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Chapter 9

Care of Relics in Early Medieval Rome

Julia M.H. Smith

Hidden in a dark corner of St. Peter's shrine, Pope Sergius I (687–701) found a silver box so blackened with age that he was at first unsure whether it was indeed made of silver. Having said a prayer over it, he broke its seal and opened it. Inside, resting on a silken cushion, he discovered a jeweled reliquary of the True Cross and, according to the *Liber Pontificalis*, introduced into Rome the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross in its honor.¹ Some decades later, Pope Zacharias (741–52) made a similar find, this time in the Lateran: a reliquary containing the head of St. George, identified by a label in Greek. Accompanied by the assembled populace of the city, a solemn liturgical procession carried the head to the church dedicated to S. Giorgio in Velabro. After Gregory had enshrined it there, many miracles and benefits followed.²

Rome was—and remains—full of surprising discoveries. In recent years, its history has become one of the hottest of hotspots of medieval scholarship. Beneficiary of skepticism towards grand narratives that is now almost universal among academic historians, beneficiary too of the maturation of post-classical archeology and of medievalists' ability to expose the sophisticated discursive strategies of superficially straightforward texts and images, Rome is a "happening place."³ Its medieval history has been recovered for the mainstream of European history: among Anglophone historians, no one knows this better than Tom Noble. Over the span of his career, he has responded to its changing historiographical parameters with a gimlet eye for historical precision and the specificity of context and meaning, and has turned his unrivaled knowledge of papal sources to the themes and problems which energize historians of early

¹ Louis Duchesne, *Le Liber Pontificalis. Texte, introduction et commentaire*, 3 vols. (Paris: Thorin-Boccard, 1886–1957), vol. I, p. 375.

² *Ibid.*, p. 434.

³ For overviews of recent scholarship, see Claudia Bolgia, "Introduction: Rome Across Time and Space, c. 500–1400: Cultural Transmission and the Exchange of Ideas," in Claudia Bolgia, Rosamond McKitterick, and John Osborne, eds., *Rome Across Time and Space, c. 500–1400: Cultural Transmission and the Exchange of Ideas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 1–15, and Caroline Goodson, "Roman Archaeology in Medieval Rome," in Dorigen Caldwell and Lesley Caldwell, eds., *Rome: Continuing Encounters between Past and Present* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 17–34.

medieval Europe as a whole, such as literacy, economy, ritual, and elites.⁴ His scholarship on Rome has said little about one such subject, however: the cults of saints and relics. I offer this contribution in gratitude for his scholarship, support, and camaraderie over many decades.

Fundamentally, relics are a form of highly portable sacrality. Particles of animal, vegetable, or mineral matter that are resistant to decay, they mediate emotional and associative values that are independent of their physical properties. They typically evoke or recall locations and persons that are remote in time (past or future) and place (terrestrial or heavenly), and commonly have a powerful religious charge, or at least an ideological one. Resistant to precise definition, they are both fragment and whole, and slide uneasily between singular, plural, and collective forms. Small in size but great in significance, of minimal material worth but immense symbolic value, relics are material triggers for affective engagement with cosmological and scriptural truths.⁵

Neither identity nor meaning inhere in objects such as these: it takes effort to make them stick. Labels, seals, silken wrappers, and jeweled containers guided Sergius I and Zacharias in interpreting what they had found, and their discoveries suggest that we need to pay close attention to how the identity of sacred particles such as these was established, whether in Rome or anywhere else. This chapter uses relics in the care of the early medieval papacy as a case study of how they were identified and preserved. It then traces long-term shifts in their significance and interrogates the contribution of the papacy to the task of affirming identity, meaning, and value. From this, there emerges an appreciation of both the work needed to maintain relics' identity, and the ease with which their importance might be altered or compromised. I thus demonstrate how relics combine objective durability with subjective meaning. Central to the enquiry is a close analysis of the tags and wrappers originally attached to assorted early relics that fell into neglect during the later Middle Ages and were only rediscovered during the twentieth century. Whereas previous studies of relics' symbolic role in the city's religious life have relied on extrapolations from selected hagiographic, liturgical, architectural, and art historical evidence, this chapter works with material that lacks any esthetic or iconographic claim to attention. In presenting evidence which is mundane, but neither trivial nor secular, it points to the challenges involved in caring

⁴ For his own assessment of the historiographical landscape, see Thomas F.X. Noble, "Morbidity and Vitality in the History of the Early Medieval Papacy," *Catholic Historical Review* 80 (1995): 505–40.

⁵ See Julia M.H. Smith, "Portable Christianity: Relics in the Medieval West (c. 700–1200)," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 181 (2012): 143–67, and more broadly, Alexandra Walsham, "Introduction: Relics and Remains," in Alexandra Walsham, ed., *Relics and Remains*, Past and Present Supplements 5 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 9–36.

for relics in the early Middle Ages, as well as those involved in studying them. Its other purpose is thus to present a more contextualized, dynamic, and nuanced interpretation of papal involvement with relics than has hitherto been achieved. It also offers a model for the analysis of any relic collection which has remained substantially intact and *in situ*.

The most important evidence is also the most intractable. It comes from “one of the most sensational archaeological discoveries of the last century”: the contents of a wooden chest (92 × 70 × 70 cm) made on the express order of Leo III (795–16).⁶ Leo’s purpose in commissioning it has been much debated, as has its possible typological role, but its original contents and function cannot be determined, and it is prudent to keep an open mind.⁷ Its location is documented from the late eleventh century, when it was one of the three altars in the pope’s private oratory, the early medieval chapel of St. Lawrence in the palace adjacent to the Lateran basilica, the Basilica Salvatoris. By the thirteenth century, it had become the sole altar there, and from the pontificate of Innocent III (1198–1216), it was concealed behind bolted bronze doors and marble panels. By the middle of the twelfth century, the chapel had acquired the by-name “Holy of Holies” (*Sancta Sanctorum*), but was destroyed by an earthquake in the thirteenth century. Nicholas III (1277–80) built the extant *Sancta Sanctorum* in its place, and moved the entire ensemble there. He was probably also responsible for replacing an earlier plaque on Leo’s chest with a new gold one which bears the legend “S(AN)C(T)A S(AN)C(T)ORU(M).” Between an inspection by Leo X (1513–21) and the removal of one relic in 1903, the altar remained locked. Then, in 1905, it was unsealed to make

⁶ A succinct overview of the history of the *Sancta Sanctorum* and its relics is available in Guido Cordini, “Non est in Toto Sanctior Orbe Locus’: Collecting Relics in Early Medieval Rome,” in Martina Bagnoli et al., eds., *Treasures of Heaven: Saints, Relics and Devotion in Medieval Europe* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), pp. 69–78, quotation at p. 70.

⁷ The chest has an incised inscription which states, “LEO INDIGNUS TERTIUS EPISCOPUS D(E)I FAMULUS FECIT,” arranged to the sides of a framed space into which the thirteenth-century gold foil label is inserted. The original use of this framed space is unknown, and the inscription raises as many questions as answers, especially concerning who Leo envisaged being in a position to see and read it. Its dimensions were recorded when Philippe Lauer examined it in 1905: Philippe Lauer, *Le trésor du Sancta Sanctorum* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1906), p. 38. Discussions of its purpose include Erik Thunø, *Image and Relic: Mediating the Sacred in Early Medieval Rome*, *Analecta Romana Instituti Danici Supplementum* 32 (Rome: L’Erma di Bretschneider, 2002), pp. 160–70; Franz Alto Bauer, *Das Bild des Stadt Rom im Frühmittelalter. Papststiftungen im Spiegel des Liber Pontificalis von Gregor dem Dritten bis zu Leo dem Dritten*, *Palilia* 14 (Wiesbaden: Dr Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 2004), pp. 75–80; Sible de Blaauw, *Cultus et decor: liturgia e architettura nella Roma tardoantica e medievale. Basilica Salvatoris, Sanctae Mariae, Sancti Petri*, 2 vols., *Studi e Testi* 355–6 (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1994), vol. I, pp. 166–7.

the chest and all its contents available for study.⁸ Many of the relics still had their medieval wrappers and labels attached, but it took a century before these were properly edited and published. Now, thanks to Bruno Galland's work, it is possible to bring them into discussions of the role of the papacy in the care of relics in early medieval Rome. Not all of these approximately 130 pieces of papyrus, cloth, and parchment bear even roughly datable text; I shall work with those for which Galland can suggest a date on paleographical criteria, and make reference to others as appropriate.⁹

Notes from the 1905 investigation indicate that the relics themselves comprised pebbles, dust, splinters of wood, lumps of wax or sponge, phials of oil, scraps of cloth, and fragments of bone.¹⁰ Singly or in groups, these were found inside many different containers and wrappers, some of which are examples of elite patronage and craftsmanship, now justly famous for their iconography and artistry, such as a wooden Holy Land reliquary box with painted scenes of virtual pilgrimage from c. 600, and two great cross reliquaries commissioned by Paschal I (817–24), one of cloisonné enamel inside a gilded staurotheca, the other a silver-gilt cruciform carrying box for an older jeweled relic.¹¹ The majority, however, consisted of an eclectic assortment of modest

⁸ For the 1903 opening, see below, p. 203. The circumstances of the 1905 opening and ensuing rival scholarly publications are discussed in Kirstin Noreen, "Opening the Holy of Holies: Early Twentieth-century Explorations of the Sancta Sanctorum (Rome)," *Church History* 80 (2011): 520–46.

