

## ABSTRACT

Sarcophagi in Context:

Identifying the Missing Sarcophagus of Helena in the Mausoleum of Constantina

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The Mausoleum of Constantina and Helena in Rome once held two sarcophagi, but the second has never been properly identified. Using the decoration in the mausoleum and recent archaeological studies, this thesis identifies the probable design of the second sarcophagus. This reconstruction is confirmed by a fragment in the Istanbul Museum, which belonged to the lost sarcophagus. This is contrary to the current misattribution of the fragment to the sarcophagus of Constantine. This is only the third positively identified imperial sarcophagus recovered in Constantinople.

This identification corrects misconceptions about both the design of the mausoleum and the history of the fragment itself. Using this identification, this thesis will also posit that an altar was originally placed in the mausoleum, a discovery central in correcting misconceptions about the 4<sup>th</sup> century imperial liturgy. Finally, it will posit that the decorative scheme of the mausoleum was not random, but was carefully thought out in connection to the imperial funerary liturgy itself.

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SARCOPHAGI IN CONTEXT:  
IDENTIFYING THE MISSING SARCOPHAGUS OF HELENA IN THE  
MAUSOLEUM OF CONSTANTINA

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of  
Baylor University  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Honors Program

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May 2016

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project has lasted for three years, and involved the help and support of many mentors and friends. I would therefore like to begin by thanking Dr. Nathan Elkins, who first set me on the scent of the mausoleum and has been a constant help and support through multiple papers, presentations, and drafts. Classical art has become a central part of my life, and I am immensely glad that I took Greek Pottery in Freshman Year.

I would also like to thank the professors in the Classics Department that have mentored me through college, especially Dr. Alden Smith, who was an incredible advisor, and Dr. Meghan DiLuzio, who taught me through the lows and highs of Latin and assisted me in research. I also thank Dr. Simon Burris and Dr. Timothy Heckenlively who taught me Greek, and Dr. Heidi J. Hornik, who was a reader for this thesis.

I would like to thank Walker Bailey, Kara Kopchinski, Kelsey Bell, Amy Gamez, and Amy Welch. They, along with a larger group of friends at the HRC, have been a constant support. I also thank the community at St. Peter's, friends who have corrected paradigms and supported my vocation; especially Fr. Daniel, a mentor and father.

I would like to thank my family, especially my parents who flew to AIA to see me present. Also, St. Agnes and St. Gemma both deserve mentioning. Finally, Megan, my fiancé, who helped me in every stage, and who on St. Agnes' Eve agreed to marry me.

Special thanks also to the guard who let me lie underneath the sarcophagus, and the German family that pretended they knew no English so their daughter could take pictures of it from her father's shoulders.

To Megan, who met me as this project was beginning, and has seen it through to its end.

There are many happy years ahead.

## INTRODUCTION

On the Via Nomentana in Rome lies the complex of buildings of Sant' Agnese fuore le Mura. It consists of a community center, a church office, a convent, and a basilica, all connected by catacombs that run beneath the site (Plate 1:1; 1:2). The most ancient extant building is a small central-plan building called Santa Costanza, constructed in the mid-4th century. An ambulatory runs around the central dome, separated by a colonnade, punctuated by two side apses and a central apse. This church holds some of the best-preserved early Christian mosaics, and at one time held the porphyry relief sarcophagus of Constantina, now displayed in the Vatican Museums. The church's particular history and design are not well understood and are hotly debated: in fact, scholarship has become increasingly certain that a second sarcophagus rested somewhere in the mausoleum, but is split over what it looked like and where it was placed.

This thesis re-examines the building as a whole and, by taking into account new evidence, proposes a new history, design, and liturgical purpose for the building. In the first chapter, beginning with a review of the textual, epigraphic, and material evidence concerning the history of the mausoleum, I will briefly summarize evolving scholarship on the origin of the mausoleum altogether, and the place of the sarcophagi within it. This will reveal a number of startling contradictions between assumptions in scholarship and the evidence itself.

Next, in the second chapter I will address one of the central forgotten elements of the mausoleum, an altar that was recorded in multiple sources, but has not been considered in the scholarship of the mausoleum itself. The evidence will suggest that this

altar was placed in the central apse where the sarcophagus replica now stands, which means that the original design of the mausoleum did not intend for the sarcophagus to be placed there, but elsewhere. This also fundamentally changes how the mausoleum is interpreted: even if the altar was only used once, it makes the syncretistic Dionysian decoration not an idle Christian fancy, but purposeful decoration.

In the third chapter, I will identify the side apses of the mausoleum as the probable original location of the two sarcophagi. Similarities in decoration and design, aided by more recent archaeological excavations at the site, strongly indicate that these were intended to be the permanent locations for the sarcophagi. This will solve the problems of abrupt transition in the design of the various mosaics, bringing into intelligible cohesion the whole program of mosaics and design of the mausoleum.

Finally, in chapter four I will address the identity of the second sarcophagus. Most scholarship which addresses the issue has currently favored a “bath-tub” sarcophagus, apparently now located below the St. Joseph altar of St. Peter’s Basilica. I will discuss why this sarcophagus was probably not original to the mausoleum, and then propose an alternative: a sarcophagus designed to be identical to Constantina’s, which was removed to Constantinople within a century of having reached the mausoleum. This sarcophagus is not theoretical, but is still partially extant today as a fragment in the Istanbul Museum.

By reconsidering the placement of the sarcophagi in relation to the mosaic program and structure of the mausoleum, the chapel can be more fully understood as a dual mausoleum for two imperial sisters, Constantina and Helena, and as a building intended for the Christian funerary liturgy. This will help scholarship more fully



understand a building that has long been a textbook example for Late Antiquity, but severely misunderstood.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Epigraphic, Textual, and Material Evidence, and Previous Scholarship

Santa Costanza, which can also be called the Mausoleum of Constantina, is attested in textual records surprisingly well. While it is an archaeologically significant building, its role in history is not as great as that of the Mausoleum of Julian or the Mausoleum of St. Helen, both of which have less detailed textual evidence. This makes the textual evidence for the mausoleum all the more fortunate. These records do not, however, go back to the site's history before Constantina. Archaeological excavations have confirmed that the Via Nomentana complex was home to an extensive system of catacombs, begun before the death of St. Agnes in 304 CE.<sup>1</sup> As with other catacombs, it was built to meet the needs of a society increasingly demanding inhumation in place of cremation. When St. Agnes was interred there, it was adopted by Christians for burial, so that the catacomb system became associated with the saint. By the time Christianity was legalized, it was the center of her cult.<sup>2</sup>

When the imperial family converted to Christianity during the reign of Constantine, each member of the family adopted particular devotions: Constantine had his twelve apostles, Helena her True Cross. His daughter Constantina evidently adopted St. Agnes (*Liber Pontificalis*, Silvester: 21). Numerous sources indicate her interment at

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<sup>1</sup> Frutaz 1969: 213.

<sup>2</sup> Frutaz 1969.

the Via Nomentana site and mention that Constantine constructed a large funerary basilica there on her behalf in his brief building spree in Rome.<sup>3</sup>

Constantine constructed this basilica as a *coemeterium* basilica: on certain feasts, especially the feast of St. Agnes, the gigantic *basilica maior* was used to accommodate the enormous crowds the liturgy drew. It was paired with a *basilica minor*, built over the saint's remains and used throughout the year.<sup>4</sup> In addition, the *coemeterium* doubled as a burial place for Christians. In *coemeteria*, the poor were buried in the aisles, radiating from the center. At first, the rich were also buried in the aisles, but later many wealthy donors commissioned small mausolea that radiated off the central basilica.<sup>5</sup> Santa Costanza is an example of such a mausoleum. The Mausoleum of Constantina may be the only appended structure found at St. Agnes, but other *coemeteria* such as San Lorenzo are dotted with mausolea of various sizes. These basilicae were constructed for all the major saints of Rome: Laurence, Marcellinus and Peter, Lucy, and Cecilia.<sup>6</sup>

There is significant textual evidence to support that Constantine commissioned the basilica. The *Liber Pontificalis* records that “at the same time he [Constantine] built a basilica for the Holy Martyr Agnes at the asking of his own daughter, and a baptistery in the same place, where his sister Constantia with the daughter of the Augustus were

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<sup>3</sup> The *Liber Pontificalis*, *Res Gestae* of Ammianus Marcellinus, and basilica epigraph are the most notable sources. However, the popular medieval devotion to “Santa Costanza” or “St. Constance” produced many more sources throughout the Medieval Period which are most comprehensively collected in the *Acta Sanctorum*.

<sup>4</sup> Krautheimer 1967: 129.

<sup>5</sup> Bardill 2012: 240.

<sup>6</sup> Krautheimer 1983: 23.

baptized by Bishop Silvester.”<sup>7</sup> The first figure mentioned, Constantia, was the sister of Constantine and has no later connection with the mausoleum. The *filia Augusti* demands further inquiry. Constantine had two daughters, therefore the daughter here is either Helena or Constantina. While it is difficult to decide which sister *filia Augusti* refers to, the site has a long association with Constantina, and the passage does appear to cement this. Constantina was also the elder sister of Helena and had a long patronage of the complex later in life recorded in the *Liber Pontificalis* (*Liber Pontificalis*, Liberius: 28-29), which also suggests her to be the more likely a candidate. The first passage tells us a few things. First, that Constantine built both a baptistery and a basilica, motivated by his daughter’s request. Second, the same daughter was baptized with her aunt at the site.

Ammianus Marcellinus, in a passage that will be critical to the rest of this argument, further supports the association with Constantina when he briefly describes the burial of Julian’s wife Helena, the sister of Constantina, and also references the location of Constantina’s interment: “While these games were going on [Julian] had sent to Rome the remains of his deceased wife Helena, to be laid to rest in his villa near the city on the via Nomentana, where also her sister Constantina, formerly the wife of Gallus, was buried” (XXI.5).<sup>8</sup> The villa referred to is the entire imperial property on the Via Nomentana, the swath of land on which the *coemeterium* basilica was built and the catacombs still

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<sup>7</sup>“Eodem tempore fecit basilicam sanctae martyris Agnae ex rogatu filiae suae et baptisterium in eodem loco, ubi et baptizata est soror eius Constantina cum filia Augusti a Siluestrio episcopo.” The translation is my own. Silvester: 21.

<sup>8</sup>“Inter quae Helenae coniugis defunctae suprema miserat Romam, in suburbano viae Nomentanae condenda, ubi uxor quoque Galli quondam (soror eius) sepulta est Constantina.” The translation is from the 1950 Loeb Edition (JC).

operated. This source, with the *Liber Pontificalis*, indicates not only that Constantina was baptized at the site, but that she was also buried there with her sister Helena.

Finally, there is a long epigraph composed by Prudentius that was in the apse of the funerary basilica until at least the time of Pope Honorius I (625-638), when he repaired it. It was rediscovered more recently in fragments in the atrium of the basilica.<sup>9</sup>

C onstantina, Deum venerans, Christoque dicata,  
O mnibus impensis devota mente paratis  
N umine divino multum Christoque iuvante  
S acravit templus victricis virginis Agnes  
T emplorum quod vincit opus terrenaque cuncta  
A ureique rutilant summi fastigia tecti  
N omen enim Christi celebratur sedibus istis  
T artaream solus potui qui vincere mortem  
I nvectus caelo, solusque in ferre triumphum  
N omen adhuc referens et corpus et omnia membra  
A mortis tenebris et caeca nocte levata  
D ignum igitur munus, Martyr devotaque Christo  
E x opibus nostris per saecula longa tenebis

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<sup>9</sup> *Acta Sanctorum*, XVIII February: S. Constantina et al: 22. and Ringbom 2003: 29 and Visser 2000: 174. “Constantina, venerating God, devoted to Christ / you prepared all expenses with a pious mind, / the divine Mind and Christ rejoicing much, / The temple of the victorious Virgin Agnes was consecrated / which conquers the make of the temples and other earthly things / and the peaks of the golden roof shines / For the Name of Christ is celebrated at these seats / “I alone who was able to conquer Tartarean death / having reached heaven, alone to bear in triumph / thus carrying the Name, I alone am able to bear both body and all limbs / from the darkness of Death and the blind lifted night. / Therefore the gift is worthy, a Martyr devoted to Christ, / from all our works, through the long ages you will hold, / O happy Virgin, Agnes of the name remembered!” The translation is my own.

O felix virgo, memorandi nominis Agnes!

It describes in detail the process of the basilica's construction by Constantina with much florid language describing the donated golden decorations and contributed vessels that made the basilica magnificent. These works are seen to contribute to her own salvation, and are portrayed as central in her own piety. The initial letters of the fourteen lines in the inscription spell "CONSTANTINA DEO", denoting what the poem extrapolates on: how the mausoleum is the gift of Constantina to God. From these three sources the Via Nomentana complex, specifically the basilica, can be connected directly with Constantina.

By the 7<sup>th</sup> century, the old basilica was in such disrepair that attempts to renovate it were abandoned, and a new basilica was built this time over St. Agnes' remains, which is the one extant today. The entirety of the old *coemeterium* basilica was not abandoned. There was a round building on the left side of the basilica that is preserved today as its own church. For a long time, it incorrectly was believed to be the baptistery referenced in the *Liber Pontificalis*, a misconception which was corrected after the 1992 excavations.<sup>10</sup> This church is presently known as Santa Costanza.

These excavations in 1992 revealed that Santa Costanza's brickwork was grafted onto the remaining brickwork of the basilica: the mausoleum had been constructed later and added on to the basilica.<sup>11</sup> Deeper foundations of a small tri-conch were discovered underneath it, possibly indicating the original baptistery constructed at the same time as

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<sup>10</sup> For example, Ferrua 1977: 281.

<sup>11</sup> Stanley 1994: 259.

the basilica.<sup>12</sup> This discovery complicates the interpretation of the site. The original basilica itself was associated with Constantina and Constantine, as has been proven. The baptistery that is referenced in the *Liber Pontificalis* was associated with Constantina. But this church, which held the burials of Constantina and Helena, does not appear in the historical record, except in Ammianus Marcellinus, whose previous reference to Constantina and Helena's burial place may have obliquely referred to it.

While his reference is not direct, its context suggests that it does intend to point towards the mausoleum: there are only two recorded imperial burials and only one mausoleum on the Via Nomentana.<sup>13</sup> The patron of the building is not as easy to discern. If Santa Costanza was added to the basilica after Constantine's reign, the mausoleum was commissioned by a different imperial patron. Estimates based on the style of the brickwork date Santa Costanza to between 350 and 400 CE.<sup>14</sup> If Constantina was interred at the site, as seems likely, it was probably completed by 354 CE, when she died, or shortly after.<sup>15</sup> This would have allowed her interment, with a space preserved for Helena, who died in 361 CE. This allows two serious contenders for the chief imperial patron: Julian or Constantius II. Evidence on either side is scarce: Ammianus in the previously quoted passage states that Helena, the sister of Constantine and wife of Julian, was buried at the same place as Constantina. Whether the added mausoleum was Julian's handiwork while he was in Rome or Constantius' as a gift for his sisters is beyond the

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<sup>12</sup> Mackie 2003: 145.

<sup>13</sup> Johnson 2009: 199-218. Contains two indices that organize every recorded and suspected imperial burial from Caracalla to Anastasius.

<sup>14</sup> Ringbom 2003: 33.

<sup>15</sup> Stanley 1994: 60. proposes this dating.

reach of current evidence.<sup>16</sup> Nonetheless, it is clear that the mausoleum was built after the basilica and thus necessitates treatment as a separate building. This archaeological and textual evidence provides the basis for the interpretation of the mausoleum and will be the touchstones both for my own arguments and those that I respond to.

In fact, the mausoleum has been the subject of much intense scholarship since the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The history of the mausoleum's interpretation shed light on assumptions made by scholars today and reveals what pieces of information in both text and decoration scholars have ignored while studying the mausoleum.

Up until the 16<sup>th</sup> century, it was treated as the associated side chapel and former baptistry of the Via Nomentana complex, with an elaborate medieval legend concerning the sainted Constantia who commissioned it.<sup>17</sup> The influx of artists in the 16<sup>th</sup> century ascribed a different story to the mausoleum, largely ignoring the legend. The artists who frequented the mausoleum preferred instead to interpret it purely by its own decoration, which was primarily Dionysian, as a fantastic Bacchic temple in a romantic fantasy. Later, an ecclesiastical interpretation was reasserted, arguing that it was a church with catechetical decoration in the same vein and construction as Maria Maggiore or John Lateran.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> This has not stopped some scholars, such as Mackie 2003: 146-147 who was subsequently contradicted by Kleinbauer 2006: 135-136. In both cases, very little evidence is provided to support either Julian or Constantius II as the patron. This appears to be the tact taken by Holloway 2003: 104.

<sup>17</sup> This story is found at the end of St. Agnes' entry in the *Golden Legend*, but the full scholarly treatment can be found in the February 18<sup>th</sup> entry in the *Acta Sanctorum*, which has never been surpassed in thoroughness. This legend has been repudiated by the parish community today, which very clearly no longer identifies her as a saint.

<sup>18</sup> The main characters in this drama around the mausoleum are the Flemish Bacchants and the rector Ugonio. Holloway 2003: 101. provides the most elaborate retelling.



For the artists of the Italian Renaissance, Santa Costanza was a ‘pagan’ temple to Bacchus, taken over by Christians who had hastily colonized it.<sup>19</sup> Even the scholarly hagiography, *Acta Sanctorum*, posits this.<sup>20</sup> The Temple of Vesta and Temple of Hercules were both extant types for ‘pagan’ temples that allowed such a comparison. The shape of the mausoleum posed another problem: it was round with an ambulatory, as imperial mausolea were by necessity. There were no examples of entirely round Christian churches (not counting the numerous examples of octagonal churches such as San Vitale in Ravenna or the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem), but some of the best-preserved ‘pagan’ temples of Rome are built in a circular form.

This was also certainly supported by the varying quality of different parts of the mosaics: the 6<sup>th</sup>-century mosaics in the side apses of the mausoleum are far inferior to the ambulatory mosaics and were probably similarly outdone by the dome mosaics. It was reasonable to suppose that the Dionysian decoration of the ambulatory and dome, being less ‘Christian’ and of less quality, must have been pre-Christian in origin, even though the history of the mausoleum as it is now understood precludes that. This idolization of truly classical forms as superior to medieval forms among Renaissance artists is exemplified by Michelangelo, who on a moment’s notice went on pilgrimage to see the tomb of St. Guido, not for spiritual assistance but to observe the figures on the saint’s

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<sup>19</sup> Holloway 2003: 100. Gathers together the various Italians who specifically identify it as a Bacchic temple in the Renaissance. One of the final hold-outs identifying the mausoleum as ‘pagan’ was Karl Lehmann in 1955. Lehmann 1955: 193-196 even posits a *Res Gestae Bacchae* against Ugonio’s Christian interpretation of the dome’s various scenes. After the subsequent archaeological excavations, this opinion has been clearly disproven.

