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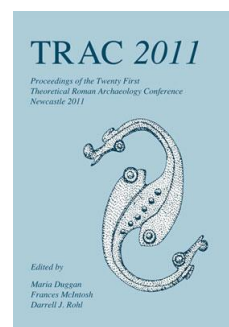
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The Establishment of Urban Movement Networks: Devotional Pathways in Late Antique and Early Medieval Rome

Michael Mulryan

Introduction

Our view of late antique and early medieval Rome has been influenced by the nature of the scholarship that has studied it. Work has tended to focus on: the history and archaeology of individual churches or other structures in the city; the early martyrs and their festivals and the basilicas outside the walls; the Church and government infrastructure; and the organisation and conversion of the aristocracy (e.g. Krautheimer 1937–77; Steinby 1993–2000; Brandenburg 2005; Delehaye 1936; Curran 2000; Salzman 2002; Frascetti 1999). Little attention has been paid, however, to how the city actually worked, something that has been a feature of the scholarship looking at evidence-rich Pompeii (and more recently Ostia), where the organisation and nature of space has been studied extensively (e.g. Wallace-Hadrill 1999; Laurence 1995; Ellis 2004; Stoeger 2009). In Rome, where the evidence is fragmentary, the tendency is to see the ancient built environment as a series of unconnected monuments on a map. What I will be arguing here is that several new Christian monuments were very much connected and there were several structured Christian itineraries, for a local audience, formulated in the late antique and early medieval period in the city. It would be wrong I think to call these ‘pilgrim routes,’ as ‘pilgrim’ attracts notions of long distance travel and non-local interest, as well as suggesting a single, focused destination. What I will be describing are better described as ‘devotional paths:’ itineraries aimed at Roman Christians, with an intramural element and marked out by two or more Christian structures dedicated to a single local martyr that would attract devotional activity, and so create a ‘path.’ Such ‘paths’ are characterised by a clear linear connection between the structures (on the same road), a narrative or ‘tradition based connection’ (a martyr’s *passio*) and the ancillary buildings for the devout that also lay on these ‘paths.’ These ‘paths,’ I believe, presaged and mirrored the well-documented and more widespread Christian processional activity that took place in the city streets certainly from the sixth century, but perhaps before. As Tilley notes in his famous *Phenomenology of Landscape*, with regard to rural prehistoric landscapes: points on a path share common elements, be they either physical or mythological (Tilley 1994: 28–30). In this way, the idea of circumscribed movement paths is nothing new, and so we should see the early Christian establishment of several in an urban environment as unsurprising, and in fact merely the continuation of a fundamental human practice that more immediately stemmed from the Graeco-Roman pagan tradition.

Wharton’s (1995) approach to urban Christianisation is worth describing here. She argues that the form of ‘post-classical’ or late antique Christian architecture is reflective of socio-political shifts. Mathews (1998: 279–82) has rightly noted that in some cases much of what is seemingly Christian architectural innovation is in fact a result of pragmatic decisions based on

local circumstances. But what Wharton does make clear is that a post-structuralist view of all late Roman building is not helpful, that is to say there are good reasons to think that in some cases a plan lay behind architectural forms, and also, I would argue here, their location in the city. The importance and use of ‘paths,’ as Tilley makes apparent, are not artificial social or religious constructs, but rather innate human creations in either a natural or man-made landscape. The marking of, and the provision for, such paths should also be seen in this way, and as such these movement ways in a city are better seen as ritualised routes formed by popular consensus and later reinforced by physical markers. Lefebvre’s (1974) idea of space defined by human movement fits neatly into this. A narrative or tradition based itinerary could be rather different, however, as the example we will describe below, associated with the martyr Laurence, may have been formed independently of any pre-existing urban path, it being a possible creation based on a newly written hagiographic tradition. Equally though, it may have resulted from a coherent pre-existing oral tradition and an informal devotional route may simply be being reinforced as with our other examples. This route has a more narrative quality, however, and Soja’s (1996) ‘real and imagined space’ is a good analogy here. Kevin Lynch’s (1960) discussion of navigation in the modern city is also relevant. Simon Malmberg (2009) has used his ideas of ‘node,’ ‘landmark,’ and ‘path’ in a recent edition of this volume to look at navigating the ancient city, but Lynch’s framework and ideas are equally relevant with reference to ritualised routes and religious navigation of the city as well. Many of the churches I will describe can be characterised as landmarks or markers along a pre-existing or created path in order to provide for it or define it.

