

## ABSTRACT

### The Use of Sacred Space in Hellenistic, Roman, and Christian Religious Sites

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My thesis investigates the use of sacred space in the Greco-Roman and early Christian religious traditions. I argue that there was a mutually reinforcing relationship between religious beliefs and practices on the one hand, and the structure of ritual space on the other. Rituals and beliefs determined the size and shape of environment in which worshippers approached the sacred, and this, in turn, influenced their experiences and beliefs. The thesis is organized as a series of four case studies. Chapter one examines the Hellenistic Temple of Apollo at Didyma in Asia Minor. In this chapter, I explore the ways in which oracular activities at the site contributed to the temple's unique architectural features. Furthermore, I argue that these very features supported the credibility of the oracle by creating a spiritually charged atmosphere. In chapter two, I turn to Rome and to the Temple of Castor and Pollux in the Roman Forum, investigating how the establishment of this site as a memorial of an important battle in Roman history paved the way for this sacred space to perform important political functions as well as religious. Finally, in chapter three, I explore two early Christian sites built over the tombs of saints: the basilica of Sant'Agnese Fuori le Mura and the basilica of San Lorenzo Fuori le Mura. I argue that the Christian veneration of saints and the localization of the holy led to the development of closely related basilica and martyrdom complexes.

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THE USE OF SACRED SPACE IN HELLENISTIC, ROMAN, AND CHRISTIAN  
RELIGIOUS SITES

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For Mom and Dad

For guiding me to Truth, Goodness, and Beauty.

## INTRODUCTION

My thesis investigates the use of sacred space in the Greco-Roman and early Christian religious traditions. I argue that there was a mutually reinforcing relationship between religious beliefs and practices on the one hand, and the structure of ritual space on the other. Rituals and beliefs determined the size and shape of environment in which worshippers approached the sacred, and this in turn influenced their experiences and beliefs. In this thesis, I examine the interplay between religious beliefs, rituals, and the structure of sacred space at Hellenistic, Roman, and Christian religious sites.

In the first chapter I undertake a case study of a Hellenistic temple in the ancient Greek world. The Temple of Apollo at Didyma demonstrates the mutual reinforcement of function and structure through its oracular activities. I propose that the unique architectural features of the temple served to perpetuate the mystical nature of the oracle at the site. In turn, knowledge regarding the oracle and its functions illuminates the purpose of particular structural elements.

In the second chapter, I turn to the Roman Republic to examine the temple of Castor and Pollux and the way it demonstrates the interplay of function and use of space. I argue that the mix of political and religious functions of the Temple of Castor and Pollux during the Roman Republic is explained by the political, communal nature of Roman religion. Furthermore, I argue that it is important to see that the Romans had a mythology distinct from Greek mythology that focused on the place of Rome and its foundation. In doing so, it worked in conjunction with Roman religion to call Romans to

seek the good of the state. The goal of the prosperity of the Roman state resulted in political uses of the sacred space at the Temple of Castor and Pollux.

In the third chapter, I investigate two similar early Christian basilicas that arose on top of the catacombs of martyrs. I argue that these basilicas, by their use as places for saint veneration, demonstrate the mutual reinforcement of function, structure, and belief system. The key to understanding these sites is to look at the cult of the saints in early Christian Rome and its role in fourth century Christianity. The cult of the saints was a bridge that brought together the legalized Christian Church of the fourth century and the formerly illegal, persecuted Church of the previous three centuries. The sacred spaces at the sites of San Lorenzo and Sant'Agnese acted as places through which the veneration of saints was encouraged and increased.

These case studies are conducted chronologically based on when they were constructed rather than when they ceased to be used. The years during which these sites were active coincided with one another and even affected one another. These sacred spaces were linked by more than the fact that they were consecrated for religious purposes. Despite the nearly one thousand year span of time between the earliest constructed site, the Temple of Apollo at Didyma, and the latest, the Basilica of Sant'Agnese, they are closely connected in history and in the impact that they had on one another.<sup>1</sup> Each of these sacred spaces represents a different belief system and use of space. Nevertheless, we see a fascinating link between the oldest and the newest. The Temple of Apollo at Didyma is thought to have been established in the seventh century

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<sup>1</sup> Kleinbauer, "Antioch, Jerusalem, and Rome," 131. It is thought that Sant'Agnese was the last of the six funerary basilicas to be built, placing it chronologically after San Lorenzo.

B.C. and definitely by the sixth century B.C.<sup>2</sup> It continued to function as an oracular site into the fifth or sixth century A.D. In 303 A.D., the Roman emperor Diocletian consulted the longstanding oracle at Didyma. The result of this consultation might have led to, or at the very least influenced, the construction of the Basilica of Sant'Agnese, investigated in Chapter Three. When Diocletian approached the oracle at Didyma, he requested permission to persecute the Christians. The oracle's response was, "The righteous on the earth [Christians] are an impediment to the god's truth-speaking and on this account cause him to speak false responses from the tripods."<sup>3</sup> Diocletian's request was granted. Not long after, during that very persecution, a young Roman Christian maiden named Agnes was martyred.<sup>4</sup> The basilica of Sant'Agnese exists in honor of her victory as a martyr. It is upon her very tomb that the basilica rests. The permission granted by the oracle at Didyma led to St. Agnes' death and, subsequently, to her basilica as well. Through this episode, we can see that these sites interacted with one another, albeit at a distance. This demonstrates in a small way that an investigation of these three seemingly isolated types of religious sites is an important investigation for it helps us understand not only how sacred space was used, but also that these three religions, though very different, influenced one another. If we want to understand how they influenced one another, looking at their use of sacred space is a good beginning.

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<sup>2</sup> Johnston, *Ancient Greek Divination*, 76.

<sup>3</sup> Fontenrose, *Didyma*, 206, Fragment 33.

<sup>4</sup> I acknowledge that Diocletian might have followed through with the persecution of the Christians whether or not the oracle had given him "permission." The purpose in including this story is to show that these sites were not isolated from one another, but rather that they indirectly affected one another.

## CHAPTER ONE

### The Temple of Apollo at Didyma: A Hellenistic Religious Site

#### *Introduction*

The Temple of Apollo at Didyma, the third largest temple in the ancient Greek world, was, and still is, a breathtaking structure. While there was a temple built during the Archaic period, the Hellenistic temple is the most remarkable; in addition, it is the structure about which we have the most information concerning the Didymaeian oracle and its function. The contrasting light and dark architectural features, the wide-open expanse where one would have expected a roof, the inner temple within a temple, the sacred grove and spring, and the overall immense size of the temple combined to create a dramatic and powerful experience for worshippers and visitors. I propose that the features unique to the Temple of Apollo at Didyma and its myths of origin created a desired mystical environment through which the oracular function of Apollo at Didyma was reinforced. The oracle at Didyma and its proceedings provide an understanding of the function of the temple as a whole. When we examine the rather unique features of the temple in conjunction with the associated myths of the foundation of the oracle, we begin to see how the structure lent itself to the function of the space it enclosed.

#### *The Role of Myths*

In order to understand the temple and its functions, it is important to look at its foundation myths and what role those myths might have played. The Temple of Apollo

at Didyma—like many sacred spaces of ancient Greece—was founded upon a holy place related to a god, in this case, Apollo. According to the most common myth of the oracle at Didyma, there was a Delphian who, after visiting Miletos—the city nearest to the temple and the one that later controlled it—accidentally left behind his son, Smicrus, when he departed for home.<sup>5</sup> Smicrus was adopted by a local man and, later, married a local woman with whom he had a son named Branchus. Apollo was captivated by the young, handsome Branchus and took him as his lover.<sup>6</sup> In reward for his favors, Apollo gave Branchus a laurel branch in the forest where he first beheld him, established an oracular sanctuary to be under Branchus' control, and inspired him with a gift of divine prophecy.<sup>7</sup> The oracular sanctuary, later to become the Temple of Apollo at Didyma, was established at that very spot and oracular authority was given to Branchus and his descendents.<sup>8</sup> Most scholars agree that the Branchidae, Branchus' supposed descendants, maintained control over the oracular activity until the Persians came in 494 B.C.<sup>9</sup> There are many variations of this story in other sources, but this account contains what seem to be the most consistent elements. An investigation of all of the variations is not relevant here, however, as we are not investigating the verity of the myths, but rather the consequences of a general ancient understanding of those myths on the use of the temple

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<sup>5</sup> Sarah Johnston, *Ancient Greek Divination* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 82-82.

<sup>6</sup> Joseph Fontenrose, *Didyma: Apollo's Oracle, Cult, and Companions*, (London: University of California Press, 1988), 107; Johnston, *Ancient Greek Divination*, 83.

<sup>7</sup> Johnston, *Ancient Greek Divination*, 83.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 84.

space. As a result, we will focus on the prevailing story and use that as a basis for understanding what role the myth might have played in the oracular identity of the temple.

The myths of the foundation of the Temple of Apollo at Didyma seem to have held an important purpose for the temple's self-identity as a prominent oracle inspired by Apollo. In the ancient world, the Apollonian oracle at Delphi was the most popular and well-known oracle contemporaneous with the oracle at Didyma.<sup>10</sup> This oracle was Pan-Hellenic, so it was not controlled by a single city so as to give it greater disinterest in the resolution of disputes. The oracle at Didyma, however, was controlled by the city of Miletos. Despite Didyma's rule by a single city, it was still internationally known and important. Nevertheless, due to the great renown of Delphi, the oracle of Didyma stood in the shadow of the oracle at Delphi. Even now, most students of ancient Greece have heard about the Delphian oracle, but have never heard of the Didymaeian oracle. The best way for the oracle at Didyma to hold its own was to associate itself—to give itself validity—through a strong connection to the oracle at Delphi. This desire for connection can be seen in elements of the myth of creation of the oracle at Didyma. The myth mentioned above indirectly drew a connection to Delphi through the lineage of Branchus, whose father was a Delphian. Sarah Johnston sees this as a clear effort to give greater authority to the oracle at Didyma by means of a connection between the Didymaeian

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<sup>10</sup> Mary Emerson, *Greek Sanctuaries: An Introduction*, (London: Bristol Classical Press, 2007), 26; Richard Stoneman, *The Ancient Oracles: Making the Gods Speak* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011), 26.



prophets and Delphi, the location of the better known and very well established oracle.<sup>11</sup>

This mythical connection is not the only possible connection to Delphi. H.W. Parke believes that the very structure of the oracle at Didyma was designed in imitation of the oracle at Delphi: in particular, the female prophetess as the instrument inspired by Apollo to speak his words to those who seek his wisdom.<sup>12</sup>

In addition to the mythical connection to Delphi, the Didymaeans also appeared to have attributed more weight to their oracle through the circulation of other myths.

According to legend, after the Trojan War, King Menelaus stopped at the Temple of Apollo at Didyma to dedicate a special shield taken from one of the Trojan War heroes.<sup>13</sup>

Whether or not this actually happened, we see that the oracle at Didyma was deemed important enough that it was, at the very least, added to the Trojan War stories as a site that was worthy of receiving the plunder from the war.

The appearance of these myths located at Didyma demonstrates a cultural understanding of the importance of the oracle at Didyma. The Delphian and Trojan threads that were woven into the stories about Didyma served to strengthen the oracle's credibility; and consequently, the oracular function of the temple was reinforced. We have seen how the beliefs surrounding the sacred space of Didyma supported its function.

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<sup>11</sup> Johnston, *Ancient Greek Divination*, 84.

<sup>12</sup> H.W. Parke, "The Temple of Apollo at Didyma: The Building and Its Function." *The Society for the Promotions of Hellenic Studies* 106 (1986): 124. To be more specific, the female prophetess at Didyma may have been influenced by the role of the female Pythia at Delphi.

<sup>13</sup> Johnston, *Ancient Greek Divination*, 84.

Now we will investigate how the architecture of the temple itself served to enhance the credibility and weight of the oracle at Didyma.