⁹ Bruno Galland, *Les authentiques de reliques du Sancta Sanctorum*, Studi e Testi 421 (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 2004). Galland only publishes those which he terms *authentiques*—that is, they identified the relics they accompanied, and for these his edition supersedes the descriptions of Lauer, *Trésor du Sancta Sanctorum*, pp. 125–35, and of Hartmann Grisar, *Die römische Kapelle Sancta Sanctorum und ihr Schatz. Meine Entdeckungen und Studien in der Palastkapelle der mittelalterlichen Päpste* (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1908), pp. 137–41. Other publications will be referred to as appropriate for the papyri and parchments which do not name relics. Cataloguing of the labels by the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana was slow and inconsistent: for details of how Galland's numbering system relates to the shelfmarks, see Galland, *Les authentiques*, pp. 41–4. Curatorial decisions placed the cloths bearing writing together with all the papyri and parchments in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, but the linen and silk wrappers without text in the Museo Sacro Vaticano; see below, n. 12.

¹⁰ Details can be found in Galland's catalogue entries.

¹¹ Conveniently illustrated in Bagnoli et al., *Treasures of Heaven*, cat. nos. 13, 36, pp. 36, 81, and fig. 31, p. 72. Other well-known items are noted by Cordini, "Non est in Toto Sanctior Orbe Locus," p. 71, with additional bibliography. For the former, see also Derek Krueger, "Liturgical Time and Holy Land Reliquaries in Early Byzantium," in Cynthia Hahn and Holger Klein, eds., *Saints and Sacred Matter: The Cult of Relics in Byzantium and Beyond* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, forthcoming), and for Paschal I's gifts, Thunø, *Image and Relic*.

pouches, boxes, silk and linen wrappers or parchment envelopes spanning the centuries during which the collection was formed.¹²

In three important respects, the Sancta Sanctorum assemblage has a distinctive profile. Firstly, 48 percent of the datable labels represent sites in the Holy Land or pertain to the life and passion of Jesus—an exceptionally high proportion in comparison with other relic collections; 3 percent designate relics of Mary, while 11 percent refer to apostles, evangelists, and other New Testament persons; 15 percent pertain to Rome's own martyrs, ranging from the famous (Peter, Lawrence) to the obscure (Domninus, Sisinnius); 11 percent of the tags mention martyrs from elsewhere, and a mere 4 percent mention post-persecution saints—an unusually low proportion (see the appendix to this chapter). Secondly, apart from Rome's own martyrs, it is an overwhelmingly eastern Mediterranean assortment. There are only six outliers, of which four reference cults originating elsewhere in the western Mediterranean and two shrines north of the Alps.¹³ As will be seen below, however, these simple categorizations are inadequate to represent fully the complexities of the collection, for relics were liable to travel via circuitous routes and intermediate cult centers.

Thirdly, and most importantly, it is an accumulation of predominantly early medieval relics. Some of the evidence for this can be found in the labels themselves: more than 75 percent of the labels date from the ninth century or earlier, and indeed, over 50 percent pre-date c. 800. Of the remainder, 8 percent are in tenth- to eleventh-century hands, a further 11 percent are twelfth-century, and 4 percent are thirteenth-century, while the remainder are undatable.¹⁴ Bearing in mind that an unknown proportion of the relics probably arrived at the Lateran with identification already attached, but that some were certainly relabeled there long after their acquisition, a paleographically derived chronology is not a secure guide to the collection's formation.¹⁵ Rather, it only indicates the most recent date at which any particular relic last underwent any significant intervention. The main clue to these relics' whereabouts is the earliest version of the *Descriptio Lateranensis ecclesiae*, redacted in the late eleventh century. This indicates that by then, a significant proportion was either in Leo III's container,

¹² For the textiles, see W.F. Volbach, *Itessuti del Museo sacro Vaticano* (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1942), and Anna Muthesius, *Byzantine Silk Weaving AD 400–AD 1200* (Vienna: Verlag Fassbaender, 1997).

¹³ Outliers: Carthage (Cyprian), Merida (Eulalia), Lérins ("various relics"), Syracuse (Lucy); plus, north of the Alps, Maubeuge (Aldegund) and Paris (Denis). Cautions about several of these relics are expressed below.

¹⁴ Galland, *Les authentiques*, p. 48. Throughout, I will cite the dates of labels suggested by Galland, but am aware that some paleographers might not share his conclusions.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

denoted as an *arca cypressina*, or elsewhere in the chapel of St. Lawrence.¹⁶ Yet by this time, tastes in the safeguarding and display of relics were evolving; so too were papal aspirations.¹⁷ As will be seen, active interest in these relics waned from c. 1100 onward. Locked behind Innocent III's bronze doors, they were left alone as the Lateran's cult of the head relics of Rome's two apostles overtook them. The contents of Leo III's chest are thus an important witness to the care of relics during the early Middle Ages, and to the fate of early medieval relics in later centuries. This chapter will sketch the broader context, then establish what can be learned from them.

* * *

Tom Noble has rightly noted the "intensity" of the cult of saints in Rome.¹⁸ The city's "dense and bewildering profusion" of relics and shrines (as of ecclesiastical personnel of all sorts) was marked by a superfluity of local martyrs, but a dearth of the kinds of saints common elsewhere in the early Middle Ages—ascetics, founding abbots, missionaries, and reforming bishops—and of the types of hagiographical evidence which document their cults.¹⁹ To be sure, Gregory the Great is an honorable exception, although even in Rome his cult did not develop as it did elsewhere.²⁰ In general, the deficit is part of the city's distinctive religious culture.

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 31–3, 58–70. *Anonymi descriptio basilicae Lateranensis*, ed. Domenico Giorgi, *De liturgia Romani pontificis in solemnibus celebrationibus missarum liber quartus*, 3 vols. (Rome: Typis Nicolai et Marci Palarini, 1731–44; single-vol. repr. Farnborough: Gregg, 1970), pp. 542–55 at pp. 545–7. Cyrille Vogel, "La Descriptio ecclesiae Lateranensis du diacre Jean," in *Mélanges en l'honneur de Monseigneur Michel Andrieu, Revue des sciences religieuses*, volume hors série (Strasbourg: Palais universitaire, 1956), dated this to the last quarter of the eleventh century, but the relevant passage is somewhat garbled and may well be a maladroit reworking of an earlier account, as pointed out by Sible de Blaauw, "Il patriarchio, la basilica lateranense e la liturgia," *Mélanges de l'Ecole française de Rome. Antiquité* 116 (2004): 161–71, at p. 165.

¹⁷ Cynthia Hahn, *Strange Beauty: Issues in the Making and Meaning of Reliquaries, 400–circa 1204* (University Park, PA: University of Pennsylvania State Press, 2012); Christof L. Diedrichs, *Vom Glauben zum Sehen: die Sichtbarkeit der Reliquie im Reliquiare. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Sehens* (Berlin: Weissenensee, 2001).

¹⁸ Thomas F.X. Noble, *Images, Iconoclasm, and the Carolingians* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), pp. 133–4.

¹⁹ Quotation from Marios Costambeys and Conrad Leyser, "To Be the Neighbour of St Stephen: Patronage, Martyr Cults and Roman Monasteries, c. 600–c. 900," in Kate Cooper and Julia Hillner, eds., *Religion, Dynasty and Patronage in Early Christian Rome, 300–900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 262–87, at p. 269. For a general overview of early medieval saints' cults, see Julia M.H. Smith, "Saints and Their Cults," in Thomas F.X. Noble and Julia M.H. Smith, eds., *Cambridge History of Christianity*, vol. III, *AD 600–1100* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 581–605.

²⁰ Alan Thacker, "Memorializing Gregory the Great: The Origin and Transmission of a Papal Cult in the Seventh and Eighth Centuries," *Early Medieval Europe* 7 (1998): 59–84. See also

Discussions of relics here nevertheless need to take Gregory into account, but for a different reason: most scholars have hitherto taken their cue from a letter he wrote in 594 to the Byzantine empress Constantina. His missive parried her demand for the head of St. Paul with horror stories about what happened to those who tried to tamper with the bodies of Rome's apostles and martyrs. He was emphatic: "May the most tranquil Lady know that, when the Romans distribute the relics of saints, it is not their custom to presume to touch any part of the body." Instead, he sent her a piece of cloth which had been placed on the saint's tomb for consecration, and then inserted into a small box for transportation and safe keeping. To describe it, he improvised by coining a Latin form of a Greek word: *brandeum*. Constantina had also demanded the head's winding-sheet, and in its place Gregory promised to send filings from the chains which had shackled St. Paul.²¹

This letter has attracted divergent interpretations: as a statement of a general principle which persisted in Rome until the middle decades of the eighth century, or as a defensive response to heavy political pressure in specific circumstances.²² Gregory may well have taken the views of his predecessors into consideration in reaching his own decision, for there was to hand in the *collectio Avellana* an earlier letter on a similar topic. In 519, the papal representatives in Constantinople had written to Pope Hormisdas about Justinian's request for relics of St. Lawrence, stating that they had explained the differences between Greek custom and the practices of the apostolic see, and suggesting a compromise gift of relics that were not body parts.²³ In all

Chris Wickham, *Roma medievale: Crisi e stabilità di una città, 950–1150* (Rome: Viella, 2013), pp. 246–7, 399, n. 63, 485.

²¹ Gregory the Great, *Registrum epistularum*, ed. Dag Norberg, *Corpus christianorum series latina* 140–140A (Turnhout: Brepols, 1982), IV.30, pp. 248–50.