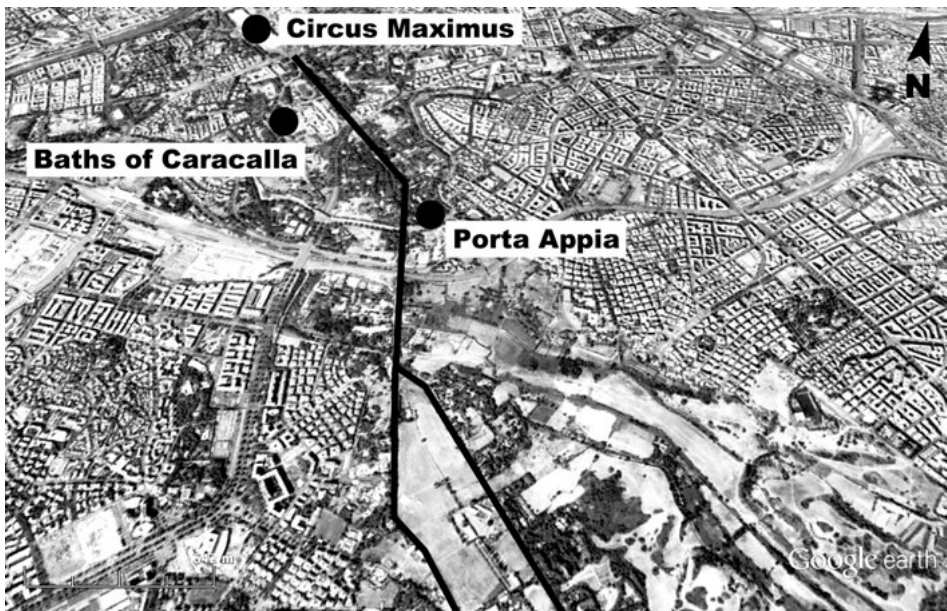


Figure 1: Via Appia-Ardeatina looking north with ancient structures marked.

Base map from Google Earth.

The via Appia-Ardeatina

The via Appia (Fig. 1) was already a well utilised route out from the city that ran from the Republican Capena gate, by the Circus Maximus, to the south-eastern heel of Italy. It was a road that was over 600 years old by the early fourth century A.D. and its frequent usage can be seen by the many tombs and pagan temples that lined it from its creation. The road was, in effect, a showpiece stage for familial and later Imperial propaganda, confirmed by its status as the usual way foreign delegations and returning armies came into Rome from the south (Livy 9.29.5–6; Diod. Sic. 20.36.1–2; *CIL* 11.1827; Steinby 1993–2000: 5.130–33). With the construction of the Aurelian walls in the mid third century A.D. this now intramural stretch lost that funereal aspect completely. The road from the Capena gate to the new Appian gate was soon marked by several bathing complexes, most notably the enormous early third century Baths of Caracalla, which must have visually dominated this part of the city. The extramural part of the road was still funereal in character of course, and from the second century A.D., or before, it featured a network of underground tombs, or catacombs, which were mainly inhumation burials within sealed recesses, or *loculi*, in the soft tufa rock of the area. Those of the new Christian faith also used these for their dead, and after the widespread persecution of Christianity in the mid third century and in the early fourth, they began to contain notable local individuals who had died in this programme. These ‘martyrs’ attracted devotion from that time, and, with the imperial acceptance of Christianity from A.D. 313, rich *memoria* to celebrate them could be built above and below ground. In turn, it made this a frequent route taken by Christians from the third century and certainly from the fourth going to visit these shrines (or their own deceased relatives). These *memoria* would formalise the martyr cults and also increase the notoriety of the individual in question. Two such martyrs were Nereus and Achilleus. They were believed to be buried just off a spur of the via Appia, the via Ardeatina, in what is now known as the Catacombs of Domitilla (Fig. 2). A poem was found from the Domitilla catacombs penned by Bishop Damasus (Bishop from A.D. 366–84) that describes the martyrs Nereus and Achilleus, thereby indicating that some sort of official *memoria* had been created by that time there (Ferrua 1942: n.8 (101ff)). A three naved semi-sub-surface basilica of the latter fourth century was discovered here in the nineteenth century with its apse over the burial place of the martyrs (Fig. 3) (Petersen 1976: 154–55).