### *The Oracle*

In order to understand the many unique features of the Temple of Apollo at Didyma, it is necessary to understand the functioning of the oracle. The oracle at Didyma was originally under the care of male priests, called *prophetes*, from among the Branchidae, who claimed descent from the mythical Branchus, the legendary founder of the oracle and the temple.<sup>14</sup> Following the destruction of the Archaic temple at the hands of the Persians in 494 B.C., however, the oracle was reorganized. Between 494 B.C. and about 330 B.C. when construction on the Hellenistic temple began, the sanctuary was essentially defunct. When the oracle was reestablished, female *manteis* (seers) took the place of male priests most likely in imitation of the female Pythia at Delphi.<sup>15</sup> The role of the *mantis* was to receive the divine responses and to deliver them to the *prophetes* (prophet) who then proclaimed them to the inquirers.<sup>16</sup> According to Fontenrose, the *prophetes* was also the official who received the questions from the pilgrims and brought them to the *mantis* who was presumably seated at the sacred spring from whence part of the power of Apollo came to her.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>16</sup> Johnston 2008: 84.

<sup>17</sup> Fontenrose, *Didyma*, 79.

The most detailed record of the divination process is provided by Iamblichus, an early fourth century A.D. Syrian philosopher.<sup>18</sup> In his *On the Mysteries*, he writes that the *mantis* would have first fasted in seclusion for three days prior to divination.<sup>19</sup> Then, when the time came to answer inquiries, the *mantis* would sit upon an axle at the sacred spring within the *adyton*, and holding a staff in her hand, she would dip either her feet or the hem of her dress into the spring, and breath in its vapors. It was believed that only then did she receive oracles from Apollo.<sup>20</sup> It is a matter of debate as to what aspect of this ritual was believed to have been the source of inspiration from Apollo: the contact of her feet with the water, the contact of her dress with the water, the breathing in of the spring's vapors, or a combination of all of those elements. Fontenrose reasonably argues that the *mantis* would have received inspiration and prophesy through all of the above actions because each of them was carried out at every divination session. The role of the sacred spring as the location of the divinization was very important for the oracle, especially with its connection to the myth of the origin of the oracle at Didyma. As mentioned above, according to the myth of Didyma, Apollo created the spring as a gift to Branchus in exchange for his affections. It shows how the ancient Greeks at Didyma attributed a special significance to a place; it was a localization of the holy.

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<sup>18</sup> One might ask how a man from the fourth century A.D. might know of the oracular processes of a temple that was functioning in the fourth century B.C. I have not mentioned that the oracle at Didyma continued functioning uninterrupted from the fourth century B.C. until about the fifth or sixth centuries A.D. Thus, Iamblichus would have had first-hand knowledge of the oracle, at least when it was functioning during his lifetime.

<sup>19</sup> Stoneman, *The Ancient Oracles*, 87-88.

<sup>20</sup> Johnston, *Ancient Greek Divination* 85.

### *Architectural Features and Their Reinforcement of the Oracle*

The architecture of the temple also served to enhance the validity and weight of the oracle at Didyma. The entire architectural setting of the Temple of Apollo at Didyma appears to have been designed with a dramatic flair in mind. This sense of the dramatic enhanced the power and mystical environment surrounding the oracle at Didyma. The Hellenistic time period in which the temple was rebuilt was known for its love of the dramatic and its use of architecture to enhance it. The Temple of Apollo at Didyma is clearly adhering to this tendency of the Hellenistic period, all the while adapting it for its own purpose: the oracle. Its awe-inspiring structure reinforced the temple's function as an oracular site.

The original "temple" at Didyma, which consisted of a simple enclosure around the sacred spring, was possibly constructed in the seventh century B.C.<sup>21</sup> Later, in the early sixth century B.C., an Archaic temple was built.<sup>22</sup> However, we know very little about the rituals and oracular activity happening at that time. During the attack of the Persians in 494 B.C., the Archaic temple was burnt down by Xerxes.<sup>23</sup> Some time around 330 B.C., construction of a new temple was undertaken at the behest of Alexander the Great.<sup>24</sup> The construction of this temple continued sporadically for some five hundred years.<sup>25</sup> It is this Hellenistic temple that is still standing today.

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<sup>21</sup> Stoneman, *The Ancient Oracles*, 84.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Fontenrose, *Didyma*, 12.

<sup>24</sup> Johnston, *Ancient Greek Divination*, 84.

<sup>25</sup> Parke, "The Temple of Apollo at Didyma," 126.

As I begin to describe the Hellenistic Temple of Apollo at Didyma, I ask that the reader try to imagine each element described. The description is not simply a boring set of measurements and architectural terms; on the contrary, if read with the image of the temple and a sense of its sheer magnitude in mind, it can serve to conjure up the magnificent grandeur of the temple (with the help of the photographs provided, of course). In doing so, we are able to see more clearly the experience an ancient Greek might have had in the spiritually charged atmosphere at Didyma.

The most immediately striking aspect of the Hellenistic temple is its grand size. As one approaches the temple, it looms up over the horizon. With a length of about 118 meters, the temple is much longer than a football field (100 yards=91.44 meters). These grand dimensions made the Temple of Apollo at Didyma the third-largest building in the ancient Greek world.<sup>26</sup> The temple is dipteral; this means that there are two rows of columns surrounding the perimeter of the temple (Figure 1). In total, the temple is composed of a ten-by-twenty-one column colonnade with extra columns in the *pronaos*, the front porch structure (Figure 1).<sup>27</sup> Measuring sixty-four feet, these columns are the tallest and slimmest of any known Greek temple.<sup>28</sup> This is a very important characteristic to note. With their remarkable height and slenderness, these columns would have towered over pilgrims as they drew near. When a pilgrim lifted his head to look up at the

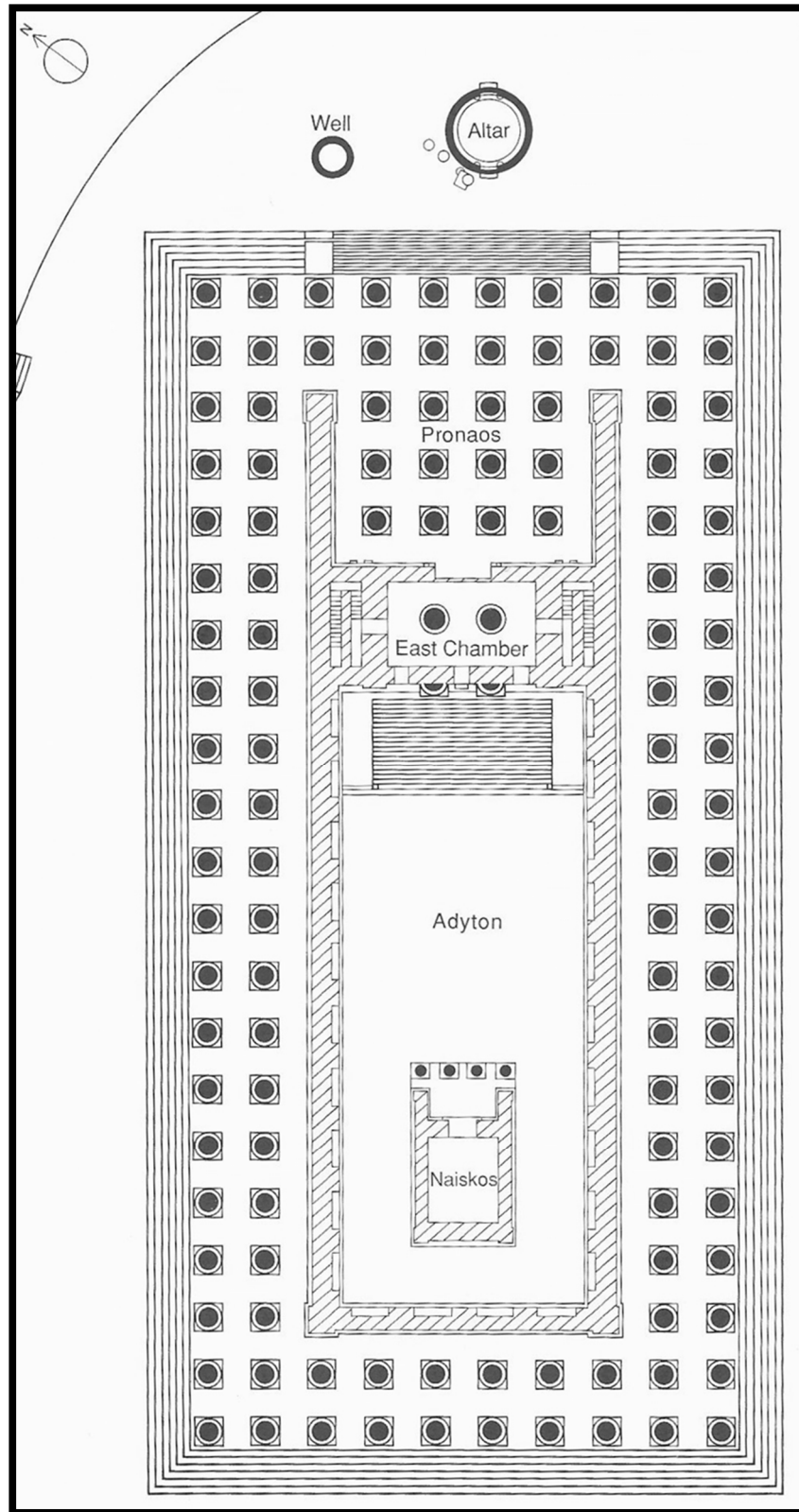
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<sup>26</sup> Fontenrose, *Didyma*, 34. The Temple of Didyma is not located in Greece, rather it is in present-day Turkey. However, this was a part of the ancient Greek world.

<sup>27</sup> William Bell Dinsmoor, *The Architecture of Ancient Greece* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1975), 231.

<sup>28</sup> A.W. Lawrence, *Greek Architecture*, (Baltimore: Penguin Books Limited, 1957), 202.

columns, it would have seemed that the columns were leaning toward him, like tall trees swaying ever so slightly in the wind. This served to enhance the awe-inspiring nature of the temple; the columns would have made visitors feel even smaller and more insignificant in the face of the perceived greatness of Apollo and his oracle.



**Figure 1:** Plan of the Hellenistic Temple of Apollo. From *Didyma* by Fontenrose

The temple rests on a platform of seven large steps that are unmanageable for men to climb; however, the center of the east side has a section of thirteen shorter steps (Figure 2). The latter steps were the only usable steps for human beings. The contrast between the massive, giant-like steps and the tiny—in comparison—human steps served yet again to remind visitors of their insignificance in the face of the great god Apollo. One could almost imagine a tiny human scrambling up the small steps while a giant god gracefully glided up the massive steps immediately beside the man. In fact, these steps served as possibly the first “initiation,” of sorts, into the “rite” of humility; this “rite” as I have called it, seemed to serve as a preparation, a making-ready, of the supplicant before he approached the great god.



**Figure 2:** Front Entrance to the Temple of Apollo at Didyma. Note the contrast in step sizes. Photograph by Megan Renz.



Once the visitor had mounted the stairs, he would enter the *pronaos*, the front porch of the temple, that was three columns deep. In most temples, the back wall of the *pronaos* contained a door that led directly into the inner sanctuary. At Didyma, however, there is not a door in the wall of the *pronaos*. Instead, in the center of the wall at the back of the *pronaos*, there is a window-like opening that begins about five feet from the ground.<sup>29</sup> The height of the opening prevented visitors from walking through this opening to enter the inner sanctuary, called the *adyton*, at least without unceremoniously climbing up and over the ledge. The only possible entrances to the *adyton* were passageways on either end of the *pronaos*, a very unique layout.<sup>30</sup> These passageways were relatively long tunnels that descended down into the *adyton*.<sup>31</sup> Whereas many visitors might have expected a direct, easy entrance into the temple, they would have had a moment of confusion in which they had to search for the entrance to the sanctuary of the god. This element of the temple's structure was yet another step in the "rite" of humiliation for pilgrims before they approached Apollo. The architecture served as a physical reminder of the divination process of an oracle in which one could not go directly to the god himself, but had to go through the agency of the *prophetes* and the *mantis*.