²² Hippolyte Delehaye, *Les origines du culte des martyrs*, *Subsidia hagiographica* 20 (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1912), pp. 60–64, cf. Michel Andrieu, *Les Ordines Romani du haut moyen âge*, 5 vols., *Spicilegium sacrum Lovaniense: études et documents* 11, 23, 24, 28, 29 (Louvain: Spicilegium sacrum Lovaniense, 1931–61), vol. IV, pp. 378–84. The argument of principled opposition has been restated by John McCulloch, "From Antiquity to the Middle Ages: Continuity and Change in Papal Relic Policy from the 6th to the 8th Century," in Ernst Dassmann and K. Suso Frank, eds., *Pietas. Festschrift für Bernhard Kötting*, *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum Ergänzungsband* 8 (Münster: Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1980), pp. 313–24, and John McCulloch, "The Cult of Relics in the Letters and 'Dialogues' of Pope Gregory the Great: A Lexicographical Study," *Traditio*, 32 (1976): 145–84. For a recent more nuanced examination, see Alan Thacker, "Martyr Cult Within the Walls: Saints and Relics in the Roman *Tituli* Churches of the Fourth to Seventh Centuries," in Alistair Minnis and Jane Roberts, eds., *Text, Image, Interpretation: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Literature and its Insular Context* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), pp. 31–70.

²³ Otto Guenther, ed., *Epistulae imperatorum pontificorum aliorum inde ab a. CCCLXVII usque ad a. DLIII datae Avellana quae dicitur collectio*, 2 vols., *Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum*

likelihood, Gregory echoed (without acknowledgment) their wording while simultaneously ratcheting up the rhetorical effect by using his hagiographical skill to narrate terrifying happenings in support of his refusal. But that is not to say that he was slavishly following precedent, and certainly not that he was formulating a policy, let alone a principle. Rather, it was left to his biographer, John the Deacon, who wrote at the command of John VIII (872–82), to transform Gregory's firm private letter to the empress into a canonical pronouncement of general applicability.²⁴ His interpretation is an instance of the Carolingian rethinking of Gregory the Great's legacy, and is a valuable indication of late ninth-century papal views, not those of Gregory himself.²⁵ The correspondence with Constantina only tells us that in 594, Gregory declined to part with the head of St. Paul.

Many of Gregory's other letters are witness to his interest in relics. He enthusiastically distributed them to his correspondents in and beyond Italy, and was far from the first pope to do so; he also called for them to be sent to him from elsewhere.²⁶ His gifts were commonly small cloths sanctified at a shrine and then sealed into a reliquary: a notably restricted selection of martyrs featured, as Conrad Leyser has emphasized.²⁷ On other occasions, he sent filings from the

latinorum et (Vienna: F. Tempsky, 1895–98), nos. 218, 212, vol. 2, pp. 679–280. The legates reported: “habuit quidem petitio praedicti viri [Justinian] secundum morem Graecorum et nos e contra consuetudinem sedis apostolicae exposuimus.” On the *collectio Avellana*, see Detlev Jasper and Horst Furhmann, *Papal Letters in the Early Middle Ages* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2001), pp. 83–5.

²⁴ John the Deacon, *Vita Gregorii magni* III.56–8, PL 75, pp. 166–8. Note the comments of Noble, “Morbidity and Vitality,” esp. at cols. 514 and 522.

²⁵ I am grateful to Conrad Leyser for pointing out to me that the letter to Constantina also appears in canon law collections from the late ninth century onwards. During the middle decades of the ninth century, corporeal relics had been exported from Rome in large numbers, sometimes with express papal permission, but the exodus appears to have dried up by 875, resuming briefly when Arnulf of Carinthia seized Rome in 896: perhaps John VIII had made a concerted effort to stem the outflow. See Julia M.H. Smith, “Old Saints, New Cults: Roman Relics in Carolingian Francia,” in Julia M.H. Smith, ed., *Early Medieval Rome and the Christian West: Essays in Honour of Donald A. Bullough* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), pp. 317–39.

²⁶ Conrad Leyser, “The Temptations of Cult: Roman Martyr Piety in the Age of Gregory the Great,” *Early Medieval Europe* 9 (2000): 289–307; Achim Thomas Hack, *Codex Carolinus. Päpstliche Epistolographie im 8. Jahrhundert*, Päpste und Papsttum 35 (Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann, 2007), pp. 786–91. For earlier papal gifts of relics by Symmachus, Hormisdas, and Pelagius I see, respectively, Andreas Thiel, ed., *Epistolae Romanorum pontificum genuinae* (Olms: Hildesheim, 1974), nos. 11, 17, pp. 708–9, 730–31; Guenther, *Collectio Avellana*, nos. 187, 190, 218, pp. 644–5, 647–8, 679–80; Pius M. Gasso, ed. *Pelagii I Papae epistulae quae supersunt, 556–561*, Scripta et Documenta 8 (Barcelona: Abbatia Montiserrati, 1956), nos. 3–4 and 20, pp. 6–10, 62–23.

²⁷ Leyser, “The Temptations of Cult,” p. 301.

chains of St. Peter enclosed in a key-shaped container, but he sometimes named other tokens, including, on one occasion, the hair of John the Baptist.²⁸ More commonly, Gregory was non-specific about their material substance, and it is unwise to over-interpret his words. The same lack of precision characterizes all but one of the pro forma letters collected in the *Liber Diurnus*. These indicate that it was common practice to request relics from the pope for new churches; the exception is explicit that the relics in question are small cloths (*palliola*) from the shrine of the apostles.²⁹ A Roman *ordo* for depositing relics (nature unspecified) in an altar gives an indication of the ritual which had evolved by the middle of the eighth century for exactly this circumstance, and John the Deacon reports having seen it performed during the pontificate of Hadrian II (867–72); on that occasion, the relic in question turned out to be from the tunic of St. John.³⁰

In the context of mission, Gregory recommended the installation of relics when a pagan temple was converted into a Christian church, and certainly kept his missionaries in England supplied.³¹ Seventh- and eighth-century missionaries likewise received—or collected—relics from Rome, and visitors and pilgrims such as Wilfred of Ripon and Benedict Biscop included them among the objects they brought home.³² All these instances of the export of relics from Rome refer

²⁸ Gregory the Great, *Registrum epistularum*, IX.229, pp. 805–11, at p. 810.

²⁹ Theodor E. von Sickel, *Liber diurnus romanorum pontificum*, 2nd edn. (Aalen: Scientia Verlag, 1966), nos. x–xiv, xvi–xvii, xxi–xxii, pp. 9–12, 13–14, 16. The *palliola* are mentioned in no. xxii.

³⁰ Andrieu, *Ordines Romani*, no. xlii, vol. 4, pp. 397–401; *Vita Gregorii magni*, III.58, PL 75, col. 168. On the *Liber Diurnus*, see Thomas F.X. Noble, “Literacy and Papal Government in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages,” in Rosamond McKitterick, ed., *The Uses of Literacy in Early Medieval Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 82–108, at pp. 95–6.

³¹ Bertram Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors, eds., *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), I.29–30, pp. 104–7, and for the reference to the relics of St. Sixtus which Gregory also sent, see Margaret Deanesly and Paul Grosjean, “The Canterbury Edition of the Answers of Pope Gregory,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 10 (1959): 1–49, at 28–9, with the essential comments of Richard Sharpe, “Martyrs and Local Saints in Late Antique Britain,” in Alan Thacker and Richard Sharpe, eds., *Local Saints and Local Churches in the Early Medieval West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 75–154, at pp. 123–4, n. 204.

³² Alan Thacker, “In Search of Saints: The English Church and the Cult of Roman Apostles and Martyrs in the Seventh and Eighth Centuries,” in Julia M.H. Smith, ed., *Early Medieval Rome and the Christian West: Essays in Honour of Donald A. Bullough* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), pp. 247–77, collects the evidence (at pp. 259–63) from Anglo-Saxon England. For Amandus, see the letter of Pope Martin to Amandus in Milo of St.-Amand, *Vita Amandi episcopi*, ch. 2, MGH SSRM 5, p. 456. For Willibrord, see Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, V.11, ed. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 484–5, and Alcuin, *Vita Willibrordi*, ch. 7, MGH SSRM 7, p. 122. For Boniface, see Willibald, *Vita Bonifatii*, ed. W. Levison, chs. 5, 6, 7, MGH SSRG.i.u.s. (Hanover, 1905), pp. 22, 35, 37.

to objects easily transportable in travelers' baggage, but are described in such generic terms that we do not know what they comprised. Their likely size and physical appearance will be discussed below, but it is important to note here that the assumption that these were not body part relics remains just that—an unproven assumption.

Any reluctance to touch or move martyr remains needs to be put firmly in context. Gregory had protested to Constantina that, from a Roman perspective—indeed, in the view of all Westerners—the Greek custom of elevating the bones of saints seemed scarcely credible, so sacrilegious was the deed. His words were designed to halt her importuning, and in effect, took considerable liberties with the truth. Strictures against moving the bodies of saints certainly applied to those whose graves lay in papal basilicas, but whether they applied elsewhere is another matter.³³

In practice, “the custom of the Romans” probably only referred to the clergy who tended the martyr tombs under papal control. Analysis of relics in *titulus* churches during c. 400–c. 700 strongly suggests that there was no single, consistent Roman attitude to corporeal relics. Imported body part relics may well have been installed in intramural churches under papal control from at least the time of Innocent I (401–17). This was certainly happening by the middle decades of the sixth century, although it did not catch the attention of the compiler of the *Liber Pontificalis* until the middle of the seventh century.³⁴ Furthermore, martyr remains may have been moved extramurally, from the catacombs to the Vatican, as early as the pontificate of Symmachus (502–6), even if the precedent was not followed for a while.³⁵

³³ Hence, Gregory I had no objections to the transfer of Donatus' body from Euria to Corcyra in 603: *Registrum epistularum*, XIV.7, pp. 1,074–5. For the suggestion that, in the Theodosian era, imperial attitudes to corporeal relics of Rome's apostles may have been significantly different, see Alan Thacker, “Patrons of Rome: The Cult of Sts Peter and Paul at Court and in the City in the Fourth and Fifth Centuries,” *Early Medieval Europe* 20 (2012): 380–406, at 398–9.