Also in the late fourth century an intramural Christian foundation was being created on the via Appia opposite the Caracallan Baths called the *titulus fasciolae* (Krautheimer 1937–77: 3.147–48; Mommsen 1894: 413–14; Guerrieri 1951). Many dubious myths and legends surround this structure (centred on the Peter legend of his vision on this road and his dropping of a bandage where the church was built) that can be passed over here (Lipsius 1891: 7–8, 171, 233; *Acta Sanctorum* July 1. 304), but it is sufficient to say that there seems to have been a connection, probably administrative, from this time between the two centres of Nereus and Achilleus’ burial place and this foundation (Petersen 1976: 155). Late fourth and fifth century inscriptions discovered in the extramural cemeterial basilica mention two readers and a cleric *de fasciola* (De Rossi 1875: 49–56). It is some time in the sixth century that I believe this connection takes on a devotional quality, with the renaming of the *titulus fasciolae* as *Sancti Nerei e Achillei* (Gregory, *Ep.* 5.57a). The transfer of their relics does not occur at the same time, however. This seems to be a deliberate attempt to spatially associate two landmarks on a linear path (Fig. 2). In this way, an administrative then devotional association can be argued for these two centres.

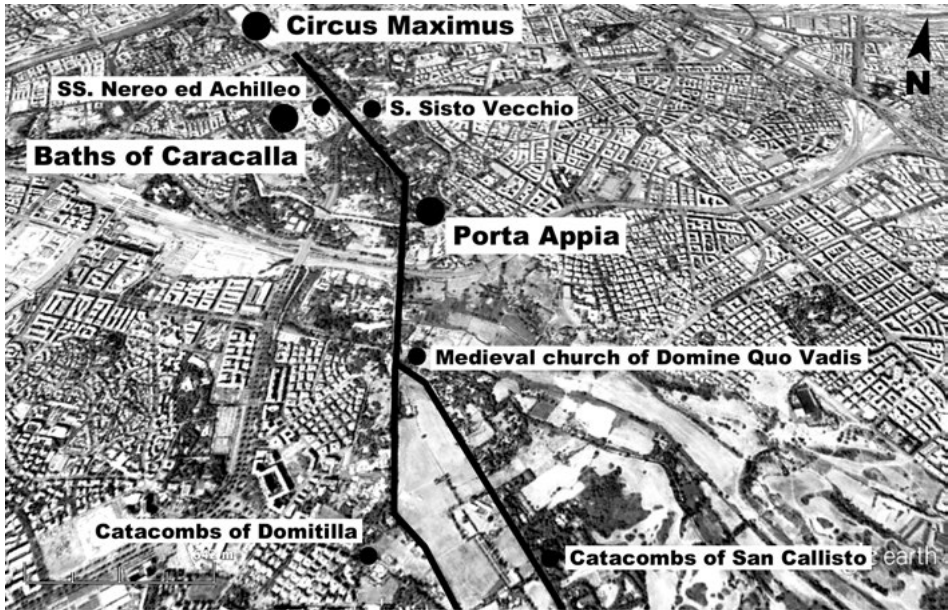


Figure 2: Via Appia-Ardeatina looking north with ancient structures, ancient roads and Christian structures marked. Base map from Google Earth.



Figure 3: Basilica of Nereus and Achilleus (Catacombs of Domitilla).



