternal residence, in as much as the language deployed in the commemorative inscription signalled that Leo's body had virtually been freed from a hidden and crowded place in the sacristy and elevated to a place of rest which, together with a magnificent tomb, ensured an adequate commemoration of his.[25] The epitaph of pope Hormisdas (514–523), commissioned for his grave in the narthex of St. Peter's by his son, conveyed the same image of the porch in front of the facade. From a strictly grammatical standpoint the inscription addressed the deceased himself, yet, semantically, it was clearly directed towards a presupposed

20 De Rossi/Silvagni 1935, 27f., no. 4159: *GREGORIO QVARTVS IACET HIC BONIFATIVS ALMVS* [...].
21 *Le Liber pontificalis*, 379; see also the remarks in De Rossi 1888, p. 202; De Rossi/Silvagni 1935, 22, no. 4148: [...] *SERGIVS ANTISTES DIVINO IMPVLSVS AMORE / HVNC IN FRONTE SACRAE TRANSTVLIT INDE DOMVS* [...].
22 Cf. Bucarelli 2015, 58.
23 Valentini/Zucchetti 1942, 96f.; Picard 1969, 757; Borgolte 1989, 50.
24 *Le Liber pontificalis*, 375.
25 De Rossi/Silvagni 1935, 22, no. 4148: [...] *HINC VATVM PROCERVMQUE COHORS QVOS CERNIS ADESSE / MEMRA SVB EGREGIA SVNT ADOPERTA DOMO* [...] *HIC TAMEN EXTREMO IACVIT SVB MARMORE TEMPLI / QVEM IAM PONTIFICVM PLVRA SEPVLCHRA CELANT* [...].

multitude of readers, because the text asked the pope to accept the prayers of the *hospes* visiting the basilica from all edges of the earth.[26]

Not only foreign pilgrims, but also a great number of Romans frequented the portico, particularly during the liturgical ceremonies on major feast days and other solemn occasions.[27] In these instances, when the appreciation, recognition and reception of the architectural surroundings reached its peak, the presence and visibility of papal epitaphs came to a forefront. Especially during papal enthronements and burials, the figure of the bishop and the memory of the long line of incumbents took centre stage, highlighted both through art and image as well as through inscribed artefacts, which added to the complex sensory experience.[28] As part of his ordination ceremony, which entailed a procession from the Lateran to the basilica of St. Peter, the bishop-elect was acclaimed as the new successor of the prince of the apostles by the people of the city both upon entering and leaving the church.[29] The ritual for the coronation of the Western emperor equally included a station in the narthex of St. Peter's.[30] By contrast, the earliest extant testimonies of normative prescriptions for the ritualistic performance of papal funerals unfortunately only date back to the fourteenth century.[31] In an 11th-century version of the afore-mentioned life of Gregory the Great by John the Deacon there is, however, a very famous depiction of the pope's interment (Fig. 1).

The drawing shows how the pope was laid to rest by the local clergy in what looks like an ancient sarcophagus, with a provost preaching from atop a pulpit to the congregation of believers – nobles and common people alike – who had gathered below the porch in attendance of the liturgical rite.[32] As a matter of fact, the Roman public was actually paid to attend the papal funerals, so as to ensure an effective intercession for the deceased.[33] Depending on the reading of one dedicatory inscription commemorating the building works of pope Simplicius (468–483), the atrium's galleries (or else those leading up to St. Peter's from the Tiber) may have been erected to shelter the visitors of the church in the first place.[34] At any rate, this is clearly the function

26 De Rossi/Silvagni 1935, 23, no. 4150: [...] *SVME TAMEN LAVDES QVAS PETRI CAPTVS AMORE / EXTREMO VENIENS HOSPES AB ORBE LEGAT* [...]. Cf. Borgolte 1989, 93.