There are particularly unique features to the Temple of Apollo at Didyma that I believe are best explained, not by the architects' desires to innovate, but rather by a

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<sup>29</sup> Stoneman, *The Ancient Oracles*, 85.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Johnston, *Ancient Greek Divination*, 86.

combined interest in relating the importance of and the mystical nature of the oracle located within this temple. One must take into account the god to whom this sanctuary was dedicated: Apollo, the god of prophecy.<sup>32</sup> Apollo is often associated with sacred groves and laurel trees. The entire structure acts dually as both temple and sacred grove of Apollo. The manmade and natural elements within the temple are skillfully interwoven. This is seen most vividly in the columns on the exterior. There were five sets of different base decorations on the columns, some of which had sculpted laurel leaves.<sup>33</sup> The columns, already appearing very treelike with their incredible height and slimness, thus were depicted as various types of stone trees, including the most important Apollonian laurel tree. From afar, it might even have looked like a grove of trees jutting out from an empty horizon.<sup>34</sup>

In harmony with this outer “grove” of trees, there was most likely a grove of real laurel trees within the *adyton* by the third century B.C.<sup>35</sup> There was a unity between the stone column “forest” of the exterior of the temple and the organic “forest” of the interior, both of which directed viewers to the oracle of Didyma as the focal point of the temple. Furthermore, within this interior grove was located the sacred spring given by Apollo to Branchus for his sanctuary. These two aspects of this forest-within-a-temple are very unusual. In addition, the fact that no roof was ever placed on the temple allowed

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<sup>32</sup> Mary Lefkowitz, *Greek Gods, Human Lives*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), 252.

<sup>33</sup> Dinsmoor, *The Architecture of Ancient Greece*, 231.

<sup>34</sup> Vincent Scully, *The Earth, the Temple, and the Gods: Greek Sacred Architecture*, (London: Yale University Press, 1962), 129.

<sup>35</sup> Johnston, *Ancient Greek Divination*, 88.

for this very natural setting within which the sky itself could add to the dramatic atmosphere of the temple—and, of course, allow for the nourishment of the trees.<sup>36</sup> Johnston even suggests that the open roof was believed to allow Apollo to easily pass from the heavens into the temple.<sup>37</sup> Many scholars explain the functions of the unique features of the temple within the context of the oracle. In this particular case, the main purpose for Apollo's direct access to the temple would have been for the sake of divination.

Nestled within this inner “forest” of the temple, was the *naiskos*, a small temple (Figure 1). This too, is uncommon among temples, for what would one do with a temple inside of a temple? Just as the contrast of large steps with small steps on the front platform of the temple served to remind man of his smallness, in some ways this temple served a similar purpose. The *naiskos* would have appeared very small in comparison to the tall walls and columns surrounding it and the vast forest-like grove all around it. While it did have other purposes, it most immediately seemed to have acted as a marker to show just how large the temple really was. For example, when we take pictures of massive buildings, we often include people within those pictures in order to give the viewer of the picture an idea of the scale. Likewise, this small temple acted as a permanent scale against the tall trees and walls and wide expanse of the interior of the temple.<sup>38</sup> This emphasis on the magnitude of the temple would have served to remind the

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<sup>36</sup> Dinsmoor, *The Architecture of Ancient Greece*, 229.

<sup>37</sup> Johnston, *Ancient Greek Divination*, 88.

<sup>38</sup> Scully, *The Earth, the Temple, and the Gods*, 130.

visitors of the oracle whom they were approaching and of their own smallness before him.

The *naiskos* might have also played an even more direct part in the oracular activity. Prior to all of her prophetic sessions, the woman (*mantis*) who received the words of Apollo spent three days of seclusion. Johnston suggests that this small temple might have been the location of this seclusion.<sup>39</sup> It was right next to the sacred spring and grove, it was located within the temple, and it was the only structure with a roof to provide protection from the elements. Thus, it seemed the most probable place to house the *mantis* during her period of seclusion.

The window-like opening placed in the wall between the *pronaos* and the *adyton* also seems to have had a function directly connected to the oracle at the Temple of Apollo at Didyma. Many scholars suggest that this window served as a balcony of sorts from which the oracle would pronounce the divination to the waiting inquirers.<sup>40</sup>

With all of these unique features in mind, imagine the experience one might have had at the temple. When one first beholds the temple, his breath is taken away by the sheer magnitude of the temple. The tall, thin columns loom imposingly into the horizon like trees in a forest. Then, he lowers his gaze to see the curiously large steps surround the temple. Yet, at the center of the east side of the temple there is a small section with normal-sized, manageable steps. The immediate contrast between the large, god-size steps and the small human steps, creates a feeling of smallness and humility for the human visitor. He is truly approaching the house of a god.

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<sup>39</sup> Johnston, *Ancient Greek Divination*, 88.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 86.

After ascending the steps, the viewer sees the *pronaos*, very typical of a Greek temple; however, upon closer inspection, he discovers that there is not a typical entrance to the *adyton*. What seems to be the most obvious entrance is window five feet in the air. Then, to either side of the window, he finds the opening to a tunnel. As he enters the tunnel, the bright light of day is suddenly dimmed and the darkness of the tunnel engulfs him as he descends at a decline—a slightly shocking thing to find in an entrance to an *adyton*. Then, as the visitor emerges from the dark tunnel, his vision is stunned by the brightness of the light blazing once again throughout the roofless sanctuary. The columns and walls of the temple seem to loom even higher around him; it is as if he has stepped out of the shade of trees densely packed together and into a sunny grove. As his eyesight adjusts, he sees a very unusual sight for the interior of a temple: a grove of laurel trees and a spring. Near these trees, he sees yet another temple. This one, the *naiskos*, is much smaller and, in contrast to the larger temple within which it sits, has a roof. As the viewer turns to look behind him, he sees a large flight of stairs rising up to the window-like opening he saw from the *pronaos*. He is inside a temple and yet it seems as if he walked into a sacred grove in the forest where he just might happen upon the god Apollo himself.

It is this sense of expectancy, this feeling of the presence of Apollo that seems to have been the goal of the entire temple complex. For this sense of the divine is what gave the oracle at Didyma its credence. Furthermore, this sense of expectancy prepared the visitor for the appearance of the *mantis* or *prophet* who was believed to be inspired by Apollo. All of these features described were a part of the “rite” of humiliation that elicited a sense of one’s own littleness and awe at the grandeur of the temple and

consequently of Apollo himself—light changing, vast open sky above, a forest in which one can get lost, and an unexpected temple within a temple.

### *Conclusion*

The Hellenistic Temple of Apollo at Didyma was a remarkable temple during its golden age, not only because of its grand dimensions, but also for the environment it created for its visitors. It combined magnitude of structure, rare architectural features, a forest of both columns and trees, various levels within, an inner temple, and a sacred spring to weave a mystical woodland of Apollo. The atmosphere of the Temple of Apollo at Didyma was created by the architecture itself to enhance the visitor's experience of Apollo and to strengthen his awe and reverence for the oracle at Didyma and Apollo himself. Through this, we see the interplay of the structure and function of this Hellenistic site. Furthermore, the Temple of Apollo at Didyma shows how the myth of a sacred space can shape and interact with its function and space.

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Temple of Castor and Pollux: A Roman Religious Site

#### *Introduction*

The Temple of Castor and Pollux situated in Rome demonstrates how sacred space can be used in public, political functions when the religion with which it is associated is a public one. As we have seen in the previous chapter, sacred space cannot be isolated from its function. In order to understand both the function of a space and the structure, it is necessary to gain an understanding of the ideologies behind the space. At the Temple of Apollo at Didyma, one could not understand the purpose of the unique architectural features without also knowing about the myths regarding Apollo and his interactions at Didyma nor without knowing about the rituals and functioning of the oracle. In a similar way, we cannot fully comprehend the Temple of Castor and Pollux without a cursory glance at Roman mythology and the way it shaped the Roman religious mindset.

The Temple of Castor and Pollux housed political and religious activities and this is understood through the public nature of Roman religion and the temple's myth linked to the foundation of the Roman Republic. Roman mythology, with its emphasis on the place of Rome and the foundation of the Roman Republic, guided Romans to a great pride for and love of the Republic to which they belonged. Roman religion too, with its public, political nature sought the welfare of the Republic. Thus Roman mythology and Roman religion were inexorably linked. An understanding of both mythology and

religion during the Roman Republic sheds light on the use of sacred space at the Temple of Castor and Pollux.

### *The Battle of Lake Regillus and the Construction of the Temple*

The Temple of Castor and Pollux, one of the oldest temples in the Roman Forum, is connected to an important myth of the early years of the Roman Republic. The cult of Castor and Pollux arrived in Magna Graecia (southern Italy) most likely around 570-530 B.C., when Rome was still a monarchy.<sup>41</sup> It quickly spread to Latium and thereby Rome. A few decades later, when the Romans were fighting to overthrow the last king of Rome, Tarquinius Superbus, Castor and Pollux appeared on the mythical scene. The Romans' fight against the Latins—who were lead by Superbus—came to an end in the Battle of Lake Regillus on July 15<sup>th</sup>, 499 or 496 B.C.<sup>42</sup> According to tradition, at the climax of the Battle of Lake Regillus, the Roman dictator, Aulus Postumius, begged for Castor and Pollux's intercession and promised to build a temple for them in return for their aid.<sup>43</sup> At this request, two young men, thought to be Castor and Pollux, came riding into the battle on white steeds and fought with the Romans, guiding them to victory.<sup>44</sup> After the battle, they were seen at the Pool of Juturna in the Forum where they proclaimed the recent

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<sup>41</sup> Amanda Claridge, *Rome, An Oxford Archaeological Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 95.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Birte Poulsen, "Cult, Myth, and Politics," in *The Temple of Castor and Pollux*, eds. Inge Nielsen and Birte Poulsen (Rome, Italy: Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, 1992), 46.

<sup>44</sup> Cicero, *De Natura Deorum*, trans. Rackham, H. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1933), 2.6, 3.11-13; Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities*, trans. Earnest Cary. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1940), 6.13.



victory of the Romans over the Latins.<sup>45</sup> This victory signified the end of what had become a tyrannical monarchy and the beginning of the Roman Republic.

Similar to what we will see in the cases of the Christian basilicas and to what we saw with the Temple of Apollo at Didyma, there is a weight attached to the holiness of a particular location; each of these sacred spaces were not arbitrarily chosen, but rather, were placed intentionally at a site where a significant encounter with the divine had, or had supposedly, occurred. Likewise, the Temple of Castor and Pollux was built at a location significant to its myth. In memory of the important victory at the Battle of Lake Regillus and the theophany of Castor and Pollux, as well as to honor Postumius' vow, Postumius' son built the Temple of Castor and Pollux adjacent to the Pool of Juturna and dedicated it in 484 B.C.<sup>46</sup> Its placement in proximity to the Pool of Juturna served to remind the Roman people of what had happened at that spot and, by association, to draw their minds to the victory which Castor and Pollux had helped bring about for the Romans. Thus we see the connection between placement of the structure and memorial of the myth. The location of the temple reminded the Romans of the myth that was very important to their history and for garnering pride in the Republic. As we see in the case of the Temple of Castor and Pollux, Roman mythology played an important role in Roman religion, and accordingly Roman religious sites.

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<sup>45</sup> David Watkin, *The Roman Forum*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 63.

<sup>46</sup> Claridge, *Rome*, 95. On the dedication by Postumius' son: Livy, *History of Rome*, trans. B.O. Foster, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1919), 2.42.5.

## *Roman Mythology*

Many scholars tend to brush aside Roman mythology as nothing more than an appropriation of foreign mythology, primarily Greek mythology.<sup>47</sup> Simon Price notes that this common way of viewing Roman mythology creates a dichotomy between the study of Roman religion and of Roman myth; the result is that we cannot gain an understanding of Roman religious sites through Roman mythology because it is not believed to be truly Roman.<sup>48</sup> Price, however, provides a strong argument that there was indeed a Roman mythology unique to Rome and that it greatly influenced Roman religion and religious structures.<sup>49</sup> It is this argument that paves the way for the understanding of the Temple of Castor and Pollux and its various functions in the Roman Republic. Roman mythology was uniquely political and public, and so it shaped the way the Temple of Castor and Pollux was used.