³⁴ Thacker, “Martyr Cult Within the Walls.” The archeological evidence pertaining to corporeal relics in S. Pietro in Vincoli, SS. Apostoli, the Lateran chapel of S. Venanzio, and S. Stefano Rotondo is summarized in Caroline Goodson, “Building for Bodies: The Architecture of Saint Veneration in Early Medieval Rome,” in Éamonn Ó Carragain and Carol Neuman de Vegvar, eds., *Roma Felix: Formation and Reflections of Medieval Rome* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 51–79, at pp. 62–6, 69–72. The *Liber Pontificalis* reports that John IV (640–42), Theodore (642–49), and Leo II (682–83) all oversaw the installation of corporeal relics in intramural churches; Duchesne, *Liber Pontificalis*, I: 330, 332, 360. The identity and nature of the relics translated from Dalmatia by John IV are discussed in detail in Gillian Mackie, *Early Christian Chapels in the West: Decoration, Function and Patronage* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), pp. 212–230, who reports (at p. 226) on the findings of the 1962 *recognitio* of the contents of the reliquary: a modest quantity of small bones, both human and animal, dust, and two Byzantine coins.

³⁵ Thacker, “Martyr Cult Within the Walls.”

The papacy did not monopolize the cult of relics in the city, however. Thacker's conclusion that popes exercised little direct control over most of the catacomb sites frequented by seventh- and eighth-century Anglo-Saxon and Frankish pilgrims raises the possibility that the guardians of these martyrial tombs did not fully align themselves with papal behavior. This may be the context for Boniface V's insistence that only priests "raise the relics" of martyrs.³⁶ We know, too, that immigrant communities brought their own saints' cults with them, including relics.³⁷ Exceptionally well documented among these were the Palestinian monks who rescued the head of St. Anastasius the Persian when Jerusalem fell to the Muslims and brought it to Rome, where it was venerated at the Greek-speaking monastery *ad Aquas Salvias* possibly as early as 645, and for which oil lamps bearing his name were manufactured.³⁸ In effect, Rome's own martyrs were but a proportion—albeit a very large one—of the city's sacred capital, and were in the care of various groups of clergy.³⁹ In this context, it would not be surprising if competing vested interests manifested themselves in divergent views on whether to move and subdivide martyrs' bodies. We should envisage a spectrum of attitudes, not a consistent, uniform, or principled opposition to bodily relics *per se*.

There thus emerges a dynamic picture of relics of various types flowing in and out of early medieval Rome, as well as being moved around within the city from one church or altar to another. Before this could happen, oil, dust, bone, or stone had to be extracted or selected, and then placed in a suitable container for safe keeping, transportation, or deposit. The famous Monza collection of glass perfume bottles indicates one common way of transporting sacred substances: they once functioned as reliquary containers for oil collected at the suburban cemetery shrines of Rome's martyrs.⁴⁰ These complement receptacles found in

³⁶ Duchesne, *Liber Pontificalis*, vol. I, p. 321. The Gregorian Sacramentary contains a prayer for the raising of relics, *oratio quando levantur reliquiae*, which recurs in OR xlII: Andrieu, *Ordines Romani*, IV: 385–86, 397, apparently applicable to both the elevation of buried corporeal remains and picking up the *palliola* placed on a tomb to consecrate them.

³⁷ Jean-Marie Sansterre, *Les moines grecs et orientaux à Rome aux époques byzantine et carolingienne: milieu du VIe s.-fin du IXe s.*, 2 vols. (Brussels: Académie royale de Belgique, 1982), vol. I, pp. 147–9, 157.

³⁸ Carmela Viricillo Franklin, *The Latin Dossier of Anastasius the Persian: Hagiographic Translations and Transformations*, Studies and Texts 147 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2004), pp. 11, 14.

³⁹ A point forcefully argued in Costambeys and Leyser, "To Be the Neighbour of St Stephen."

⁴⁰ They contained "holy oils [which] in the times of the pope, lord Gregory, John, unworthy sinner, brought to the ruler, Theodelinda, queen, from Rome"; Jan-Olof Tjäder, ed., *Die nichtliterarischen lateinischen Papyri Italiens*, 3 vols., Acta Instituti Romani Regni Sueciae 19 (Lund: Gleerup, 1954–82), vol. 2, pp. 205–22. The papyrus labels remained attached to the

Rome's churches, which indicate that the means by which relics were transferred around the city were local reflexes of common late antique Mediterranean practices.⁴¹ Two sets of excavations are of particular note in this context. In the 1940s, explorations under the *confessio* of St. Peter's identified an early medieval altar block whose cavity yielded a marble urn, inside which were found two cylindrical silver capsules, each only 3 cm tall. They were wrapped in white cloths marked with a note of the contents, and the capsules were also inscribed directly in an uncial hand of possibly seventh/eighth-century date. The exterior of one read "sancti Petri et sancti Pauli," the other "Salvatori et sanctae Mariae." One contained two scraps of fine cloth, each about 3 mm square, the other three slightly larger pieces.⁴² A somewhat different procedure was followed in a church dedicated to the apostles Philip and James which Pelagius I (556–61) had commenced but his successor, John III (561–74), completed. Here, building activity in 1873 discovered the original relic deposit, which consisted of pieces of purple linen cloth in an undecorated oval silver casket, along with a silver phial of oil. These were placed in a stone-lined cavity underneath the *confessio* of the marble chest altar, while a monumental inscription was erected to record the consecration of the church and identify the relics.⁴³

The contents of the Sancta Sanctorum are consistent with this picture. A uncial label in an eighth-century hand declared that a small ampulla contained Christ's blood; a miniature wooden capsule full of white powder and wrapped in a linen cloth, also labeled in uncial, was stated to hold relics of the Savior, St. Martha, and St. Michael, and an oil lamp held oil from the Lord's tomb.⁴⁴ A wooden box with internal subdivisions and Greek inscriptions (possibly ninth-

bottles until the nineteenth century. I concur with Dennis Trout that these are unlikely to have been a gift from Gregory: Dennis Trout, "Theodelinda's Rome: *Ampullae, Pittacia* and the Image of the City," *Memoirs of the American Academy, Rome* 50 (2005): 131–50, at pp. 133–4; I follow Trout's translation of the notitia at p. 132.

⁴¹ For a recent overview, see Ann Marie Yasin, *Saints and Church Spaces in the Late Antique Mediterranean: Architecture, Cult, and Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), ch. 4; for an older one, see Joseph Braun, *Der christliche Altar in seiner geschichtlichen Entwicklung*, 2 vols. (Munich: Alte Meister Guenther Koch, 1924), vol. 1, pp. 635–40.

⁴² B.M. Apollonj Ghetti et al., *Esplorazioni sotto la confessione di San Pietro in Vaticano eseguite negli anni 1940-1949*, 2 vols. (Vatican City: s.n., 1951), vol. 1, pp. 188–91, with a photograph of the capsules at p. 190.

⁴³ Ippolito Mazucco, *Filippo e Giacomo apostoli nel loro santuario romano* (Rome: L'Apostoleion, 1972), with a photograph of the silver casket at p. 47; Braun, *Der christliche Altar*, vol. 1, pp. 194–6, no. 261, p. 638, no. 199. Inscription in Richard Krautheimer, *Corpus basilicarum christianarum Romae: The Early Christian Basilicas of Rome (IV–IX Cent.)*, 5 vols. (Vatican City: Pontificio istituto di archeologia cristiana, 1937–77), vol. 1, p. 79.

⁴⁴ Galland, *Les authentiques*, nos. 14, 96, 111, pp. 198, 130, 142. These are visible in the photographs from 1906: Lauer, *Trésor du Sancta Sanctorum*, figs. 10, 15, 20, pp. 53, 91, 120.

century) had had its contents changed, and on discovery, held relics from the Holy Land in the form of little phials and pebbles, folded inside parchment.⁴⁵ Circular pieces of cloth had been twisted and tied around other tiny Holy Land relics.⁴⁶

When martyrs' bodies were to be moved from the catacombs, however, different means of transport and packaging were needed. The three sets of human bones found when an altar in the church of S. Agata dei Goti was opened in 1932 had only demonstrably been in that church since at least 1054, but scrawled on the bags and winding-sheets which held them together, in hands of the eighth or ninth century, were the names of two groups of saints, one of whom early medieval sources report was buried in the cemetery of Callistus, the other in the cemetery of the Jordani.⁴⁷ They would have been moved on a bier or cart rather than in a pocket or saddlebag.

* * *

Overall, then, the early medieval evidence suggests a pragmatic and deliberately flexible approach to caring for relics in early medieval Rome. So how did the papal administration facilitate the movement of relics, to the extent that popes were involved in it? There are three points to consider. The first is the production of the relics and reliquaries themselves. Thanks to later miracle tales which elaborated upon the custom of Gregory the Great's day, the consecration of small pieces of cloth (*panna*, *palliola*) at the shrine of St. Peter (and elsewhere) is particularly well known, although the practice was by no means new at the time.⁴⁸ This was evidently coordinated by clergy given access to the saint's *confessio*, and involved saying mass or prayers while the cloths rested on, above, or near the apostle's tomb. Similarly, the manufacture of filings from the apostles' chains—normally Peter's, but explicitly on one occasion Paul's—required a priest to stand at the chains, rasp in hand.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Lauer, *Trésor du Sancta Sanctorum*, pp. 99–100, and Galland, *Les authentiques*, p. 29 (N.XIII).

⁴⁶ Ibid., nos. 69, 72, 95, pp. 118, 120, 129.

⁴⁷ Albert Bruckner and Robert Marichal, eds., *Chartae Latinae antiquiores: Facsimile Edition of the Latin Charters Prior to the Ninth Century*, 49 vols. (Zurich: Urs Graf, 1954–98) (hereafter *ChLA*), vol. 22, pp. 68–70, no. 729; P. Franchi de'Cavalieri, "Le reliquie dei martiri greci nella chiesa di S. Agata alla Suburra," *Rivista di archeologia cristiana* 10 (1933): 235–60.

