The Early Christian Sanctuaries and the Transformation of Italian Landscape

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Abstract

In the early Christian period the birth and development of relics’ cult led to the transformation of urban, suburban and rural Italian landscape. Indeed, the deposition of venerated bodies in extra-muros cemeteries led to the gradual Christianisation of the whole peninsula. The link between territories and martyrs’ cults is shown by Christian Calendars, which reported just the dies natalis and the place of depositio. The saints were so territorially well established that their burials were simply considered as loca by ancient Christians. The gradual monumentalisation of martyrs’ tombs led to the birth of huge sanctuaries. They were composed of funerary and religious buildings but also service facilities, accommodations for pilgrims and monasteries. The most important sanctuaries were those of Saints Peter in the Vatican, Erasmus in Formia, Alexander in Nomentum, Felix in Cimitile, Januarius in Naples, Felix in Venosa, Marcellianus in Syracuse and the Apostles in Concordia. They became so popular that Jerome said: ‘move tur urbs sedibus suis’. It seems that sometimes there was a coincidence between sanctuaries and episcopal palaces, such as in Sardinia, in some part of Latium and probably at Cimitile, Venosa and Concordia Sagittaria. In the fifth and sixth centuries some sanctuaries spread also in rural areas, usually along important routes. Suburban and rural sanctuaries led to the development of new settlements, as shown by the birth of new villages. The current word “Cimitile”, for example, derives from “Cimiterium” and even Paulinus of Nola wrote about a vicus nearby the sanctuary. At Saint Peter’s tomb, a Civitas was born in the Early Middle Ages. At the end of the Early Christian era, the translationes broke the tie between relics and their locus depositionis, causing new urban sanctuaries to form.

Keywords: Christian Sanctuaries, Relics, Saints, Basilicas, Graves

Introduction

In the early Christian period the birth and development of relics’ cult led to the transformation of urban, suburban and rural Italian landscape. Indeed, the deposition of venerated bodies in extra-muros cemeteries led to the gradual Christianisation of the whole peninsula. The link between territories and martyrs’ cults is shown by Christian Calendars, which reported just the dies natalis and the place of depositio. The saints were so territorially well established that their burials were simply considered as loca by ancient Christians (Brown, 1983).

The Tombs of the Saints

During the second and third centuries AD, some humble memoriae were built on the Roman apostolic tombs, the trophies of Saint Peter in Vatican (Guarducci, 1995) and Saint Paul on Via Ostiense (Bucarelli & Morales, 2011). The term memori-
ae refers to the first martyrial buildings: simple funerary structures, poorly decorated, built to honour the venerated graves.

Around the mid-third century, the *Memoria Apostolorum* on Via Appia was dedicated to both apostles and built on a pagan cemetery undergoing Christianisation (Fiocchi Nicolai, 2001: 7-47). Here, a courtyard was surrounded by: an altar which remembered the Vatican trophy, a portico attended by pilgrims and the so-called *Triclia*, a room for *refrigeria*, occupied by a counter and a fountain. The walls and pillars of the *Triclia*, decorated with frescoes, were covered by hundreds of scratched inscriptions with invocations to Peter and Paul and references to *refrigeria* in their honour (Carletti, 2008). For the first time, a Christian building led to a real transformation of a suburban area and was frequented by several pilgrims.

Also the earliest tombs of common martyrs usually spread in pagan cemeteries undergoing Christianisation (about the sanctuaries of Rome: Spera, 1998: 1-104; 2012a: 33-58; Pani Ermini, 2000; 2001; Fiocchi Nicolai, Granino Cecere & Mari, 2001; 2004; 2005; 2006; 2008; Agostino, 2013; Luciano, 2013: 909-18). During the third century, many venerated tombs were placed in catacombs (Bisconti et al, 1998; Pergola 2002). The *depositio* of saints at the entrance of hypogeal cemeteries was very common and often documented by both historical and archaeological sources. Just the presence of a saint’s body often led to the birth of catacombs. It is striking that Hyacinth’s grave was found completely intact. It was a *loculum* dug at the entrance of the catacomb of Hermes (Bisconti & Mazzoleni, 2005: 26-27). Some privileged burials were grouped together into *cubicula*. The Crypt of the Popes was a cubicule built in AD 235 in the catacomb of Saint Callixtus and housed, in the third century, the graves of nine popes (Fiocchi Nicolai & Guyon, 2006: 121-61).