Figure 4: Crypt of the Popes.

Another linear devotional route is that associated with the martyred third century bishop Sixtus II. Just off the via Appia are what are now known as the Catacombs of Callixtus (Fig. 2). This was the burial place of the third century bishops of Rome and was, as such, a major draw for Christians from that time until these relics were removed in the ninth century. From the fourth century the site was embellished, notably by Bishop Damasus, again, who enhanced the Crypt of the Popes (Fig. 4) and created a stairway down into it (La Regina *et al* 2001–2008: 2.32–34). This crypt included the remains of Sixtus II and firmly established the place as a sacred destination. At the turn of the fifth century another small Christian centre was founded outside the Baths of Caracalla on the via Appia called the *Basilica Crescentiana (Liber Pontificalis* 1.218; Mommsen 1894: 412, 414; Steinby 1993–2000: 4.330, 5.177–78), which was also rededicated in the sixth century. This was to Sixtus II (or *titulus Sancti Sixti* (S. Sisto Vecchio)) (Gregory, *Ep.* 5.57a) and so once again a linear devotional link was created between a martyr's remains and a church dedicated to them inside the walls on the same road (Fig. 2). As we have said, this was a well worn path for Christians to go out of the city to visit and pray at the tombs of these important local martyrs from the third century, so the sixth century devotional paths laid out along the Appia-Ardeatina routes may, in reality, have been simply the formalisation and provision for a route that was already established.

This provision seems to be enhanced with the sixth century foundation of a Christian hostel near to both the intramural churches. The sources only describe this *xenodochium* as being on the via Nova, a road that lay parallel to the via Appia as it ran outside the Caracallan Baths (Gregory, *Ep.* 1.42; Steinby 1993–2000: 5.217–18), but this means the hostel was clearly near our two rededicated foundations. This may indicate that this route was becoming more popular with Christian visitors from outside the city. Changes within the Caracallan Baths from the fourth century may also point to the Christianisation of the area and the via Appia as an increasingly popular Christian devotional pathway. The Baths of Caracalla, seem to have been

in use until the early Middle Ages, in spite of the main flow of water being cut off during the Gothic siege of the city in A.D. 537–38. Some sort of change in function took place in the baths in the fourth century and into the late fifth and sixth, as shown by the discovery of brick stamps of Constantine and Theodoric and the addition of small pools or basins to various rooms in a late phase (Procopius, *De Bello Goth.* 5.19.13; Delaine 1988: 21–22; Delaine 1997: 37–41). Perhaps this was for the use of the baths for baptismal and other liturgical purposes, or for the poor, rather than a sign of a degradation in the water-supply, as it has been argued? Equally, one of the two large porticoed palaestrae here, with the adjacent sixth to seventh century cemetery (in the outer precinct), has been argued to have been the site of the *xenodochium* (Cecchini 1985). The church of SS. Nereo ed Achilleo became a *Diaconia*, or a place to provide care for the poor, certainly by the early ninth century, so this may tie in with the new role for the area (*Liber Pontificalis* 2.9, 21, 33). As the likely focus for devotees of Sixtus or Nereus and Achilleus from the sixth century coming from the catacombs into the city, as well as still being a busy and important road, this provision seems logical and provides further evidence for the creation of a devotional pathway along the via Appia-Ardeatina route.

As part of this phenomenon, and so worth noting, is the later early medieval foundation of a church at the junction of the Appia and Ardeatina routes outside the walls. The basilica, known as *Domine quo vadis* and later S. Maria in Palmis, was built sometime in the ninth century, or not long before, as a marker along the Appia as part of the second century tradition that said the apostle Peter had a vision of Christ here, urging him to return to the city to be martyred (Armellini 1891: 891–92, and see above). Interestingly, this ties in with an earlier pagan tradition where this area was linked to the minor deity Rediculus, the god of return, where a *campus* and/or *fanum* dedicated to him existed on the site of, or very near this church (La Regina *et al* 2001–2008: 5.10–11 with refs.). Thus, from the ninth century at least, the via Appia was marked with several martyr foci for devotional movement, this foundation providing a node or landmark that signposted the dividing point between the two routes described above, and itself being a focus for Petrine devotion. This pathway may have been the second such example in Rome, however, as an earlier fourth century itinerary can be argued to have been established.