<sup>20</sup> *Acta Sanctorum*, XVIII February: S. Constantina et al: 19.

recycled Roman sarcophagus.<sup>21</sup> Santa Costanza was treated as a gold mine for artists who were similarly motivated, trying to find a truly classical, ‘pagan’ base from which, from their perspective, Christian art had shamefully fallen short.

Because of this, all the great Renaissance notebooks have depictions of the ambulatory, with the *Codex Escorialensis* having the most famous cross-section that preserved in outline the drum decoration (Plate 5:28).<sup>22</sup> The romantic idea of traveling to the bucolic Bacchic temple, the singular survivor of the iconoclasm of Christianity, was a powerful and appealing idyll which the complex tolerated with dismay. When a secret society formed that broke into the church during the night to perform Bacchic orgies, the church decided something had to be done by censoring the activity.<sup>23</sup> The rector Pomponio Ugonio, a priest with classical interests, set about re-examining the iconography of the mausoleum.<sup>24</sup> Focusing on the dome, he observed that its iconography was being ignored in favor of aesthetics. If the pictures were viewed as actual scenes and not simply artistic follies, they clearly represented Biblical scenes. He was the first to interpret the entire structure as a Christian baptistery.<sup>25</sup> Drawing on the *Liber Pontificalis*, he established a new narrative for the building: it was the baptistery of Constantina, which became later her mausoleum as well.

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<sup>21</sup> Zanker 2004: 8.

<sup>22</sup> Ringbom 2003: 30.

<sup>23</sup> Holloway 2004: 101.

<sup>24</sup> Rasch 2007 contains scans, transcription, and translation of Ugonio’s notebooks, along with the small sketches he produced.

<sup>25</sup> Holloway 2004: 100-102.

This is not to suggest that the “pagan temple” narrative did not survive long past the Renaissance. As late as 1955, scholars were still proposing evidence in favor of a ‘pagan’ origin for the basilica,<sup>26</sup> and until at least the late 1960s, it was still a common viewpoint to suggest (if also to disagree with) in books referencing the mausoleum.<sup>27</sup> The church of Santa Costanza understandably posed a conundrum for the Renaissance viewer. Since Ugonio’s research, only a handful of serious proposals have been made connecting the church with a Bacchic temple.

While there is a consistent flow of engravings depicting the mausoleum in the centuries after Ugonio’s research, the next major contributor to scholarship concerning the mausoleum was the great catacomb explorer Giovanni Battista de Rossi.<sup>28</sup> He considered not only the building but also the sarcophagus of Constantina, the large porphyry relief sarcophagus that had stood in the mausoleum for centuries. Therefore, he was the first to treat it as a combined mausoleum and baptistery. He also believed the mausoleum was originally a baptistery, bringing in the misreading of the *Liber Pontificalis*, as well as mistaken archaeology in the crypt and drawing comparisons with the Lateran baptistery. Therefore, he proposed a font in the center with the sarcophagus in the central apse. Based on numerous engravings and early photos, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, he would have found the sarcophagus in the central apse (Plate 5:29; 1:5). He conducted the first serious excavations at the site, and believed that he found the original baptistery a

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<sup>26</sup> Lehmann 1955: 291; Even Holloway 2004:104 posits this as fact, clearly relying on older scholarship in a cursory study.

<sup>27</sup> Ie, Oakenshott 1967: 63.

<sup>28</sup> Ringbom 2003: 26-28. Summarizes the full history of the scholarship with a thoroughness absent in every other source.

meter below floor level, with channels to funnel in rainwater. His reconstruction was based heavily on the Lateran baptistery, and later attempted reconstructions would import in wholesale the railings, baptistery, and other elements from the Lateran baptistery without any precedent in Santa Costanza itself (Plate 5:30).

Rudolf Michel published a critique of de Rossi's interpretation in 1912, and pointed out the complete lack of baptismal imagery and excessive imagination in his proposals.<sup>29</sup> Drawing connections between imperial mausolea, Michel suggested that Santa Costanza was built first and foremost as an imperial mausoleum.<sup>30</sup> Curiously throughout all of this, no one, not even de Rossi, realized that the ruins connected with Santa Costanza were the remains of the *coemeterium* basilica. This idea was not seriously proposed until 1946 when Fredrich Wilhelm Deichman published it.<sup>31</sup> His idea was confirmed by excavations in the 1950s at the site.<sup>32</sup>

Up to this point, the mausoleum was universally ascribed to Constantina only. While earlier sources such as the *Acta Sanctorum*, in an entry attempting to catalog exhaustively all known information and references about 'St. Constantina', had referred to the passage from Ammianus that suggested co-patrons for the mausolea, those references had fallen out of scholarship. Even as late as the 1994 excavations at the site, which revealed that the mausoleum was constructed after the basilica, no connection was

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<sup>29</sup> Michel 1912.

<sup>30</sup> Ringbom 2003: 26.

<sup>31</sup> Deichman 1946: 213-234.

<sup>32</sup> Ringbom 2003: 26. Deichmann 1946 records the specific findings summarized in Ringbom.

made between the mausoleum and other patrons.<sup>33</sup> Instead David Stanley, both in separate articles and the dig report itself proposed various locations for Constantina's burial without accounting for Helena or proposing a place for her sarcophagus.

It was not until Gillian Mackie reexamined the building in a survey of early Christian basilicae that Ammianus Marcellinus was reexamined. Mackie proposed that Ammianus answers lingering questions about Santa Costanza that other sources could not: the recurring image of the two faces, the two women crossing the Jordan, twin pillars, twin depressed apses, even twin panels on either side of the ambulatory.<sup>34</sup> Mackie proposed that the mausoleum had been built to contain two imperial burials, those of Constantina and Helena, the two daughters of Constantine. Mackie did not propose a theory for the original locations of the sarcophagi in the mausoleum, and was unwilling to designate positively the design of the second sarcophagus, providing only a brief overview of the issue at hand.<sup>35</sup> A cohort of scholars have since then responded to her analysis and Stanley's discoveries, proposing various theories for the organization of the mausoleum.

The goal of this thesis is to further Mackie's project, by answering a few questions definitively. Where were the sarcophagi placed in the mausoleum? What did the sarcophagus of Helena look like, and where is it now? How do these questions affect the cohesive understanding of the Mausoleum of Constantina and Helena's decoration?

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<sup>33</sup> Stanley 1994: 257-261.

<sup>34</sup> Mackie 2004: 148.

<sup>35</sup> Ringbom 2003; Kleinbauer 2006; Johnson 2009; Rasch 2012; Holloway 2003. These sources also participate in the conversation with Mackie, proposing different answers to the various problems raised by Stanley's discoveries and the reconsideration of textual sources.

Was there a missing liturgical aspect to the space, and how did the Christianization of the imperial funerary liturgy affect its practice?

Before I approach these questions in the following chapters, I will lay out the appearance of the mausoleum as it is pertinent to this study. This will rely on a combination of historical records and the mausoleum's appearance as it is extant today. With this in mind, the arguments to follow will be clearer and can be placed in a visible context.

The mausoleum is built in the style of most other tetrarchic mausolea.<sup>36</sup> The inner dome is surrounded by a lower circular vault, creating a double-core design. Twelve apses geometrically divide the outer wall, and twelve arches hold up the inner ring of the vault. The dome is elevated by a circular clerestory. Similar to most other examples of imperial mausolea, there is a crypt underneath the mausoleum, too small to be used in the same way as the Mausolea of Diocletian or Gordian where a crypt stored a sarcophagus or trophies.<sup>37</sup> Instead, the sarcophagi at the Mausoleum of Constantina and Helena were kept at ground level.<sup>38</sup> Much of the original decoration of the mausoleum has worn away or disappeared due to the effects of its long occupation and use.

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<sup>36</sup> Johnson 2009. deals with this type in detail. In essence, the imperial mausoleum is a round structure, well-lit so as to allow the viewer to see the mausoleum, usually topped with a dome.

<sup>37</sup> which is reached by a stairwell that descends to the catacombs.

<sup>38</sup> This was not usually the case in Tetrarchic mausolea, but it appears to be the case in Hadrian's Mausoleum, the Mausoleum of St. Helen, and in the Apostoleion. This is explored in detail by Johnson 2009.

The dome is 10.5 meters in diameter and 17.0 meters in height.<sup>39</sup> The accompanying faces of the cupola are now undecorated; the other paintings which were added in the late Renaissance have been removed, leaving the brick bare. The Renaissance drawings record the basic scheme of the mausoleum's original decoration. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Dionysian enthusiasts from the Netherlands had a cult centered around the mausoleum (or, from their perspective, the temple) and its sarcophagus. Their engravings of the mausoleum allow us to roughly construct what it looked like before the mosaics were removed.<sup>40</sup>

The register bordering the dome featured a mosaic that depicted marine life with *putti* and fish dancing in a river among rafts and rushes.<sup>41</sup> Large caryatids rose from the supporting tall pillars that divided the mosaic program into twelve wedge-shaped segments (Plate 1:3). These segments each had a lower scene set inside the marine life conceit, paired with a framed picture above it, similar to the Third Style of Pompeian wall painting. After the iconographic investigation of the rector Ugonio, the 24 scenes were read as Old Testament signs of New Testament events and truths, and most of the

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<sup>39</sup> Rasch 2007: ill. 210. Today, it is covered by a painting of the Trinity and saints unrelated to the original design.

<sup>40</sup> The cult was formed of artists from the Netherlands who latched onto the mythical 'pagan' origin of the mausoleum. The mausoleum became a sort of symbol for the lost 'pagan' heritage of Rome, a sort of last complete relic. This culminated in night-time initiations in front of the sarcophagus apparently hailed "The Tomb of Bacchus". Understandably, the rector Ugonio put a stop to this. This also provided the impetus to Ugonio's detailed iconographic investigation. Holloway 2004: 101 and Ringbom 2003: 30.

<sup>41</sup> The *Codex Escorialensis* is one source, the notebooks of Poponio Ugonio another. The latter is present, with complete transcription and translation (into German) in Rasch 2007. Gwynn 2013:29. displays some English drawings, and Wilpert 1976: 47-58. also includes a number of examples.

engravings suggest that this interpretation is probable.<sup>42</sup> Convincing research has shown that the set of images matches closely the *Ordo Commendationis Animae*, a funerary liturgy from a few centuries after the mausoleum's construction.<sup>43</sup> Today these mosaics are obliterated, extant only in engravings.

The drum between the dome and the arches is less well-attested. Most depictions in Renaissance engravings depict a series of polychromatic marble panels with little decoration.<sup>44</sup> It is possible that there were figural scenes, but it is more likely that the lack of detail was meant to draw attention to the dome above. In 1620, a cardinal tore down most of the drum mosaics, now in disrepair, and replaced them with new paintings.<sup>45</sup> Later, in restorations at the site in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Renaissance paintings were taken down except from the dome itself. The drum is now exposed brickwork.

The ambulatory that surrounds the drum holds the only surviving mosaics that originated in the building. The upper vault encircles all of the drum (Plate 1:4; 1:5), except the front, which connects to an elevated and separate apse and tower. The vault is composed of eleven panels, each separated by a barrier of interlocked rings. There are

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<sup>42</sup> Rasch 2007: ill. 97.1 and Kleinbauer 2006: 135. Lehmann 1955: 193-196 specifically bemoans how Ugonio changed the field so completely, and mocked his methods.

<sup>43</sup> Mackie 2003: 147-148. and Sicard 1978: 362-366. The twelve caryatid pillars reach up to a higher register which is itself divided into twelve segments, creating an illusion that the mausoleum continues far upwards. Mackie mentions that Ugonio's account appears to record a boat with the two sisters appearing in this mosaic opposite the entrance. As I have not seen this addressed elsewhere and she highlights the poor quality of Ugonio's records at this point in his manuscript, I have chosen to not address this evidence thoroughly. However, given the portraits in the side panels, it is clear that such an image, if it was present, would be in conversation with Eucharistic imagery, as opposed to the portraits above the side apses. This issue will be explored later.

<sup>44</sup> Krautheimer 1986: 67 and Isabelle *Tombeau de Ste. Constance, vue Restauree* 1855. (Plate 1:5)

<sup>45</sup> Specifically Cardinal Fabrizio Veralli in 1620: Ringbom 2003: 21.



five thematic pairs of panels, and one unique panel that covers the entrance. The vault has one panel of geometric designs centered on the entrance. Pairs flank this panel on either side around the vault, ending at the apse and tower. The ambulatory itself, excluding the vault, was once decorated. None of this decoration is extant today. Like the drum, the only evidence of decoration are the holes in the wall that some scholars have used to reconstruct the outlines of the marble decoration.<sup>46</sup>

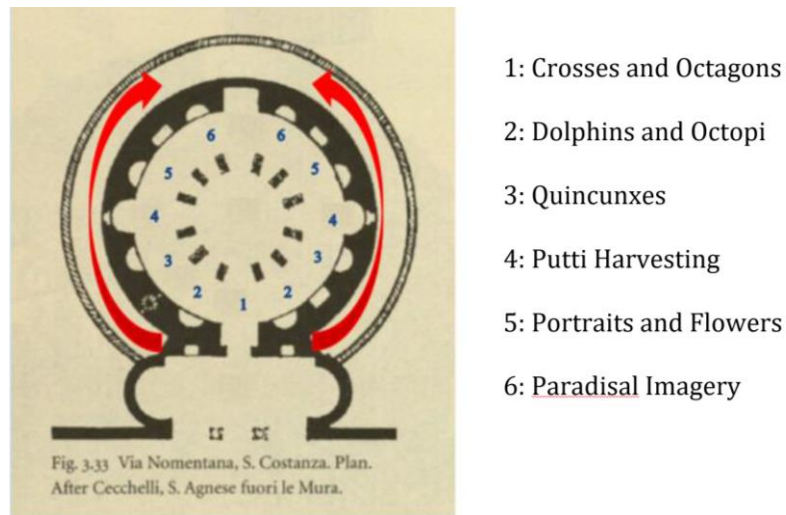


Figure 1: Mosaic Panels Key (Plate 1:4)

The panel overshadowing the entrance is a geometric field of octagons and crosses, each containing thirteen dots (Plate 1:6). In the octagons are four-petal flowers, radiating out. The design is first and foremost geometric and contrasts with the later, more decorative panels. The style appears to have been a popular decoration in 4<sup>th</sup>-

<sup>46</sup> For example, Isabelle 1855 (Plate 5:30), who produced an imaginative reconstruction, or Rasch 2007, who produced a more thoroughly detailed one in the Appendix.

century Early Christian art as it appears at various other sites, the most similar being in the Via Latina catacombs.<sup>47</sup>

The first set of panels repeat this basic cross imagery, in a simple geometric arrangement of stars and diamonds, but with abstract visual imagery (Plate 2:7). The stars are filled in with very small figures meant to resemble four dolphins attacking an octopus (Plate 2:8). The dolphins and octopus symbol is found in other early Christian art and represents Christ's victory over death; they are also obliquely Dionysian.<sup>48</sup>

The second pair of panels are each a field of connected quincunxes, four circles connected to a central circle (Plate 2:9). All of the four outer circles of each quincunx are filled with simple crosses. The center of each quincunx holds a figure, alternating between *putti* and dancing young women, with their feet always facing downwards in the vault (Plate 2:10). The spaces in between the quincunxes are filled with birds. These panels begin to introduce clear visual imagery. The quincunx is a popular and constant symbol in Christian art, representing God's throne and the four beasts, or Christ and the evangelists. The *putti* and young women are additions foreign to that theme.<sup>49</sup> Because of the Dionysian themes elsewhere in the Mausoleum, the female figures most probably represent the bacchantes of Dionysius, and the *putti* are in this case servants of Dionysius, reiterating the Dionysian theme.

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<sup>47</sup> Tranzo 1986: Catalog. and Mackie 2003: 153.

<sup>48</sup> Ringbom 2007: 36-37. The role of the dolphins in defending Bacchus granted them a cultural connection that makes this the first example of a Dionysian undercurrent in the decoration of the chapel that is central to it.

<sup>49</sup> Oakeshott 1967. This source interpreted those figures as Cupid and Psyche, despite this being entirely foreign to both a Dionysian and a Christian decorative scheme.

The birds are more esoteric symbols. Many are identified with Christian symbols of rebirth, especially the partridge and peacock.<sup>50</sup> Specifically, this rebirth is that of Christ's resurrection. The peacock's legendary immortal flesh became gradually associated with the Eucharist. As a symbol, the peacock particularly has an important history. The peacock, as a sign of rebirth and immortality, was associated with female goddesses, specifically Juno. It was associated with imperial women, also at the time of their death and deification, as the counterpart to the Eagle of Jupiter for emperors. This makes it a symbol doubly fitting for a Christian woman in the imperial family; it is natural that this same symbol appeared on the sarcophagus of Constantina itself. Lastly, the mosaics of the chapel have also been compared to the Palestrina "Nile" mosaics, which uses birds as simple visual decoration.<sup>51</sup> This comparison highlights that it is important to balance interpreting the symbolism of the panels with the aesthetic appeal of a river scene that would have little iconographic significance. While there is iconography with intentional meaning within the panels, the simple appeal of a generic river scene cannot be discounted here.

The third pair of panels is the symbolic center of the vault's Dionysian imagery. The panels mirror one another. In the right corners of each panel there is an idyllic four pillared gazebo, really a fermenting vat, with three young men, commonly identified as *putti*, trampling grapes (Plate 2:10; 2:11). They all hold curved rods, and one holds up a snake. In the left corners of each panel, one *putto*, carrying the same curved rod, hunches over with a basket of grapes on his back. Another *putto* looking back at the others leads

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<sup>50</sup> Mackie 2003: 152.