As in Rome, the other Italian martyrs were buried both in catacombs and *sub divo* cemeteries (Luciano, 2014). The first ones have been found only in Latium, Campania, Sicily and Sardinia, in presence of tuffaceous soils. Their sanctuaries reused earlier Roman cemeteries or were dug *ex novo* by Christians. In the first case, they occupied squared funerary rooms since Roman noble tombs, unlike the Christian ones, were small and simple, as seen in the burials of Saints Agrippinus in Naples (Fasola, 1993), Victorinus in Amiternum (Somma, 2012: 185-94), Marcianus at the catacomb of Saint John in Syracuse (Sgarlata, 2010: 253-72) and Lussorius in Fordongianus (Spanu, 2000; Cisci, 2001: 371-406). The venerated burials in the newly excavated catacombs could be found at the entrances or in the inner areas, but always near the main gallery. An example is the grave of Saint Lucy, found in an *ambulacrum* at the catacomb of Syracuse. Two or more sanctuaries in the same catacomb were usually separated from each other, as in some sites in Latium. The most important one is that of Saints Alexander, Eventius and Theodulus at Nomentum (Padovano, 2006; Fiocchi Nicolai, 2009: 219-76).

The subdial cemeteries sanctified by relics have been excavated only recently. Saint Erasmus was buried in a pit grave at the suburb of Formia (Punzo, Miele & Frecentese, 1992), while Felix of Nola was inhumed in a tile tomb inside a frescoed mausoleum (sanctuary of Cimitile) (Ebanista, 2006). The supposed Felix of Venosa was buried in a masonry tomb at the so-called Complessio paleocristiano instead (Marchi, 2010: 201-18).

The Peace of the Church

The Peace of the Church in AD 313 gave strength to the cult of saints. Emperor Constantine supported it and enhanced the sites linked to the memory of Christ (Biddle, 2006), the apostles and the most venerated martyrs (Krautheimer, 1986; Carandini, 2013). The Emperor built a small church, with a single nave, on Saint Paul’s tomb and a huge basilica, in the Vatican, with an atrium, five naves, a transept and a semicircular apse (Testini, 1980: 180-85; Zander, 2007: 21-23, 128-30).

In suburban cemeteries, close to the hypogeal sanctuaries, some circiform basilicas equipped with an ambulatory were built (Guyon, 1987: 207-260; Fiocchi Nicolai, 1996: 69-139; Cianetti &
Pavolini, 2004; Nieddu, 2009). The construction of basilicas close to the relics, but not above them, was justified by the need to not affect the saints’ tombs. Furthermore, it was linked to the Roman tradition: the places used for funerary liturgies had to be separated from the burial rooms. Architectural accommodations, such as staircases or galleries, allowed a link between the basilicas and hypogean sanctuaries nearby. The Constantinian basilicas were funerary churches, *coemeteria subteglata* according to the ancient Christian sources, used for martyrial ceremonies and *refigeria*. The floors were occupied by many graves of faithful people who aspired to have a privileged burial; also Pope Mark was probably buried in a sarcophagus in the *exedra* of his basilica. As well as in the Vatican, great mausoleums were built outside the circiform basilicas, such as the *monumenta* of Empress Helena near Saints Peter and Marcellinus, and Constantina close to Saint Agnes.