27 Arbeiter 1988, 211; Blaauw 2011, 40f.; on the atrium in general Picard 1974.

28 Blaauw 1994, 608; on the interplay of art, architecture and liturgy see Romano 2014, 29–40 and, very recently, also with reference to papal inscriptions, Noble 2020, 65f.

29 Gussone 1978, 140f; Blaauw 1994, 611.

30 Blaauw 1994, 614.

31 Paravicina Bagliani 1997, 118–124.

32 Codex Farfensis, Eton College Library, Ms. 124, fol. 122r.; Liverano 2008, 163, fig. 4; Blaauw (2011), fig. 9.

33 Borgolte 1989, 78f.

34 De Rossi/Silvagni 1935, 10, no. 4104: *CVM SVBITIS PERAGI FALLAX CLEMENTIA VERIS / ET SACRA ADEVNTI FESTA VETARET AQVIS / SIMPLICIVS PRAESVL SACRARIA CELSA PETENTEM / PORTICIBVS IVNCTIS TEXIT AB IMBRE VIAM*. Cf. the discussion in Picard 1974, 857f. and Krautheimer 1977, 267f., 279; Blaauw 1994, 464 seems to have no doubt that the inscription refers to the *quadriporticus*; see also Arbeiter 1988, 190f.

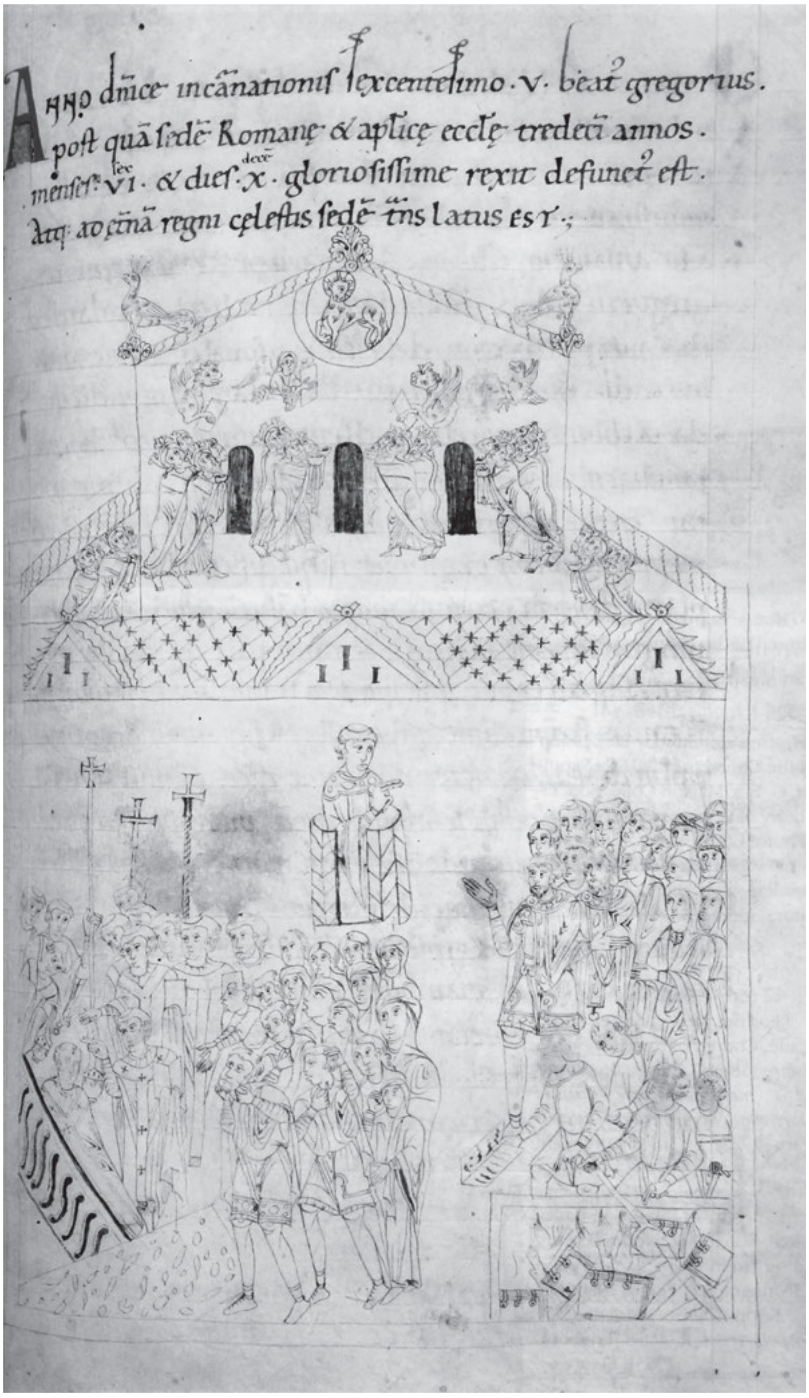

Fig. 1: Image depicting the burial of Gregory the Great from the 11th-century Codex Farfensis (Eton College Library, Ms. 124, fol. 122r).

which the whole space would take on eventually, with the fountain in the middle of the courtyard serving as a ritual lavatory and the surrounding roofed porches as lodgings for pilgrims.[35]

So much for the open space of the *quadriporticus* directly in front of St. Peter's basilica, but what about the *secretarium* at its southern edge, where Leo I and several of his successors had initially been buried? Contrary to what Leo's seventh-century epitaph asserts, the sacristy was actually far more public than the inscription suggested. Judging from the available source material, the edifice served as a repository for liturgical instruments, books and paraments, where the officiants would gather to put on their liturgical vestments.[36] Because of its purpose as a place of assembly, the structure, over time, took on new meaning, for example as a venue for church councils. However, the earliest Roman liturgical *ordo* gives ample proof that access to the sacristy was by no means restricted to the ordained few. On the feast days of Holy Week, the lay chamberlain (*cubicularius laicus*) was to carry the pope's chair into the sacristy, and while the deacons, after the bishop's arrival, had to leave and dress up outside, the papal officials were allowed to stay within the room.