<sup>51</sup> Mackie 2003: 148.

an ox-cart carrying grapes across to the fermenting vat. All these *putti* are realistically clothed in tunics or loincloths. This scene is on both the panel's inner and outer border of the vault; they are divided in the middle by interlacing grape vines, entwining with each other around a central portrait. Various birds are perched in the vines, and naked *putti* run about with the same curved rods to cut bunches of grapes.<sup>52</sup> The *putti* joyfully trample grapes and hold snakes. Dionysian tradition has Jupiter presenting his son with a crown of snakes; therefore the snake identifies something of a vague Dionysian figure. The scene is profoundly realistic: they carry the proper implements of their trade and they dress properly and even the *putti* tangled in the vines seem to be doing mundane work. This mundane focus is not typical of early Christian art, but it does match closely with Dionysian decoration as early as the 1<sup>st</sup> century in Pompeii. On the other hand, the Dionysian wine-making imagery itself was especially popular among Christians, who assimilated it into Eucharistic imagery.<sup>53</sup>

The fourth pair of panels contains a field of circles, alternating in a diamond field between flowers and characters (Plate 2:12). The flowers are all the same: a larger green cross with a smaller cross over it. This is apparently an extension of the floral cross that recurs throughout the ambulatory as a distinct variation of the floral cross that appeared earlier, especially in the first two sets of panels. The characters are a random assortment of male and female busts and figures. The figures are all bacchantes and *putti* depicted in the same dancing position. The busts are just variations of one man and one woman

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<sup>52</sup> Mackie 2003: 153.

<sup>53</sup> Examples include decoration at the Dura Europos sites and the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus. Malbon 1990.

looking different ways. The most likely explanation for the scheme is also the most obvious: as with the second set of panels, the primary motive is not symbolic, but aesthetic.

The fifth and final pair of panels are the most striking in the ambulatory. They contain a field of various fruit cuttings: ivy, figs, grapes, and pine. Assorted bright blue drinking vessels, such as horns, bird fountains, and shells all lie about (Plate 3:13). Birds are perched on cuttings or on the white field itself, including partridges and peacocks.<sup>54</sup> The final set of panels features an even combination of Christian and Dionysian symbols. Pine-cones and ivy represent the *thyrsi* (Euripides, *Bacchae* 1:80), figs represent the fall, and grapes are a shared symbol among Dionysian and Christian iconography. The birds perched about carry the same message of resurrection. Drinking vessels of every kind surround them, including those associated with Dionysian ritual washing.<sup>55</sup> Thematically, the mosaics proceed from the abstract, the first panel and second set of panels, to the production of the wine, the third set of panels, to the community's eternal banquet, the fourth and fifth sets of panels (Plate 1:4).

While the twelve wall niches correspond to the twelve sets of columns, the side apses, along with the central apse combine to form a cruciform plan, which the mausoleum combines with the circular plan. The side apses are 1.67 meters in length and are 3.18 meters wide. Today, the apses hold mosaics depicting Christ handing the Law to

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<sup>54</sup> Mackie 2003: 152.

<sup>55</sup> Oakeshott 1967: 61; Mackie 2003: 151; and this view is common in overviews of Roman Art, e.g. Ramage and Ramage 2009: 358-359.

Moses in the left apse and Christ handing Peter the keys on the right (Plate 6:34, 6:35).<sup>56</sup>

The mosaics are dated at the earliest to the 6<sup>th</sup> century and have also been heavily restored. Authors have tried to reconstruct their original appearance.<sup>57</sup> But these are universally understood to not have been part of the original design of the chapel. The wall of the niches is the same blank pocked brick-work that covers much of the mausoleum.

The left niche has been converted into a sacristy by a curtain, and doubles for storage and sound control. The floor on this niche is flush with the rest of the chapel, and the terracotta tiling merges onto it without distinction. The right niche is blocked by a metal guard rail: This is because it is sunk into the ground 0.3 meters. The floor of the right niche is a patchwork of marble fragments, some with a few letters of inscriptions. In the hole is a marble base with a central indentation that appears to be fitted to hold a bathtub sarcophagus (Plate 3:14). The marble base is left haphazardly at an angle, as if rapidly abandoned when its former sarcophagus was moved. Technical drawings of the chapel confirm that the left niche has been filled in, and was originally sunken into the ground like the right niche (Plate 3:15).

As I will argue further in Chapter 4, if both niches were purposefully sunken below ground level originally, then they served a specific purpose in the original mausoleum. We can positively connect the mausoleum with the two imperial sisters. We would expect most likely two sarcophagi, in view of the wealth of twin imagery throughout the mausoleum. The sarcophagus of Constantina is small enough to have been

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<sup>56</sup> Oakeshott 1967: 61-62.

<sup>57</sup> Oakeshott 1967: 61-62. Traces this argument very thoroughly. While it had loomed large, especially when the mausoleum was perceived as a Christianized 'pagan' mausoleum, it has gradually faded from discussion.

placed in the sunken apse horizontally. If the twin sarcophagus was the same size or smaller, then it could fit in the opposite apse. Because Roman funerary aesthetic preferred sarcophagus decoration that was either close to or flush with the ground, this is the most likely explanation for the sunken apse, which would accommodate the sarcophagus' base.<sup>58</sup> The marble sarcophagus stand could have served to hold one of the two sarcophagi. It is separate from the sarcophagus it held which suggests that it was an accommodation made specifically for Santa Costanza to hold a sarcophagus that was not made for the mausoleum. A later patron moved a bathtub sarcophagus to Santa Costanza and added the base to accommodate it. Therefore, the marble base should not be treated as original to the mausoleum.

The central apse is more properly described as a separate niche and tower. The ambulatory breaks here, reaching up above the height of the ambulatory to the height of the clerestory. This tower is groined, with a window on all four faces (one window opens up to the central drum). On the front-most face of the tower are the remains of a now illegible fresco featuring an inscription (Plate 3:16).<sup>59</sup> The niche below this is sunk further into the wall. The arch above the niche has some small remains of a blue field dotted with stars that covered the entire apse. Apart from this, most of the decoration is undecorated plaster left over from the mosaic.

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<sup>58</sup> Zanker 2004: 24-26 provides a compelling description of sarcophagi's use and placement. In the Isola Sacra necropolis, the majority were placed level with the ground, and even those on a plinth were expected to be viewed glancing downwards. While some care went to tailoring detail to placement, examples such as the Column of Trajan provide context for well decorated sarcophagi with whole sections decoration that were permanently inaccessible to viewers.

<sup>59</sup> Visser 2000:142-144, ft. 11. Has one of the few references to this inscription, if un sourced, and treats it as a dedication for the later drum and dome frescos.

Renaissance engravings depict a golden Chi-Rho on the front face of the niche (Plate 3:17). In conjunction with written accounts, they also indicate a heavenly Jerusalem inside the tower itself, featuring a lamb and the city of the New Jerusalem.<sup>60</sup> Written sources draw a close comparison to the New Jerusalem in Santa Pudenziana. Presently, the niche holds a replica of a porphyry sarcophagus that is now in the Vatican museums. The original porphyry sarcophagus was permanently removed from the premises in 1790, presumably from the same location, after having been briefly removed in 1467 and returned in 1471.<sup>61</sup>

The “sarcophagus of Constantina” which is in the Vatican Museums today and once sat in the central apse has been long identified as such. There was a strong devotion to the deified Constantina, so that the sarcophagus was for a long time the center of her cult.<sup>62</sup> The replica of the sarcophagus of Constantina that now occupies the central apse is poorly made and today badly-worn (Plate 4:19), but the sarcophagus itself is well polished and striking. The lid features male heads on the sides and female heads on the front and back, all joined by garlands (Plate 4:20). The front and back faces of the sarcophagi are identical: three scenes of *putti* at work making wine, holding sickles, and dancing. Each scene is separated by tendrils (Plate 4:21). Birds perch in the branches of the vines (Plate 4:22). Peacocks flank the corners, and a *putto* approaches a lamb to garland him in the center (Plate 4:23). On the sides there is a scene of three *putti*

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<sup>60</sup> Mackie 2003: 171. This is the Anonymous Destailleur’ drawing.

<sup>61</sup> Klienbauer 2006: 131-138. Visser 2000: 140-141. also provides an elaborate collection of stories surrounding the sarcophagus’ various stations around Rome.

<sup>62</sup> A topic which is further addressed in Chapter Four.



trampling the vintage, with one spout pouring into three amphorae of wine (Plate 4:24). The sarcophagus is supported by a large base, just under 0.3 meters in height.

The imagery on the sarcophagus clearly matches the ambulatory panel that was placed above the side apses: the harvest scene that is now iconic for the ambulatory. Even the poses and wine jars match the various *putti* on the sarcophagi (Plate 5:25).<sup>63</sup> There is a connection here between the sarcophagus and the side apses that does not exist between the sarcophagus and the central apse. Because the sarcophagus has been moved around so many times, there is no need to assume that it was originally placed in the central apse, in fact, thematically, it fits better into the iconographic program in the side apse.

The floor has a few features that must be noted. Marble flooring covers the ground between the columns holding up the central dome, which proves that the columns' bases are at the original elevation of the mausoleum. In between the pillars closest to the central apse, there is a granite slab that was added later between the marble flooring (Plate 5:26).<sup>64</sup> It is sized similarly to the sarcophagi, which suggests that it held a sarcophagus at some point in the church's history.<sup>65</sup> On the other hand, given its sloppy placement, it does not appear to be original to the mausoleum; Instead, it serves as evidence of one of the many shifts in the design of the chapel. Finally, the floor of the central apse and right apse are both patchwork marble that is original to the mausoleum,

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<sup>63</sup> The material of the canopy and the number of wine spouts are different, as the comparison plates show. However, these minor differences pale next to the remarkable similarity. This is addressed further in Chapter Three.

<sup>64</sup> This has featured as a central issue in Kleinbauer 2006.

<sup>65</sup> Krauthieimer 1986: 67 and Kleinbauer 2006: 137.

proving that the level for the floors of the apses has also not been changed since the mausoleum was constructed (Plate 5:27).

While this is not an exhaustive description, it captures the key pieces of the building that are involved in dating and understanding the building as a whole. In Chapter Two, I will examine the contrary narratives given by sources analyzing the mausoleum and by the mausoleum itself, arguing that a number of scholarly assumptions have passed over major details in the mausoleum. In Chapter Three, I will use the new iconographic program of the mausoleum to propose a more likely location for the two sarcophagi. Finally, in Chapter Four I will address what that second sarcophagus, the sarcophagus of Helena, paired with Constantina's, looked like, what happened to it, and where it is located today.

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Altar in the Central Apse

When visitors enter Santa Costanza today, they are confronted with an altar in the center of the mausoleum. It is dated to 1256 by an inscription on its front face, and stores the relics of Constantina and a handful of other saints. Incidentally, Constantina is thus one of the only members of the imperial family to have extant remains. This altar, a late addition, is clearly not native to the mausoleum: aside from the date on the front of the altar, it is clearly built to match the style of the later basilica built on the site.

If the modern altar is certainly a later addition, scholars are still uncertain what stood in its place in the mausoleum originally. One account proposes that a tondo of Silenus occupied the center of the floor.<sup>1</sup> Another strand of thought placed a baptistery in the center, assuming that the entire structure was the baptistery the *Liber Pontificalis* referred to. This received the support of Giovanni Battista, who was convinced that the crypt below the mausoleum was a fountain system. Some of the reconstructions were very elaborate (Plate 5:30).

Whatever was in the center of the mausoleum, the central apse of the mausoleum has usually been allocated for the sarcophagus of Constantina, with some notable exceptions (see Chapter One). Even in sources that disagree with this, the apse is either

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<sup>1</sup> Mackie 2003: 151. she reports this from PS Bartoli as an earlier ancient pavement. It is totally unattested elsewhere, and seems to fall in line with the more fantastic retellings of the “Bacchic Temple,” in line with John Evelyn’s diary. Lehmann 1955: 291.

treated as a doorway that was walled off, or is ignored altogether.<sup>2</sup> This poses a problem of much greater importance than the contents of the center: the mosaic program of the mausoleum proposes a narrative contrary to either of these two proposals.

The first proposal, that the central apse housed the sarcophagus, contradicts two basic facts of the mausoleum's decoration. First, the portraits of the deceased are in the panels in front of the side-apses, whereas no similar depiction was located near the central apse. Second, the mausoleum contained two sarcophagi. As addressed in Chapter One, there is no convenient system to maintain this proposal without simultaneously dismissing the evidence for the second sarcophagus.

However, the sarcophagus of Constantina has a long-standing association with the central apse that cannot be easily dismissed. The sarcophagus replica that sits the central apse today reflects the position of the sarcophagus as early as the 15<sup>th</sup> century, and possibly as early as 1256 when the altar in the center of the mausoleum was dedicated. Krautheimer, for example, assumes this arrangement for the sarcophagus of Constantina, without any accompanying sarcophagus for Helena. This would suggest that Krautheimer believed that Constantina and Helena were possibly interred in a single sarcophagus, as is occasionally recorded for imperial burials in the *Catalog of Sarcophagi* in the Apostoleion.<sup>3</sup> The theory goes that the sarcophagus was 'found' in position, and was therefore originally there. While this argument would essentially ignore the side apses, it still seems to be an effective apology for the modern design of the mausoleum, at least

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<sup>2</sup> Kleinbauer 2006. incredibly does not address it at all, whereas Rasch 2007. proposed that it was door to a portico around the outside of the mausoleum.

<sup>3</sup> Stanley 1994: 257-258 and Downey 1959: 36.

for the current placement of the sarcophagus replica. But it proves insufficient for multiple reasons.

First, it leaves the mausoleum unbalanced and empty. The altar in the center is a later addition; it is difficult to imagine how odd the mausoleum would look with that gone today. It also assumes that the imperial family under Constantine shared sarcophagi. The register of sarcophagi in the Apostoleion from the 9<sup>th</sup> century shows more specifically that most royalty had their own sarcophagi, men and women, certainly at the height of the military lull and economic bounty of Constantine's later reign.<sup>4</sup> This was the time when both of the royal sarcophagi discussed in this thesis would have been commissioned, and it would not be reasonable to apply the standard practices of another era.

Furthermore, the central apse is raised, at a time when imperial sarcophagi were just moving out of crypts under the mausolea. There was no tradition of elevating the sarcophagus. The central apse is also cordoned off from the mausoleum and was backed by a tall flat wall decorated by a Chi-Rho that is two and a half times taller than the sarcophagus. The sarcophagus would have blocked the original decoration: a considerable oversight if the sarcophagus and the Chi-Rho were both original to the structure. Finally, the apse is not curved and over twice the size of the sarcophagus. The apse would have blocked almost all the sarcophagus' decoration except on the front face and dwarfed it in size, both of which it does today to the replica so that today sarcophagus replica appears far more diminutive than it is in reality (Plate 3:18). This proposal seems not to accord with the structure and decoration of the mausoleum.

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<sup>4</sup> Downey 1939: 30-32.

The second proposal, that the apse was either left empty or was a walled-off doorway, as J.J. Rasch put forth, does not match the mosaic program any better. While the program contains portraits over the side apses, it actually culminates around the tower, immediately in front of the central apse. The two flanking panels contain the most ostentatious decoration, which contrasts with the first panel, immediately above the entrance which is stark in its color. Besides this, the imagery is thematically Eucharistic, not funerary as the dome mosaics are.

This Eucharistic dimension is clear in the decoration of Santa Costanza. At the beginning of the ambulatory, immediately above the entrance, there is first the field of crosses and floral octagons (Plate 2:6). This obliquely liturgical decoration of the *crux gemmata* gives way to imagery that pair of panels moves towards a gradually building climax. Geometric designs give way first to dolphins that might point towards either the *ichthus* or Bacchus' adventures at sea (Plate 2:7). This Bacchic theme continues with the mixture of Christian quincunxes with mythological Bacchants and *putti* (Plate 2:9). The panels immediately in front of the side apses represent in a liturgical context the trampling of the grapes, almost like an offertory (Plate 2:10). While they are the most famous panels, they are not in fact what the ambulatory focuses on. Instead, more figural decoration appears in the fourth set of panels that gives way to set of ambulatory panels (Plate 2:12). The picture throughout the ambulatory is not one of freely wandering design, but an organized and clear procession in which the viewer is guided by the design to the ambulatory's end. The side apses are treated with special care – much of the decoration has likely since been lost – but they are not the focus of the ambulatory as a whole.

In fact, the ambulatory's imagery, besides being processional, is only vaguely funerary. The Bacchic decoration is the most likely candidate, especially in light of the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus, where *putti* appear in a funerary context. However, even there they are organized as Seasons. The syncretistic connection with Eucharistic imagery appears as a background to both. Even if it was distinctly funerary, though, these panels are not the culmination.

The ambulatory terminates in two final panels, the first to incorporate gold *tesserae*. The imagery found on these two panels clearly does not suggest a funeral, but instead a ritual washing. In keeping with the previous Dionysiac accretion, the mosaics bring in the Dionysian *liknon*, a basket of fruits (and a phallus, reasonably absent in a Christian church) that was connected with Dionysian purification.<sup>5</sup> A cult myth held that Dionysius was carried to his washing in such a basket. It played a major symbolic role in the Dionysian cult, which involved a ritual purification. The same image of ritual purification, with its associated cultural symbolism, is clearly referred. The same attention to variety is shown here as with the decoration in the harvest panels.

The syncretized imagery must be read in a Christian context. While early baptism was often done in rivers, vessels for pouring water soon became important when shallow pools of standing water were used for baptism.<sup>6</sup> This is a pertinent factor in the case of Sant' Agnese, which stands on high ground. There is not a general theme of purification, but a specific reference to baptism. Here there is a field of fruits specked with gold, mixed with various pouring vessels, instruments of purification. Fruit alone could be

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<sup>5</sup> Nilsson 1975: 143.

<sup>6</sup> Even Didache Ch. 7 already shows a shift towards baptism in standing water.

interpreted as purely paradisaal imagery, and is found as such in both art and literary contexts, such as Rufinus' translation of *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto*.<sup>7</sup> But if the two images were to appear entwined, especially with an underlying Dionysian theme of purification, the panel ought to be specifically read as baptismal, not simply "a journey through death."

If the imagery is baptismal, the central apse was probably not used to hold the sarcophagi. The imagery in the apses cannot be interpreted as a progression towards the sarcophagus, because baptism would not fit into the theme of progression. While it is clear that the panels develop in detail step by step as they advance away from the entrance, there is no thematic chain towards death. Neither empress was baptized close to death like Constantine; both were baptized Christians involved in the Liturgy of the Eucharist throughout their lives.<sup>8</sup> Baptism was not for them the final step before death. If the viewer wanted to advocate still for a "progression towards death" interpretation, a more "spiritual" reading could be applied, first to compromise and then see baptism as the final step to Paradise through Death, which lies within the tower. While more sensible, it contains a new problem. This "more spiritual" thematic approach depends on a progress towards death and paradise. But the image of baptism in the 4th century was that of a guardian not for paradise, primarily, but the sacraments. Besides the famous exclusion of catechumens by shutting the doors, churches like Sts. John and Paul preserve evidence of curtain rails, to block out the sight of the catechumens, who made

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<sup>7</sup> Rufinus *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto*: II.VII.