Smaller funerary basilicas with a classical plan were promoted by the popes, such as the three *"Iuliae extra muros*” on the *Viae Aurelia, Portuense and Flaminia* (Cecchelli, 2003). Some remains of the basilica of Saint Valentine were found near the tomb of the martyr, on Via Flaminia. It was a small single-nave building, occupied by tombs dated between AD 318 and 523.

The *cellae trichorae*, trefoil *martyria*, were common in the first half of the fourth century (Luciano, 2012: 363-65). The Western Tricora, in Saint Callixtus’ cemetery, was the mausoleum of Popes Tarcisius and Zephyrinus. Next to the *martyrium* of Saint Sinforosa, however, a basilica was built; the central apses of the two buildings were joined and connected through an opening. The *trichora* close to the circiform basilica of Saint Lawrence was Pope Leo’s mausoleum, while the structure near Saint Agnes might have been a first sanctuary of the martyr.

The enlargement of hypogean sanctuaries led to the birth of *Aulae ad Corpus*. That of Saint Thecla in Rome had three naves and was occupied by graves and decorated with frescoes; the venerated tomb was kept visible on the western side. In the Agrippinus’ *aula* in Naples, the area sanctified by the bishop’s tomb became an elevated presbytery, equipped with apse and *cathedral*. In the sanctuary of Saints Alexander, Eventius and Theodulus, two different *aulae* were built. A small *aedicula* covered the grave of Victorinus in Amiernum, while the construction at Saint Lussorius in Fordongianus was more substantial. It created a walkway for pilgrims, an apse and a funerary monument on the saint’s grave, which was surrounded by an ambulatory connected with two privileged sarco- phaguses. The *aulae ad corpus* spread also in subdial areas, as seen in the small single-nave basilica of Saint Erasmus in Formia and that of Saint Felix in Cimitile, which was built on the earlier mausoleums, and had a narthex and a *triforium*.

Since the mid-fourth century, pilgrims’ graffiti covered the walls of the *aula* at Cimitile. They were fairly numerous since, as noted by Paulinus (Carm. XIV 85), the tomb of Felix was at that time well known and visited. The construction of the *Basilica Vetus*, in the second half of the fourth century, led to the association of a liturgical building to the *martyrium*, a model already tested in Rome. In the same period, a *cella trichora* was built in Concordia Sagittaria, while Saint Severus of Ravenna was buried in a mausoleum in a Classis cemetery.

The Great Bishops

The enhancement of the sanctuaries between the second half of the fourth century and the beginning of the fifth was promoted by great bishops. In Rome, Pope Damasus (AD 366-384) looked for the venerated graves, then enriched them with elaborate marble decorations and enlarged the sanctuaries to make the circulation of the pilgrims easier. He also dedicated poetic compositions to the saints inscribed on epigraphs (Ferrua & Carletti, 1985). The holy crypts became brighter thanks to marble facing, white plastering, openings and enlargements with skylights. Some devotional *itinera* had been created through the construction of new stairs. The most important Damasian restorations concerned the Crypt of the Popes, Peter and Marcellinus’ sanctuary, Januarius’ in Praetextatus,
Sebastian’s in his catacomb and Nereus and Achilles’ in Domitilla. The renovations of the Crypt of the Popes were very significant. The original stairs were reconstructed, a third staircase was added and an altar supported by pillars was built.

In the second half of the fourth century, the *retrosanctos* became common, changing the catacombs’ topography (Duval & Picard, 1986; Spera, 1994: 111-27). The presence of venerated tombs led to the birth of new areas (e.g. behind Saint Agnes’ tomb), simple privileged rooms (behind the Crypt of the Popes), big rooms extensively used (catacomb of Saint Thecla) and sets of poor burials which were grafted into tight spaces (catacomb of Commodilla).