[37] Now, since the time of Gregory I, the latter may have ideally belonged to the clerical ranks, but at least from the ninth, if not already from the eighth century onwards, the prestigious administrative positions lay firmly within the hands of the higher nobility, which, of course, is equally true for the most important ecclesiastical offices.[38] Consequently, even those spaces, which were instrumental for the execution of the sacramental powers of the clergy, could be accessed by laics.[39]

From Leo I up until the beginning of the eighth century, that is for more than two hundred years, papal tombs and the corresponding commemorative inscriptions spread all over the doorsteps of the Vatican basilica, until they eventually began to penetrate the interior of the church. With two, if not three possible translocations, the memory of Boniface IV and the fate of his mortal remains amply illustrate the challenges in reconstructing this process. Once again, the topographical information provided by Petrus Mallius in his *descriptio basilica Vaticana* is difficult to make sense of, but luckily the above-mentioned second epitaph of Boniface IV provides some clues as to the events surrounding the posthumous remembrance of the most revered early medieval popes (Fig. 2).[40] Although the inscription explicitly praises the efforts of Gregory IV in recovering the bones of Boniface IV, the epitaph has variably been

35 Blaauw 1994, 465, 530.

36 Borgolte 1989, 91f.

37 *Les Ordines romani*, 73–78; Romano 2014, 232–234: Cap. 22–23: *Diebus vero festis* [...] *sellam pontificis cubicularius laicus praecedens deportat, ut parata sit dum in sacrario venerit*. Cap. 32: *Nam, egredientibus diaconibus de secretario, remanent cum pontifice primicerius, secundicerius, primicerius defensorum, notarii regionarii, defensores regionarii* [...].