The via Aurelia

This route (Fig. 5) is marked by two intramural Christian centres located at an important traffic crossroads on the western edge of the ancient city. Where these two foundations were constructed there is the junction of a major road coming into Rome from the west and the catacombs, the via Aurelia, and another major road that leads north to St. Peter's on the Vatican hill, thought to be the ancient via Septimiana (Steinby 1993–2000: 5.133–34, 3.311–12; La Regina *et al* 2001–2008: 1.170–86; *SHA* Sev. 19.5) (Fig. 6). These two Christian foundations seem to be connected in some way, either by proximity or administration as they are mentioned in the early sources together. One is dedicated to the early third century martyred bishop Callistus and the other to its builder, the fourth century bishop Julius (337–52) (*Liber Pontificalis* 1.9, 141, 206, 230; Mommsen 1894: 411; Gregory, *Ep.* 5.57a) The sources are not very clear as to whether they are referring to one foundation or two, but, on balance we can relate them to the modern San Callisto and Santa Maria in Trastevere, respectively, both of which lie along the via Aurelia at this important junction and are about 50m from each other (Guenther 1895: *Ep.* 1 *passim*; *Liber Pontificalis* 1.509, 2.16, 19, 26; Verrando 1985 1024–36; Steinby 1993–2000: 1.215, 3.119–20, 219–20). The road to St. Peter's that led north from this

crossroads, was probably called the *via Septimiana* in antiquity, as we have said, but was known as the *Via Sancta Pellegrini* by the Middle Ages, indicating its importance for pilgrims by that time. This is clearly one of Lynch's urban nodal points. Again, we may have a situation where frequently utilised Christian routes, probably from the third century, were embellished and provided with places to worship and/or rest on the way to devotional foci outside the city, in this case the catacombs along the *via Aurelia* and the tomb church of St. Peter. The existence of a *Lares Compitales* shrine at this crossroads, as at all crossroads in the city, and the potential religious friction, or lack of friction, between these pagan protectors of the neighbourhood and these new Christian centres, is also worth noting.

As well as the frequent Christian devotional traffic at this crossroads, there are also devotional links that can be argued between the intramural Callistan and Julian foundations and the extramural catacombs along the same *via Aurelia* road. In the catacombs now named after the local martyr Calepodius, located just off the *via Aurelia*, there were also the burials of Callixtus and Julius. Julius built a sub surface basilica over the grave of Callixtus and was himself buried in the same catacombs (*Liber Pontificalis* 1.8, 9; La Regina *et al* 2001–2008: 2.50–54), so seems to have had some sort of devotion to the 3rd century bishop. This may be mirrored in the foundation of two centres inside the city to both Callixtus and by Julius in close proximity to each other along the same road. Evidence for a third century *Callistum* is not trustworthy (*Liber Pontificalis* 1.141) so we must assume such a story grew around a fourth century foundation, so Julius may have constructed both basilicas, or built his near to a pre-existing recently built centre dedicated to Callixtus. Either way, we can argue for Julius associating himself with his predecessor Callixtus through his building work inside and outside



Figure 5: Trastevere churches zoomed out with catacombs and *via Aurelia* and *Septimiana* marked.

Base map from Google Earth.