During the pontificate of Damasus, the use of funerary basilicas built by Constantine and his successors went on. In this period the main patrons of the churches were no longer the imperial authorities, but the popes. Damasus himself promoted the building of new churches, uniquely decorated according to priests Faustinus and Marcellinus. Addressing to Emperor Theodosius, they criticised the excessive wealth of the contemporaneous basilicas, which were full of gold and marble coverings. In the cemetery of Generosa, the apse of the funerary church of Damasus, probably dedicated to Faustinus, Simplicius and Viatrix, was equipped with a *fenestella* connected to the sanctuary. The basilica, with three asymmetric naves, was semi-hypogeal and preceded by a narthex.

After the Damasus’ papacy, the building activity in the catacombs was quite limited, concerning simple embellishments or renovations promoted
by church members or aristocrats. In this period, however, the church of Saint Paul, on the initiative of Valentinian II, Theodosius and Arcadius, was widened and became an important worship place, like Saint Peter’s, from which the plan was derived. Large privileged mausoleums were built.
close to the most important basilicas, such as those near Saint Peter, which probably belonged to Emperors Honorius and Theodosius.

Pope Damasus inspired many bishops of his time. Paulinus of Nola (355 Bordeaux - 431) and Ambrose of Milan (AD 374-397), in particular, miraculously discovered new relics (inventiones). They reorganised the suburbs of their cities, enhancing the old sanctuaries and building new ones. In Milan, the four Ambrosian basilicas (Martyrum, Apostolorum, Prophetarum, Virginum) occupied each of the cardinal points, forming a cross (Lusuardi Siena, Rossignani & Sannazaro, 1997) (fig. 1). The relationship between suburban basilicas and cities is symbolised by the porticus connecting the Apostolorum to Milan. Similar structures joined the sanctuaries of Saints Peter in Vatican, Paul on Via Ostiense and Lawrence on via Tiburtina to Rome.

In Naples, the inventio of Januarius’ relics led to the birth of a new sanctuary in the catacomb of Capodimonte. Everywhere, new churches were built both in hypogeal and subdiaul cemeteries. Consequently, the sanctuaries became larger, with different religious and funerary buildings. They became so crowded that Saint Jerome said: ‘movetur urbs sedibus suis’ (Ep. 107.1) or ‘the cities moved from their original location’.

The sanctuaries of Saint Alexander on Via Nomentana and Saint Felix at Cimitile (Brandenburg & Pani Ermini, 2003; Ebanista & Fusaro, 2005) show that similar architectural models were often used (figs. 2-3). In both sites a large basilica with a confessional altar was linked to the aula ad corpus through some triforia. Paulinus, Ambrose and the other great bishops of that period usually became saints and were often buried in the suburban sanctuaries, at the martyrs’ tombs they supported. Instead, Pope Damasus chose the new basilica on Via Ardeatina as his burial place.
The Arrival of Foreign Relics

During the fifth century, in spite of the obstinacy of the Roman Church to preserve its venerated graves, many relics reached Italy from many parts of the Mediterranean. Holy fragments from North Africa arrived especially in southern regions and in the islands, brought by the exiles of Vandalic persecution. The cities of northern Italy were connected to the Adriatic trade and Constantinople imported mostly Eastern relics, such as those of Saint Stephen and apostles. Even Helene, mother of Constantine, brought to Rome some fragments of the Holy Cross, which were placed in Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, at the Lateran Palace.

As with the inventiones, the translationes were managed by the bishops, Ambrose and Paulinus in particular. In this way they could show their influence and, through the consecration of new churches and the sanctification of suburban areas, increase the importance of the Roman Church. The arrival of holy fragments was considered as a miraculous event and celebrated as an imperial adventus. The scene represented on an ivory tablet from the Treasure of Treviri, dating back to the fifth century, has significant importance on this subject (Chavarria Arnau 2007: 101). A reliquary is carried by two bishops standing on a cart preceded by a procession. The emperor and his wife are in the first row surrounded by crowds of rejoicing people. The procession is going to a church under construction since the translated relics were usually used to consecrate the altars.