It seems that those who viewed Roman mythology as really only a Greek appropriation, were judging Roman mythology with a certain inappropriate standard. It is true that when compared to Greek mythology, Roman mythology does not have its own parallel mythology. The Romans did not have a cosmogony—stories about the creation of the world—like the Greek writings of Hesiod, nor did they have stories of the

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<sup>47</sup> S.R.F. Price, “The Place of Religion: Rome in the Early Empire,” Vol. 10 of *The Cambridge Ancient History*, eds. Alan K. Bowman, Edward Champlin, and Andrew Lintott, (Online: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 814.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 815, 846.

gods partaking in mortal lives quite like stories such as Homer's *Odyssey*.<sup>50</sup> In contrast, "Roman myths were in essence, myths of place."<sup>51</sup> Many of the great stories, or myths, of the Romans took place in Rome and emphasized the importance of Rome herself. Furthermore, a large portion of these myths dealt with the founding of Rome or the early history of the city.<sup>52</sup> The Romans held fast to these myths as a part of their identity. The Romans used their myths as a way to form their character. We often read of Romans in the late Republic referring to a character or story from the early Republic as a standard to which one ought to be held. The people of these stories taught individuals how to be good Romans with *pietas*. According to Cicero, "*pietas* is justice with regard to the gods," (est enim pietas iustitia adversum deos. *Nat. Deor.* 1.116)<sup>53</sup> The Romans held *pietas* to be a very high and important virtue that one ought to seek. It was a virtue that helped the Roman people achieve the very goal of their religion, as I will discuss later, which was the prosperity and welfare of the Republic. "Justice with regard to the gods" would make the gods happy, ensuring their protection of and aid for Rome. So, we can see how *pietas* was a highly valued virtue in ancient Rome.

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<sup>50</sup> Price, 815. One might use the *Aeneid* as an argument for the idea that the Romans did indeed have myths in which the gods partook in mortal lives in a similar way to Homer's *Odyssey*. The *Aeneid*, however, was an epic associated with the Augustan and Imperial period of Rome. The mythology to which I am referring is primarily associated with the Republic.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Cicero, *De Natura Deorum*, 1.116.

The perpetuation of these myths was necessary for the formation of Roman identity. It was through the sacred architecture and the myths associated with that architecture that the Romans carried their stories and the ideals within those stories down to further generations. For the Romans, whose myths were myths of place, it would only make sense that these myths were memorialized through physical places that served to teach of those myths. Geoffrey Sumi says,

“For Romans much of their history was contained in the monuments that dotted the landscape of their city, and these monuments, I would argue, acted as a kind of mnemonic device that allowed Romans to remember some of the great events of their past.”<sup>54</sup>

Not only did these monuments serve as reminders of Roman history, but they also served as teaching aids to guide the Romans to learn about their foundation as a Republic; that, in turn, would instill within them pride for Rome and motivate them to strive for *pietas*. The Temple of Castor and Pollux with its myth regarding the foundation of the Roman Republic served as a physical reminder of Rome’s proud past in its overthrow of tyranny.

### *Roman Religion*

In order to understand the link that existed between Roman religion and Roman politics, it is necessary to outline a few basic principles of Roman religion. Roman religion was not a single belief system with a codified dogma. Unlike Christianity, it did not have any revelation or official belief system to which its followers were obligated to

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<sup>54</sup> Geoffrey Sumi, “Monuments and Memory: The Aedes Castoris in the Formation of Augustan Ideology,” *The Classical Quarterly*, New Series 59, no. 1 (May 2009):168.

adhere.<sup>55</sup> Rather, Roman religion was oriented around *orthopraxis*, meaning, “right practice,” whereas Christianity is a religion with *orthodoxy*, meaning, “right doctrine.”<sup>56</sup> Individuals were born into a certain social status and had particular religious duties that pertained to that social status; as such, an individual did not make a personal decision to convert to Roman religion.<sup>57</sup> Roman religion and Christianity have two very different goals. Christianity seeks the eternal salvation of each individual within the community. Roman religion, however, sought to maintain the prosperity and good of the community, namely of the Roman Republic.<sup>58</sup> Thereby, as was mentioned previously, *pietas* was highly esteemed in Roman religion because it ensured the good of the community by winning the gods’ favor. As a natural result of the public goal of Roman religion, “there was a religious aspect to every communal action, and a communal aspect to every religious action,” making the Roman religion a political religion.<sup>59</sup> This leads us to a noteworthy distinction between the Christian and Roman religions that is necessary to understand the different functions of the sacred spaces. Christianity was not in essence a political institution. Its theology, rituals, and activities were not intertwined with the proceedings of the state nor were its sacred spaces meant to function in any political

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<sup>55</sup> John Scheid, *An Introduction to Roman Religion*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), 18.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 20.

manner.<sup>60</sup> Roman religion, however, was essentially tied to the public and the political realm of the Republic.

### *The Use of the Temple of Castor and Pollux*

As would be expected, the Temple of Castor and Pollux had typical religious functions. One of the most important was an annual parade in memory of Castor and Pollux's theophany at the Battle of Lake Regillus. This parade, called the *transvectio equitum*, was held on date of the Battle of Lake Regillus, July 15<sup>th</sup>.<sup>61</sup> It consisted of possibly up to five thousand men following two men on white steeds acting as Castor and Pollux. According to one source, the members of the parade were men of the equestrian order who "had the right of the public horse (*equites equo publico*)."<sup>62</sup> During the Roman Republic, the parade snaked through the Forum and ended at the Temple of Castor and Pollux where the equestrians came before the censors and were discharged from service in the military.<sup>63</sup> We can see how even this religious ritual associated with the Temple of Castor and Pollux had a political aspect to it. The religious and political in Rome was almost inseparable. While the parade did honor and remember Castor and Pollux and their intercession for the Romans, it was also a ritual important for the

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<sup>60</sup> Some might argue that Christianity did become a political institution, especially under the Emperor Constantine. I would like to make it clear that I am referring to Christianity from the outset, in its original establishment. The Christian belief system based upon Christ's sayings and teachings did not include a necessary political institution.

<sup>61</sup> Claridge, *Rome*, 95; Sumi, "Monuments and Memory," 179.

<sup>62</sup> Sumi, "Monuments and Memory," 179.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.

political side of the Republic; in fact, government officials and soldiers were the main actors in the ceremony. Most interesting for the use of space at the Temple of Castor and Pollux is the way in which it grew into a place for public assembly.

The temple's location in the Roman Forum set it up to be used politically. The Roman Forum was the center of Roman government and political assembly during the Republic. The Forum reflected the Roman integration of religion and politics because it housed both highly important religious places such as the Temple of the Vesta, the hearth goddess of Rome, as well as important public buildings like the Curia.<sup>64</sup> The atmosphere of the political and religious in the Forum was reflected in the Temple of Castor and Pollux. As a temple of traditional Roman religion, it thus functioned in a political setting as well as religious. The temple's use for public assemblies seems to have begun in the later Republic after the Roman Forum was reoriented, sometime after 338 B.C.; prior to this rearrangement, during the early republic, the main locations for public assembly were the Comitium, and the Curia buildings.<sup>65</sup> The Comitium was the primary place for political assemblies during the Roman Republic and the Curia was the senate-house.<sup>66</sup>

In the second century, there was a major shift of political assemblies to the Temple of Castor and Pollux. This seems to be connected to a significant change in the temple's structure. Based on archaeological evidence, it appears that the temple was

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<sup>64</sup> Claridge, *Rome*, 106.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 169-170.

<sup>66</sup> Entries "Comitium," and "Curia" in *Oxford Classical Dictionary*. Richmond, Ian Archibald, Donal Emrys Strong, and Janet DeLaine, *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2012.

renovated in the first half of the second century sometime around 168 B.C.<sup>67</sup> During this renovation, the outermost row of columns on the front porch, or *pronaos*, was removed and replaced with a tribunal, a speaker's platform.<sup>68</sup> Generally, the *pronaos* was an important architectural aspect of Roman temples, whereas tribunals were associated with political buildings. With this renovation, we see a mixing of the religious and political architectural elements of the Temple of Castor and Pollux. The tribunal was an important structure for political assemblies.

Only a few decades after the addition of the tribunal, in 117 B.C., Lucius Caecilius Metellus rebuilt the temple. This temple and the former temple were nearly uniform in their orientation, size, and plan.<sup>69</sup> The tribunal remained an important aspect of the temple's function. Prior to the temple's rebuilding, the tribunal at the Temple of Castor and Pollux had already become an important location for public assemblies. The Comitium had been the original place for *comitia*, assemblies but, in 145 B.C., the tribune of the plebeians, Caius Licinius Crassus, brought the people out of the Comitium and into the Forum proper, probably to the tribunal at the Temple of Castor and Pollux in order to vote.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Birte Poulsen, "Written Sources," in *The Temple of Castor and Pollux*, eds. Inge Nielsen and Birte Poulsen (Rome, Italy: Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, 1992), 55.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Inge Nielsen, "The Metellan Temple," in *The Temple of Castor and Pollux*, eds. Inge Nielsen and Birte Poulsen (Rome, Italy: Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, 1992), 108.

<sup>70</sup> Varro, *On Agriculture*, trans. W.D. Hooper, Harrison Boyd Ash (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1934), 1.2.9. Varro only mentions that Crassus brought the people into the "farm" of the forum. Poulsen, "Written Sources," in the *Temple of Castor*



There are many other circumstances in which the tribunal at the Temple of Castor and Pollux was utilized for public assemblies and voting. Additionally, by the second century, the Senate was meeting regularly at the Temple of Castor and Pollux and they continued to meet there through the late Republic.<sup>71</sup> Thus, both of the governmental bodies of the Republican government, the plebeian officials and the patrician senators, were associated with the Temple of Castor and Pollux in some way. Naturally, conflicts between these two often-opposing bodies took place at the temple. With its important location and function in the Forum, the Temple of Castor and Pollux “became a locus for popular politics and therefore resonant of popular sovereignty.”<sup>72</sup> In fact, in the late Republic, Cato the Younger forced his way up onto the tribunal to oppose Julius Caesar and Metellus. At another time, during his consulship with Caesar, Bibulus pushed his way up to the tribunal at the Temple of Castor and Pollux in an attempt to interrupt a speech that Caesar was giving for the passing of a law.<sup>73</sup> Bibulus was unsuccessful and was driven back by the crowd. After that episode, Bibulus gave up any attempts to publicly oppose Caesar. Instead, he did not appear in public until the final day of his year as consul with Caesar, leaving Caesar to unofficially serve as consul alone.<sup>74</sup> Through this event we see that important political events took place at the Temple of Castor and

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*and Pollux*, 55. Poulsen suggests that the “farm” of the forum mentioned in Varro might have been the temple of Castor and Pollux.

<sup>71</sup> Poulsen, “Written Sources,” in *The Temple of Castor and Pollux*, 55, 56.

<sup>72</sup> Sumi, “Monuments and Memory,” 171.

<sup>73</sup> Cass. Dio 38.6.1-5.

<sup>74</sup> Cass. Dio 38.6.5.

Pollux. In fact, “Many politicians in the late Republic endeavoured to control the temple in their hopes of swaying the assemblies that gathered there.”<sup>75</sup> The Temple of Castor and Pollux had a powerful influence on the assemblies for a few reasons. First, its location in the Roman Forum near the Curia and Comitium, and in the political center, gave it a perfect place for calling the people’s attention. Second, by that time, the precedent had been firmly established that the Temple of Castor and Pollux was a place for public assembly. And finally, the temple’s association with the myth and event of the Battle of Lake Regillus and the subsequent founding of the Roman Republic gave it a level of importance for the identity of Rome and the Roman people.

### *Conclusion*

The case study of the Roman religious site of the Temple of Castor and Pollux demonstrates how the religion and mythology of the Roman people shaped the use of sacred space. Roman religion, with its emphasis on the prosperity of the state, was aided by Roman mythology in calling her adherents to a greater desire to seek the welfare of the state by striving for *pietas*. With this communal goal at the heart of Roman religion, it follows that the religious site of the Temple of Castor and Pollux also had political functions because the political realm of the Republic sought, or declared itself to seek, the welfare of the Republic.

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<sup>75</sup> Sumi, “Monuments and Memory,” 172.

## CHAPTER THREE

### San Lorenzo Fuori le Mura and Sant' Agnese Fuori le Mura: Christian Religious Sites

This chapter shows how funerary structures of the sacred sites of San Lorenzo and Sant' Agnese reinforce their functions as places for the veneration of the saints.