⁴⁸ Thacker, "Memorializing Gregory the Great," pp. 63–7. Earlier accounts of placing something on the apostle's tomb to be sanctified before being given as a gift vary in points of detail, but reflect an analogous relic-making procedure; Guenther, *Collectio Avellana*, no. 218, pp. 679–80: *sanctuarium* of Sts. Peter and Paul placed at the shrine's second (that is, inner) grille; Gasso, *Pelagii I Papae epistulae*, no. 20 pp. 62–3: a tunic is placed *in interiori parte sepulchri beati Petri* for three days, which Eutychius can either use as a relic or wear when he says mass.

⁴⁹ Gregory the Great, *Registrum epistularum*, IV.30, p. 250.

Less is known about the boxes in which Gregory's staff placed the cloths. Were they tiny wood or metal canisters, or were they rather larger, similar to the one found in the altar of Sts. Philip and James? Were they perhaps elaborately wrought silver caskets, similar to the so-called *capsella Vaticana*, dating from the reign of Heraclius (610–41) and found inside the altar of the Sancta Sanctorum?⁵⁰ Whatever they were like, someone must have organized their supply in quantities adequate to meet demand. Indeed, Justinian assumed that Hormisdas could produce or procure reliquary boxes to order, for when he requested relics of Sts. Peter, Paul, and Lawrence, his first thought was to have silver caskets made and sent to Rome, but he changed his mind, so the papal legates reported, and instead requested that the pope have the boxes made.⁵¹ As for the key-shaped reliquaries in which Gregory frequently dispatched the filings from the chains of St. Peter, their distinctive shape surely implies a workshop working to commission, and capable, when requested, of making one in gold.⁵² This production seems to have been long-lived, for keys of St. Peter were available for dispatch as late as the pontificate of Gregory III (731–41), who sent one to Charles Martel.⁵³

A second observation concerns the selection of relics for dispatch abroad. The few details available are suggestive. Pelagius II gave Gregory of Tours's deacon "relics of the saints whose sacred feet the Lord had washed with his hands [that is, the apostles], together with relics of Paul, Lawrence and Pancras, Chrysanthus and the virgin Daria, and John with the other Paul, his brother," while in 667, Pope Vitalian sent the Northumbrian ruler Oswy "relics of the apostles St. Peter and St. Paul and of the holy martyrs Lawrence, John and

⁵⁰ Galit Noga-Banai, *The Trophies of the Martyrs: An Art Historical Study of Early Christian Silver Reliquaries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 162–3; Ruth E. Leader-Newby, *Silver and Society in Late Antiquity: Functions and Meanings of Silver Plate in the Fourth to Seventh Centuries* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), pp. 97–110.

⁵¹ *Collectio Avellana*, no. 218, ed. Guenther, pp. 679–80.

⁵² See Gregory the Great, *Registrum epistularum*, VII.23, pp. 474–8, for a golden key of St. Peter desecrated by a non-Catholic Lombard and the production of an analogue by King Authari, which he sent to Pelagius II. Gregory of Tours reports that gold keys were common, claiming that "many people" made them: *Liber in gloria martyrum*, ch. 27, MGH SSRM I/ii, p. 54.

⁵³ *Codex Carolinus*, ep. 2, MGH Epp. 3, pp. 478–9. They may have been available prior to Gregory I's pontificate, for Pelagius I sent filings from Peter's chains to Eutychius, patriarch of Constantinople in 558–9, but without mentioning their container; Gasso, *Pelagii I Papae epistulae*, no. 20, pp. 62–3. On the production of fine metalwork, see Antonio Iacobini, "Aurea Roma" — Le arti preziose da Costantino all'età carolingia: committenza, produzione, circolazione," in *Roma fra oriente e occidente*, Settimane di studio del Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo 49 (Spoleto: Presso la sede del centro, 2002), pp. 651–93. See also Thomas F.X. Noble, "Paradoxes and Possibilities in the Sources for Roman Society in the Early Middle Ages," in Julia M.H. Smith, ed., *Early Medieval Rome and the Christian West: Essays in Honour of Donald A. Bullough* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), pp. 55–83, at pp. 76–9.

Paul, as well as Gregory and Pancras.”⁵⁴ Both shipments had been assembled from across several of the main papal intra- and extramural churches. Relics of Gregory apart, both overlap with Gregory the Great’s preferred choice of relics to send to petitioners.⁵⁵ The pattern of fairly settled relic-gathering habits among the papal entourage over many decades may well hint at some sort of relic dispatch office with a limited range of stock, but in ample supply. Certainly, several centuries later, the Lateran seems to have acted as the papacy’s relic depot, sending out consignments in response to incoming requests.⁵⁶

Lastly, we turn to the ways in which literate habits interacted with relics. Calendrical lists and inscriptions confirm that naming the martyrs in writing had been integral to their commemoration since at least the fourth century, although no evidence for labeling individual relics survives from such an early date.⁵⁷ Among the oldest extant relic labels are the tiny gold foil plaques discovered in 1873 inside a reliquary under the main altar of the cathedral at Grado, in all probability already venerable when placed there by the episcopal community of Aquileia after its flight to the island in 578. The papyrus tags formerly attached to the Monza oil flasks are also notably early, and, like the accompanying inventory, are written in new Roman cursive script. Indeed, Tjäder was prepared to date them to the time of Gregory’s pontificate, although his views have not fully displaced previous suggestions of a date in the second half of the seventh century.⁵⁸ Papyrus certainly remained in common use in Italy for labeling relics, as for other documentary purposes, into at least the eighth century, albeit gradually supplemented, and finally supplanted, by parchment.⁵⁹ The relics sent to England by Gregory I and Vitalian are thus very

⁵⁴ Gregory of Tours, *Liber in gloria martyrum*, ch. 82, p. 94; Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica*, III.29, ed. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 320–21.

⁵⁵ Thacker, “Martyr Cult Within the Walls,” p. 68, notes the correlation between cults favored by Gregory and Vitalian’s gifts to Oswy.

⁵⁶ For the deposition at Maiella of relics “que venerunt nobis de Lateranensis palatio” c. 1020, see Enrico Carusi, “Intorno al *Commematorium* dell’abate Teobaldo (a. 1019–22),” *Bullettino dell’Istituto storico italiano e archivio muratoriano* 47 (1932): 173–90, at p. 187. For a notice of the deposition of relics sent by Innocent II in 1142 to the Aquitanian church of Saint-Avit-Sénieur, see Robert Favreau, “Épigraphie médiévale et hagiographie,” in Robert Favreau, ed., *Le culte des saints aux IXe–XIIIe siècles* (Poitiers: 1995), pp. 63–83, at p. 78, n. 102.

⁵⁷ See the overview of Paola Supino, “Scrivere le reliquie a Roma nel medioevo,” in Luisa Miglio and Paola Supino, eds., *Segni per Armando Petrucci* (Rome: Bagatto Libri, 2002), pp. 250–64.

⁵⁸ For Grado, see Ezio Marocco, *Il tesoro del duomo di Grado* (Trieste: B. Fachini, 2001), pp. 12–15, and Cynthia Hahn, “The Meaning of Early Medieval Treasuries,” in Bruno Reudenbach and Gia Toussaint, eds., *Reliquiare im Mittelalter* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2005), pp. 1–20, at pp. 4–9. For Monza, see Tjäder, *Die nichtliterarischen lateinischen Papyri Italiens*, vol. 2, pp. 206, 209–10, with comments on dating controversies of Trout, “Theodelinda’s Rome,” p. 131, n. 1.

⁵⁹ Seven papyrus labels survive from Cantù (Tjäder, *Die nichtliterarischen lateinischen Papyri Italiens*, vol. 2, pp. 222–5 [= *ChLA*, vol. 29, pp. 2–3, no. 862]), one from Saint-Maurice d’Agaune

likely either to have borne papyrus tags or to have been marked with the saints' names on their linen wrappings.

We can also speculate on how the relics brought back by pilgrims themselves may have been identified. When Wilfred went around the saints' shrines on his visit to Rome in 680, he obtained a great number and, so his biographer Stephen of Ripon tells us, took care to write down "what each of the relics was and to which saint it belonged," perhaps in an inventory akin to the one which listed the contents of all the Monza ampullae.⁶⁰ In view of the heavy pilgrim traffic to Rome's many martyrs by this date, it is possible that shrines themselves made supplies of papyrus available for pilgrims to use for listing or labeling the sacred tokens they collected. More plausibly perhaps, churches may have maintained a supply of pre-prepared relics (whether in glass phials, cloth packages, metal pots, or other containers) available to satisfy the demand, in the manner of the eastern Mediterranean shrines which manufactured metal or terracotta ampullae for pilgrims, each with its own distinctive iconography and/or legend.⁶¹ In general, it is almost impossible to tell whether pilgrims, Wilfred included, labeled relics themselves, and if so, whether they did so when they first acquired them, or rather later, perhaps on arrival back home. In all likelihood, practices varied.

Whatever the case, once relics had entered ecclesiastical collections, clergy sifted through them from time to time, whether to move them from one reliquary or altar to another or to inventory them. In the process, they commonly replaced degraded or illegible labels as required.⁶² Emphatically, then, the script of a label is no guide to the date when a pilgrim acquired a relic or the date when the church in which it came to rest took ownership of it.⁶³ Like medieval book collections, most relic collections were heterogeneous

(Rudolf Schnyder, "Das Kopfreliquiar des heiligen Candidus in Saint-Maurice," *Zeitschrift für schweizerische Archäologie und Kunstgeschichte*, 24 [1965–66]: 65–127, at p. 123), inventoried as B.II.133, and seven from the Sancta Sanctorum, two of which are blanks, two in Latin, and three in an unidentified script and language (Galland, *Les authentiques*, nos. 55, 98, 116, 117, pp. 113, 131, 143, 144 [= *ChLA*, vol. 22, pp. 57–9, nos. 724–6]). I am grateful to Bryan Kraemer for his expert opinion that these are not in Demotic; cf. Galland's hypothesis.