The foreign relics of Rome were usually placed in catacombs, inside cubicles or galleries, but those of Quirinus and Stephen occupied, respectively, a mausoleum (the so-called Platonia) and a basilica. In all cases, however, the locus depositionis was a small reliquary, since the relics were usually ex contactu or fragmented. Instead, the areas sanctified by relics were preexisting since the cults were probably promoted by private faithful, as shown by Quirinus’ memorial inscription (ICUR, 5, 13276). The three-nave basilica of Saint Stephen, for example, was built by the patrician Demetrias on her own property but under the oversight of presbyter Tigrinus, as attested by the marble slab dedication (ICUR, 6, 15765). The church, equipped with a baptistery, probably belonged to a rural settlement and had martyrial, funerary and pastoral functions (Nuzzo, 2012: 332-33). On Via Ardeatina, the ad corpus basilica of Greek Martyrs was a rectangular semi-hypogeal building with an apse. At the beginning of the Christian Age, the Roman Church did not have the need to increase its sanc- toral, the depositiones of new relics in suburban cemeteries was probably related to the presence of foreign communities. Since the early fifth century, the foundation of new churches caused the traslatio of apostles’ and Stephen’s fragments from the Holy Land (Martorelli, 2012: 231-64). Basilicae Apostolorum, churches of Saint Stephen and the earlier bishop’s and martyrs’ memoriae led to the setting-up of sanctified areas in the suburbs. This model of urban planning, typical of Rome and found in Milan too, spread in particular in Northern Italy, due to the influence of Ambrose and the presence of ports connected to Eastern Mediterranean (Crosato, 2008). Examples can be found at the suburbia of Aquileia (Cuscito, 2008: 45-94), Ravenna (Augenti, 2012: 537-53), Aosta (Bonnet & Perinetti, 1986), Rimini (Negrelli, 2008: 18-25), Ostia (Pannuzzi & Carbonara, 2007: 4-16), Naples and Capua. The Basilicae Apostolorum, like that of Constantinople, usually had cruciform plan to recall the Passion of Christ, as attested by the commemorative inscription of Ambrose (ILCV 1800).

Even the basilicas of Saint Stephen were sometimes cruciform but their confessiones are less known. The church of Aquileia is poorly investigated, such as that of Milan, founded by bishop Martinianus, who was buried inside. The cruciform basilica of Verona (first half of the fifth century), and that of Aosta (beginning of the fifth), with double apses, are better known. Also Saint Stephen in Arce, a small building on Cidneo hill in Brescia, had two exedrae delimiting an ambulatory (Spera, 2012b: 280-81). Saint Stephen’s basilica in Rimini, probably situated on Via Flaminia, was built by Galla Placidia (AD 392-450) according to the historical sources. The Empress, who was
Fig. 4 The catacomb of St. Januarius in Naples and its central part (Fasola 1993, Pianta I and III).
born in Constantinople, was very involved in the Oriental cults. In Ravenna she built the basilica of Holy Cross, consecrated with the wooden fragments, while in Rome she restored Santa Croce in Gerusalemme (David, 2012: 687-96). Other churches of Saint Stephen were in Campania. The Medieval Martyrologium of Beda spoke of a basilica in Puteoli. Inside it, Proculus, Acutius and Eutyches, martyrs with Saint Januarius, had been buried. The building is hypothetically recognised in a structure of the Roman cemetery of Via Celle, also used by Christians (Arthur, 2002: 76-77). The Sancti Stephani mentioned in the biography of Bishop Victor (AD 485-498), which was in the sanctuary of Saint Januarius at Capodimonte, could be recognised in the building commonly known as Basilica Maior. The church of Saint Stephen in the sanctuary of Cimitile, with one nave and two side structures which gave it a cruciform plan, dates to the beginning of the sixth century.