#### *Introduction to the Cult of the Saints*

In order to understand the use of sacred space in late antique Christian funerary basilicas, it is important to gain a more comprehensive view of the cult of the saints. There are many complex factors that contributed to the cult of the saints in late antique Christianity. The study of a constantly evolving, living people and their belief systems and rituals is rarely simple because there are always aberrations, controversies, and disagreements within a group of people. The early Christian church was constantly facing new questions about what was orthodox and how the faith should be lived out. The cult of the saints and the rituals associated with it was no different.

A large aspect of the cult of the saints is the localization of the holy. For the early Christian community, veneration of relics of a dead saint was an accepted practice. It involved a reverence for the body of a person who had won the ultimate spiritual victory. For it is believed that a saint is one who has won Heaven and whose soul is united with God, and that his body and soul will be reunited at Christ's second coming. St. Paul said in First Corinthians, "Now you are the Body of Christ, and each one of you a part of it."<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:27.

The saints, when they had been on earth living as faithful Christians, would have been considered members of the Body of Christ. Membership in the Body of Christ does not cease at death, though. It follows that the bodies of the saints—who were not only members of the Body of Christ on earth, but also are in Heaven after their death—are still a part of the Body of Christ on earth. The cult of the saints and the veneration of relics reminded Christians of the “death-defying moment of ‘glory’ associated with God’s triumph in the saint.”<sup>77</sup> It is important to note that the Christians believed that it was God’s glory that was being celebrated in the saint’s victory and not the saint himself. In fact, the cult of the saints “rendered that much more physical, more local, and more frequent the supreme moment of Christ’s triumph over death” through each saint’s individual victory over death.<sup>78</sup> The saint’s relics, then, brought Christ’s triumph to mind and brought the pilgrim into worship of Christ’s victory as seen repeatedly in the lives of his saints and martyrs.

In the cult of the saints, the placement of the holy relics reminded Christians of the Church that had flourished even through persecution during its first few centuries. Furthermore, the localization of the holy helped to fill visitors with quiet reverence that would lead them to reflection on the saint’s life and to be inspired to strive to win heaven as well. Peter Brown refers to this invisible presence of the deceased as “*praesentia*.”<sup>79</sup> Many saints’ tombs were marked with the inscription, “*hic locus est...*,” or “this is the

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<sup>77</sup> Peter Brown, “Enjoying the Saints in Late Antiquity,” in *The Religious History of the Roman Empire: Pagans, Jews, and Christians*, eds. J.A. North and S.R.F. Price (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 541.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 86-87.

place (where)..." These inscriptions emphasized the *praesentia* of the saint whose body rested there. It was important to the early Christians to state that a particular spot held the bones of a saint. Brown suggests that this attention to the location of the holy produced a "tension between distance and proximity" which heightened the power and greatness of the *praesentia* in which the saint was located.<sup>80</sup> This attention to the localization of the holy had a large impact on the sacred space of early Christian religious sites. If the body of a saint had a particular holiness, then the place in which the body rested also had a type of holiness because it housed the holy. This understanding led to the development of the saint shrines. We will see this played out in the use of sacred space at the sites of San Lorenzo and Sant' Agnese. The Christian practice of the veneration of saints did not, however, always have an established type of sacred space beyond simple tombs of the saints.

While it is true that a strong devotion to holy places developed in early Christianity, in the first few centuries of Christianity's existence, its adherents, in general, tended to avoid a localization of the holy. One clear reason for this is that the Roman and Greek polytheistic religions, which Christianity opposed, believed certain places were innately holy. We saw this at the Temple of Apollo at Didyma with the spring that was believed to have sprung forth at Apollo's command. Furthermore, the entire site itself held a particular holiness for pilgrims due to its location at the supposed spot where Apollo met Branchus. Additionally, the oracular activity brought certain holiness to the site because Apollo was inspiring the *mantis*; in some way, Apollo was believed to be present at that place for the sake of divination. Other Greek temples, such as the Temple

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 88.

of Zeus at Olympia, were thought to be dwelling places for the gods. The Christians, however, believed in a God who could not be contained in temples: “The God who made the world and everything in it, being the Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in shrines made by man.”<sup>81</sup> Christianity felt the need to make a clear break from the pagan understanding of divine presence. According to R.A. Markus, Christian churches, as opposed to polytheistic temples, were “not temples of a divinity, only gathering places for his worshippers” among which God was present because his worshippers are the Body of Christ as mentioned earlier.<sup>82</sup> The joint function of both gathering space for the Mass and place of veneration for the saints had not yet become common. A large factor in this was the persecution of the Church; due to it, Christians were not able to build elaborate or well-established places of worship. When a change in the social acceptance of Christianity came, there arose a clearer localization of the holy within Christianity, especially in saint veneration, but this localization differed from that of the Greek or Roman religions in that it did not believe that God was contained in the temple nor that he was fully encompassed within it when he visited, but only that his presence pervaded it.

The fourth century brought a dramatic shift to the use of sacred space within Christianity. In 313 A.D., Emperor Constantine’s Edict of Milan legalized Christianity in the Roman Empire and brought an official end to the persecutions of the Church. Very quickly, Christianity became not only acceptable, but also even desirable. This change in the reception of the Church within the Roman Empire naturally affected the Church itself.

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<sup>81</sup> Acts 17:24.

<sup>82</sup> R.A. Markus, “How on Earth Could Places Become Holy?: Origins of the Christian Idea of Holy Places,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 2.3 (1994): 264.

As R.A. Markus observes, “the new conditions of a Christianity favoured by emperors, fashionable, prestigious and likely to confer worldly advantage, required a huge spiritual adjustment from its adherents.”<sup>83</sup> The “spiritual adjustment” to which Markus refers dealt with the way in which the Church viewed itself in light of its persecuted history and how it connected with the men and women who had gone before them, many of whom had been victorious martyrs for the faith.

For the first three centuries of its existence, the Church had been persecuted; yet, within a generation, the Church was a “triumphant, and soon to be dominant, elite.”<sup>84</sup> This sharp and rapid change seemed to create a disjunction between the present Church of the fourth century and persecuted Church of the recent past that the Christians cherished. As Markus astutely writes, the new generation of Church leaders and faithful had to “convince themselves that, essentially, nothing had changed and that their Church was still the Church of the martyrs. No radical break could be allowed to divide the triumphant Church of the fourth and later centuries from its persecuted predecessor.”<sup>85</sup> The cult of the martyrs was a natural bridge that served to unite the fourth century Church to the persecuted Church that had come before it.<sup>86</sup> The veneration of martyrs provided the chance for members of the present Church to visit the tombs of the martyrs of the persecuted Church and to lift up their prayers to the martyrs in heaven. They could

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<sup>83</sup> Markus, “How on Earth Could Places Become Holy?,” 268.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 269.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

celebrate the ultimate triumphs of the martyrs and be inspired to their own triumphs by those very celebrations. Thus, the cult of the saints was strengthened by the fourth century legalization of Christianity because it served as a connection between the Church's persecuted past and its present. It became an even more important part of the fourth century Church.

This “spiritual adjustment” and the stronger embrace of the cult of the saints was reflected in the use of sacred space, particularly at the sites of martyr's tombs. These tombs had been the first sites of saint veneration. Now, with an increase in devotion to the saints, these sites grew in importance and evolved into greater religious sites like San Lorenzo and Sant'Agnese. These tombs began to turn into sacred space intended for saint veneration in order to remind Christians of their predecessors and the saints and to connect them with those saints in face of the new changes that the legalization of Christianity had brought. Sacred spaces that functioned both as the gathering place for the faithful in the Mass and as a site for saint veneration began to appear in Rome. These two functions of sacred space—to gather the faithful for the liturgy and to venerate the saints—became a common combination.

We see this change very clearly through Emperor Constantine's ecclesiastical building initiative. Among the vast numbers and types of edifices built, there were many structures built at or near popular martyrs' tombs. These structures provide great insight into the fourth century Christian cult of the saints and its effect on worship and space. In this chapter, I will focus on two sites that began as merely martyr's tombs and were made into basilicas in honor of the saints. These two sites are the basilicas of San Lorenzo Fuori le Mura and Sant'Agnese Fuori le Mura, both of which are located in Rome, Italy.



In this section, I have established that the cult of the saints became a very important aspect of fourth century Christianity because it was a necessary bridge between the persecuted Christian Church of the first three centuries and the suddenly accepted and even desirable Church of the fourth century. Through the case studies of the sacred sites of San Lorenzo and Sant'Agnese, I will investigate how these sites were integral parts of this "bridge."

### *Overview of San Lorenzo and Sant'Agnese*

Both San Lorenzo and Sant'Agnese are among a unique category of martyrria. These are both *martyrium* complexes that, by the fourth century, consisted of a *basilica ad corpus*—directly over the tomb—and a separate, larger basilica called a *coemeterium*. The *basilica ad corpus* was made to honor and cover the tomb of the martyr. The *coemeterium*, however, had another function. Krautheimer argues that the *coemeterium*, a "roofed cemetery," was made to house the celebration of funeral banquets, called *refrigeria*, at the graves enclosed within it.<sup>87</sup> Krautheimer is careful to point out that these *coemeteria* were not typical structures for the weekly celebration of Mass; rather, they functioned for saint veneration and any related funerary celebrations.<sup>88</sup> In summary, the *martyrium* complexes at the sites of San Lorenzo and Sant'Agnese consisted of the catacomb with the saint's resting place, a basilica built directly above the catacomb and made solely for the tomb, and a separate basilica for the burial of the Christian faithful

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<sup>87</sup> Richard Krautheimer, "Mensa-Coemeterium-Martyrium," *Cahiers archéologiques* 11 (1960): 31.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

near the saint where funeral banquets could be held. The space of each of these structures served different sacred purposes in the veneration of the martyr. In order to understand these structures, though, it is important to consider the lives and martyrdoms of both of these saints in conjunction with the structures themselves, and the use of the sacred space at these structures.

This chapter serves to show how the sacred structures of San Lorenzo and Sant' Agnese played an important role in constructing the "bridge" that connected the fourth century Christians to the persecuted Church that had preceded them and had been the fertile ground of the Church that allowed for the blossoming of the Christians of the fourth century. In the first section, I will begin with an introduction into St. Lawrence's martyrdom. Then, I will describe the layout of the site of San Lorenzo. Finally, I will explain the use of sacred space at San Lorenzo and how that reinforced the veneration of saints within the context of fourth century Christianity. In the second section, I will turn to the site of Sant' Agnese. I will tell the story of her martyrdom, describe the structure at her site, and draw similar conclusions to San Lorenzo regarding the use of sacred space at Sant' Agnese. This section will demonstrate how an understanding of the use of sacred space at one site can illuminate the functions at another, similar site.

### *San Lorenzo (Saint Lawrence)*

The *Peristephanon* written by the fourth century Spanish poet Prudentius is our best source for the life of Saint Lawrence, also known as San Lorenzo in Italian.

According to the poem, St. Lawrence was the chief of seven deacons of Rome.<sup>89</sup> While St. Lawrence was at the foot of the cross of Pope Sixtus II, his teacher and the bishop of Rome, Sixtus gazed down at Lawrence and foretold that he too would be martyred in three days.<sup>90</sup> After Sixtus' death, the prefect of Rome—having heard tale of tremendous wealth of the Christian Church and knowing that St. Lawrence was the steward of the treasure of the Christian church—called St. Lawrence before him and demanded that he relinquish the gold, silver, and other treasures of the Church to the Roman state.<sup>91</sup> St. Lawrence readily acquiesced, only requesting time to collect all of the treasures of the Church.<sup>92</sup> The prefect agreed and gave him three days.

The three days passed and on the third day St. Lawrence had gathered the poor, the sick, and the beggars of the city in a church. He approached the prefect and said, “I wish for you to appear in the presence of and admire the wealth displayed which our very rich God has in his sanctuaries.” (*Adsistas velim coramque dispositas opes mirere, quas noster Deus praedives in sanctis habet*. Prud. *Peris*. 2.169-172). St. Lawrence brought the prefect to the doors of the church and let him behold the wealth of the church: the poor men, the beggars in ragged clothing, and the sick.<sup>93</sup> The prefect was enraged, yet Lawrence questioned him for his wrath and defended the value of the “wealth” of the

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<sup>89</sup> Prudentius, *Peristephanon*, trans. H.J. Thomson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1955), 2.37-38.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.27-28.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 2. 54.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.109-128.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 2. 177-180.

church saying, “Why do you extol the poison of glory and judge it to be great? If you truly seek gold, it is the light and race of men” (*Quid tu venenum gloriae extollis et magni putas? Si quaeris aurum verius, lux est et humanum genus.* Prud. *Peris.* 2.169-172).