⁶⁰ Bertram Colgrave, *The Life of Bishop Wilfred by Eddius Stephanus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1927), ch. 33, pp. 66–7; Tjäder, *Die nichtliterarischen lateinischen Papyri Italiens*, vol. 2, pp. 216–22.

⁶¹ Chiara Lambert and Paula Pedemonte Demeglio, "Ampolle devozionali ed itinerari di pellegrinaggio tra IV e VII secolo," *Antiquité tardive* 2 (1994): 205–231; William Anderson, "The Archaeology of Late Antique Pilgrim Flasks," *Anatolian Studies* 54 (2004): 79–93.

⁶² I discuss this in Smith, "Portable Christianity."

⁶³ For a contrasting methodology for working with relic labels, see Michael McCormick, *Origins of the European Economy: Communications and Commerce, AD 300–900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 283–318.

and accumulated gradually, the history of the whole distinguishable from the story of each constituent part.

* * *

With this in mind, it becomes possible to focus on the assemblage found inside Leo III's chest. There are two ways to explore its composition: the geographical mobility of cults, and the techniques used to wrap and label relics. Taken together, they reveal something of the complexity of the history of the papal relic hoard. In suggesting how the papacy cared for its relics, they also yield more surprises.

In the first place, not all relics reached the Lateran directly from a saint's first or founding cult site. This can easily be demonstrated in two cases. In one, an uncial hand noted that a cloth wrapper contained "various relics" which came from the monastery of Lérins, including a piece of Mary's black cloak.⁶⁴ The other concerns an eleventh-century label for a relic of St. Denis (the Areopagite had been conflated with the martyr of Paris since at least the ninth century). This had been acquired from Regensburg, whose (fraudulent) claim to the saint's remains was upheld when Leo IX visited the Bavarian town 1052.⁶⁵ Although these are the only items that can be proven not to have originated from a saint's primary cult site, they are unlikely to be the only ones.

Pursuing this theme sheds light on the circulation of relics in and around Rome itself. I have selected three types of relic for this purpose: non-indigenous saints, Rome's own martyrs, and Christ's nativity. Using the brief information on the Sancta Sanctorum relic labels to deduce unrecorded patterns of relic circulation is, necessarily, something of an exercise in educated guesswork. Nevertheless, two of them—Cyprian of Carthage and the apostle Bartholomew—may shed light on how non-local saints became appropriated into Roman traditions. Relics of the former had been venerated in the Catacomb of Callixtus since at least 354, and perhaps this, rather than Carthage, was the proximate source of the relic of Cyprian that was labeled in a seventh- or eighth-century uncial hand.⁶⁶ Similarly, it is reasonable to posit a local origin for the piece of the beard of St. Bartholomew recorded on a twelfth-century label.⁶⁷ In 983, this apostle's cult was introduced by Otto III to the church on Tiber Island which now bears

⁶⁴ Galland, *Les authentiques*, no. 97, p. 130: "Reliquias diuersas de Lirino monasterio id est pallium sanctae Mariae nigro colore."

⁶⁵ Ibid., no. 126, pp. 153–4, a gloriously spurious pseudo-diploma, complete with three monograms. See also Andreas Kraus, "Saint-Denis und Regensburg: zu den Motiven und zur Wirkung hochmittelalterlicher Fälschungen," in Wolfram Setz, ed., *Fälschungen im Mittelalter. Internationaler Kongress der Monumenta Germaniae Historica, München, 16.–19. September 1986*, *Schriften der Monumenta Germaniae Historica* 33 (Hanover: Hahn, 1988), pp. 535–49.

⁶⁶ Galland, *Les authentiques*, no. 22, p. 101.

⁶⁷ Ibid., no. 17, p. 99.

his name; this may be a more probable provenance than this wandering apostle's other western Mediterranean resting places, Benevento and Lipari, let alone the various eastern cities claiming his body.

There are, then, clear signs that saints' relics of external origin were moved around within Rome, acquiring new local affinities and identities in the process. The handful of composite labels in the Sancta Sanctorum allows us to extend the insight to the remains of Rome's own martyrs. These composite tags all date from the eleventh–thirteenth centuries: each names multiple saints whose cults had not, as far as is known, hitherto shared either feast day or resting place until they came together in a single bundle or reliquary. A straightforward example is an eleventh- or twelfth-century tag naming Sebastian along with the well-known pair Processus and Martinianus. The cult of this duo originated in a different cemetery from that of Sebastian, but Paschal I moved their relics to an oratory dedicated to them in St. Peter's.⁶⁸ Sebastian soon followed, one of three martyrs moved to the Vatican and each enshrined in a separate altar by Gregory IV.⁶⁹ In all probability, then, relics derived from these shrines made their way into the same reliquary, and perhaps with further subdivision, were later moved to the Lateran. More tendentious is a label which asserts that in 1018, Benedict VIII had found relics of Sts. Primus and Felicianus and also Gorgonius in the cemetery of Helen (that is, *ad duas lauras* on the via Labicana). This prolix tag acknowledges that other relics of these three saints were deposited in S. Stefano Rotondo.⁷⁰ These claims are implausible, for several reasons. They contradict earlier evidence that only Gorgonius had originally lain in the cemetery of Helen, and that Primus and Felicianus had been translated to S. Stefano Rotondo by Pope Theodore.⁷¹ It may therefore be more sensible to regard this eleventh-century note as formulating a plausible backstory in support of a cult which had recently arrived at the Lateran from nearby S. Stefano Rotondo.⁷² In both cases, then, these labels represent conjoined cults in which one saint had a different trajectory around the city from the other pair of saints in the same

⁶⁸ Agostino Amore, *I martiri di Roma*, *Spicilegium pontificii athenaei antoniani* (Rome: Antonianum, 1975), pp. 255–7, summarizes the evidence; for the reasons why Paschal I selected them, see Caroline Goodson, *The Rome of Paschal I: Papal Power, Urban Renovation, Church Building and Relic Translation, 817–824* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 277.

⁶⁹ Amore, *Martiri*, pp. 184–5; Duchesne, *Liber Pontificalis*, vol. 2, p. 74.

⁷⁰ Galland, *Les authentiques*, no. 62, p. 115.

⁷¹ Amore, *Martiri*, pp. 86–8, 113–14. For Theodore, see above, n. 34.

⁷² Pierre Jounel, *Le culte des saints dans les basiliques du Latran et du Vatican au douzième siècle*, Collection de L'Ecole française de Rome 26 (Rome: Ecole française de Rome, 1977), pp. 244, 286. Primus and Felicianus (but not Gorgonius) are mentioned among the relics in the earliest extant recension of the *Descriptio basilicae Lateranensis*, ed. Giorgi, *De liturgia Romani pontificis*, p. 546.

bundle. The Sancta Sanctorum labels thus hint at the dissemination around the city's churches of tiny particles of its holy dead in ways too routine to catch the attention of other sources.

Finally, it is useful to consider relics of the crib of the nativity (*praeseptum*) in this context, as an example of biblical relics whose laconic labels provide only part of their story. Leo III's chest contained six of them, none dating later than the ninth century. Only two, both in uncial hands, explicitly came from Bethlehem.⁷³ What of the others, all relics *de praeseptio*?⁷⁴ Sta. Maria Maggiore was styled *ad praesepe* from the 640s, and had a distinct chapel of the *praeseptum* by the reign of Gregory III (731–41). Might this have been the source of some of the other crib relics in the Sancta Sanctorum?⁷⁵ The possibility cannot be excluded.

In turning to techniques of wrapping and labeling, Galland's paleographical analysis offers some initial parameters. In his judgment, none of the following were penned by papal scribes: the eight Latin labels written in eighth-century Frankish so-called "Luxeuil" minuscule, nine labels in Greek, and a set of seven Holy Land relic wrappers in poor Latin and crude lettering.⁷⁶ On the other hand, the four parchment "envelopes" making use of the blank verso sides of letters (datable to 1118) eliminated by the papal chancery certainly were, and so were the seven written in an eighth- or ninth-century curial hand.⁷⁷ To these should be added another archival discard, a letter sent to Urban II in 1096 which had been cut in half vertically, the surviving half being found enclosing a relic of Pope Damasus.⁷⁸ Furthermore, some relics were demonstrably relabeled by Lateran clerics, presumably to replace old abraded (papyrus?) ones.⁷⁹ But the

⁷³ Galland, *Les authentiques*, nos. 11 and 13, pp. 96–7.

⁷⁴ Ibid., nos. 4, 69, 106, 120, pp. 94, 118, 138, 148. On nos. 106 and 120, see also below, pp. 199–200.

⁷⁵ Dale Kinney, "The *Praeseptum* in Santa Maria in Trastevere and Santa Maria Maggiore," in *Marmoribus vestita. Miscellanea in onore di Federico Guidobaldi* (Vatican City: Pontificio istituto di archeologia cristiana, 2011), pp. 777–95.

⁷⁶ Galland, *Les authentiques*, pp. 44, 49–50, 58 (I have added to Galland's totals one label which mixes Latin and Greek). Cf. Thomas F.X. Noble, "The Declining Knowledge of Greek in Eighth- and Ninth-century Papal Rome," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 78 (1985): 56–62.

⁷⁷ Galland, *Les authentiques*, pp. 52–3, 58. For recycled letters, see Raffaello Volpini, "Documenti nel Sancta Sanctorum del Laterano: i resti dell' 'archivio' di Gelasio II," *Lateranum* 52 (1986): 215–64.