<sup>8</sup> The *Acta Sanctorum* entry, combined with the *Liber Pontificalis* makes this clear.



up a tremendous number of the early Christians.<sup>9</sup> For the Constantinian Church, baptism was a real pertinent issue, looming large in the minds of the masses considering conversion. Therefore, the proper identification of these two panels' theme would be, based on the evidence, Eucharistic.

The ambulatory culminates at the tower, flanked by the final panels and immediately in front of the central apse. The tower's decoration is only remembered in written account today and some small sketches, but its cumulative effect was powerfully eschatological. The combined effect of the New Jerusalem with the dedicatory inscription for the mausoleum would have had much the same emphasis as with most other 4<sup>th</sup>-century churches, where the front of the church was the focus of the mosaic.<sup>10</sup> The Jordan River scene holding the two patrons would have connected the scene to the individual building, while still emphasizing its majesty. Even in accounts from visitors in the Renaissance, the boat of the two women was one of the defining images for the mausoleum.<sup>11</sup> This would have only been heightened by the central apse, with the field of dark blue broken by a field of golden stars and the Chi-Rho.

The imagery acts as the culmination of the mosaic program. The mosaics of the dome are entirely separate from the program of the ambulatory and central apse; they serve only as funerary memorials. The ambulatory, on the other hand, and the structure of the mausoleum builds towards the tower and culminates with it. It is purposefully subdivided from the rest of the structure, separating it off as a sort of sacred space. This is

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<sup>9</sup> Holloway 2003: 62-63.

<sup>10</sup> For instance, San Clemente or Maria Maggiore.

<sup>11</sup> Evelyn *Diary*: Nov. 10, 1844 (pg. 110).

similar to the use of apses in early Christian basilicae: the apse was necessary for even the smallest church.<sup>12</sup> The mosaic program fits with the scheme stylistically, building up from geometric panels and polychromatic marbles to the panoply of the New Jerusalem.

The New Jerusalem could be mistaken within a modern paradigm for a primarily funerary image. In such a funerary interpretation, the deceased patron would have placed all her hopes in the New Jerusalem. The patrons' placement in it would be confirmation of their relatives' fondest hopes: their dear Constantina and Helena had gone to Paradise, hence the paradisaic imagery. This would supply a convenient connection to the drum mosaics, but would do so at the cost of misinterpreting New Jerusalem iconography.

The New Jerusalem appears in various apses in early Christian basilicae, most clearly in Santa Pudenziana. Even with examples such as San Clemente or John Lateran, the apse was populated with figures among bucolic fields that call to mind similarly themed imagery from scripture. In these various contexts it represents an eschatological reality and sacredness, not a funerary hope for reunion.<sup>13</sup> If anything, it represents a sacred secondary world that is a fulfilled counter-type to the present one, an idea central to the patristic liturgy. This is why the apse of a basilica hovers over the sanctuary, where the liturgy occurs. The New Jerusalem is a symbol for the Eucharistic liturgy more than a heavy-handed sermon about the happiness of Heaven. In the case of Santa Costanza, the mosaic clearly does not match its current funerary interpretation, but has to be reread in a Eucharistic light.

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<sup>12</sup> For example, Ss. Peter and John: Holloway 2003.

<sup>13</sup> ie. Rev. 3:12, 21:2; Is. 54:11-14

The final mosaic piece not yet accounted for is the Jordan River scene around the rim of the drum, recorded in artists' notebooks. This scene unites the dome and the ambulatory, bringing together the funerary and the Eucharistic. The scene depicted the two sisters in a boat on the Jordan River, surrounded by *putti* on skiffs and caryatids. The sisters are crossing the river, reflecting the already developed patristic doctrine of *post mortem* purgation.<sup>14</sup> In fact, the Jordan River Scene surrounded the drum mosaic, which imitated closely the *Ordo Commendationis Animae*, a western liturgy of prayers for the dead believed to have originated before the mausoleum was built.<sup>15</sup> It is somewhat surprising to discover that, even in this clearly funerary imagery, a liturgical theme is still evident, here a liturgy that had been hastily attached to the imperial funerary service as prayers for the dead. The mosaics do have a funerary context, but it is a Eucharistic funerary context. The focus of the Jordan River is on the funeral, but with the simultaneous emphasis that the liturgy will help them cross the Jordan. This draws the mosaic program in full circle, uniting itself around the Eucharistic liturgy and the funerary liturgy.

This evidence, while helpful for understanding the mosaics, is profoundly confusing in light of the mausoleum itself. The mosaics appear to contradict the mausoleum. The mosaics suggest a building centered around the Eucharistic liturgy, but the building itself apparently has no native altar, and was, as most scholars believe, centered around a porphyry sarcophagus, with no place left in the mausoleum for the

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<sup>14</sup> For instance, Augustine *Enchiridion*: 69.

<sup>15</sup> Mackie 2004: 150.

second sarcophagus. This conundrum has gone entirely unaddressed in scholarship on the mausoleum.

This mystery can be unraveled using evidence from a second imperial mausoleum in Rome, contemporary to the Mausoleum of Constantina and Helena. By looking at evidence for the original structure of this second mausoleum, the missing gaps and contradictions of the Mausoleum of Constantina and Helena can be brought to light. This second mausoleum belonged to St. Helen, the mother of Constantine. She was interred in a separate mausoleum located on the Via Labicana in Rome, which is commonly believed to have been built as a mausoleum for Constantine, before Constantinople drew him away. Her sarcophagus remained in the mausoleum until the early 12<sup>th</sup> century, when Pope Innocent II transferred her relics to Santa Maria Ara Coeli. Within two decades, the empty sarcophagus was removed by Pope Anastasius IV, who took it to St. John Lateran for future use.<sup>16</sup>

The two mausolea are both round, both feature three interior apses, and both were roofed with a dome. The primary architectural difference between the two mausolea is the double-core construction of Santa Costanza: the Mausoleum of St. Helen has no similar ambulatory. The style of Santa Costanza inevitably encourages a flow in the building. This is an improvement when compared with mausolea such as Diocletian's at Split or St. Helen's in Rome, where the primary experience is walking into the center and being surrounded with the light of well-placed windows. In short, the double-core buildings encourage a circular flow that wends around the center. This has in fact been connected by W. Kleinbauer with Constantius II's building program, and it is possible

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<sup>16</sup> Johnson 2009: 112.

that this innovation was begun under his reign, allowing the mausoleum to be dated slightly earlier, to the reign of Constantine.<sup>17</sup>

Kleinbauer refers to a number of examples. In the case of the Holy Sepulcher this winding is guided by walls, making the interior edicule the focus of the circling. In the case of Santa Costanza, the more open pillars and originally empty center make the apses the focus of a circuitous track winding around the church, but clearly centered on the ambulatory. This can still be seen in some Renaissance engravings (Plate 2:5).<sup>18</sup> The windows that are installed in the ambulatory and tower prove this further. While the clerestory provides the primary light, the ambulatory mosaics are meant to be seen. This effect is still seen today, where the church is lit only by natural light but is still perfectly visible. These innovations mark an improvement of design, but, by connecting the two buildings, also allow them to be contrasted, apart from these improvements.

The Mausoleum of St. Helen is otherwise very similar to the Mausoleum of Constantina and Helena: It was built in the same style, similarly attached to a church with a stairwell to its own catacombs, and also held a porphyry sarcophagus. This close comparison in fact brings out one apparent difference: when the Mausoleum of St. Helen was constructed, it was given an altar, placed “before the tomb, before blessed Helen Augusta” (*Liber Pontificalis, Silvester: 26.7*).<sup>19</sup> The altar was of pure silver and weighed 200 pounds. This would open up the possibility that the Mausoleum of Constantina and Helena was designed to hold a similar altar. Because both buildings were used

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<sup>17</sup> Kleinbauer 2006.

<sup>18</sup> the absent Medieval altar is an effort in the artist’s imagination

<sup>19</sup> *ante sepulchrum ante beatae helenae augustae.*

identically, being Christian mausolea, it could even establish a possible precedent that the Mausoleum of Constantina and Helena appears to break by not having an original altar, an idea supported by the Eucharistic imagery of the mosaic program that is, without an altar, unfulfilled.

This altar was set in front of the sarcophagus of St. Helen. This sarcophagus was known to have been placed in the central apse of that mausoleum, and the contradictory evidence in Santa Costanza is not present here. The altar would have been placed between the viewer and the sarcophagus, partially obstructing it. Nevertheless, it would have been situated in or near the central apse. While this precise placement does not work for Santa Costanza, it does provide the answer to the empty central apse: it held the altar. This altar is actually attested to in a later edition of the *Liber Pontificalis*, which clearly states that in the 9<sup>th</sup> century the liturgy was held there: “at the church of St. Constantina beside the basilica of the Holy Virgin” (*Liber Pontificalis*: II, 163).<sup>20</sup> For there to be a celebration of the Eucharist in the 9th century, four centuries before the 1256 altar was consecrated, there must have been an altar present as well as an at minimum sporadic use of the mausoleum after the destruction of the funerary basilica itself two centuries prior. This reference confirms the results of comparing the two mausolea and also suggests that the dedication of the altar was not so much a conversion of the mausoleum into a church, as much as the re-instatement of a liturgical space used periodically into a regular church, which it remains so today.

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<sup>20</sup> *ecclesia sanctae Constantiae iuxta eandem sanctae virginis basilicam*. The translation is my own.

One last issue remains. Even if Christian imperial mausolea had altars, what were they installed for? These two examples were attached to larger basilicas, as was the Apostoleion in Constantinople. If the liturgy of the Eucharist needed to be celebrated in the basilica throughout the year, it could be done on the main altar. While the altars were used as side-altars by the 9<sup>th</sup> century, as the *Liber Pontificalis* makes clear, this is not necessarily their original intent.<sup>21</sup> By studying the first series of Christian imperial funerary rites, it becomes clear that the Eucharist played a central role, and was in fact required at the site of interment, whereas the non-Christian rites of the funeral were not.

Javier Arce has clearly parsed the division between the two parts of the imperial funerals of Constantine, Constantius II, and Justinian. In these three cases, all at different points in a period of tumultuous societal religious change, the pre-Christian “liturgy” remains a constant. Even Eusebius is forced to admit that Constantine had a proclaimed *iustitium*, that is he declared it an ill-omened day on the calendar. The *pompa funebris*, his funeral procession, and proclamation as *Divus* were both preserved; the latter was minted on *consecratio* coins. That same ambulatory of columns in the Apostoleion that Eusebius connects with the twelve apostles would have also been used for the rite of circumambulation, which occurred in all imperial ceremonies throughout the Tetrarchy and the House of Constantine, Christian and non-Christian.<sup>22</sup> While the non-Christian liturgy is left murky, it is clear that Constantius II was not able to participate in the

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<sup>21</sup> The history of side altars and their relation to imperial funerary altars is outside the consideration of this thesis.

<sup>22</sup> Johnson 2009: 1-8; Davies 2004: 124-128. This particular rite involved a ritual procession around the sarcophagus before placing it in its permanent spot in the mausoleum. It evoked the ritual procession around the funeral pyre when emperors were cremated. This rite explains the circular shape of imperial mausolea from the time of Hadrian. There is a possibility that it was repeated during specific feasts of the year.

Christian liturgy, because he was a catechumen. An entire “religious service” occurred in the Apostoleion, separate from the festivities held before the proper interment of the sarcophagus.<sup>23</sup>

This same dual set of rituals is recorded for Constantius II and Justinian, with more detail (as Eusebius is a somewhat biased and fastidious historian). The non-Christian rite was celebrated at the site of his death, whereas the Christian rite was celebrated at Constantinople and the Apostoleion led by Julian. The first rite, which Arce describes as a “military funeral” followed non-Christian predecessors precisely. The church service itself, though, Arce claims is unknown. By Justinian’s time, the traditions had been successfully syncretized: they were essentially identical, but the *laudatio funebris* became a homily, the torches of the crowds became signs of resurrection, the embalming honey became an ancient custom.

The existence of something like a round church might briefly give pause at such an early period of monumental Christian architecture. These various mausolea must be understood as uniquely separated from other liturgical structures, precisely because they are funerary in nature. The architectural style is largely dictated by past non-Christian models, namely the round mausolea first pioneered by Augustus, based on the *tumuli* of the Etruscans.<sup>24</sup> The process is not so much an accommodation of a Christian building to imperial burial as a non-Christian building to Christian burial, with the architectural type changed to accommodate the new liturgy.

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<sup>23</sup> Arce 2000: 122.

<sup>24</sup> Johnson 2009: 17-22.



If Arce was correct, it is unfortunate that the Christian rite has not been preserved in detail. However, his generalization does not do the evidence justice. Eusebius' account does provide some detail. Notably, he calls the rites celebrated "the rites of Divine worship" (Eus. *Vita Con.* IV.71). It is the implication of the collective scholarship that this rite was then, almost certainly, Eucharistic. When most sites connected with imperial burial then have altars, or evidence pointing to altars, this becomes more certain.

More evidence can be added to Eusebius. Sozomen and Eusebius both agree on a funeral oration and military procession in their description of Constantine's funeral. Eusebius goes into more detail, describing the liturgical action that followed the drawing of the soldiers. Johnson's portrayal of a "funeral... Of a pagan emperor, minus the cremation, with a Christian component tacked on at the end"<sup>25</sup> does not necessarily do justice Eusebius' description. The Eucharist described became a second-half of the ceremony, and clearly had a significant effect upon the ceremony. Practically, freestanding mausolea no longer were the norm. That almost every mausoleum after Constantine was attached to a church suggests that the imperial perception of death and the purpose of burial had changed. Further changes, such as the certain installation of altars into numerous mausolea, and likely installation of altars into many more such as the Mausoleum of Constans or Constantina and Helena suggests that Constantine was not the only member of the imperial family that was interested in a Eucharistic dimension of his interment.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Johnson 2009: 14.

<sup>26</sup> Johnson 2009.

Constantine certainly did possess a clear desire for an artistic link between his burial and the Eucharist. In his case, he attempted to gain a connection with his sarcophagus and the High Altar of the Apostoleion itself. In Eusebius of Caesarea's description of his final resting place (*Vita Constantini*: 4.60) he clearly envisioned himself as a prime figure in a regularly offered Eucharistic sacrifice, central to whatever church he was buried in. Eusebius famously attributed his ostentatious burial to an intense desire to be in the presence of the apostles during the liturgy. Whatever his motivation, the desire to be 'in the center of things' is very clear. This tendency was gradually drawn in by the ecclesiastical hierarchy: Ambrose's attempt to be buried under the high altar falls in a similar vein.<sup>27</sup> This explains the placement of the altar in the Mausoleum of St. Helen immediately before her sarcophagus: it reflected an earlier version of Constantine's goal for the Apostoleion, a goal that was thwarted by Constantius II.<sup>28</sup> The same care he wished to extend for himself appears to have been applied to his original resting place, or, if it was installed at his mother's death, for the care of her soul. The Mausoleum of Constantina and Helena would have followed the later model.

It is not likely that the altar implied in the *Liber Pontificalis* was originally in the center of the mausoleum. Besides the mosaic program, comparisons to other examples make this resoundingly clear. The altar in the Mausoleum of St. Helen clearly described as being directly in front of the sarcophagus. It was similarly so with most examples of

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<sup>27</sup> Krautheimer 1983: 69-92.

<sup>28</sup> Johnson 2009: 124-125. However, Johnson believes the move may have been primarily necessitated for practical, not theological reasons.

early Roman churches, even those not based on basilicae: they have altars at the front of the church in a dedicated apse such as in Sant' Aquilino in Milan, or under a baldachin, as at Old St. Peter's, or simply against the front wall, as in the *domus Ecclesiae*, such as in Dura Europos. This final type would be the one most likely present at this site: there is not enough space for a true free-standing altar due to the size of the central apse. This type is also found in the catacomb 'chapels' found underneath both the Sant' Agnese catacomb complex and the Via Latina catacomb complex. Besides these more humble examples, Richard Krautheimer's reconstructions seem to show this same style of altar set directly beneath the pillar of Constantine in Constantinople.<sup>29</sup> Official imperial use in something like the pillar of Constantine would have rendered such an altar arrangement as acceptable for another sort of small imperial structure, like a mausoleum added to an already well-endowed basilica.

The mausoleum's decoration posed a significant problem to interpreting the mausoleum cohesively. By drawing comparisons between similar buildings from the same period and examining the dual nature of the imperial funerary liturgy, it becomes apparent that in fact the only satisfactory solution to the question is to postulate an altar in the central apse. This fundamentally changes the interpretation of the mausoleum's history and program. It confirms fragmentary data still extant concerning the Christianized imperial funerary liturgy. Finally, it proves that the currently popular argument, that the sarcophagus was placed in the central apse, must be incorrect. Instead, another location in the mausoleum must be sought.

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<sup>29</sup> Sommer 2007: 138-139; Frutaz 1976: Image 13; Krautheimer 1983: 55-56, 62-63.



## CHAPTER THREE

### The Number and Placement of the Sarcophagi

Second only to the centuries-long argument over the Christian or ‘pagan’ origin of the mausoleum, the scholarly debate on the number, nature, and placement of the sarcophagi within the structure has dominated scholarship concerning the mausoleum.<sup>30</sup> Even if scholarship today can finally say in consensus that it is Christian in origin, that still does not settle the debate and confusion over its most fundamental arrangement and use. I intend to prove that the theory placing a single sarcophagus at or near the tower is incorrect, and that it is certain that two sarcophagi were placed in both of the side apses, leaving the central apse open for the Eucharistic liturgy.

This hypothesis has not been proposed in any published source. Some scholars, such as Krautheimer, assume a single sarcophagus in the central apse.<sup>31</sup> After all, this is where the replica is found today, and where the sarcophagus of Constantina stood for centuries. Other sources, such as Holloway, preserve that placement for Constantina’s sarcophagus and see the sarcophagus of Helena in the bathtub sarcophagus which was moved to St. Peter’s.<sup>32</sup> The placement of the bathtub would have been somewhere in the chapel asymmetrically, such as in one of the side-apses (Plate 6:31). The bathtub itself

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<sup>30</sup> Mackie 2003, Holloway 2004, Kleinbauer 2006, Stanley 1994, Johnson 2009, as a few examples all propose different theories for the placement and number of sarcophagi in the mausoleum. Almost every source will, even if it doesn’t propose evidence for a particular position, cite one of the different theories from another author.

<sup>31</sup> Krautheimer 1986: 67.