When St. Lawrence concluded his eloquent speech, the prefect ordered that he be killed in a slow, tortuous death over a fire.<sup>94</sup> In this way, St. Lawrence was martyred and won the ultimate victory over sin and death.

St. Lawrence’s victory is what the site of San Lorenzo was constructed to honor and to inspire later Christians to seek as well. The veneration of St. Lawrence would remind the fourth century Christians that this is the legacy from which they came, that they could celebrate with the Church of their past, and finally, that they too must seek to serve God and the Church to the point of the ultimate victory, like St. Lawrence.

### *The Site of San Lorenzo*

San Lorenzo Fuori le Mura (St. Lawrence Outside the Walls) was built, as the name suggests, outside the walls of Rome in the fourth century A.D, most likely during the reign of the emperor Constantine.<sup>95</sup> It was built on an imperial estate that had formerly belonged to a wealthy Christian woman, Cyriaca.<sup>96</sup> Her land had been confiscated during the Christian persecutions, but Constantine later contributed it to

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid. 2.337-344.

<sup>95</sup> Krautheimer, “Mensa,” 22.

<sup>96</sup> Matilda Webb, *The Churches and Catacombs of Early Christian Rome* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press): 240.

ecclesial land.<sup>97</sup> As previously mentioned, the ancient site of San Lorenzo Fuori le Mura consisted of two parts, the *coemeteria* or *basilica maior*—also known as the East basilica—and the site of the St. Lawrence’s tomb, where a *basilica ad corpus* was later built in the sixth century (see Figure 1).<sup>98</sup> The *basilica maior* is the fourth century building associated with Constantine’s reign.<sup>99</sup> During the twentieth century, excavations of the site shed more light on the site both regarding the fourth century basilica and the site prior to that basilica. The archaeologists found that the hill—which now abuts the basilica on only two sides—had once encompassed the whole site of St. Lawrence’s catacomb.<sup>100</sup> There had been an even more extensive network of galleries and chambers connected to St. Lawrence’s catacomb within the hill.<sup>101</sup> Yet, when the basilica was built, part of the hill along with part of the underground network was cleared away. During these same twentieth century excavations, Wolfgang Frankl discovered the ruins of the *basilica maior*, this is the important structure that is referred to as the *coemeterium* by Richard Krautheimer. Until that time, the existence of another construction at the site had only been hinted at in a few epigraphs. The *basilica maior* at San Lorenzo was rather large, measuring longer than 300 feet by 120 feet.<sup>102</sup> The *basilica maior* had a nave and

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Krautheimer, “Mensa,” 18.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 15, 18.

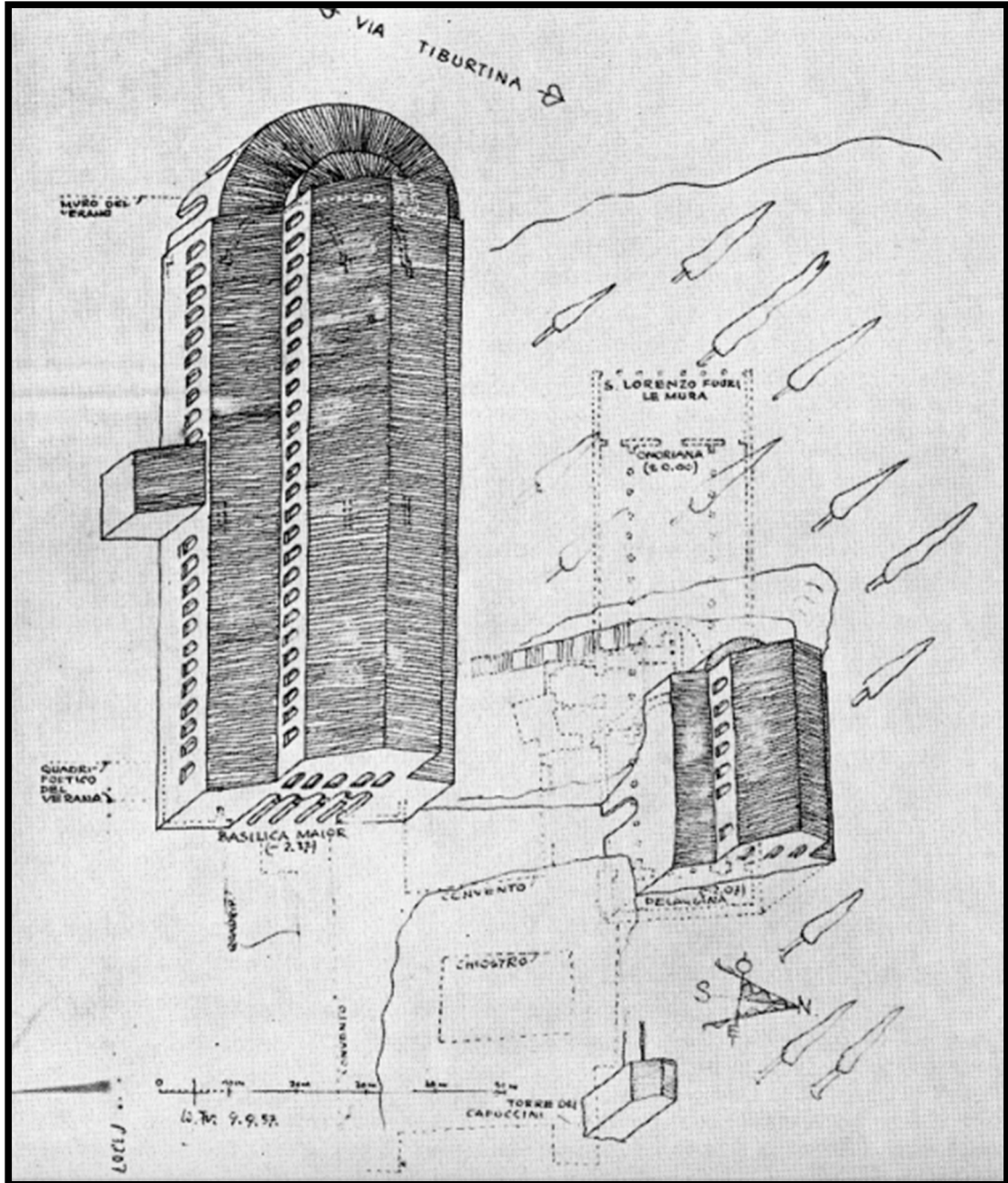
<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 18.

two aisles that converged into an ambulatory around the main apse, creating a rounded end (see Figure 1).<sup>103</sup> There were many mausolea, or burial chambers, attached to the sides of the basilica and the floor was densely packed with graves throughout.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid. 18.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid. 18.



**Figure 3:** San Lorenzo Fuori le Mura East basilica and *basilica ad corpus*. Drawing by W. Frankl

### *The Use of Sacred Space at San Lorenzo*

As was mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the Christian idea of the localization of the holy in the saint's relics affected the use of space at San Lorenzo and Sant'Agnese. The focus on the localization of the holy through saint's relics created a "tension between distance and proximity" to the saint.<sup>105</sup> The idea that the saint's relics held a particular holiness led to a greater evocation of awe when one was in proximity to those relics. This awe helped to remind the pilgrim of the *praesentia*, or invisible presence, of the saint. It reminded the pilgrim that the saint was present as a member of the Body of Christ. At the site of San Lorenzo, because St. Lawrence's relics were located there, people from within the city made "pilgrimages" of sorts to the outskirts of the city where San Lorenzo was located in order to beseech him for his intercession or to bury a loved one near him. Yet, as Brown suggests, they were not simply going to achieve those ends, but also meet the person of St. Lawrence, to encounter his *praesentia*.<sup>106</sup>

The arrangement of the sacred space in San Lorenzo emphasized these pilgrimages and the idea of the *praesentia*. At the funerary site, which appears to be the original construction after the catacomb itself, Constantine had a set of stairs constructed that led down into the crypt where St. Lawrence is buried.<sup>107</sup> In addition, he installed a silver grille around the immediate perimeter of St. Lawrence's grave.<sup>108</sup> Even at the

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<sup>105</sup> Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, 88.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid. 87.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.



place at which a pilgrim encountered the saint, there was a barrier that created distance between him and the saint. The pilgrim had traveled a distance to come before the saint, and yet a small distance still remained between the two at the place of the holy encounter. Brown suggests that this unsurpassable remaining distance was intentional for the sake of enhancing the *praesentia* of the place and the saint in that place. I believe that it could also be symbolic of the relationship Christians understood the living to have with the victorious dead in Heaven. There is certainly a proximity that can be achieved with the saints just as the pilgrim can overcome distance to achieve greater nearness to the saint. The living can ask for the saints' intercession and encounter them through their relics on earth. There is a barrier between the living and the saints, however, that cannot be fully passed until death and that is the eternal life in Heaven. The living may encounter heaven through the Mass and the intercession of the saints, but they are not able to be fully living in heaven until death. That is the final victory that the saints have achieved and which the living have not yet faced. It is this victory to which the church leaders, such as St. Augustine, urged their flock; they strove to direct the veneration of the saints toward imitation of the saints' triumph and not merely toward the celebration of it.<sup>109</sup> The entire cult of the saints and use of sacred space is an interplay between both connection and distance between the Christians still living on earth and the faithfully departed.

The uniqueness of San Lorenzo Fuori le Mura can be attributed to its particular funerary function. In scholarship, San Lorenzo, Sant'Agnese, and four other Constantinian basilicas in Rome are grouped together under the category of "funerary

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<sup>109</sup> Brown, "Enjoying the Saints," 542-544.

halls” or “*coemeteria basilicae*.”<sup>110</sup> These funerary basilicas were not intended for regular Sunday Masses despite being full basilicas.<sup>111</sup> Rather, they seemed to be used mainly for the celebration of the saints’ feast days, a use that complemented the saint veneration at the catacomb from which these basilicas had sprung.<sup>112</sup> These celebrations appear to have included Mass, banquets, eulogies of the martyr, and overall, a very large gathering of people.<sup>113</sup>

Today, it may seem relatively normal to establish a religious space on or near a cemetery. For the ancient Romans, though, this was strange. Cemeteries were solely for the dead and were not to be mingled with places of the living.<sup>114</sup> Christianity, however, revolutionized sacred space. As Brown has written, “the immemorial boundary between the city of the living and the dead came to be breached by the entry of relics and their housing within the walls of many late-antique towns...”<sup>115</sup> Places of worship and religious ritual expanded to also become the sites of burial for many of the faithful. With this understanding of the radical nature of a funerary basilica in fourth century Rome, we can begin to look at the novelty of the funerary basilica and San Lorenzo in particular.

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<sup>110</sup> See, for example, Ramsay MacMullen, “Christian Ancestor Worship in Rome,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 129.3 (2010): 600; Krautheimer, “Mensa,” 31.

<sup>111</sup> Gregory Armstrong, “Constantine’s Churches: Symbol and Structure,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 33.1 (1974): 11; Krautheimer, “Mensa,” 26.

<sup>112</sup> Krautheimer, “Mensa,” 34.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 32, 34.

<sup>114</sup> Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, 8.

<sup>115</sup> Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, 4-5.