Many basilicas jointly dedicated to the proto-martyr and other native saints were in Southern Italy, usually in country areas, such as the church of Saints Stephen, Pancratius and Euplius in Messina, mentioned by Gregory the Great (Epist. 2.6). The basilica dedicated to the proto-martyr and Agatha at Siponto was founded by Bishop Lawrence, as attested to in his Vita. It was a building with three naves and a fenced presbytery, dated to the end of the fourth-beginning of fifth century. If the cruciform martyrium of Vaste (fifth century) was really dedicated to Stephen, we would assume that his relics should have been arranged at an altar because a section of the presbytery was carefully fenced (D’Andria, Mastronuzzi & Melissa-no, 2006: 231-321). The rocky cemetery behind the church was occupied by some privileged burials.

In addition to the apostolic relics, the remains of John the Baptist and other common martyrs arrived in Italy between the fifth and sixth centuries. The remains of Forty Martyrs of Sebaste, instead, were venerated in the basilica Ad coetum sanctorum in Brescia, founded by Bishop Gaudentius.

In the three-nave building of Saint Phocas in Priolo, near the catacombs of Manomozza, the relics of the martyr, which were arrived in Sicily in the early fifth century, were discovered under the altar (Sgarlata, 2005: 73-74, 85-92). The funerary church of Saint Restituta in Ischia, mentioned by Gregory the Great, was dedicated to the martyr of Carthage just after the arrival of her relics. In the apse of Saint John at Timavo (fifth century), the supposed relics of the Baptist and Evangelist were placed in a real masonry tomb (Nuzzo, 2012: 335).

The End of Late Antiquity

Pope Symmachus (AD 498-514), known as “builder of churches” in Liber Pontificalis, promoted the enhancement of the sanctuaries. In the catacombs, it led to the completion of construction undertaken by Damasus, with the strengthening of the itineraria and the building of some ad corpus basilicas. At that time, the hypogea were only used for devotional purposes and many old burial areas were destroyed. The replacement of aulae ad corpus with real hypogeal or semi-hypogeal basilicas is well documented: Saints Felix and Adauctus, Saint Hippolytus, Saint Hermes, Saint Lawrence, Saints Marcellinus and Peter, Greek Martyrs and, later, Saint Agnes. The graves of the saints became altars, and the funerary-martyrial liturgy coincided with the pastoral-Eucharist one.

In this period, in the catacomb of Capodimonte, the Basilica minor of Saint Januarius was built (fig. 4). It was single-nave, accessible by triforium and connected through an opening with the underlying confessio. A Basilica maior was instead built in the sub divo cemetery so that the Januarius’ sanctuary became very large. The early-medieval Homilia de Miraculis Sancti Ianuarii made references to the ‘omnia tecta antraque beati matyris Ianuarii’.

Subdial basilicas, built above or near the underground cemeteries, were very common across Italy, in Latium in particular (Fiocchi Nicolai, 1988; 2008: 313-34). Unfortunately, they aren’t archaeologically well known, but often documented in historical sources or by the buildings that replaced them in the Middle Ages. Instead, the three-nave basilica built above the large Crypt of Saint Mar- cianus in Syracuse (sixth century) is well known
(Sgarlata, 2003). The main altar was aligned with the underlying venerated tomb.

The gradual loss of importance of the cities led to the spread of worship places in rural areas and, perhaps, to the acquisition of episcopal and parish functions by some sanctuaries. That of Saint Alexander on via Nomentana, for example, was known as *paroecia* in historical sources. In the fifth and sixth centuries, the rural sanctuaries were usually located along important routes, as shown by those of Cantiani on *Via Gemina* [San Canzian d’Isonzo] (Toplikar & Tavano, 2007), not far from Aquileia; Saint Lawrence in Gozzano; the controversial example of Saint Giusto near Foggia. They usually
consisted of small churches with reliquaries dug in the presbytery and enhanced by simple architectural elements, sometimes in perishable materials, such as in Gozzano.