⁷⁸ Galland, *Les authentiques*, no. 105, p. 137. The letter is edited and dated in Bernard de Vregille, "Mariage aristocratique et droit grégorien: un document du *Sancta Sanctorum* intéressant Besançon et Montbéliard," *Bibliothèque de l'Ecole des chartes* 158 (2000): 547–55.

⁷⁹ See Galland, *Les authentiques*, no. 85, p. 125, and the comments (at p. 155) on the thirteenth-century label of relics of Sts. Agnes and Euphemia. On these relics, see further below, pp. 202–3.

script of the majority of the labels cannot be located, and the handful of blank or illegible labels seems not to have troubled anyone.⁸⁰

As Galland has shown, there are several sets of labels in the same hand that were cut from a single piece of parchment, but he was unable to attribute more than one of these to activity within the Lateran palace.⁸¹ However, by turning from purely paleographical criteria to the historical and geographical coherence of each group of relics, it is possible to nuance some of his conclusions. A group of relics all labeled in the same northern Frankish hand reflect a distinctive pilgrimage itinerary through the Holy Land, and might have been brought by a western pilgrim returning home through Rome.⁸² By contrast, the four objects from as far apart as the Low Countries and the Holy Land that were labeled by another eighth-century minuscule hand must have been brought together and relabeled somewhere central.⁸³ Should we envisage these as the work of a pilgrim who settled at the Schola Francorum? Alternatively, did the Lateran sometimes absorb into its collections relics from other churches when it took control of them, as happened frequently elsewhere?⁸⁴

For the most part, though, the care of relics seems to have been associated with the maintenance of the Lateran palace archive and books, at least its liturgical ones.⁸⁵ As well as the relics protected by envelopes made out of documents discarded as unsuitable for permanent archiving, leaves of old books could be pressed into service. One relic was protected by a fragment of an eleventh-century Beneventan prayer book, another a leaf from a twelfth-century psalter, and a third from a rectangle of parchment with part of a penitential alphabet on it.⁸⁶ Three scrappy twelfth-century tags were cut from a small piece of parchment bearing traces of an erased text that cannot be identified.⁸⁷

⁸⁰ For a list, see Galland, *Les authentiques*, pp. 43–4.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 49–54.

⁸² *Ibid.*, nos. 65, 66, 77, 78, 79, pp. 50, 117, 122–3.

⁸³ This is Galland's Group C, consisting of relics of Sts. Aldegund (Low Countries), Isaac (Holy Land), Cosmas and Damian (Constantinople? Rome?), and Michael (Monte Gargano); *ibid.*, nos. 28–31, pp. 103–4.

⁸⁴ Early medieval examples of grants of churches, including their relics and other liturgical furnishings, can be found in Janneke Raaijmakers, *The Making of the Monastic Community of Fulda, c.744–c.900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 192, n. 180, and Susan Wood, *The Proprietary Church in the Medieval West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 104–6, 126, 455–7.

⁸⁵ For the Lateran *scrinium* and library in the early Middle Ages, see Noble, "Literacy and Papal Government in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages."

⁸⁶ Galland, *Les authentiques*, pp. 42, 139. Galland does not catalogue the first two of these; that they were found inside reliquaries is clear from Lauer, *Trésor du Sancta Sanctorum*, p. 131. The third is Galland, *Les authentiques*, no. 108, p. 139.

⁸⁷ This is Galland's Group O, labels 15, 16 and 17; Galland, *Les authentiques*, pp. 53, 98–9.

For the most part, though, wrappers and labels were made out of blank pieces of papyrus or parchment. The need for a supply of one or other medium confirms an association with the writing office, and although some tags may have been trimmings, others were demonstrably cut as a set from large sheets of membrane.⁸⁸ By the twelfth century, this link may have been long-standing. The presence of a fragmentary Carolingian-era imperial diploma on papyrus among the documents inside the *arca cypressina* certainly suggests as much, although whether this was placed there for safe keeping or was another instance of a discarded document recycled as a wrapper cannot now be determined.⁸⁹ In view of the proximity of the papal writing office, the *scrinium*, to the chapel of St. Lawrence, these interchanges might readily have been very informal: at the very least, they give a glimpse of documentary habits at the heart of the Lateran palace, where a frugal economy of recycling prevailed.⁹⁰

In this context, one final group of relics deserves particular mention. It comprises: a stone from Christ's crib, soil from the cave where Elizabeth fled with her infant son John the Baptist, a stone from the river Jordan, a piece of the sponge used at the crucifixion, a stone from Calvary, earth from the Holy Sepulcher, and finally, wax from a candle there, which presumably came from the candles lit at the Easter vigil. The selection is a narrative sequence from baptism to resurrection, analogous to the sixth-century wooden reliquary box also found inside Leo's chest, and to the iconography of the ampullae from Monza and Bobbio.⁹¹ Its coherence as a single set of relics is provided by the

⁸⁸ Ibid., pp. 49–54.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 42; *ChLA*, vol. 55, pp. 81–3, no. 8. The text is that of a lost pact between emperor and papacy, possibly dating from 892: see Angelo Mercati, "Frammenti in papiro di un diploma imperiale a favore della Chiesa romana," in Albert Brackmann, ed., *Papsttum und Kaisertum. Forschungen zur politischen Geschichte und Geisteskultur des Mittelalters Paul Kehr zum 65. Geburtstag dargebracht* (Munich: Verlag der Münchner Drucke, 1926), pp. 163–7, and for the general context, Thomas F.X. Noble, *The Republic of St. Peter: The Birth of the Papal State, 680–825* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984), p. 315.

⁹⁰ On the layout of the early medieval Lateran, see Manfred Luchterhandt, "Päpstlicher Palastbau und höfisches Zeremoniell unter Leo III.," in Christoph Stiegemann and Matthias Wemhoff, eds., 799. *Kunst und Kultur der Karolingerzeit: Karl der Grosse und Papst Leo III. in Paderborn*, 3 vols. (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 1999), vol. 3, pp. 108–22. There are instances of relics wrapped in reused parchment elsewhere, but only the Lateran seems to have made something of a habit of it. Other examples known to me are: Jean-Pierre Laporte, *Le trésor des saints de Chelles* (Chelles: Société archéologique et historique de Chelles, 1988), pp. 163–9 (fragment of a twelfth-century charter), and Maurice Prou and E. Chartraire, "Authentiques de reliques conservées au trésor de la cathédrale de Sens," *Mémoires de la Société nationale des antiquaires de France* sér. 6, 59 (1900): 129–72, at 145, no. 118 (fragment of an uncial sacramentary).

⁹¹ See above, p. 182 and n. 11; André Grabar, *Ampoules de Terre Sainte (Monza-Bobbio)* (Paris: Librairie C. Klincksieck, 1958), pp. 50–61.

wrappers: squares of parchment cut from two consecutive leaves of a fourth- or fifth-century uncial manuscript of the fourth decade of Livy.⁹² Its generous margins left ample room on which someone scrawled a note of the contents of each packet in a poor late seventh- or eighth-century hand in a Latin that is more vernacular than correct.

Where was this done? Why was a volume of Livy discarded for use as scrap parchment? In Galland's view, both script and Latinity were too poor for this to have been executed in Rome, but there are no solid benchmarks against which to assess this value judgment.⁹³ Wherever the set was wrapped, it was certainly in the Lateran not long afterwards, where six of the seven pieces were subdivided. Of the two almost identical sets of relics, one was returned to its original envelopes, and the other placed in newly cut parchment squares. The identifications were copied and the Latin corrected: this is the set of labels written in a curial hand.⁹⁴ It nevertheless raises more questions. In what circumstances were these relics acquired, and why were they then divided? Why did the Lateran persist in enclosing relics inside parchment packaging? Was anyone curious enough to stop and read the text on the old wrappers? What had happened to the rest of the Livy manuscript?

* * *

The care of relics in early medieval Rome has led to the "fortuitous transmission" of a few paragraphs of Livy.⁹⁵ Whether Leo III himself ever saw and handled these or any of the relics discovered inside his chest remains an open question, as does the original purpose of the chest itself. None of the relics was demonstrably in Rome by Leo's pontificate. The assortment nevertheless has a predominantly early medieval character: either it was formed at an early date, or from the ninth century onwards old relics venerable for their antiquity were sought out and assembled, irrespective of the legibility of their cloth, papyrus, or parchment wrappers and tags, or even of the language in which they were written. Perhaps relics assembled elsewhere did not find a convenient repository in the *arca*

⁹² *Codices Latini Antiquiores: A Paleographical Guide to Latin Manuscripts prior to the Ninth Century*, ed. E. A. Lowe, 12 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1934–71), vol. 1, p. 18, no. 57; Galland, *Les authentiques*, pp. 49, 55, no. 46, pp. 146–51, nos. 118–24; Marco Vattasso, *Frammenti d'un Livio del V secolo recentemente scoperti. Codice vaticano latino 10696*, Studi e Testi 18 (Vatican City: Biblioteca apostolica Vaticana, 1906); Galland, *Les authentiques*, nos. 118–24, pp. 49, 55–6, 146–51.

⁹³ Cf. *ChLA*, vol. 22, p. 61, no. 728. Influenced by the find-spot, Petrucci considers the hand to be a Roman one, and assumes that it dates from the pontificate of Leo III. Similarly, see Supino, "Scrivere le reliquie," p. 254.

⁹⁴ Galland, *Les authentiques*, nos. 99–103, 106, 109, 111, pp. 52, 55–6, 131–5, 138, 140, 142. Two further relics from the Holy Sepulcher were added to the second set.

⁹⁵ Leonard Boyle, *Medieval Latin Palaeography: A Bibliographical Introduction* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), p. 84, no. 571.

cypressina in St. Lawrence's chapel until long after Leo III's pontificate. These questions, however, challenge interpretations of the Sancta Sanctorum based on iconographic and liturgical evidence alone.