The archaeological evidence at San Lorenzo, in addition to literary evidence, suggests that fourth century Christians were performing funerary banquets called *refrigeria*.<sup>116</sup> A *refrigerium* was a memorial meal for one's deceased family that early Christians practiced.<sup>117</sup> The family members would go to the burial site of the dead and feast at the site. This type of funerary banquet was reminiscent of a Roman practice of ancestor worship. The Romans held *vigilia*, "all-nighters," that were meals conducted at the burial place of one's ancestors.<sup>118</sup> They would pour libations of wine over the sarcophagus and offer food to the deceased. It was thought that the dead needed these memorials for further peace in the afterlife.<sup>119</sup>

The Roman practice of "ancestor worship" as seen in their *vigilia* and the practice of *refrigeria* seen among late antique Christians were very similar and sometimes hard to distinguish between. Christian leaders like St. Ambrose and St. Augustine strongly opposed Christian funerary banquets.<sup>120</sup> Regardless of the lack of orthopraxy of this ritual, we can see how it stemmed from an attempt to connect with the persecuted Church of the past. In the similar way that adherents to Roman religion sought to be connected to their pasts by means of ancestor worship, so too did some of the fourth century Christians strive to find a link to their Christian past. The celebration of *refrigeria* does not necessarily represent proper practice and belief of Christianity, as St. Augustine and St.

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<sup>116</sup> MacMullen, "Christian Ancestor Worship," 601-604; Krautheimer, "Mensa," 34.

<sup>117</sup> Jensen, R.M., "Refrigeria," *The Encyclopedia of Ancient History*.

<sup>118</sup> MacMullen, "Christian Ancestor Worship," 603.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 603.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

Ambrose's objections suggest, but this understanding of *refrigeria* helps us to see better the way that the sacred space at San Lorenzo—and Sant' Agnese—functioned.

MacMullen provides compelling evidence that these *refrigeria* were being performed by Christians at San Lorenzo.<sup>121</sup> There are multiple burial sites of both Christians and non-Christians at which the word *refrigeria* is written.<sup>122</sup> Furthermore, near San Lorenzo there are mausolea where pieces of cookware and eating ware have been found.<sup>123</sup> These mausolea, though not part of the basilica proper, are connected to the cemetery site of San Lorenzo. Finally, within the basilica of San Lorenzo itself, there is an inscription in which the owner refers to a burial site as the location of dining in the Church of St. Lawrence.<sup>124</sup> These artifacts and their close proximity to burial sites of the Christian faithful and to San Lorenzo itself indicate that the Christians, too, were performing *refrigeria* in some sense. Through the *refrigeria* we how the sacred space of funerary basilicas was used as a bridge between the Christians of the fourth century and the Christians who had been persecuted throughout the first three centuries.

The *Vita Melaniae Junioris*, Life of Melania the Younger, dating around the beginning of the fifth century, provides evidence for the use of the separate spaces—the *basilica maior* and the *basilica ad corpus*—on the site of San Lorenzo at that time. The separate use of these spaces reinforced the cult of the saints. According to the story, Melania wished to go to the celebration of the St. Lawrence's *dies natalis* ("day of birth")

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 604-605.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 605.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 604.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 605.

on the eve of the feast day at the basilica of the martyr, but she was so far along in her pregnancy that her parents refused to let her go.<sup>125</sup> The next day, nevertheless, Melania went to the celebration of the feast day itself at the *martyrium* of St. Lawrence.<sup>126</sup> There is a distinct difference in the words used to describe the locations of the festivities of the vigil and the festivities of the actual *dies natalis*. It is believed that the vigil celebrations were grand affairs: “hymns were sung, psalms and praise to the Lord recited, mass was said,” and generally a meal for the poor was provided.<sup>127</sup> There were rowdy crowds of people at the vigil activities.<sup>128</sup> The small size of the *basilica ad corpus* at San Lorenzo—and other *martyria*—would not have been able to hold gatherings of this sort. It seems only fitting that a larger building than the *basilica ad corpus* be used. Krautheimer says, “For the huge crowds gathered on the vigil of the festivals of one of the great saints...to be regaled with food, drink, and presumably a eulogy of the martyr, a huge building would have been required.”<sup>129</sup> The *coemeteria* was an ideal location.<sup>130</sup> There was space to celebrate the mass as well as great space in the aisles to hold the banquet and other activities. Furthermore, the common function of the *coemeteria* as a space for burial and celebration of *refrigeria* would have been fulfilled by this type of feast celebration.

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<sup>125</sup> Gerontius, *Vita S. Melaniae Junioris*, trans. Elizabeth A. Clark (New York: E. Mellen Press, 1984). Krautheimer, “Mensa,” 26.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

The evidence from the *Vita Melaniae Junioris* is twofold—not only does it confirm that the vigil celebrations were most likely held in the *coemeteria*, but it also suggests that the activities on the actual feast day were generally held at the smaller *basilica ad corpus*. The story says that Melania went to the *martyrium* (synonymous with *basilica ad corpus*) on the feast of St. Lawrence.<sup>131</sup> The feast day proper was most likely a simpler affair for “a smaller crowd of serious worshippers.”<sup>132</sup> With this understanding of the functions of the two main spaces on the feast of St. Lawrence, we gain a clearer view of the site as a whole. The *coemeteria* served mainly burial and banquet purposes—both private *refrigeria* and communal meals for the saint’s feast day. It provided space for Christians to be buried near St. Lawrence and to still have room for *refrigeria*. Furthermore, less commonly, it could be used for the Mass, baptisms, and other ecclesiastical purposes if needed. Finally, it served as the location for the large celebration of the saint on the vigil of his *dies natalis*. For those who wished to visit St. Lawrence’s tomb in order to beseech his intercession, to make a pilgrimage to encounter his *praesentia*, or to celebrate his glorious victory as a martyr, the *basilica ad corpus* provided a reverent place to do so. The functions of both of these spaces, through the various practices of saint veneration, enhanced the connection between the fourth century Christian Church and the persecuted Church that had come before.

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<sup>131</sup> Gerontius, *Vita S. Melaniae Junioris*; Krautheimer, “Mensa,” 26.

<sup>132</sup> Krautheimer, “Mensa,” 34.

### *Sant'Agnese*

As mentioned in the first section of the chapter, the basilica of Sant'Agnese Fuori le Mura in Rome is similar in structure to the basilica of San Lorenzo Fuori le Mura in more ways than its title. The site, like San Lorenzo, consists of a large basilica, the *basilica maior*, and a basilica *ad corpus*. Furthermore, the basilicas themselves are constructed in similar form because they belong to the category of funerary basilicas. Thus, we can infer that the sacred space at Sant'Agnese was used in similar ways to the San Lorenzo; namely, that the major basilica was used mainly for funerary banquets and for vigil feasts like St. Agnes' *dies natalis* and that the basilica *ad corpus* was used for more serious saint veneration, especially on the actual feast day of St. Agnes. As a whole, through the basilica of St. Agnes, we see not only another example of a *coemeteria basilica*, but we also see how an understanding of use of sacred space at one site can lead us to a better understanding of the use of sacred space a site with a similar structure. Whereas, in each of the previous two chapters, I have demonstrated how the functions and beliefs associated with one particular sacred space influence its structure and the structure, in turn, reinforces the functions and beliefs, this chapter, with its two case similar studies, demonstrates the reinforcement of structure and functions between two separate sites in addition to the reinforcement within each of those sites.

### *The Martyrdom of St. Agnes*

The young, much-revered St. Agnes was a virgin from the fourth century A.D. who was most likely martyred during the persecution of Diocletian. The three main sources for her life—St. Ambrose, Pope Damasus, and Prudentius—agree that she was

only twelve or thirteen when she was martyred, but they vary on the exact way that she died. According to St. Ambrose and Prudentius, Agnes was killed by the sword.<sup>133</sup>

Despite these variations regarding the manner of her death, all of the sources, either directly or indirectly, allude to a threat to spoil her virginity, which she had consecrated to Christ. Prudentius, a Christian poet who lived at the end of the fourth century A.D., recounts that a judge, upon Agnes' refusal to deny her faith, threatened:

Hanc in lupanar trudere publicaum certum est, ad aram ni caput applicat  
ac de Minerva iam veniam rogat, quam virgo pergit temnere virginem.  
Omnis inventus inruet et novum ludibriorum mancipium petet.”  
I am resolved to thrust her into a public brothel unless she lays her head  
on the altar and now asks pardon of Minerva, the virgin whom she, a  
virgin too, persists in slighting. All the young men will rush in to seek  
the new slave of their sport (Prud. *Perist.* 14.25-30).<sup>134</sup>

Agnes remained steadfast, inciting the judge to follow through with his threat. She was brought to a brothel and stripped of her clothing. Out of respect, no one dared to look at Agnes; all except one young man. At his glance, his eyes were struck by fire and he fell to the ground blinded.<sup>135</sup> The judge, still enflamed with rage, ordered that Agnes be beheaded. Yet again, the young girl was unfazed. Agnes faced her executioner saying with audacity, “I shall welcome the whole length of his blade into my bosom, drawing the sword-blow to the depths of my breast; and so as Christ's bride I shall o'erleap all the darkness of the sky and rise higher than the ether.”<sup>136</sup> With those words, Agnes was

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<sup>133</sup> Prudentius, *Peristephanon*, 14.90; Ambrose, *De Virginibus*, 2.7.

<sup>134</sup> Prudentius, *Peristephanon*, 14. 25-30.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.



martyred and won the victory for which pilgrims would later travel to visit her resting place.

*The History of the Basilica of Sant'Agnese Fuori le Mura*

The sacred site of Sant'Agnese underwent three main building phases beginning with the death of St. Agnes in the early fourth century A.D. The first phase consisted simply of veneration at the tomb of the saint. Then, sometime in the last half of the fourth century A.D., Constantine built a basilica over the tomb. Finally, in the seventh century A.D., Pope Honorius I rebuilt the structure into the present-day basilica. I will focus on the Constantinian basilica, as this is the one that is similar in form and function to San Lorenzo.

Situated on what was once the imperial estate of Constantina, the daughter of Constantine the Great, the basilica of Sant'Agnese Fuori le Mura lies along the Via Nomentana.<sup>137</sup> This land was initially used for a network of catacombs at the end of the second century A.D. A second network arose sometime between the end of the third century and the beginning of the fourth century A.D. St. Agnes was buried within this second network of catacombs where her tomb was venerated.<sup>138</sup>

Later in the fourth century A.D. the Constantinian basilica was erected next to the catacomb.<sup>139</sup> While there is some disagreement about when and by whom this basilica

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<sup>137</sup> Matilda Webb, *The Churches and Catacombs of Early Christian Rome* (Portland: Sussex Academic Press), 246.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>139</sup> W. Eugene Kleinbauer, "Antioch, Jerusalem, and Rome: The Patronage of Emperor Constantius II and Architectural Invention," *Gesta* 45.2 (2006): 131; Ann Marie Yasin,

was built, archaeological evidence confirms that the structure was completed before 400 A.D.<sup>140</sup> The ancient sources connect the project to Constantine's daughter, Constantina. According to the *Passio s. Agnetis* of pseudo-Ambrose, Constantina was suffering from sores when she prayed for St. Agnes' intercession.<sup>141</sup> She was healed and subsequently asked her father and brothers to build a church to the "little miracle-working virgin"<sup>142</sup> The *Liber Pontificalis* adds that Constantine undertook this initiative after his daughter's baptism, presumably between 314 and 335 A.D.<sup>143</sup> Each one of these stories connects Sant' Agnese to Constantine in some way. These sources provide more support for Krautheimer's categorization of Sant' Agnese with San Lorenzo and the four other funerary Constantinian basilicas.

#### *The Structure of the Basilica of Sant' Agnese Fuori le Mura*

Sant' Agnese, as mentioned previously, belonged to a group of six "coemeteria" or funerary basilicas built in the fourth century near catacombs outside the walls of Rome near.<sup>144</sup> The Constantinian basilica of Sant' Agnese, along with the five other cemetery basilicas, had a relatively unique "circiform" shape. The side aisles curved into a circle

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*Saint and Church Spaces in the Late Antique Mediterranean: Architecture, Cult, and Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 158.

<sup>140</sup> Webb, *Churches and Catacombs*, 247.

<sup>141</sup> Frutaz, *Il complesso monumentale*, 43. This is a summary from the source *Passio s. Agnetis*.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> David J. Stanley, "New Discoveries at Santa Costanza," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 48 (1994): 257.

<sup>144</sup> Kleinbauer, "Antioch, Jerusalem, and Rome," 131.