<sup>32</sup> Holloway 2004: 104.

would also be out of place originally in the mausoleum (see Chapter Three). Kleinbauer observed a granite slab in the floor roughly the dimensions of the sarcophagus in front of the central apse between two columns, and accordingly placed a similar slab opposite it for the two sarcophagi (Plate 6:32).<sup>33</sup> Some more haphazard proposals have simply put one or both sarcophagi in the center (Plate 6:33). There has been no serious challenge to the proposals regarding the placement and identification of the bathtub sarcophagus, except to suggest both sisters were possibly buried in the sarcophagus of Constantina.

After Constantine constructed the Church of the Holy Apostles, or the Apostoleion, most imperial burials were placed in this enormous church in Constantinople. The late Byzantine *Book of Ceremonies* contains an impressive list of the imperial sarcophagi contained in the Apostoleion that gives this incredible weight: around 44 separate burials.<sup>34</sup> Even in the case of Julian the Apostate, his original mausoleum in Tarsus is now lost, as his sarcophagus was removed centuries later and brought to Constantinople and placed in the Northern Stoa.<sup>35</sup> There are the mausolea of numerous Tetrarchs,<sup>36</sup> but these lack the Christian element that clearly united burials after the Battle of the Milvian bridge. The mausolea of Rome provide a rare chance to glimpse what was lost with the destruction of the Apostoleion: the treatment of the imperial dead in a newly Christian empire. Specifically, this mausoleum would have paired the two royal sisters, making it different even from the mausoleum of St. Helena in Rome. The

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<sup>33</sup> Kleinbauer 2006: 137-138.

<sup>34</sup> Downey 1959: 30-32.

<sup>35</sup> Downey 1959: 34 and Bufalo 2012: 168.

<sup>36</sup> To name a few, Diocletian at Split, Maxentius at Rome, Galerius at Gamzigrad, and Maximian at Milan are all extant today, in ruins. Johnson 2009.

funerary liturgy can even be somewhat inferred through the architecture of the building itself as will be discussed further in the subsequent chapter. The developing structure of the tetrarchic mausoleum undergoes significant changes when it is combined with a church. Santa Costanza therefore provides an invaluable piece to a puzzle in which many pieces are missing.

The mosaic panels of the ambulatory have been essential to interpreting the mausoleum,<sup>37</sup> if nothing else than because they are the last surviving link to the original mausoleum apart from the sarcophagus of Constantina. They clearly build up in the detail and action of each set of panels, starting at the one over the entrance, and culminating at the pair flanking the tower.<sup>38</sup> The culmination of detail and design does not mean, as many scholars have assumed, that the sarcophagus or sarcophagi were placed in that central apse beneath the tower. Instead, these mosaics suggest that there were two sarcophagi, placed in the two side apses.

The apse mosaics in the side apses function with a separate iconography and were added to the mausoleum at a later time, within two centuries of the mausoleum's construction (Plate 6:34; 6:35).<sup>39</sup> Their style imitates that of the Santa Pudenziana apse closely.<sup>40</sup> In a consideration of the original function of the side apses, these mosaics have to be discounted. This is due to the mosaics' late installation, which renders them irrelevant in trying to reconstruct the original appearance of the mausoleum. That they

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<sup>37</sup> Their interpretation is the focus of most scholarship, such as in Oakenshott 1967, Mackie 2003, and Holloway 2004.

<sup>38</sup> Oakenshott 1967: 62, see Plate 1:4.

<sup>39</sup> Oakenshott 1967: 62.

<sup>40</sup> Holloway 2003: 103.

were installed suggests that there were significant changes in the function of the structure, especially the side apse. The funerary basilica probably experienced years of significantly declined use, if not outright abandonment after the *coemeteria* feasts stopped in Rome.<sup>41</sup> These were after all what the funerary basilicae were originally constructed for. If, on the other hand, the mausoleum was restructured or reorganized, new mosaics might have been added to accommodate a less organized iconographic program that could still make it a ‘proper’ church. The mosaics do serve the purpose of indicating a disturbance in the mausoleum’s iconographic structure within a few centuries of its construction. I believe that this disturbance was most probably the removal of that second sarcophagus, the sarcophagus of Helena as addressed in Chapter Four.

The harvest panels in the ambulatory sitting in front of the apses are arguably the most iconic images from the mausoleum (Plate 2:10). In a building that is now so barren of its original art, the mosaics stand out as surprisingly lifelike.<sup>42</sup> They focus on conceits in a way that Christian art would soon lose. For instance, the detail of the mule carrying the cart, or of the intricately laid out process of producing wine, is symbolically unnecessary,<sup>43</sup> but it produces a powerful effect in a way that the geometric designs in the

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<sup>41</sup> Krautheimer 1960: 1-39. This did not, of course, affect the Mausoleum in the same way, as its altar was most likely intended for the funeral liturgy alone. This would have left it open for reuse.

<sup>42</sup> For example, laymen books such as Ramage & Ramage 2008 and Matilda 2001 both use these as key decorations to explaining the mausoleum.

<sup>43</sup> There is a shift here from the sort of rigorous detail that is found, for example, in the *putti* scenes at Pompeii. The illustrations are so detailed and accurate in depictions of everyday life that they have proven helpful to archaeologists. Christian art, on the other hand, from an early point was primarily symbolic. The sarcophagus of Junius Bassus is the best example of this pairing. On the sides, *putti* trample grapes in a scene as playful and detailed as the scenes in the chapel. On the front face of the sarcophagus, the History of Salvation is played out in less detail, with a simple plurality of symbols dominating the scene. Malbon 1990.



mausoleum do not. While there was significant figural decoration on the drum and tower, the harvest panels were the only examples of substantial figural decoration in the ambulatory: the panels of busts and figures have little movement or detail.

The figural detail itself further draws attention. The conceit stretches from the edges of the panel, with the *putti* trampling grapes, throughout the entire field of vines. *Putti* are suspended among peacocks harvesting grapes to bring down. In the center of both panels are separate portraits, larger than the surrounding figures (Plate 6:36). While they have been heavily restored, it is clear that they were two different figures; male and female has been proposed,<sup>44</sup> but historically two sisters, namely, Constantina and Helena, are more supportable. The three *putti* trampling grapes particularly draw the viewer's attention: they match the decoration on the sarcophagus.

The Dionysian imagery of Santa Costanza has drawn much attention to the mausoleum, serving as proof of a Dionysian influence or even Dionysian origin to the mausoleum. This was responsible for those late hold-outs that insisted Santa Costanza was a Roman temple even into the mid-20th century. Yet it does have a history going back at least a century prior in Christian art. In the church of Sts. Peter and Paul in Rome, frescos extant today feature a frieze of *putti* harvesting grapes alternating with birds. This is in an adjoining room with probable Christian decoration: an orans figure standing next to a disciple.<sup>45</sup> These decorations were from the beginning of the 4th century. They are on the ground floor, which predates the church building but appears to have served as a

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<sup>44</sup> Fritz 1946.

<sup>45</sup> Holloway 2003: 63-70.

site for Early Christian liturgy. Early Christians appear to have coexisted with these sorts of themes, similar to Christ as Apollo in the excavations of St. Peter's.

In addition, there is the iconic example of Junius Bassus' sarcophagus from the mid-4th century. While the front and back faces of the sarcophagus are divided into 20 clearly Christian scenes, the sides feature the same harvesting conceit (Plate 7:37).<sup>46</sup> The birds are not present, but there is one *putto* trampling, and three driving a cart. There is the same attempt at basic perspective as in the panel, trying to slightly foreshorten the mules and cart so it appears to descend. The same interest in posture and movement is also stressed. While the implications of both examples require much more examination, they are revealing about the 4<sup>th</sup>-century Christian's mentality: Dionysian themes were tolerated, if not actively embraced in art. This occurred even side by side more explicitly religious themes. While the explicitly Christian mosaics are now lost from the mausoleum, in the original scheme the same unexpected pairing of non-Christian and Christian would have been present, in the drum and in the ambulatory.

While the juxtaposition of Christian and non-Christian themes in the mausoleum is striking, it was commonplace. What is more striking about the harvest panels is their close resemblance to the sarcophagus of Constantina. It would be one thing to observe similar themes between media; for example, the harvesting scene on the sarcophagus of Constantina is thematically similar to the harvesting frieze on the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus. Both have *putti* with wings harvesting grapes. On the other hand, the harvesting panels of the ambulatory match the harvesting scene on the sarcophagi in detail, down to the same characters holding the same pose. The harvesting *putti* on the front and back

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<sup>46</sup> Malbon 1990.

faces of the sarcophagus are identical to those caught in the midst of the tendrils in the panel. The tendrils and vines, along with the interspersed birds appear in both contexts. The three *putti* trampling grapes in different poses holding knives for the harvest appear in both. There are three jars of identical design below the trough for trampling in both (Plate 5:25). The only missing figure is the mule-drawn cart; one might suggest that perhaps there was a lack of room. The other major difference is the canopy. The mosaic has a structural canopy, while the sarcophagus has one made of tendrils. The tendril canopy fits better with the sarcophagus' theme of winding tendrils than a structural canopy would have. The similarity in design is striking. If the sarcophagus was originally connected to the mausoleum, it is probable that one design influenced the other.

This bears a heavy weight on the placement of the sarcophagi as well. The two portraits represent the two occupants of the mausoleum. They are both female, both looking down, surrounded by vines (Plate 1:4, Plate 2:10). They appear to mark the side apses they each stand adjacent to. If this indicated where each of the sisters were interred, the extant sarcophagus of Constantina would have sat under the imagery of the three *putti* trampling grapes identical to her own sarcophagus (Plate 5:25). It was a common practice to have continuity between burial place and sarcophagus, and reinterpreting Roman sarcophagi in light of their placement *in situ* has become a modern refrain.<sup>47</sup> Because of this, such similar imagery that seems to be tailored to each other suggests that they were actually tailored to each other. The extant sarcophagus of Constantina was made for the apse, or the apse for it. It is most probable that, given the Vitruvian love of symmetry, the other sarcophagus would have been similarly themed.

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<sup>47</sup> Zanker 2004: 24-28.

The final panels of the ambulatory mosaic that flank the tower have been interpreted as funerary in theme (Plate 3:13). For example, Oakeshott observes that “the journey from the entrance to the sarcophagus leads from the ordinary and worldly, through the vine harvest, which is death”<sup>48</sup> in commenting on the theme of purification. This interpretation, posited by multiple authors, relies on the assumption that the ambulatory is building up to a sarcophagus.<sup>49</sup> The interpretation is an impressive iconographic system, tying up the various elements of the mausoleum, but it is also circular. The sarcophagus is assumed to be in the central apse. If it is in the central apse, the ambulatory must be interpreted as advancing from the entrance to the sarcophagus.

If there were two sarcophagi, baptismal imagery is no longer the primary image in the chapel to determine their placement. The image throughout is that of twins, especially within the ambulatory, an image that focuses on the harvest panels. As opposed to the harvest panels, which sit over perfectly sized apses, the tower area does not have enough space to accommodate two sarcophagi and, as was proved in Chapter Two, has iconography which clearly excludes a sarcophagus and strongly suggests an altar. Simply put, relying on the paradisaic imagery of the tower and the flanking ambulatory panels is not sufficient evidence when it ignores the larger scheme of the church. Those can more reasonably be interpreted in a sacramental context, apart from a strict interpretation of “procession towards death” that ignores a great deal of the symbolism in the actual mosaics.

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<sup>48</sup> Oakeshott 1967: 62.

<sup>49</sup> Also appears throughout Mackie 2003 and in Krautheimer 1986:67. It would be fair to characterize all interpretation of the ambulatory program as either funerary or ‘pagan’, that is Dionysian to the exclusion of any Christian influence.

In the various examples of imperial mausolea from the Tetrarchs and the House of Constantine, sarcophagi were placed against the walls in niches. When a single sarcophagus was in the mausoleum, for instance in Diocletian's mausoleum at Split, the sarcophagus was placed in the central apse. In examples with more than one sarcophagus, the sarcophagi are placed in niches with symmetry in mind, either dispersed throughout a complex or held in a central room.<sup>50</sup> Often, the sarcophagus was stored in a lower crypt to protect it. This imitated the technique used at the Mausoleum of Hadrian, but it became less common as mausolea approach the reign of Diocletian.<sup>51</sup> At Split, most evidence indicates that the sarcophagus was kept above ground, despite a crypt being present at the mausoleum.

A round path was always kept in the mausoleum for the rite of circumambulation. This was a major feature in the funerary liturgy of the state cult from the time of Augustus. When the empire was Christianized, almost every aspect of the funerary rite, even the cremation, was kept intact. A Christian liturgy was simply added to it. Some adaptation was necessary: the cremation involved the burning of a wax effigy.<sup>52</sup> The rite of circumambulation, involving a ritual procession around the displayed corpse, kept its position of prominence and continued to shape the mausolea in which emperors were buried.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Johnson 2009: 1-8.

<sup>51</sup> Johnson 2009: 35-40.

<sup>52</sup> This practice had some precedent already among the more mystically minded late imperial emperors, and therefore the shift to wax effigies cannot be attributed to the conversion of the imperial household. Johnson 2009.

<sup>53</sup> Johnson 2009: 18. Johnson directs readers to Davies 2004 for a more thorough investigation.

These precedents set constraints on the organization of the mausoleum. There were most probably two sarcophagi, based on the decorative scheme of the chapel. There is no reason to suspect that the sarcophagi were displayed in the center of the mausoleum, except if they were possibly displayed there temporarily for the Rite of Circumambulation. They were certainly not both displayed in the central apse. There is not space, and the result would not make balanced use of the space in the mausoleum: all the used space would be in a small apse at one end, an apse that probably could not fit the two sarcophagi, even if they were turned on their sides.

It is improbable that they were displayed under the inner colonnade that divides the ambulatory from the drum.<sup>54</sup> While there is a granite slab under this colonnade in front of the central apse, there is no matching slab in front of the entrance (Plate 7:38). The slab is clearly shaped to hold a sarcophagus of the approximate size of Constantina's. The slab haphazardly shatters the marble ring that forms the bottom of the colonnade, which indicates that it is probably a later addition to the mausoleum. The slab has no counterpart therefore its addition probably came after the twin sarcophagus was removed.

There is only one possibility left: the two sarcophagi were displayed in the side apses. This provides for a balanced use of space, along with a more intentional display of the sarcophagi's decoration. The sarcophagus of Constantina would have been displayed with its front face (decorated with the harvesting *putti*) facing towards the chapel, with the trampling *putti* scenes on either side. The other sarcophagus, if it was identical to the sarcophagus of Constantina, would have been displayed the same way. This takes

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<sup>54</sup> This was first proposed by Kleinbauer 2006, but other sources had alluded to the granite slab previously.

advantage of the curved apses to display three of the four faces of each sarcophagus (Plate 7:39). The difference between the side apse and central apse would actually be striking: the central apse today noticeably obscures the side faces of the replica sarcophagus. In addition, the sunk floor of both side apses would have hidden the base, making the decoration more striking. Besides fitting the standards set by earlier mausolea and spreading out the mausoleum's focus, this sarcophagi placement would have been noticeably more aesthetic.

While it is outside the scope of a historical study to attempt to quantify aesthetic value, there are some considerations that can be identified in the Roman aesthetic. In trying to reconstruct an ancient building, understanding that aesthetic can be an effective tool. Firstly, Vitruvius in his books on architecture places a heavy emphasis on symmetry. This is not simply ensuring that sides match. Instead, the emphasis is on being “duly proportioned”, with the human body as the prime example. It is ruled by geometric relationships, with functions and members spread throughout the body.<sup>55</sup>

Second, more recent examinations of the chronically under-studied field of Roman sarcophagi have examined them in light of their position in the sepulcher. There is sometimes a disconnect between the producer of the sarcophagus and the producer of the tomb: in some cases, even large portions of a sarcophagus are obstructed by their surroundings. In the few cases known to have sarcophagi in their original interment, it is clear that the burial site was taken into account when designing the sarcophagus. Decorations would be carved particularly deep on visible faces to better create shadows. More effort would similarly be put on these faces, an effort clearly visible on the sides of

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<sup>55</sup> Vitruvius *De Architectura*: III.I.1-2.

the sarcophagus. There also appears to be a preference for decoration flush with the floor.<sup>56</sup> Whereas later aesthetic would place the sarcophagus of Constantina on a stand above the audience, this would have been less likely when it was first placed in the mausoleum in the 4<sup>th</sup> century. Considering both of these factors, the side apses provide a placement more in line with Roman aesthetics.

Even with all these factors in place, there is one key missing: could the sarcophagi actually fit? The sarcophagus of Constantina is among the smaller imperial box sarcophagi,<sup>57</sup> but it is nonetheless imposing when compared to the many smaller bathtub sarcophagi. The sarcophagus base is 1.65 meters by 2.53 meters. Each apse bulges slightly, and the approximate diameter of both is 3.18 meters.<sup>58</sup> Because of the bulge, they accommodate about 2.25 meters in depth. This gives just enough room to fit the rectangular sarcophagus into the semi-circular space, almost as if one was designed with the other in mind. This also keeps the side faces visible, and might even have allowed for space for some of the many ornaments the *Liber Pontificalis* records were in the complex.

It is clear that practically, thematically, and aesthetically it is necessary that two sarcophagi were placed in either side apse. The structure of the mausoleum does not allow for the two sarcophagi to be placed anywhere else. The iconographic program strongly suggests that they be placed in the side apses. If they are not, the iconographic

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<sup>56</sup> Zanker 2004: 24-26.

<sup>57</sup> This is the one reason Bardill gives for attributing the sarcophagus to Constantius.

<sup>58</sup> The sarcophagus measurements are from my own research. The apse measurements are taken from Rasch 2007.



program is left insufficient, resulting in the sort of misinterpretation that occurred from the Medieval period forwards: Constantina as saint, the mausoleum as ‘pagan’, the mausoleum as baptistery. Finally, the mausoleum is treated as a less aesthetically pleasing building, poorly designed. It is clear that the mausoleum was a well-designed building, and this set-up makes this clear, rendering it more beautiful, sensible, and understandable: the sisters are being led over the Jordan River gradually into Paradise. The prayers offered at the site help them in their journey.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The Fragment

Thus far, I have addressed the original arrangement of the mausoleum, proposing the placement and appearance of the sarcophagus I attribute to Helena, distinct from that of Constantina. I have treated the sarcophagus as if it were lost and could only be reconstructed from the design of the mausoleum. Based on the structure of the mausoleum, it is plausible that the sarcophagus was identical in appearance and size to the sarcophagus of Constantina, of the same material, and was removed from the mausoleum shortly after its interment. Such a sarcophagus would have completed the design of the mausoleum, and its removal would have associated the mausoleum with Constantina alone. In fact, this sarcophagus that I have proposed is not conjectural, but extant today in Istanbul.