My analysis suggests four conclusions about papal relic collecting. First, the majority of the relics which the 1905 investigation found inside the altar of the Sancta Sanctorum had been somewhere in the Lateran complex from an early date, whether in one of the altars in the chapel of St. Lawrence or an adjacent chapel, or in the basilica. Whether any of these altars had ever had a founding relic deposit at the time of its consecration remains unknown, but the gradual accumulation of relics within the Lateran nevertheless meant that it was well endowed with them as early as 700. Second, the Sancta Sanctorum assemblage bears witness to an undocumented flow of modest relics from one church to another around the city, for which liturgical, administrative and personal motives presumably varied from one instance to another. Nevertheless, with the single exception of Benedict VIII, no reigning pope is mentioned on any of these labels, leaving us primarily reliant on external narrative sources to gauge the extent of direct papal involvement in this. Third, the collection must be understood as dynamic and fluid, for during the early Middle Ages, relics were as frequently shifted around as in later centuries. Finally, it is extremely improbable that the early medieval stratum was offerings carried by western pilgrims from their local shrines.

How, then, had the collection found inside Leo III's chest been formed? It is best understood in the context of early medieval Rome's medial position between East and West. In all likelihood, it included tokens carried by many different messengers: those passing through Rome en route to other destinations, representatives of the papacy who undertook diplomatic exchanges with Constantinople or Jerusalem, envoys arriving from distant places, and Romans who went on pilgrimage to other Mediterranean shrines. In addition, it surely also included tokens brought by eastern Christians on pilgrimage to Rome, along with others left by western pilgrims when they stopped over in Rome on their way home from the Holy Land.⁹⁶ Each individual piece, or set of pieces, will have had its own, now irrecoverable, back story.

Moreover, because the Lateran relic collection was not secured in a sealed altar, but was subject to frequent interventions, we may suppose that its formation involved removal as well as accumulation. By analogy with the relics assembled in the Pharos chapel of the imperial palace in Constantinople, or

⁹⁶ McCormick, *Origins of the European Economy*, pp. 129–236; Michael McCormick, *Charlemagne's Survey of the Holy Land* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2011), pp. 78, 167–72. Note also the presence in Rome at the 649 Lateran council of the papal legate in Palestine, Stephen, Bishop of Dor: Rudolf Riedinger, *Concilium Lateranense a. 649 celebratum* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1984), p. 37.

the relic-laden treasuries of early medieval rulers in the early medieval West, it is highly probable that the Lateran assortment reflects the exchange of gifts and favors that accompanied intense political maneuvering and ecclesiastical diplomacy.⁹⁷ After all, this was the context in which Gregory the Great declined to grant the head of St. Paul to Constantina, sending her instead a scrap of fabric inside a little box. Similarly, it was in politically sensitive circumstances that Hadrian I and Leo III gave gifts of relics to Charlemagne and his trusted agent in Italy, Angilbert.⁹⁸ The early medieval contents of Leo III's chest can thus be understood as the residue of several centuries of undocumented to-and-fro of offerings, gifts, negotiations, and redistributions that mapped both the Lateran's place in the city and Rome's place in the world. Unfortunately, given the present state of knowledge, it remains impossible to assess whether the Lateran redistributed incoming relics of non-Roman origin to its beneficiaries, and especially the extent to which Holy Land relics reached western churches by this indirect means.

It is clear, however, that as Rome's economic and political role altered, and as the papacy's representation of itself to the wider world acquired an ever greater focus on St. Peter, so the spiritual, ideological, symbolic, and historical values encoded in the Sancta Sanctorum relics changed. An overview of interventions from the eleventh century indicates that high and late medieval popes had little interest in this early medieval heritage. On the one hand, paleographical analysis shows that all clerical interventions from the eleventh century onward only concerned the remains of saints: without exception, the relics representing the Holy Land, Christ, and Mary bore tags written in the seventh, eighth, or ninth century. On the other hand, there is no extant early medieval evidence that the chapel of St. Lawrence contained any head relics, yet by the end of the eleventh century, the *Descriptio Lateranensis ecclesiae* claims that one of the two side altars held four: those of Sts. Peter, Paul, Agnes, and Euphemia.⁹⁹ Prior to, or during, the removal of the side altars, these were placed inside the main altar, Leo III's *arca*, where they were to be found by the end of the twelfth century.¹⁰⁰ Honorius III (1216–27) commissioned a simple silver box (16 × 21 × 18 cm) for the head of St. Agnes, into which he also placed the particles of

⁹⁷ Julia M.H. Smith, "Rulers and Relics, c.750–950: 'Treasure on Earth, Treasure in Heaven,'" in Alexandra Walsham, ed., *Relics and Remains*, Past & Present Supplement 5 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 73–96; Paul Magdalino, "L'église du Phare et les reliques de la Passion à Constantinople," in Jannic Durand and Bernard Flusin, eds., *Byzance et les reliques du Christ* (Paris: Association des Amis du Centre d'Histoire et Civilisation de Byzance, 2004), pp. 15–30.

⁹⁸ Angilbert of Saint-Riquier, *De ecclesia Centulensi libellus*, ch. 2, MGH SS XV/i, p. 175.

⁹⁹ Giorgi, *De liturgia Romani pontificis*, p. 547.

¹⁰⁰ De Blaauw, "Il patriarchio," pp. 167–8.

Euphemia; this was then returned to the altar, and was the sole object retrieved in 1903.¹⁰¹ Nicholas III sealed relics of the head of St. Praxedes into a casket of similar shape and size (18.5 × 23.5 × 19.7 cm) which had been assembled out of older byzantine elements, and then placed it in the *arca*.¹⁰² Later, in 1367, as part of his restoration of papal authority in Rome after the return from Avignon, Urban V (1362–70) extracted the heads of Sts. Peter and Paul and enshrined them in the Lateran basilica, where their cult rapidly rose to predominance.¹⁰³ In effect, the investigators in 1905 found a collection that had fossilized in the thirteenth century, but which had very largely been formed by the ninth century. Its paleographical “stratigraphy” is indirect but eloquent testimony to the material contribution of relics to the gradual assimilation of the late antique Lateran Basilica Salvatoris into the high medieval Petrine papacy.

* * *

The oldest items in the altar of the Sancta Sanctorum take us back to the age of Gregory the Great and his immediate successors. Although many practical questions about the care of relics in early medieval Rome remain—with many more about their liturgical roles, ideological significance, and historical values—Gregory’s letters confirm that the cult of relics in the city was already in full flood. By the same token, they reflect a specific moment in a dynamic encounter between the papacy and the material heritage of Christian sanctity. Affected by shifting preferences in the accumulation and display of relics as much as by the interests of other stakeholders in and beyond Rome, the care of relics responded to papal officials’ changing political priorities and ideological aspirations. Likewise, the city’s monumental environment and liturgical ceremonials provided a continuously evolving backdrop and rationale. While the earliest phases of the papal relic assemblage will always remain speculative, its history from the eleventh century onward suggests that it also refracted these changing parameters.

As a labeled relic hoard whose find spot is known with certainty and which benefits from supporting documentation, the Sancta Sanctorum collection is unusual, but not unique. Similarly, other major medieval churches besides the Lateran acted as centers for the redistribution of relics while also accumulating them. Elsewhere too, an overlay of newer interpretations sometimes overwrote

¹⁰¹ See Galland, *Les authentiques*, no. 85, p. 125, and for the reliquary, Carlo Bertelli, *Restituzioni 2004: tesori d’arte restaurati* (Vicenza: Banca Intesa: Terra ferma, 2004), no. 23, pp. 136–8.

¹⁰² Lauer, *Trésor du Sancta Sanctorum*, pp. 73–8; Cordini, “Non est in Toto Sanctior Orbe Locus,” p. 71 and figs. 33a–b; Bertelli, *Restituzioni 2004*, no. 15, pp. 102–6.

¹⁰³ Noreen, “Opening the Holy of Holies,” p. 525; Daniela Mondini, “Reliquie incarnate. Le ‘sacre teste’ di Pietro e Paolo a San Giovanni in Laterano a Roma,” in Davide Scotto, ed., *Del visibile credere: pellegrinaggi, santuari, miracoli, reliquie* (Florence: Leo S. Olscki Editore, 2011), pp. 265–96.

relics' previous importance, for relics characteristically had fragile identities and a labile symbolic meaning. That this particular assemblage has been amenable to such a detailed analysis depends, however, on two other features, both of which are without parallel. One of them is the exemplary quality of Galland's edition of an entire corpus of labels, which sets a new benchmark of best practice. The other is inherent in this collection's specific location, where, over the centuries, the heavy pressure of papal ownership shaped its profile in a distinctive way. Thanks to these unique circumstances, it has proven possible to tease out the implications of the care of relics in early medieval Rome and uncover a material ideology at the very heart of the papacy.

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Appendix: Relic Labels in the Sancta Sanctorum

The table below uses the dating offered by Galland for the 113 labels bearing relic-related writing, but omits blanks, parchments with unrelated text, and the five Greek labels for which Galland offers no date. Composite labels (those bearing the name of more than one saint or relic) are counted only once.

Century (as suggested by Galland)	7-8th	8th	8-9th	9th	10th	11th	11-12th	12th	13th	Totals	
										No.	%
OT places and prophets	3	2								5	4
Life of Christ and associated places	19	15	2	14						50	44
Mary	3									3	3
Other NT (John the Baptist, apostles, evangelists, angels)	2	2	1	2	2		5			12	10.5
Rome's martyrs	1	1	1	2	2	1	1	5	3	17	15
Other martyrs	3	4	1	1	2			1		12	10.5
Post-persecution saints	1	2		1				1		5	4
Unidentified	1	5	1		1				1	10	9
Totals	33	31	6	18	5	3	1	12	4	113	100

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