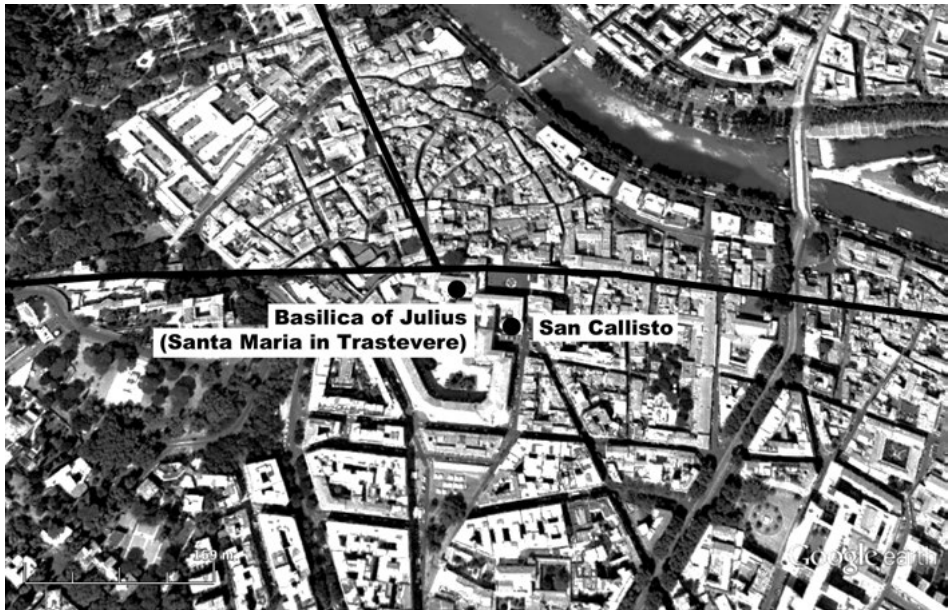


Figure 6: Trastevere churches zoomed in with ancient roads marked.
Base map from Google Earth.

the city and for the creation of a devotional path along the via Aurelia from the mid fourth century. This was a route, as we have described, that was already a well-trodden pathway for the Christians of the city going out to the catacombs, and going from the Transtiberim region to visit the burial place of the apostle Peter. This phenomenon may indicate that Julius was trying to promote devotion towards Callistus with his building activity by marking at Callixtus' grave, and at an important nodal point for Christians within the city, two centres dedicated to the third century bishop.

A Narrative Led Itinerary

Another type of Christian itinerary, which may have been created sometime in the seventh century, is that which promoted the story of the *martyrdom* of a local individual, and may be a new innovation of the period, rather than simply providing a built infrastructure for an already popular route, as with the pathways we have just described. The example we have for Rome are the churches built on the sites of notable events in the martyrdom story of the popular Roman martyr Laurence (Fig. 7). The veracity of his martyrdom tradition is impossible to gauge. In the fourth and fifth century the belief that he was tortured by flames, or more specifically was tortured on a brazier, and eventually heroically dies, already existed (Ferrua 1942: 33; Ambrose, *De Offic.* 1.41; Prudent. *Perist.* 2. 45–492), but by the sixth century an elaborated version with specific topographical references appears (*Acta Sanctorum*, Aug. 2.519, 3.13–14), with the construction of these churches postdating this later detailed narrative. The topographical references refer to where Laurence was held prisoner, where he was tried and where he was tortured and martyred. Such places were made real and solid for the devotee (alongside the long embellished site of Laurence's burial place outside the city) by the

construction of three churches in the Subura and Roman forum areas and framed an ‘imagined space’ in early Medieval Rome (Soja 1996).

The first focus for this Laurentian devotional path is the church of San Lorenzo in Panisperna on the Viminal. Little is known about its history beyond some early medieval references describing routes through the city. The church is first recorded in the seventh century as the basilica where Laurence’s grill lay, and in the eighth or early ninth century as, more explicitly, where he was tortured (Hülse 1927: 3; Valentini and Zucchetti 1942: 179, 189). So the tradition behind the church’s foundation is clear and gained it some notoriety for what seems to have been only a small structure (small donation: *Liber Pontificalis* 2.11).

At about the same time, in the seventh or eighth century, we see the appearance of the church of San Lorenzo in Fonte about two hundred metres to the south, on the main ancient artery of the *vicus Patricius* (which branches to the north-east from the important Argiletum road from the Forum of Nerva). This church is built above the place believed to be where Laurence was imprisoned, with the supposed remains of the prison and the well which, in the sixth century tradition, Laurence miraculously created, still visitable today. To found a church here to St. Laurence so near to another, which also claimed a powerful *loca sancta* heritage, seems to suggest the active creation of a devotional itinerary. Remains of an oratory found under the current church date to the seventh or eighth century (Steinby 1993–2000: 3.182–83; Krautheimer 1937–77: 2.153–58).