In the Istanbul Archaeological Museum, a visitor can find a large porphyry fragment recovered by the French archaeologist Jean Ebersolt in 1903 (Plate 7:40; 7:41; 7:42). This fragment, inv. No. 806, is almost identical to the sarcophagus of Constantina, specifically, to a section of the front lateral face, and is approximately 1.00x0.61 meters in size.<sup>1</sup> It matches the sarcophagus even in its minute details, suggesting not simply inspiration or similar provenance, but intentional coherence (Plate 8:43). Not only are the figures in the same postures, but even the pattern of the acanthus leaves and the number

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<sup>1</sup> These measurements are my own, scaled using the photograph. They are therefore estimations, perhaps only accurate within a few centimeters. The issue of obtaining measurements from photographs is well documented.

of grapes in each cluster is the same. The basket has a different pattern and an extra vine tendril can be found only on the fragment, but these differences underscore how similar the two are. The scale of the relief, too, is equal in size and depth. I propose that this is the sarcophagus of Helena that has been missing from the Mausoleum of Constantina on the Via Nomentana. This will be called the relief sarcophagus, as opposed to its twin, the sarcophagus of Constantina.

The fragment of the relief sarcophagus itself has been the subject of fierce debate since it was first discovered.<sup>2</sup> Ebersolt found the fragment during a series of excavations in 1907 sponsored by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Education.<sup>3</sup> It was found while excavating on the premises of Hagia Eirene, where most other extant imperial porphyry sarcophagi have been found.<sup>4</sup> These are porphyry box sarcophagi, not the “bathtub” porphyry sarcophagi found throughout Rome. Ebersolt recognized that a porphyry box sarcophagus in Istanbul was an imperial sarcophagus, and he subsequently sought to determine to which member of the imperial family the sarcophagus belonged.<sup>5</sup> Ebersolt was at first very hesitant to attribute any origin to the fragment, although he tentatively suggested that he may have discovered the sarcophagus of Constantine.<sup>6</sup> In his 1921 report, he suggests that identifying the fragment with the sarcophagus of Constantine was not unreasonable on the grounds that Nicholas

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<sup>2</sup>The main works involved in the debate are Delbrück 1932; Ebersolt 1921; Ebersolt 1929-1930; Vasiliev 1948; Grierson et.al. 1962; Bardill 2011.

<sup>3</sup> del Bufalo 2012: 224. and Ebersolt 1921: 1.

<sup>4</sup> Vasiliev 1948: 12. One was even found underneath an ancient plane tree.

<sup>5</sup> Ebersolt 1921: 13. contrasted to Ebersolt 1930.

<sup>6</sup> Mendel 1912: II, 447-448 references this proposal prior to the Archaeological Report.

Mesarites, a 12<sup>th</sup> century Byzantine historian, recorded that Constantius II's sarcophagus was "inferior" to that of Constantine. Nonetheless, he did acknowledge that the claim was uncertain.<sup>7</sup>

As this idea became generally accepted, Ebersolt more elaborately and emphatically promoted this proposed identification. In his 1930 *Sarcophages imperiaux de Rome et de Constantinople*, he posited that the cavalry sarcophagus in the Vatican Museums, commonly identified with St. Helen, the mother of Constantine, was instead that of Constantius Chlorus (Plate 8:44).<sup>8</sup> St. Helen, in his hypothesis, had been buried in the relief sarcophagus while in Rome, and this sarcophagus had been moved to Constantinople while Constantine was still alive. Constantine was later interred in the sarcophagus with his mother in the Apostoleion. Finally, Constantius II, admiring the design of St. Helen and Constantine's sarcophagus, commissioned a nearly identical sarcophagus for his beloved sister Constantina who had just died in Rome, which resulted in what is now commonly called the "sarcophagus of Constantina". The Apostoleion was destroyed, and the first sarcophagus was smashed, giving us the fragment extant today.

Ebersolt's scholarship was revisited in 1948 by A. A. Vasiliev, who was collecting evidence concerning the imperial porphyry sarcophagi found in Istanbul.<sup>9</sup>

Vasiliev proposed that the nine discovered porphyry sarcophagi matched the nine

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<sup>7</sup> Ebersolt 1921: 14. Il serait hasardeux d'affirmer que ce fragment provient du sarcophagi de Constantin I, bien que son attribution au fondateur de Constantinople n'ait en soi rien *invraisemblable*."

<sup>8</sup> Ebersolt 1929-1930: 585-586.

<sup>9</sup> Vasiliev 1948.

porphyry sarcophagi of the Apostoleion recorded in the *Book of Ceremonies*.<sup>10</sup> After the Council of Chalcedon in AD 451, the single porphyry mine, Mons Porphyreticus in Egypt, was essentially closed off to the Empire, and thus only members of the imperial family from Constantine to Marcian were able to obtain porphyry sarcophagi.<sup>11</sup> There were nine referenced in the *Book of Ceremonies*: Constantine, Constantius II, Julian, Jovian, Theodosius I, Theodosius II, Arcadius, Eudoxia, and Marcian (buried with Pulcheria).<sup>12</sup> Archaeologists by Vasiliev's time had discovered the remains of nine imperial sarcophagi, some of which are today in front of the Istanbul Archaeological Museum (Plate 8:43), some of which were found by 18<sup>th</sup> century visitors and subsequently lost, and some of which remain in Hagia Eirene.<sup>13</sup> Vasiliev proposed that all that was left to do was to now sort out which of the listed imperials used which of the sarcophagi.<sup>14</sup>

In examining the fragment in question, he came to the conclusion that Ebersolt's later exposition on the fragment's history was certainly correct, and definitively identified the sarcophagus as Constantine's. Vasiliev carefully gathered literary evidence from Russian and Italian pilgrims and tourists to Constantinople about Constantine's sarcophagus. Despite this thoroughness, he relied only on the testimony of the Florentine

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<sup>10</sup> Downey 1959. He offers an extensive commentary and translation of the original, with the original text.

<sup>11</sup> Vasiliev 1948: 24; de Bufalo 2012: 79.

<sup>12</sup> Some lists give ten sarcophagi instead, so Delbrück, another scholar, suggests a different list. This includes Valentinian I. He is quoted by Mango 1962. This discrepancy shows the deeper problems that Vasiliev's reliance on a limited list of names creates.

<sup>13</sup> Mango 1962. Sarcophagi that were found and subsequently lost, now only remembered in written records.

<sup>14</sup> Vasiliev 1948: 9.

Buondelmonti, who in his *Descriptio Urbis Constantipoleos* describes the sarcophagus of Constantine as *immenso*.<sup>15</sup> For Vasiliev, this quote confirmed Ebersolt's revised theory; he proposed that as the sarcophagus of Constantina is among the largest extant porphyry box-sarcophagi, a sarcophagus identical in appearance and size, which the fragment suggests, could be identified as Constantine's sarcophagus.

Vasiliev essentially translated and popularized Ebersolt's story, but he contended with him concerning for whom the relief sarcophagus was made: Vasiliev proposed that the sarcophagus was made for Constantine himself, and that only the remains of St. Helen had been transferred to Constantinople from her resting place with Constantius Chlorus.<sup>16</sup> After Vasiliev's work, this identification became the default interpretation for the fragment.<sup>17</sup>

In 2012, on the occasion of the 1700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the acclamation of Constantine as emperor, Jonathan Bardill reviewed Vasiliev's identification in an effort to re-examine the identity of Constantine's sarcophagus.<sup>18</sup> He re-examined the sources Ebersolt and Vasiliev quoted, most notably Nicholas Mesarites, and proved that they did not match the fragment. Instead, he identified another sarcophagus discovered in Hagia Eirene as Constantine's sarcophagus (Plate 8:47),<sup>19</sup> principally by examining the

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<sup>15</sup> "*et amplissima omnia sepulcra imperatorum porphyrea videntur magnifica, una cum Constantini immenso.*" Buondelmonti 1864: 181. This is a Latin translation of the 1422 original.

<sup>16</sup> Vasiliev 1948: 22.

<sup>17</sup> Odahl 2005: 370; Del Bufalo 2012: 224; the museum itself (Plate 8:46).

<sup>18</sup> Bardill 2012: 183-187.

<sup>19</sup> This is inv. no. 608, one of the sarcophagi found there that did remain. His investigation of the revetments, (p. 188-191) is very interesting and creates a very convincing defense for his own identification.

revetments and proving that the golden decoration on the sarcophagus would have matched that of Constantine. In fact, much of his work was taken from a scholar roughly contemporary with Ebersolt, Richard Delbrück.<sup>20</sup> Delbrück had proposed this same sarcophagus in Hagia Eirene, inv. no. 608, as Constantine's sarcophagus in a Turkish newspaper, but Vasiliev had dismissed the announcement as local media hype. Vasiliev, who actually quoted Delbrück extensively, did not know that the newspaper was reporting the same author on whose books he relied. Bardill rectified this, quoting Delbrück, retracing his process, and identifying solar symbols and crosses in the revetments of this sarcophagus.

Bardill dealt with Nicholas Mesarites' claim by putting his description in historical context. Immediately prior to Nicholas Mesarites' visit to the Apostoleion, Alexius III Angelus stripped every sarcophagus except that of Constantine of its gold decoration to supplement imperial wealth (Nic. Chon. 479.37-38), implying, of course, that there was gold present at one time on the sarcophagi for Alexius to strip off, including Constantine's. Bardill proposes that the fragment comes from a relief sarcophagus lacking the numerous revetments that cover the other extant porphyry sarcophagi. A close examination of the sarcophagus of Constantina (which Bardill treats as an identical model) reveals that it had no metal decoration: the anchoring holes clearly visible in the other porphyry sarcophagi of Constantinople are absent (Plate 8:47). The fragment is actually the one extant sarcophagus that certainly could not belong to Constantine. With regard to the quoted source, this scholar proposed that Mesarites' language of 'greater and lesser' referred not to size, but rather to the decorations that

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<sup>20</sup> Delbrück 1932. The anecdote is recorded in Bardill 2012: 187.

remained on Constantine's sarcophagus as compared to Constantius' sarcophagus now stripped of gold.

Bardill's work was clearly aimed at finding the sarcophagus of Constantine, not dealing with the fragment itself. In trying to disprove Ebersolt's identification, he ended by cursorily suggesting that the fragment belonged to Constantius II.<sup>21</sup> But his argument was spent proving that it *could have been* Constantius II's, never that it *was* Constantius II's sarcophagus. His attribution to Constantius II was reached by process of elimination, precisely the same method that he criticized Vasiliev for using to solve the same set of problems but using a different list.<sup>22</sup> He chose Constantius II for no reason other than that he was the most prominent imperial to happen to not have an identified sarcophagus. Bardill's identification of Constantine's sarcophagus is thorough and well-defended, but his following identification of the fragment is not. Since this proposed identification, any further support for or contest of this area of research has been neglected.<sup>23</sup>

The theories proposed by Ebersolt, Vasiliev, and Bardill have each taken into account certain portions of the entire picture, but ignored others. Each theory is able to answer a number of problems surrounding the fragment, but each has fallen short of giving an identification of the fragment that properly matches what is known about it. I will critique each in turn to explain where they have fallen short.

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<sup>21</sup> Bardill 2012: 186-187. This claim makes up a very small part of an already small section.

<sup>22</sup> Bardill 2012: 183. Referring to Grierson 1963: 3. (5<sup>th</sup> footnote).

<sup>23</sup> Besides a brief cameo in de Bufalo 2012:224., in which it was still called "a fragment of the sarcophagus of Constantine?" the fragment has not gained new scholarship.



On the one hand, Ebersolt's identification of the fragment as a sarcophagus made for St. Helen solved, among other things, the long-standing confusion surrounding her burial place. While her sarcophagus is claimed to be in Rome, a great deal of testimony claims that her remains are not. The pilgrims Anthony of Novgorod (1204), Stephen of Novgorod (1350), Ignatius of Smolensk (1389-1393), and Zosimus the monk (1419),<sup>24</sup> in their records of travel to Constantine's mausoleum all agree that Helen is buried with Constantine. By identifying the so-called "sarcophagus of St. Helen" with Constantius Chlorus, Ebersolt explained the martial imagery that has never been reasonably connected with St. Helen.

On the other hand, Ebersolt ignored a great deal. He dismissed contradictory reports concerning the appearance of Constantine's sarcophagus, which he only addresses in his 1921 report. He glossed over the similarity between the fragment and the "sarcophagus of Constantina." Ebersolt was the first to propose that the two sarcophagi were essentially identical because they were made in the same workshop.<sup>25</sup> This proposal has proven popular as a way to dismiss their similarity, but does not reflect the way that even marble sarcophagi were created, much less porphyry sarcophagi made only for members of the imperial family and each crafted in careful design.<sup>26</sup> Because of this dismissal, Helena, the sister of Constantina, was totally absent in Ebersolt's investigation of the sarcophagi fragments and their relation to Santa Costanza. Indeed, Ebersolt's

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<sup>24</sup> Vasiliev 1948: 16-18.

<sup>25</sup> For example, in Vasiliev 1948: 15; Coulson 1998: 226; Bardill 2011: 186.

<sup>26</sup> For example, Zanker 2004: 38-39. records detailed customization as standard in marble sarcophagi. imperial sarcophagi are described each described as unique throughout Johnson 2009.

proposition creates more questions than it answers: if the design was so beloved, why only for Constantina, of all people? What was the rationale for leaving the remains of Constantius Chlorus in Rome? Why did every other emperor choose a sarcophagus type that differed from Constantine? How did no visitor comment on the specific decoration of such an odd sarcophagus, if it was the centerpiece of the Apostoleion?

Vasiliev's proposal solved some difficulties in Bardill's, but created new difficulties as well. By proposing that the relief sarcophagus had been made for Constantine and not for St. Helen, he explained why the "sarcophagus of St. Helen" is associated with her. But his analysis ignored numerous points on which Ebersolt was uncertain, such as on the contradictions between sources. Vasiliev is very insistent that the size of the sarcophagus is directly related to the socio-political importance of the person within it, but this is demonstrably not the case.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, Vasiliev, despite gathering up an invaluable collection of testimonies concerning the porphyry sarcophagi, only seriously considers that of the Florentine Buondelmonti and his description of an *immenso* sarcophagus.

Second, Vasiliev relied upon a list of sarcophagi that has been proven demonstrably questionable and used it to sort the extant porphyry sarcophagi. While Ebersolt and Delbrück clearly used the *Book of Ceremonies* in connection with other

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<sup>27</sup> The sarcophagi of Constantina, a minor member of the imperial family, and not an empress, has one of the largest sarcophagi. If size indicates relative importance, this does not make any sense. Therefore, size cannot have been the primary concern, as he assumes. He does not address this problem. The same concept addressed in Mackie 2003, and her answer is critiqued by Kleinbauer 2006, concerning instead the power to design and commission Santa Costanza. Clearly the measure of how much "political capital" is required for certain imperial actions needs to be reconsidered.

sources, Vasiliev used it uncritically.<sup>28</sup> Vasiliev's method was only to sort out which of the burials referenced in the *Book of Ceremonies* had used which of the sarcophagi. This has been the implicit assumption in most interactions with the sarcophagi since Vasiliev, and has led to important claims that contradict the *Book of Ceremonies* being ignored outright.<sup>29</sup> While Vasiliev helped gather invaluable information, in the process of analyzing it he set numerous precedents that kept the information from being properly considered. Because of this, the sarcophagi have been studied through a poor lens of evidence that resulted in its misidentification as Constantine's sarcophagus, until 2012.

Bardill's proposal corrected Vasiliev's fairly uneven analysis of sources. Because of this, he was able to disprove the longstanding connection between Constantine and the fragment and to reaffirm the ignored identification first proposed by Delbrück. Instead of simply leaving the fragment as unidentified, which would be reasonable without additional evidence, he attempted to use a 'list of sarcophagi' to determine by process of elimination to whom the sarcophagus belonged. Yet, from the list of ten sarcophagi which he used, he only succeeded in eliminating two, and gave no evidence as to why Constantius, one of the remaining eight, was the correct choice.<sup>30</sup>

Even disregarding this ambiguity, his argument that Constantius II was a reasonable choice does not follow with the evidence he presents. He first uses Mesarites

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<sup>28</sup> Vasiliev 1948: 9. Bardill alternatively offers ten sarcophagi (Bardill 2012: 183), in conjunction with Grierson 1962: 3.

<sup>29</sup> Grierson, Johnson, and even Bardill.

<sup>30</sup> It is possible that Bardill believed that Constantius II commissioned his sarcophagus and Helena's from the same workshop, and therefore they were similar, or that he purposefully commissioned the same sarcophagus for his sister as he did for himself. However, Bardill does not make this evident.

to argue that Constantius II's sarcophagus was one of those stripped of gold, making it look inferior to the still adorned sarcophagus of Constantine. Suddenly, abandoning his earlier argument outright, he had to argue that Mesarites' statement that the sarcophagus of Constantius II was "less splendid" than Constantine's because it was stripped of gold instead applied to the Fragment. But the Fragment clearly comes from a sarcophagus not intended for gold decoration, and in fact Ebersolt used the same argument backwards to posit that the fragment's sarcophagus, despite lacking gold decoration, was more splendid than the gold-covered sarcophagi when he identified the Fragment as coming from Constantine's sarcophagus.<sup>31</sup> But, in an even more confusing move, Bardill switched argument again, saying that the greater size of Constantine's sarcophagus, not its gold covering made it "more splendid", an argument that does not reflect the probable scale of the fragment's sarcophagus compared to the other sarcophagi known to have stood in the Apostoleion: it was one of the biggest. If he wanted to argue that Mesarites meant "Constantine, greater than Constantius II, has a sarcophagus with size difference to reflect it," the fragment's sarcophagus would be a poor choice. Thus he was left with an identification that was not substantially supported, and defensible only as 'not unreasonable.'

Instead, it would be more reasonable to question why none of the sources mention the bizarre decoration on the relief sarcophagus. After all, there are only ten known box sarcophagi of porphyry in Constantinople, compared with perhaps one hundred more imperial sarcophagi of various marbles scattered throughout the Apostoleion and the

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<sup>31</sup> Bardill 2012: 186-187. Bardill is clearly on the defensive, but forgets to justify the claim itself. Instead, he only tries to prove that the claim could be true.

city.<sup>32</sup> If the relief sarcophagus belonged to a famous emperor like Constantius II, one of the numerous commentaries likely would have referenced the relief, all the more striking among the gold decoration. Either the sarcophagus from which the fragment came was unremarkable because of its decoration, which seems unlikely, or it was unremarkable because of its owner.