38 Cf. Wickham 2014, 188f with a slightly different emphasis than Noble 1984, 212–230.

39 On the general participation of laics in the Roman mass see Romano 2014, 54–62.

40 Silvagni 1943, table II, no. 5.

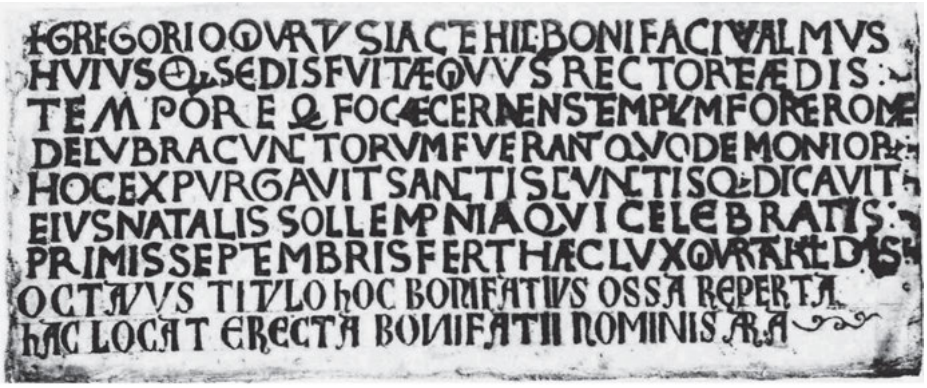

Fig. 2: Rome, St. Peter, Epitaph for Boniface IV with double inscription.

ascribed to Gregory V (996–999), Gregory VI (1045–46) or even Calixtus II (1119–1124) on the basis of its metrical style and palaeographical features.[41] The consistent rhyme of the leonine verse indeed strongly suggests a twelfth-century origin of the inscription, meaning that, at that time, but with reference to ninth-century events, something must have happened to the corporal remains of Boniface IV.[42]

Indeed, there is another inscription, this one from S. Maria in Cosmedin, which corroborates this hypothesis, recording that an arm relic of Boniface IV had been deposited in the altar of the church in connection with its dedication in 1123.[43] Yet, while the main body of text of this second inscription seems to indicate that Calixtus II had been responsible for the most recent elevation of Boniface's *corpus*, he actually had no hand in the renewed *inventio*, because the first line– somewhat isolated from the rest of the inscription and possibly appended using the free space at the top of the slab – identifies Calixtus' predecessor Gelasius II (1118–1119) as the donor of the relics.[44] Thus, it would seem that sometime towards the end of the first quarter of the twelfth century, either during the pontificate of Calixtus II, when the altar of S. Maria in Cosmedin was officially consecrated, or probably even a few years earlier, when Gelasius II had raised parts of the body of his revered predecessor Boniface IV, an epitaph in memory of the saintly bishop had been erected in the Vatican basilica of St. Peter, which epigraphically accredited Gregory IV with the initial translocation of Boniface's relics. Curiously, however, neither Gelasius II nor Calixtus II had their name inscribed and remembered in the process, not to mention that the epitaph of

41 De Rossi 1888, 211; Picard 1969, 763f.; Ladner 1970, 310; Borgolte 1989, 77.

42 Garms/Sommerlechner/Telesko 1994, 140 and in general Bayer 1990; I am grateful to Prof. Tino Licht and Dr. Kirsten Wallenwein from the Department for Medieval Latin at Heidelberg University for sharing their expertise in analysing the epitaph of Boniface IV.

43 Silvagni 1943, table XXV, no. 1.

44 Forcella 1874, 305, no. 742: *INFRASCRIPTORVM PIA SACRA PATROCINIORVM GELASIVS IVSTVS DEDIT ISTIC PAPA SECVNDVS* [...]. On this point see Riccioni 2000, 143–146.