Figure 7: Laurence martyrdom churches zoomed in from angle with possible path marked.
Base map from Google Earth.

Also, perhaps in the seventh or eighth century, the church of San Lorenzo in Miranda was founded in the Roman Forum, within the cella of the former Temple of the Divine Faustina and Antoninus, and was said to be built where Laurence was sentenced to death. Such an idea may have stemmed from the fact that the church lies not far from the seat of the Urban Prefect in the forum, where many such trials would have been heard (Armellini 1891: 156–57; Hülsen 1927: 288–89). It is first mentioned in the written record in the eleventh century and then in the twelfth century as *s. Laurentius de mirandi* (Ferrari 1957: 190–91; Urlichs 1871: 110). There are no seventh or eighth century archaeological remains at the site that have been discovered, so its early medieval origins seem to be based on the fact that the temple must have been relatively intact for a church to be founded within its cella, and the church is not mentioned in the usual sources before that time.

Conceivably then, we have a period in the seventh century when all three churches were founded as a response to the embellished and topographically rich martyrdom story of Laurence being written down. In this way, this may represent a deliberate attempt to establish a devotional route for devotees of the martyr. Such a route could have begun at San Lorenzo in Miranda in the Forum, an appropriately prestigious beginning, where Laurence was believed to have been imprisoned; then the devotee may have moved along the main urban axes of the *Argiletum* and *Vicus Patricius* to San Lorenzo in Fonte, his place of imprisonment; and completed his itinerary at San Lorenzo in Panisperna just to the north, the culmination of the narrative where Laurence was heroically martyred. Even if such a route was conceived over a longer period of time, beyond the seventh century, it still represents the creation of a devotional, narrative based, itinerary, a more sophisticated and elaborate concept than those itineraries described earlier. This was a route of the imagination with the devotee following in the footsteps of the martyr. In other words, an itinerary based more on those established in Jerusalem following the life and death of Christ.

Conclusion

To conclude, I think we can argue for the creation of three devotional pathways primarily for a local Christian audience in late antique and early medieval Rome, formed in the fourth, sixth, and seventh-eighth centuries. The first two represent provision for pre-existing devotional paths that involved prayer and devotional activity at the burial place of the martyr, but were now provided with intramural churches dedicated to the same martyr on the same road where similar activity could take place. The final itinerary marks a step towards a different sort of devotion based on a long-standing oral or recently created written tradition surrounding a martyr's death. This was not a linear path determined by already established Christian urban pathways, but rather a haphazard route purely dictated by believed *loca sancta* and in the mind of the devout. This pattern of 'paths,' both real and imagined, long argued for in a modern urban context, need to be seen as a feature of the ancient city as well.

In pre-fourth-century Rome the focus for formal religious activity and the 'centre' of the city was the forum and the immediate area. In Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages with the slow Christianisation of the city and its shrinking around the Tiber curve, the focus gradually becomes St. Peter's, with the ancient city centre being largely abandoned. The result of this is that the new landmarks and other topographical foci were churches as well as the ancient ruins around them. The pagan crossroad shrine had been replaced by the church as the focus for the different neighbourhoods in the city, and those churches that had an association with well-known local martyrs would have attracted greater interest. The Christianisation of

Rome was not simply the appearance of churches, *xenodochia* and *diaconia* (Christian hostels and places for the poor) within the urban landscape, but the Christianisation of the landscape itself. This process and the externalisation of Christian space is complete with the advent of processions and stational liturgy (see Baldovin 1987: 36–37, 145–47) but, I would argue, are preceded by the sort of devotional paths I have described: marked by centres dedicated to a local martyr along linear, popular Christian routes or, later, defined by a topographically rich hagiographical narrative. The road itself and the movement along it becomes ritualised.

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