While Bardill helps open the re-identification of the fragment, his identification does not take into account the information which he has presented, instead quickly glossing over the question at hand. Instead, it leaves the fragment unidentified. Helena has been absent from all of these considerations because she was not on the registry of sarcophagi. However, there are separate records that, critically compared to the contradictory sarcophagi lists, help prove that Helena's sarcophagus is the relief sarcophagus, and that it was moved from Rome to Constantinople.

If this fragment does belong to Helena's sarcophagus, it is necessary to begin with what can be discerned about the translation of Helena's sarcophagus from the Mausoleum of Constantina in Rome to Constantinople. It is clear that she was interred at the Via Nomentana complex (Amm. Marc. XXI.5). It is also clear that she was shortly after removed because she is entirely absent from the historical record at Santa Costanza after Ammianus Marcellinus in the 4<sup>th</sup> century. In the *De Locis Sanctis Martyrum* of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, the paragraph on Constantina's mausoleum and sarcophagus does not mention Helena.<sup>33</sup> The cult of Constantina, that is, Santa Costanza, makes no reference to her in

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<sup>32</sup> Grierson 1962: 3; Downey 1959: 1.—both give a picture of the scope on imperial sarcophagi alone scattered throughout the city.

<sup>33</sup> Visser 2000: 245.

the *Legenda Aurea* or Hrotsvita of Gandersheim's play *Gallicanus*.<sup>34</sup> In both examples, the heavily re-imagined Constantina is associated with her attendants Attica and Artemia and the exorcists Sts. John and Paul, but Helena is nowhere to be found.<sup>35</sup> The building itself is clearly associated with Constantina only.<sup>36</sup> Helena's sarcophagus was therefore removed early on from the mausoleum, early enough for the cult to develop independently.

There are two sources that reference Helena's remains after Ammianus Marcellinus, and both state that she is in Constantinople interred with Julian, her husband. These sources describe the removal of Julian's sarcophagus from Tarsus to Constantinople. The first is Symmeon Logothete, who in his tenth-century *Chronicle* refers to Julian's removal to Constantinople and re-interment in a cylindrical sarcophagus (described using the same vocabulary present in the more commonly referenced *Book of Ceremonies*): "And he was carried back into Constantinople, and he was set within also with Jovian, in a porphyry sarcophagus, rounded on the sides, with Helen, the daughter of Constantine and his wife."<sup>37</sup> (Symmeon Logothete, *Chronicle* 94:1-3). The second, Leo

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<sup>34</sup> The *Legenda Aurea* is well known. Constantina, or St. Constance appears in Book 4, along with a cast of elaborate characters. This is thoroughly explicated in the *Acta Sanctorum*, V, Feb, XVIII, 67-71. The Medieval play-writer Hrotsvita wrote a play about Gallus' conversion, called *Gallicanus* where Gallus was supposed to be similar to Clovis, a converted general, who was persecuted by the evil Julian. She also greatly expanded on Constantina's cult. Helena was entirely absent. St. John 1923 is an accessible translation of her work.

<sup>35</sup> This also makes the speculation in some sources (ex. Coulson 1998: 226) that the "sarcophagus of Constantina" actually belongs to Helena very unlikely.

<sup>36</sup> It is so completely associated with her only that there is a popular idea that the mausoleum held Constantina and Hannibalianus her husband, though founded on no serious evidence. Oakeshott 1967; Brandenburg 2005: 14. addresses the idea as common-place.

<sup>37</sup> απεκομισθη δε αυθις εν Κωνσταντινουπολει, και ετεθη ενθα και το Ιοβιανου, εν λαρνακι πορφυρω κυλινδροειδει μετα Ελενης θυγατρος Κωνσταντινου και γυναικος αυτου. The translation is my own.

the Grammarian, appears to quote from Symmeon Logothete's work in his own twelfth-century *Chronicle*. A phrase found in both texts, “μετα Ελενης θυγατρος Κωνσταντινου και γυναικος αυτου,”<sup>38</sup> indirectly places Helena's remains not in Rome, where Mackie assumed they remained because of Ammianus Marcellinus, but rather, in Constantinople with Julian in the cylinder-ended sarcophagus.

Yet, these sources are not indisputable evidence. Both sources write centuries after Julian's burial, the date of which multiple sources, including Julian's contemporary Ammianus Marcellinus, attest. Furthermore, these much later writers are the only sources that state that his sarcophagus was moved. Moreover, even if the sources are right and Helena was interred with Julian in his sarcophagus, it is essentially impossible to verify that multiple imperial family-members were interred in one sarcophagus. For example, St. Helen was widely believed to be interred in Constantine's sarcophagus, and the possibility is still taken seriously.<sup>39</sup> Both Ebersolt and Vasiliev both actively supported it.<sup>40</sup> Helena is absent from the more popular list of sarcophagi, *The Book of Ceremonies*, but the list is also corrupted by numerous textual variants, which differ on some key points from each other. Error could account for the absence of any reference to her in the catalog; anyway, Symmeon Logothete predates *Ceremonies*.

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<sup>38</sup> “With Helen the daughter of Constantine and his wife.”

<sup>39</sup> Bardill 2012: 186 outright dismisses the idea as a misreading of Eusebius by later writers. This does not necessarily seem to be an effective argument against those passages brought up by Vasiliev, for example, because these all come from pilgrims. The dupe would have had to be against Constantinople itself, which seems less likely.

<sup>40</sup> Ebersolt 1929-1930 revives the argument as a full explanation of his theory, which Vasiliev 1948 re-summarizes and popularizes.

These sources are not a new discovery. Indeed, Johnson and Grierson both reference the record of Helena's re-interment.<sup>41</sup> Johnson depicts it as a legend impossible to substantiate. Grierson does take the account more seriously, and even suggests that the move happened in the reign of Theodosius, but stops short of affirming it fully, calling it merely "apparent" that the sarcophagus was moved. For both of these authors, there was nothing in Constantinople that tied to Helena and substantiated the 'rumors.' As I endeavor to show, the fragment, by virtue of its similarity to Constantina's sarcophagus, affirms the written record.

The primary source of importance for Helena is her relationship to Constantine and Julian. It follows that her remains would be moved to be interred in the same mausoleum as the two emperors. These two men happen to both be buried in the Apostoleion. Because her primary weight in any political agenda stems first and foremost from them, it appears reasonable to think that if she were moved anywhere, it would be to the mausoleum that holds them both.<sup>42</sup> The Apostoleion in Constantinople was constructed for an imperial mausoleum and was destroyed after the fall of the city to make way for the Fatih Mosque.<sup>43</sup> Records of the complex are scant, but it appears that there was a church proper, called the Church of the Holy Apostles, and a mausoleum

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<sup>41</sup> Johnson 2009: Appendix 1 & 2; Grierson 1962: 41. Johnson's appendices contain a full list of every known imperial mausoleum and every claimed imperial burial.

<sup>42</sup> As earlier examples of this trend, I would refer to the motivations behind Julius Caesar's burial, the famous translation of saints to the Apostoleion, and the movement of Julian himself to the Apostoleion. The dead are still useful to those still in power as political signs, and were used as such.

<sup>43</sup> Krautheimer 1983 and Johnson 2009: 119-129 reconstruct the Apostoleion. Their reconstructions highlight how the stoas would be hidden around corners, a stark contrast to the open round mausolea.



immediately next to it called the Mausoleum of Constantine.<sup>44</sup> They were originally connected by portico, which was gradually built up until the two buildings became effectively one. Constantine's mausoleum had two stoas attached to it, the North and South stoas. The Northern stoa is where Julian and Jovian were interred, according to multiple sarcophagi registries, and presumably where Helena was laid to rest as well with Julian.

As previously noted, Helena is absent from *The Book of Ceremonies*, specifically from the list of ten porphyry sarcophagi in the Apostoleion, and this absence, might render the possibility of her interment in the Apostoleion unlikely. More careful examination of various sources reveals that there are attributions of porphyry sarcophagi to those unmentioned in the catalog. Valentinian, for example, who in the thirteenth-century *Necrologium Imperatorum*, which goes back to a lost tenth-century Greek catalogue, is reported to have been interred in a porphyry sarcophagus that was unmentioned in other sources. The same happened with Anastasius I.<sup>45</sup> Also, some of the sarcophagi were possibly *spolia*. Notably, Justin I is recorded to have been buried in Justinian's sarcophagus with his wife.<sup>46</sup> Thus, the omission of Helena's name from the book in question does not provide conclusive evidence against this theory. Instead, the various other records that record her translation to Constantinople suggest that she was simply one more burial left out of the *Book of Ceremonies*.

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<sup>44</sup> Those sources which do exist usually focus on the central rotunda itself, as this was built by Constantine for himself. Such as Eusebius (Eu. *Vita Constantini*, 4.60) or Socrates (So. 2.38).

<sup>45</sup> Grierson 1962: 42, 45.

<sup>46</sup> Grierson 1962: 45.

It is easy to miss the detail in which this discovered fragment matches the sarcophagus of Constantina. There is evidence that at least one other sarcophagus, produced at the same workshop is also extant in fragmentary form. There is a sarcophagus lid in Egypt at the Alexandrian Museum, superficially similar to the sarcophagus lid in Rome (Plate 8:48).<sup>47</sup> It was recovered in an Arabian bath and moved to the museum. The design is similar enough to suggest an origin in the same workshop as the sarcophagus of Constantina. But differences become apparent after a less cursory examination. The garlands are oversized and cramped on the ends of the Alexandrian lid, and bulge noticeably on the sides of the lid with large medallions. The sarcophagus of Constantina has noticeably thinner garlands with no medallions and much smaller leaves: approximately 40 leaves on the sides of the Alexandrian lid, but approximately 80 on the sides of the sarcophagus of Constantina. The faces (or masks) are different styles and are switched, with men on the sides and women on the ends. The tapered top of the lid also protrudes significantly more on the Alexandrian lid, doubling its height, whereas the tapered lid on the sarcophagus of Constantina increases its height by less than half and is much less noticeable.

This examination, while pedantic, shows the sort of differences present between most sarcophagi, even of the same workshop, in a specimen usually proposed to have originated from the same workshop as the sarcophagus of Constantina.<sup>48</sup> The superficial similarities that connect the two do not compare to the detailed twin that the Fragment

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<sup>47</sup> Vasiliev 1948: 15.

<sup>48</sup> For instance, when Vasiliev addresses this fragment, he treats it as proof that the Fragment is only an accidental twin to the sarcophagus of Constantina, without examining it in detail.

appears to be next to the sarcophagus of Constantina (Plate 8:43). Even within its own workshop, the fragment's sarcophagus appears to be a unique twin, designed in conjunction with the sarcophagus of Constantina, making it necessarily the sarcophagus of Helena. The lid itself has not been properly studied apart from being used as a foil for the Fragment and the sarcophagus of Constantina, except tangentially in comparison to Dionysian art.<sup>49</sup> Nonetheless, it confirms what the Fragment suggests: the Fragment was designed as an identical twin to the sarcophagus of Constantina, but was eventually reused as *spolia* and forgotten.

Here the argument seems to come to an end. The argument began with looking for the missing sarcophagus of Helena that was only for a short time at Sant' Agnese fuori la Mura. It became gradually apparent that the sarcophagus would likely look identical to Constantina's that can be connected to Helena. It then became apparent that the sarcophagus did exist, along with a record of her interment with her father. There is one difficulty: she is not interred in her own sarcophagus, but with her husband Julian in his sarcophagus. And this is certainly not the relief sarcophagus, as the record clarifies: “*κλινοδροειδει*,” with rounded-ends (Plate 8:45).<sup>50</sup> This is another of the extant sarcophagi, no. 3155 in the Istanbul Archaeology Museum, easily identified because of its distinct description. Therefore, the fragment's sarcophagus must have been re-used for another purpose. It is finally necessary to determine what that purpose was.

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<sup>49</sup> Coulson 1998.

<sup>50</sup> ex. Symeon Logothete *Chronicle* 94:1-3; *The Book of Ceremonies* 42; gathered in Vasiliev 1948: 7-8.

Similarly to Helena, Julian's body disappeared from his mausoleum shortly after being interred. Julian expressly wished to be buried at a new mausoleum in Tarsus. Every major contemporary historical source, including Ammianus Marcellinus, Libanus, Socrates, and Zosimus, records his burial in this mausoleum at Tarsus.<sup>51</sup> Even if the mausoleum was at some later point destroyed,<sup>52</sup> in catalogues of sarcophagi beginning in the 9<sup>th</sup> century Julian's sarcophagus appears in the Northern Stoa of the Apostoleion with the emperor Jovian. The only record of his sarcophagus being moved are the same two references to Symmeon Logothete and Leo the Grammarian.

Grierson suggests that the removal of Helena and Julian to the Apostoleion was the work of the emperor Theodosius. Whether he is correct or not, it is clear that they were both moved to the Apostoleion. Helena was reinterred and, in the majority of accounts, forgotten. The *Book of Ceremonies*, for instance, or the record of Nicholas Mesarites (Nic. Mes., *Descriptio*, 39.4), refer to seeing Julian but take it for granted that Julian is interred in the Apostoleion alone, and do not mention Helena, or even mention the translation of Julian's sarcophagus from Tarsus. Helena's sarcophagus disappeared. It did not remain in Rome, and it clearly was not used to hold Helena's remains. If it was moved to Constantinople, then it was presumably used for *spolia* for another imperial burial.

The problem of checking names off the list, inherited from Vasiliev, kept scholars from considering that some of the sarcophagi could have been reused as *spolia*. The

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<sup>51</sup> Grierson 1962: 40; Johnson 2009: 234—Amm. Marc. XXV.10.5; Zos. III.34.4; Lib. Or. 15.77, 16.53, 18.159; Soc. 3.26.

<sup>52</sup> Johnson 2009: 103-104.

possibility that a sarcophagus could be *spolia* was never seriously considered, except in the case of St. Helen and Constantine because the number of sarcophagi extant and in the court record matched.<sup>53</sup> At least three of the burials on Vasiliev's list, for example, died after the likely date of Julian's re-interment with Helena. If the records are right in placing Julian and Helena in the same sarcophagus, the second porphyry sarcophagus went without an occupant. Its reuse as one of the ten would have been inevitable, given its quality and design. Eudoxia, the wife of Arcadius, would be perhaps the most likely candidate as the only other empress who merits her own separate burial in porphyry.<sup>54</sup> This would also explain how the sarcophagus was forgotten: anonymous because of the occupant, not because the design was plain.

Ebersolt, Vasiliev, and Bardill all worked to properly contextualize the fragment and attribute it to its particular member of the imperial family. While they made progress, they each ran into road-blocks that kept them from properly taking all the different connecting strands into account. Taken as a whole, these strands of evidence show that the fragment did not belong to Constantine or Constantius II or St. Helen, but was instead a sarcophagus meant for the Mausoleum of Constantina in Rome and was transported later to Constantinople and the Apostoleion.

This fragment was part of a larger sarcophagus that belonged to Helena, the daughter of Constantine, and was the twin of the "sarcophagus of Constantina." Together, they filled the side apses of Santa Costanza. This can be discerned from historical sources

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<sup>53</sup> Vasiliev 1948: 21-22.

<sup>54</sup> It is possible, if unclear, that relief sarcophagi are specifically connected with women, and gold-decorated sarcophagi with men. Admittedly, there has not yet been a cross over.

and from the purposeful similarity in the design of both sarcophagi. When an emperor was improving the Apostoleion, likely Theodosius, he wanted to gather together the members of the imperial family. He brought in the sarcophagi of Julian and Helena. Julian's sarcophagus was used for both, and Helena's was reused in *spolia*, possibly for Eudoxia. Helena's remains were with Julian's until the despoiling of the sarcophagi at the fall of the city, and her sarcophagus remained in the Apostoleion, reused, until it too was destroyed. As with so many other sarcophagi, these were moved to Hagia Eirene, where they remained in various states of disrepair. Finally, Ebersolt, leading an archaeological mission, discovered these various sarcophagi, which spurred the Turkish government to excavate the remaining finds, among which was the lid to Julian's sarcophagus.

Here, in the Istanbul Archaeological Museum, ends the tremendous journey of an (almost) unique piece of art: from a Roman mausoleum shared by two close sisters, to the central imperial church of the world, to destruction and anonymity in a former churchyard. Helena's life, obscured by the brighter lights that surrounded her, comes to mind. But her life and the beauty she left in her memory are not forgotten.

## CONCLUSION

With the various fragments of evidence for the mausoleum synthesized together, these hints now take solid form, allowing the cohesive design of the original mausoleum to be again revealed as a single whole. The entrance was first approached through the basilica, with the visitor going first through the narthex into the towering basilica, lit with large wide windows. The unique status of Santa Costanza as the only mausoleum at the site was evident also from within. Various candelabra provided light in the short passage into the mausoleum. Entering inside, the first sight was the daylight streaming in from the large windows in the central drum, shining a light on the center of the mausoleum. This would then have lit up the polychromatic marble decoration held by revetments throughout the mausoleum: below and above the windows of the drum and on the walls around the ambulatory, all reflecting the light. This contrasted to the dark ambulatory, which was provided just enough light by some small slanting windows. This softer light made the ambulatory mosaics visible.

The first mosaic was not ornate, a simple geometric pattern without any bright colors. As it proceeded around the ambulatory in either direction, the mosaic first grew in the third panel shockingly detailed figural decoration, all centered around a portrait of the deceased imperial lady in either side apse. The sarcophagus was visible immediately below, porphyry with dancing *putti*, which carried the flat decoration of the mosaic overhead to the tangible relief below. The identical sarcophagus on the opposite side of

the mausoleum was purposefully theatrical, shocking the visitor. The same sarcophagus was looking back.

The ambulatory continued to the last panel, but then fell short to accommodate a tower, which let in a great deal of light from its large windows. The final panels, a combination of feasting and washing imagery specked with gold sparkled theatrically. Moving to the center, the viewer could have looked up and seen in the well-lit dome the complicated and elaborate Jordan River mosaic, which depicted *putti* fishing around the boat carrying the two sisters. The panels it surrounded told the story of the litanies prayed at their funerals in decades prior, presumably as the mourners (those who were Christian) had stood below.

In the central apse an altar stood against the wall. Above it there was not just an empty brick face, but a bright field of blue mosaics and glittering gold stars. The tower was barely visible because of the light, but if seen from the right angle it depicted a lamb in the New Jerusalem, again signifying what prayers were said at their funeral.