Boniface IV lacks the visual qualities and artistic expertise of other Roman or papal inscriptions attributable to the 1120s/1130s.[45]

At the turn of the fourteenth century, when the eponymous Boniface VIII (1294–1303) transferred the relics of Boniface IV to his own *sacellum*, the funerary slab was used for a second time. More precisely, Boniface VIII simply added two lines to the already existing inscription in commemoration of the altar he dedicated to Boniface IV.[46]

Interestingly, this reconfiguration of the funerary micro-landscape of St. Peter's, that is the development towards single papal oratories spread over the interior of the church triggered by John VII (705–707) and his famous personal chapel in the basilica's northern nave, did not harm the integrity of the narthex as a memorial and epigraphical space.[47] After all, both John the Deacon and Petrus Mallius were able to, first, identify the original location of the graves of Leo I, Gregory I and other popes long after their transferral into the church, and, second, read the corresponding epitaphs, which obviously continued to serve as visible fulcrums of remembrance, presumably because the inscriptions had been left untouched.[48] The late ninth and tenth centuries, moreover, witnessed the return to a clustered, if not collective episcopal *memoria* in the narthex of St. Peter's.[49] At a time when Rome was afflicted by fierce intra-curial conflicts, the portico thus enjoyed somewhat of a comeback as part of an epigraphic reappropriation of sorts. With different clerical factions seeking to communicate their opposing claims to the public, funerary inscriptions were once again consciously placed near and in-between the portals of the church, at eye-level in fact, for the space above the doors was occupied by a depiction of a series of church councils.[50]

A complementary glance at the situation in the basilica of St. John Lateran reveals close parallels between the two most important places of papal representation in medieval Rome as regards the interplay between memory, ritual and epigraphy. At the turn of the second Christian millennium, the city's cathedral slowly evolved into an alternative burial place for the bishops of Rome, and analogous to the situation in the *basilica Vaticana*, the first papal tombs and epitaphs erected in the Lateran basilica, those of Sylvester II (999–1003) and Sergius IV (1009–1012), were located and displayed in the narthex of the church.[51] Thus, the portico of the *basilica Salvatoris*, which – judging from the available twelfth-century liturgical sources – figured just as prominent in the city's stationary liturgy as that of Old St. Peter's, assumed additional

45 Compare Silvagni 1943, table II, no. 5 to table XXIV, no. 1f. and table XXV.

46 De Rossi/Silvagni 1935, 27f., no. 4159: [...] *OCTAVVS TITVLO HOC BONIFATIVS OSSA REPERTA / HAC LOCAT ERECTA BONIFATII NOMINIS ARA*. Cf. Paravicini Bagliani 1997, 208.

47 On John VII and the following century of papal burials see Borgolte 1989, 94–101 and Ballardini/Pogliani 2013, 190–213.

48 Picard 1969, 763 with regard to the case of Gregory I.

49 Borgolte 1989, 119–126.

50 Cf. Zöller 2019, 87–92.

51 Zöller 2019, 101–104.

functions as a commemorative funerary space.[52] Famously, the porch housed the *sedes stercorata*, the marble chair used – at least from the end of the eleventh century onwards – as a ritual throne of the pope during the ceremonies surrounding his inauguration into office.[53] Due to its dedication to the saviour, the Lateran basilica also served as the setting for the papal liturgy during some of the most important feast days of the church year, such as Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday and Holy Saturday. Just like in St. Peter's, the pope, together with the cardinals and deacons, would dress up in the sacristy annexed to the portico at its southernmost extremity in preparation of the divine service. Meanwhile, all the other participants waited outside in anticipation of the solemn opening of the mass, which took shape as a festive introit guiding the congregation from the narthex towards the main altar.[54] Evidently, the beginning of these and other offices was carefully staged in the immediate vicinity of the entrance to the church, much to the advantage of the memory of Sylvester II and Sergius IV, whose epitaphs received a great amount of publicity in this specific topological and praxeological context.