Until the sixth or seventh century, many suburban churches of Rome were dedicated to non-Roman saints and probably consecrated with their relics, like those of Aristo, Agatha, Christina, Victoria, Cyrus, Apollinaris, Euplius, Menas, Menna, and Cyprian (Spera, 2002: 691-712). Sometimes, these buildings were located near the sanctuaries of Saints Peter, Paul and Lawrence, or along their porticus. The basilica of Saint Menna, remembered by Gregory the Great (In evang. 2, 35) was perhaps founded by Pelagius II (AD 570-590) and located near that of Sancti Pauli. It’s likely that the basilicas built far away from the walls had a parochial function, such as that of Saints Nicander, Eleuthérius and Andrew, built by Gelasius I (AD 492-496) on Via Labicana (Lib. Pont. I, 255). Also the basilica of Saint Cyprian on the same via, known through a funerary inscription of AD 577 (ICUR, 1, 1122), was probably used for cura animarum.

The coincidence between sanctuaries and episcopal sees seems pretty clear in Sardinia (Giuntella & Pani Ermini, 1989: 63-83), in some part of Latium and probably at Cimitile, Venosa and Concordia Sagittaria (Flaborea, Sottil Zanco & Vignadel, 1996: 12-35). These sites, such as the sanctuary of Saint Erasmus in Formia, were architecturally very complex. According to the Liber Pontificalis and archaeological sources, between the fifth and sixth centuries, service facilities (baptisteries, balnea, housing staff, libraries and chapels), accommodations for pilgrims (xenodochia, habitacula pauperibus and porticoes), privileged burial areas and monasteries were built close to the martyrial basilicas (Tarquini, 2005: 1-133) (fig. 5). The transformation of the sanctuaries in episcopia, attested by the remains of baptismal fonts, needed easy accessibility by citizens. Not surprisingly, the site of Venosa was located in an urban area, that of Concordia near the city walls, while the sanctuary of Cimitile attracted a suburban settlement. The relationship between sanctuaries and episcopia led to the birth of small collectivebishops’ cemeteries, such as in Cimitile, Saint Lawrence in Aosta, Saint Alexander on the Nomentana and Saint Juvenal at Narnia (Perissinotto, 1998). These funerary areas were in hypogeal crypts, mausoleums and churches, sometimes consecrated by apostolic relics (Picard, 1988).

The supposed displacement of episcopal sees goes hand in hand with the gradual urbanisation of the suburbs. It also led to the birth of monasteries at the sanctuaries, historically and archaeologically attested, such as that of Saint Martin of Copanello, probably founded by Cassiodorus (AD 485-580). It had the same plan of the sanctuaries of Venosa and Concordia, with a central complex composed of a small funerary triobed chapel and a martyrial basilica (Coscarella, 2012: 299-316).

Conclusion

At the beginning of the Early Middle Ages, the presence of buildings with different functions at sanctuaries, the erection of porticoes connecting them with the cities and the change of urban gates’ names show that city walls were just a simple physical barrier. On the other hand, suburban and rural sanctuaries led to the development of new settlements, as shown by the birth of new villages. The current word “Cimitile”, for example, derives from “Cimiterium” and even Paulinus of Nola wrote about a vicus nearby the sanctuary (Ebanista, 2005: 313-77). In Rome, a real Civitas was born at Saint Peter’s tomb in the middle of the ninth century.

The translationes finally broke the tie between relics and their locus depositionis, causing new urban sanctuaries to form. Translated relics were usually placed in the altars and crypts of urban churches. For the first time, Saints Primus and Felician were moved by Pope Theodore (AD 642-649) from Via Nomentana into the basilica of Saint Stephen. In the Middle Ages the cult of relics became an urban phenomenon, although the suburban sanctuaries continued to be visited by pilgrims.

In conclusion, the cult of relics really led to the transformation of Italian landscape, causing
the gradual integration of urban, suburban and rural areas. The *suburbia* and *vici* turned into settlements thanks to the attendance of pilgrims. Later, the cities welcomed new sanctuaries due to the translation of relics. The ancient distinction between the city of people and the city of dead fell away at the beginning of the Early Middle Ages.

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