When the two sarcophagi were present in the mausoleum together, they were certainly the central ornaments of the mausoleum. They looked identical, wedged perfectly into place in a horseshoe that made the side decoration of *putti* trampling the vintage barely visible. On the front, a lamb, garlanded by *putti*, referred back to the lamb in the tower, just as the *putti* did to the panel. This was a unique mausoleum, with only two sarcophagi holding two sisters apart from their spouses, buried with equal dignity and honor. They stood as close together as the pairs of pillars that ran around the ambulatory, and were united in death.



Within a century, this scheme would be ruined: Helena was removed because, to the eyes of Constantinople, she was an empress, greater in dignity than Constantina. The basilica was allowed to fall into ruins. The sarcophagus of Constantina was moved around the mausoleum and, eventually, the city of Rome, while Helena's sarcophagus stood in Constantinople. The altar was used on occasion to celebrate Mass, the center under the dome hosted occasional baptism. Finally, Constantina's sarcophagus was removed entirely, and replaced with a poor replica: the mausoleum had lost both its sarcophagi. A new altar, placed in the center, was used for Mass during the day, while Dutch enthusiasts used the building for pseudo-Dionysian rites during the night. Constantina's sarcophagus was given a new home in the Vatican Museums, placed on the side of another circular interior, across from another porphyry sarcophagus: that of Helen, Constantina's grandmother.

Helena's sarcophagus, likely used for *spolia*, sat in Constantinople, until it was destroyed with all the other imperial sarcophagi, sacked and broken into pieces. Only one fragment was recovered, four centuries later, and was placed in the Istanbul Archaeological Museum, where it remains today, misidentified as the sarcophagus of Constantine. Now, the fragment can be correctly identified, as only five porphyry imperial sarcophagi can be. Its original design and placement can be ascertained and, in a small way, the sisters can be united in death once again.

## APPENDIX

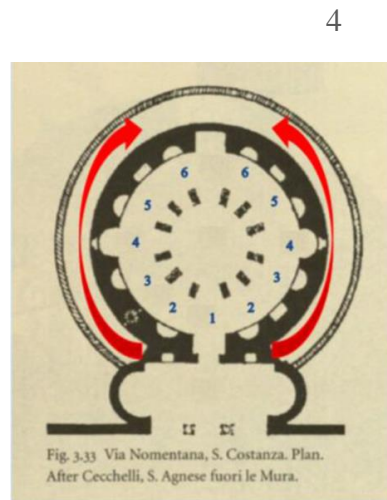
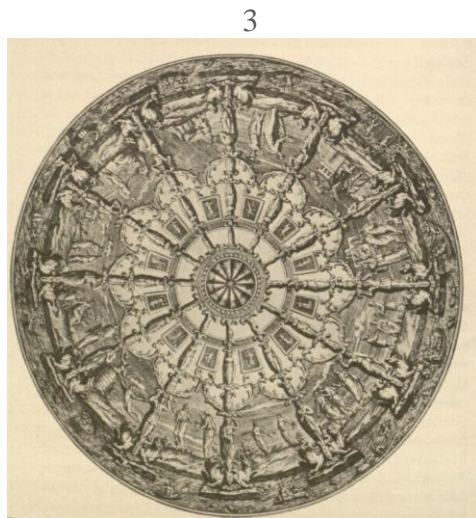
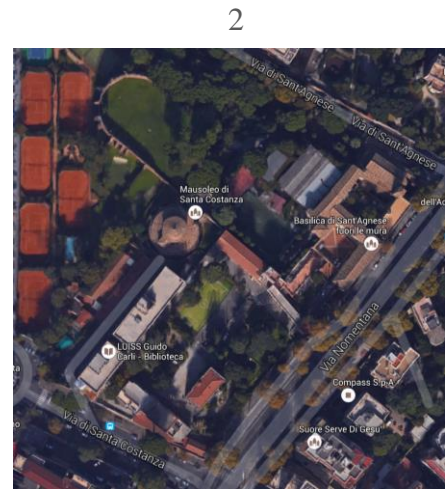
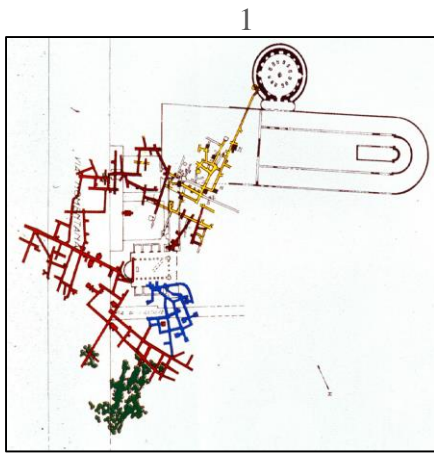
## APPENDIX: LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

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2. Aerial view. Google Maps.
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4. Diagram of mosaic panels, placed over Fig. 3.33 in Holloway 2003: 95.
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7. Panel pair 2 in ambulatory mosaic. Holloway 2003: 99.
8. Detail of dolphins in Panel pair 2 in ambulatory mosaic. Ringbom 2003: 35.
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10. Panel pair 4 in ambulatory mosaic. from Wilpert 1976: Appendix.
11. panel pair 4 in ambulatory mosaic, putti detail. Photograph by Jackson Perry.
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22. Detail of birds on sarcophagus. Ibid.
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27. Diagram of patchwork marble slabs, Ibid.
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29. Photograph of Santa Costanza in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, taken from Frutaz 1976.
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39. Computer reconstruction of side apse with sarcophagus. Model by Jackson Perry.
40. Front view of Fragment. Photograph by Megan Renz.

41. Side view of Fragment. Ibid.
42. Fragment with scale. Photograph by Dr. Meghan DiLuzio.
43. Comparative details of Fragment and sarcophagus of Constantina. Photographs by Megan Renz and Jackson Perry.
44. Sarcophagus of Helen, mother of Constantine. Photograph by Jackson Perry.
45. Imperial porphyry sarcophagi at Istanbul museum. Del Bufalo 2012: 17.
46. Fragment tag on display. Photograph by Megan Renz.
47. Hagia Eirene sarcophagus, inv. No. 608. Bardill 2012: 189.
48. Alexandrian sarcophagus lid, with the lid of the Vatican sarcophagus for comparison. Vasiliev 1938: 34-35.

PLATE 1



- 1: Crosses and Octagons
- 2: Dolphins and Octopi
- 3: Quincunxes
- 4: Putti Harvesting
- 5: Portraits and Flowers
- 6: Paradisal Imagery

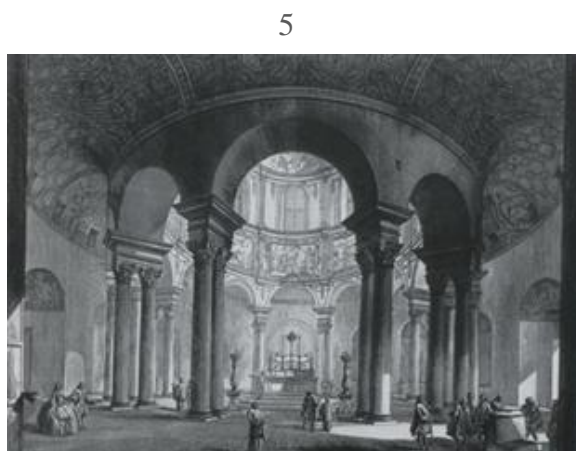


PLATE 2

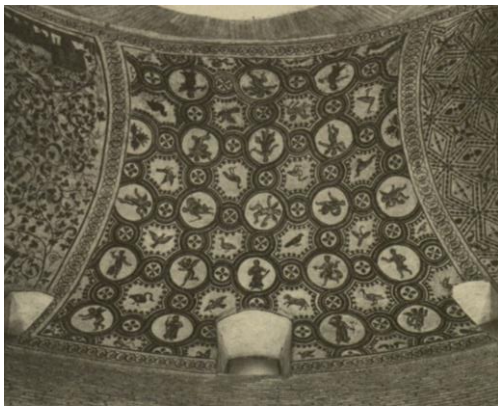
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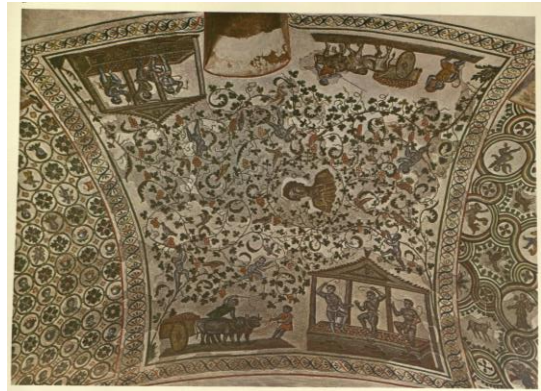
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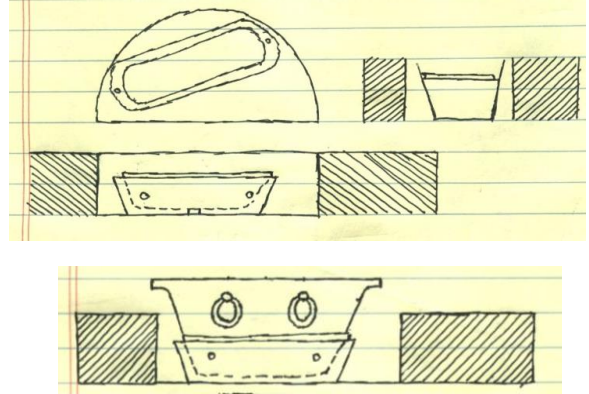


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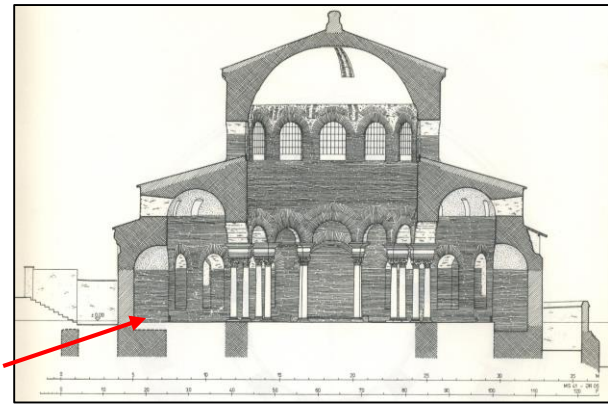
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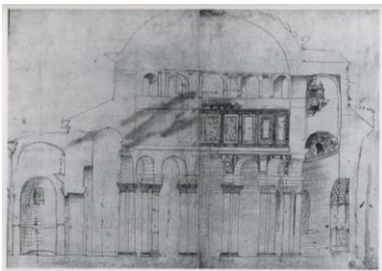
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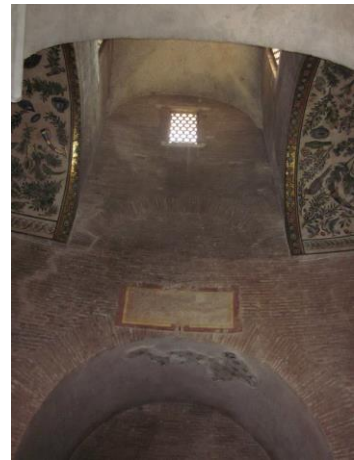




PLATE 4

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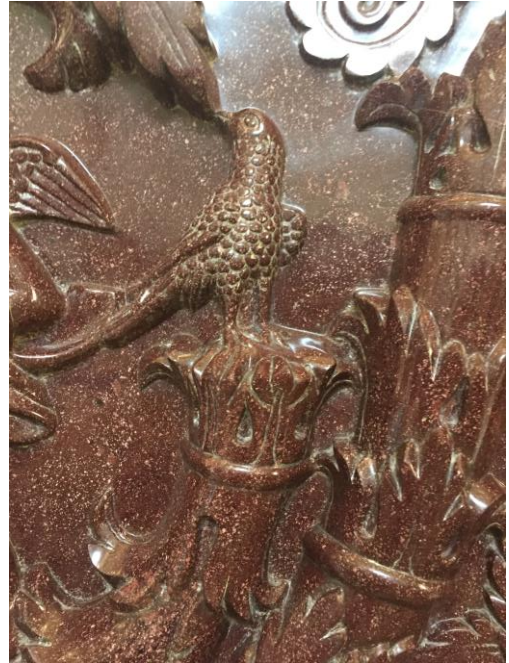
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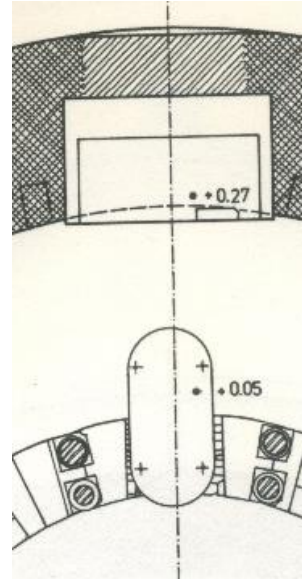


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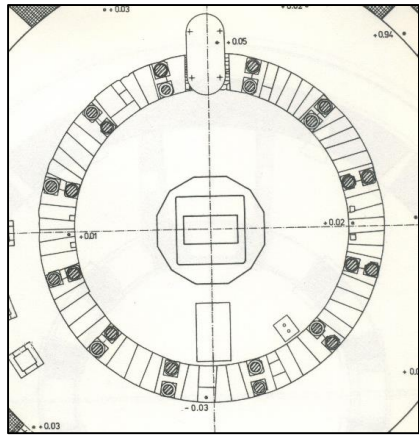
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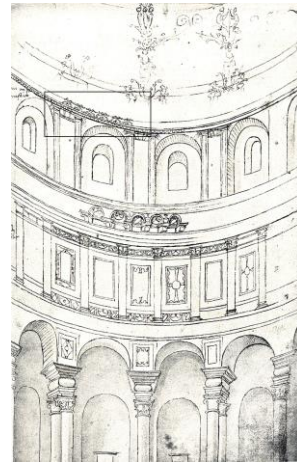
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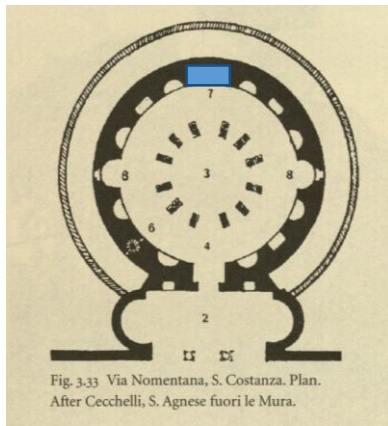


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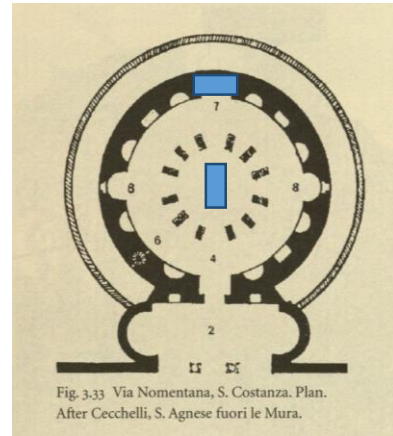


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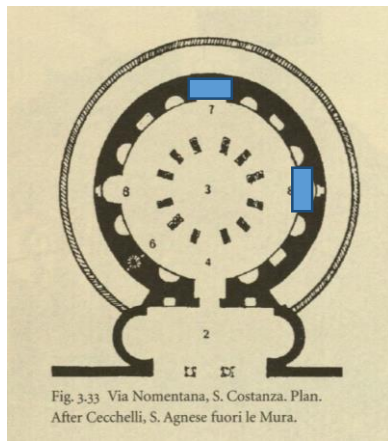
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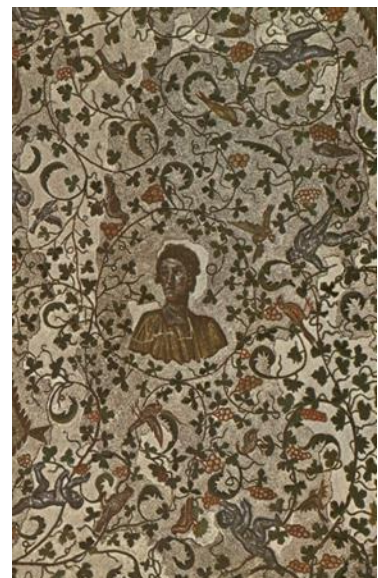
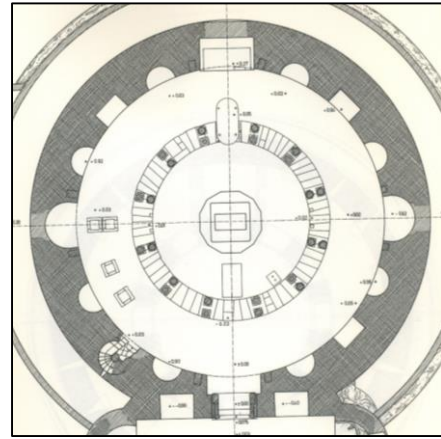


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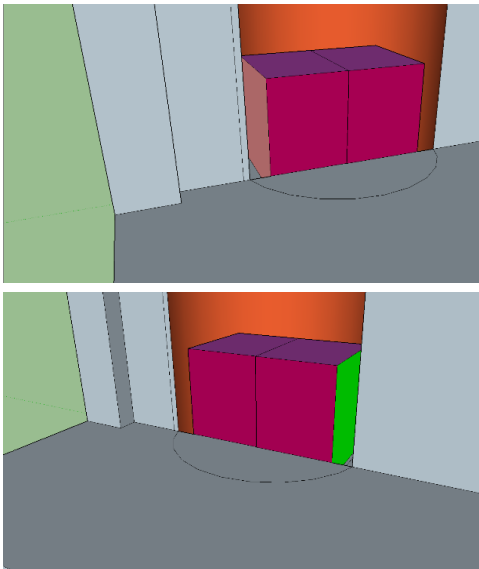
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PLATE 8

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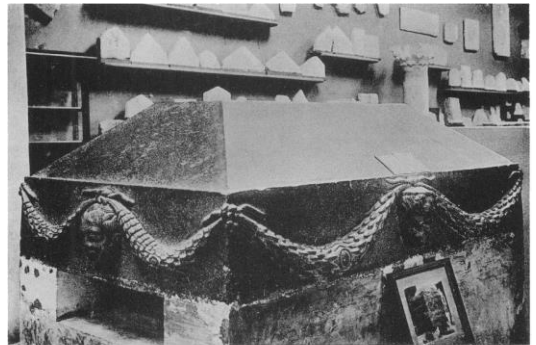
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