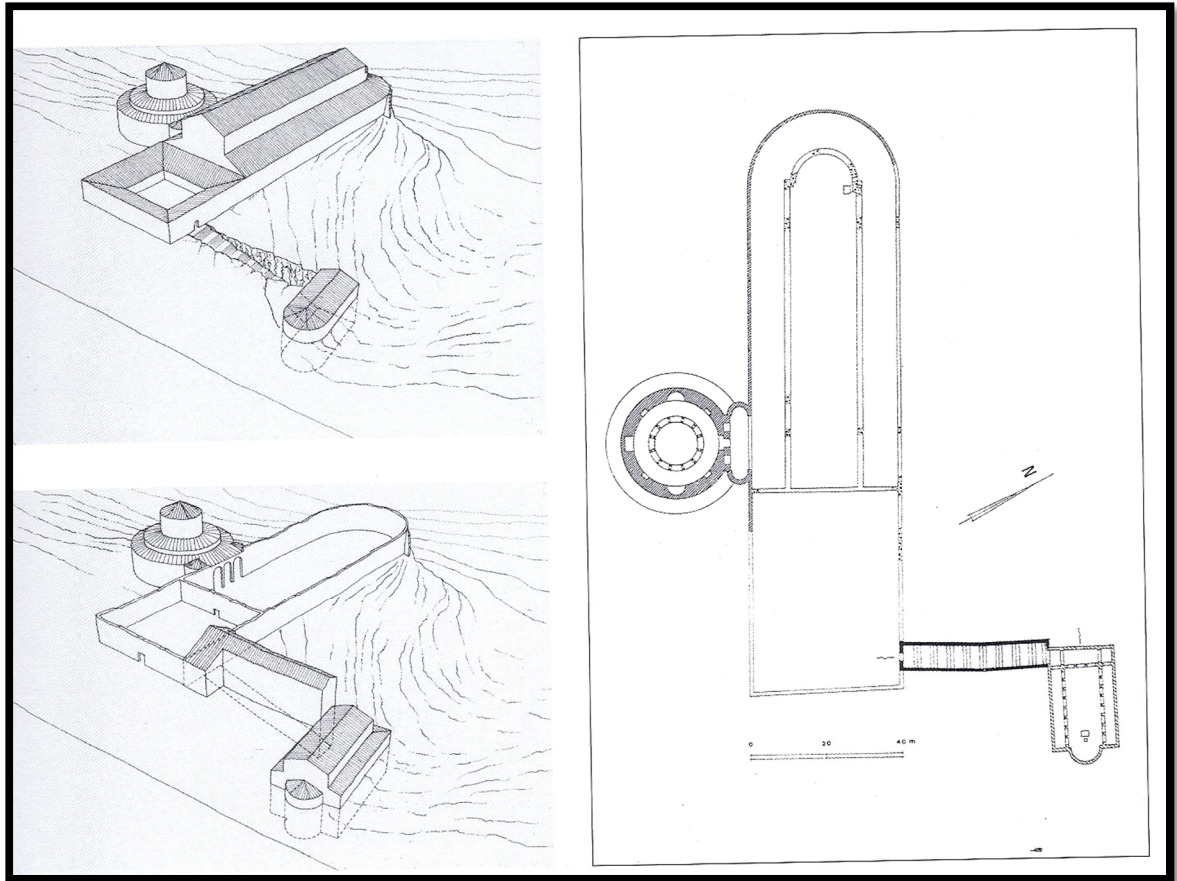
at the end, giving the basilica a circular shape in contrast to the squared ends of most Roman basilicas. This apse-ended basilica was about twice as long as it was wide.<sup>145</sup> It had a single nave with one aisle flanking either side. In the center of the nave was a unique rectangular structure whose function is uncertain. Krautheimer, however, postulates that the structure contained the *mensa martyris* (table of the martyr), which would normally be located directly above the tomb of the martyr.<sup>146</sup> The tomb of St. Agnes, however, was not under the basilica, but rather below an open courtyard in front of the nave.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Kleinbauer, "Antioch, Jerusalem, and Rome," 131.

<sup>146</sup> Fusco, "Sant' Agnese nel quadro," 17.

<sup>147</sup> Kleinbauer, "Antioch, Jerusalem, and Rome," 131.



**Figure 4:** *Basilica Maior* (structure on the left in each image) and *Basilica ad corpus* (structure on the bottom right of each image). Image from *La Basilica Costantiniana di Sant'Agnese*, 56.

On the southeast side of Sant'Agnese, foundation walls extending out of the main wall of the Constantinian basilica were found. David Stanley virtually reconstructed the structure based on the archaeological evidence found.<sup>148</sup> The resulting shape was that of a triconch; a structure traditionally associated with martyr shrines. Evidence of a similar

<sup>148</sup> Stanley, "New Discoveries," 260.

triconch structure located was found at San Lorenzo Fuori le Mura.<sup>149</sup> Stanley suggests that the triconch structure served as a place to venerate St. Agnes within the church because her catacomb was slightly distant and, as mentioned before, not located in the main part of the church.<sup>150</sup> This would have reminded those celebrating within the larger basilica of the person whose victory that sacred space commemorated. Even this small structure served to direct pilgrims' thoughts to the saint and to bring what might seem like a disconnected persecuted past of the Church into the reality of the present Church.

A final, separate component of the Sant'Agnese is the attached Church of Santa Costanza. According to archaeological evidence, namely the comparison of brick courses, Santa Costanza was built under a different initiative than that of Sant'Agnese.<sup>151</sup> For this reason, I will not include Santa Costanza in my investigation of Sant'Agnese.

Now that we have examined the historical development of the basilicas of Sant'Agnese and the layout of the Constantinian building, we may consider how the structure reflected the function of the church and the activities that took place there. Based upon the similarities in structures between San Lorenzo and Sant'Agnese, it is probable that the *basilica maior* and the *basilica ad corpus* at Sant'Agnese functioned in the same way as those at San Lorenzo; in fact, Krautheimer states that San Lorenzo, Sant'Agnese, and two other basilicas functioned in these same ways.<sup>152</sup> Although we do not have a source like the *Vita S. Melaniae Junioris* that refers to the different

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 259.

<sup>152</sup> Krautheimer, "Mensa," 34.

celebrations at the separate sites, we can infer that the major basilica at Sant'Agnese was also used for the larger, rowdier celebrations of on the vigil of her feast day. Its grandness in size and categorization as a funerary basilica makes it very likely that similar activities went on at the celebrations at St. Agnes: *refrigeria*—both during the feast of St. Agnes and all throughout the year—, large banquets in honor of Agnes herself, eulogies, Mass, etc. The *basilica ad corpus*, almost in the same location with respect to the major basilica as the *basilica ad corpus* at San Lorenzo, might have been the space that housed the more reverent, smaller celebration on St. Agnes' actual feast day. As she was buried underneath the *basilica ad corpus*, it follows that those who wished to celebrate her feast day with a true devotion to St. Agnes would have desired to come before her very relics and to encounter her *praesentia*. There they would have been reminded of both the closeness they have with her through her intercession, but also the distance between them until they themselves could dwell in heaven for eternity.

### *Conclusion*

The Christian religious sites of San Lorenzo and Sant'Agnese were intended to increase the veneration of their respective saints. This veneration connected the Christians to their persecuted Christian brethren who had come before them, reminding them that they still belonged to the same Church and that they too must seek the victory of heaven, even if they were no longer persecuted. The two basilicas—the *basilica maior* and the *basilica ad corpus*--at the sites of San Lorenzo and Sant'Agnese carried out this function of saint veneration in different ways. The *basilica maior* housed the burial sites of many other, uncanonized Christians. It was a space in which the living Christians

came to partake in funerary banquets as a way to try to connect to the Christians who had come before them. Furthermore, the *basilica maior* was the location for the larger, less reverent celebrations on the vigils of the saints' feast days. The *basilica ad corpus*, however, provided a space in which pilgrims could encounter the *praesentia* of the saint, especially on the saint's feast day. There they were able to honor the saint, ask for his or her intercession, and find inspiration to strive for victory over sin so that they could be united with God and the saints in heaven. The understanding of the cult of the saints, the importance of relics and their *praesentia*, and the "spiritual adjustment" of the fourth century, were necessary for learning how the sacred spaces at the sites of San Lorenzo and Sant'Agnese were used.

## CONCLUSION

In this thesis I have shown through a series of case studies of the sacred spaces of three very distinct religions that one must learn about the ideological, historical, and mythological contexts of a space in order to understand its functions holistically. When investigating ancient structures and how they might have been used, it is necessary to go beyond simple analysis of archaeological findings and possible practical uses of structural elements. We can come to a fuller understanding of the interplay of the structure and the functions of sacred space when we know the beliefs and rituals of the people using the space. We have seen this in each of the case studies conducted in this thesis.

The Temple of Apollo at Didyma demonstrated how a greater understanding of the religious, historical, and ideological context of a sacred site lent itself to a fuller comprehension of the use of the space. We investigated how the myth of the foundation of the Temple of Apollo at Didyma served to connect the space to the god with which it was associated; it also connected the oracle at Didyma to the more renowned oracle at Delphi. These both served to enhance the credence of the oracle—the primary function of the space. Furthermore, the unique architectural features of the temple worked together to create a cohesive program that enhanced the mystical atmosphere of the temple. This atmosphere formed the hearts and minds of the visitors to the site, preparing



them to approach Apollo through his oracle. As a result, the oracular function of the space was strengthened.

The Temple of Castor and Pollux demonstrated the interplay of structure, function, and belief systems through its political use. The Temple of Castor and Pollux became a space greatly associated with Roman politics during the later Republic. It was one of the primary sites where the Roman senate met and it was the locus of many public assemblies. I argued that the Temple of Castor and Pollux's political use, although a religious site, could be understood in light of the communal nature and purpose of both Roman religion and mythology. The Temple, in addition to housing political assemblies, stood as a physical reminder of the foundation of the Roman Republic through the myth of the Battle of Lake Regillus. This function and the political function are both natural results of a religion that is public in nature and whose goal is the welfare of the Republic.

The sacred sites of San Lorenzo and Sant' Agnese illustrated the mutually reinforcing relationship of structure and function and the important role of beliefs in it. These two sites were constructed at a pivotal time in the early Christian Church in which Christians needed a bridge between the persecuted Church of the first three centuries and the suddenly legalized, accepted Church of the fourth century. The veneration of the saints was a vital practice at that time that served as that bridge. The two structures on each of these sites worked together to function as sites of saint veneration. The *basilica ad corpus*, on the one hand, created a space in which pilgrims could reverently come to honor and ask for the saint's intercession at his or her burial place. On the other hand, the *basilica maior* provided a larger space in which Christians could be buried near the saints and in which grand feasts and funerary banquets could be held in honor of the saint and

the other Christians buried there. These important functions all strengthened and reflected the veneration of the saints.

As we have seen, each of these sacred spaces had in common with the others a mutually reinforcing relationship between its structure and function; and yet, these relationships were manifested in ways unique to each particular religion and its corresponding belief system. It was for this reason that it was necessary to conduct a series of case studies for this thesis in order to display this relationship in each different religious setting. Nevertheless, these sites also had an element of the use of sacred space that was uniform throughout the different religions. Each sacred site was established upon a location that was supposed to have been the place of some kind of divine encounter. The Temple of Apollo at Didyma was believed to have been constructed at the very site where the god Apollo met Branchus and later created the sacred spring for him. The Temple of Castor and Pollux was built as near as possible to the Pool of Juturna where the divine twins had supposedly appeared to announce the Roman victory at the Battle of Lake Regillus. Finally, the sacred sites of San Lorenzo Fuori le Mura and Sant'Agnese Fuori le Mura were both established at the burial places of their respective saints.<sup>153</sup> At all of these sites, we see an emphasis on a particular place that elevates it, or sets it apart, from other space. These sacred sites were not arbitrarily established at

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<sup>153</sup> It is important to clarify that the early Christians did not believe the saints to be gods in the way that the Romans believed Castor and Pollux to be gods or in the way that the Greeks believed Apollo to be a god. The Christians saw the burial place of the saints as “divine” because it housed the bodies of men and women who had been so imbued with the grace of God that they had a particular holiness in them because they had participated in the divinity of God and were in unity with him in heaven.

simply any place. Rather, these sacred sites were chosen with deliberation to be connected in some way to the god or saint with which it was associated.

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