Considering the exact position of the Lateran complex within the topography of the city, with its façade facing away from the city to the east, it may be questioned, however, in how far the inscriptions of the narthex were exposed to a wider audience on a daily basis.[55] At least during the later Middle Ages there is evidence to suggest that the Lateran basilica could also be entered from the west, i. e. from the northern part of the transept, where fourteenth-century sources refer to a portal facing the square located to the north-west of the church.[56] Yet, even earlier, i. e. at the turn of the thirteenth-century, pope Boniface VIII had already ordered for his loggia of benediction to be erected in the very same direction, so as to perform blessings as well as promulgate papal decrees while overlooking the *campus Lateranensis*, the commercial and judicial centre of the whole district.[57] By that time, however, papal tomb monuments and epitaphs of the twelfth century were to be found inside the Lateran basilica proper. Still, the place of the eastern entrance in the ritual life of the city was firmly 'inscribed' in the liturgical cycle of the Roman church, despite all deficits brought about by structural and architectural changes to the layout of the Lateran complex.

In conclusion, microscopic investigations into the epigraphic record of papal burials demonstrate that funerary inscriptions of Roman bishops were intricately woven into the material fabric and cultural practices which defined and constituted their immediate spatial and social environment. They were, moreover, consciously located

52 On the narthex of the Lateran Basilica see Herklotz 1989.

53 Gussone 1978, 251–289; on the *inthronisatio* of the pope in the twelfth century see also Schimmelpfennig 1968 and Schimmelpfennig 1970.

54 On the liturgical role of the narthex see Herklotz 1989, 45–48.

55 Cf. Krautheimer 1996, 356.

56 Claussen/Jäggi/Mondini 2008, 156–160.

57 Gandolfo 1999; Kessler/Zacharias 2000, 28–33; Herklotz 1985.

in such a way that not only clerics and monks were able to see and take notice of them, just like the papal building inscriptions on the ninth-century fortifications around the proto-urban quarters of St. Peter's and St. Paul's situated beyond the Aurelian walls.[58] Judging from surviving examples and epigraphic fragments, medieval papal epitaphs additionally followed a standardized pattern.[59] The texts were engraved into marble slabs, preferably of an oblong, rectangular format, and in terms of layout (mise-en-page) due attention was paid to even alignment and balanced proportions. For centuries, the script was consistently made up of square, capital letters, almost completely devoid of decorations, enclaves or abbreviations and thus relatively easy to decipher. All of this reinforced the impression of a monumental, venerable appearance, recalling the famous eulogies of pope Damasus (366–384) and his epigraphic legacy, all while creating a visual language, or graphic code, which transcended the level of subtle palaeographical referencing.

Far removed from the individualized sepulchral sculpture of the later Middle Ages, papal funerary inscriptions, up until the thirteenth century, collectively transformed naves, aisles and porticoes into hallways crowded with oversized, uniform text monuments, where very few locations stood out architecturally. The narthex in front of the Vatican Basilica, conceived of as a public space, essentially functioned as a gallery, a place to be traversed mostly, where clerics and laics, visitors and incumbents alike, would pass by a long series of office holders before reaching the resting place of the very first in line, Peter himself. Along the way of processions and liturgical routes, the funerary inscriptions were the only recognizable markers which helped to locate the exact spot where his successors lay buried, for any related sarcophagi were very probably sunk into the ground below the marble pavement in order to guarantee the free passage through the porch.[60] This is also what seems to be depicted in John the Deacon's life of Gregory the Great from the Codex Farfensis (Fig. 1). In this specific setting, the physical and graphic qualities of the papal epitaphs underscored the spatial configuration of the place. With their material attributes, they turned the portico into a veritable lapidarium, where inscribed artefacts of similar size and shape were carefully exhibited and where epigraphic uniformity was ultimately deployed for the visualization and monumentalisation of one central dogmatic principle of the medieval papacy, namely that of a collective group of successors absorbed into a transpersonal, timeless institution.

58 Cf. Dietl 2017.
59 Zöller 2022.
60 Blaauw 1994, 580; Herklotz, 129f.

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Fig. 1: Blaauw 2011, fig. 9.
Fig. 2: Silvagni 1943, table II, no. 5.