

THE LATERAN BAPTISTRY:

MEMORY, SPACE, AND BAPTISM

A Thesis Presented for the
Master of Architecture Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

David Tyler Thayer
May 2012

Copyright © 2012 by David Tyler Thayer
All rights reserved.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my sweet EL. Asking you to marry me was the best decision I will ever make. I love you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It goes without saying that this thesis would not have been completed without the support and encouragement of many people in my life. I could spend hours thanking each one of you, and recounting the all the ways you have helped my research of this topic and how you have blessed my life. I would like to thank my mother and my father for their never ending support and encouragement; truly, I would not be the man I am today without each of you. I would also like to express my deepest and most sincere gratitude for the friendship and love of my brother; our relationship is rare. My parents and brother are an immense blessing in my life. I would also like to thank my extended family and my “new” family—Caryn, Doug and Brian—for all your support and encouragement through the last two years. My family has put up with me for missing family get-togethers, and they have put up with me locking myself behind closed doors at the few get-togethers I have attended. For your love and support I am extremely grateful.

To my wife, for whom this work is dedicated, I am thankful to God for your love and role in my life. I would have never remained sane this last year, if it wasn’t for you. My love for you will burn until my last living breath. You are my best friend, lover and helpmate. I cherish you more than anything else in this world. Thank you for all that you have done for me and this thesis!

I thank David Wells for all our discussions on theology, editing and friendship. I thank Amy Neff for her amazing insight into the artist’s mind. If I had never taken your class and invited you onto my committee, this thesis, and my understanding of the mosaics would never have happened. I thank Katherine Ambroziak for her amazing mind and thoughtful comments throughout the last semester. Without our discussion and your experience and interest in ritual, many of my discoveries may have never come to fruition. I also thank the administration and staff of the College of Architecture and design. Your support, guidance and financial assistances were crucial to this work and my research.

Last, but most definitely not least, I thank Gregor Kalas. Your guidance, support, criticism, challenges, and friendship were all crucial to my research and my personal growth. You helped make me a better researcher, writer and scholar. This topic and thesis would not exist if you had never had an interest in my scholarly career. I am extremely grateful for you and your role as my mentor in the realm of history and theory. I will never forget our many thought provoking discussions that often went over our allotted time. I’m proud to be your student.

ABSTRACT

In the fourth century, the Lateran Baptistery was sponsored by Constantine the Great; it is the first extant free-standing baptistery known from the Roman world. In the fifth century, Pope Sixtus III renovated the baptistery through a newly-emphasized spatial hierarchy and the appropriation of some of Rome's most cherished structural elements and decorating themes. The result was a unique space that created a dialogue with Roman memory for the specific function of the baptismal rite it hosted. This thesis will analyze the spatial and symbolic forms, and the baptism ritual to show Sixtus III's interaction with the Roman tradition of memory making and preservation.

The Lateran Baptistery's reuse of *spolia* and ancient iconography themes demonstrate the implications of Sixtus' action concerning the memories preserved within the baptistery. Therefore, the baptistery linked the creation of the experiential memory of the initiate with the recalled memory of imperial Rome—especially in connection with the baptistery's founding patron.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
ABSTRACT	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	vi
LIST OF FIGURES.....	vii
CHAPTER I Introduction: Historical and Site Context	1
CHAPTER II Sacrality as Place: Transformation through a Classicizing Renaissance	15
CHAPTER III <i>Spolia</i> and Memory: Imperial <i>Romanitas</i> in the Lateran Baptistery	29
CHAPTER IV The Regeneration Motif: Mosaics and Inscriptions.....	52
CHAPTER V The Theology of Baptism	75
CHAPTER VI Creating Identity: Transformative Memory in Ritual Regeneration	89
CHAPTER VII Concluding Thoughts.....	105
BIBLIOGRAPHY	113
APPENDIX.....	117
VITA.....	119

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure I-1: Map of area known as Laterano before Constantine.....	8
Figure I-2: Reconstruction of the ancient <i>domus</i> and bath on the site.	10
Figure I-3: Drawing showing Lateran Basilica superimposed on top of the barracks.....	10
Figure I-4: Hybrid plan of the baptistery showing different phases	12
Figure I-5: Pre-Constantinian Site w/ Sistine Baptistery superimposed	12
Figure I-6: Reconstruction of site context during the fifth-century renovation	14
Figure II-1: Hypothetical reconstruction of Constantinian Phase.....	17
Figure II-2: Exterior of Lateran Baptistery.....	17
Figure II-3: Photo of Side IV of the baptistery.....	19
Figure II-4: Illustration of foundation and walls.....	19
Figure II-5: Fifth-century Sistine porch of Lateran Baptistery.....	21
Figure II-6: Reconstruction of site context during the fifth-century renovation	21
Figure II-7: Details of <i>spolia</i> : architrave, capitals, porphyry columns, and base	23
Figure II-8: Eastern apse mosaic	25
Figure II-9: Renaissance drawings of lost apse mosaic	25
Figure II-10: Interior; porphyry colonnade	27
Figure III-1: Plan of Constantinian Baptistery foundation ca. 330	31
Figure III-2: Plans of palace and imperial mausole	31
Figure III-3: Comparison of similarities	32
Figure III-4: Baptistery superimposed on domus bath	34
Figure III-5: Plan of the Forum Baths in Ostia Antica	36
Figure III-6: Porphyry Sarcophagi.....	40

Figure III-7: Roma <i>cella</i> of the Temple of Venus and Rome 4th C.	40
Figure III-8: Statue of Apollo, formerly of Roma, 3rd or 4th C.	41
Figure III-9: Rotunda of Maxentius, early 4th C.	43
Figure III-10: <i>Spolia</i> capital and architraves at the front porch	43
Figure III-11: <i>Spolia</i> base and column at front porch.....	45
Figure III-12: Remains of the Temple of Hadrian at the Campus Martius.	46
Figure III-13: Diagram of capitals	46
Figure IV-1: Eastern apse mosaic.....	56
Figure IV-2: Ara Pacis acanthus vine scroll decoration.	58
Figure IV-3: Upper section detail of eastern apse	61
Figure IV-4: Ara Pacis, Pax Romana scene	63
Figure IV-5: Detail of August of Prima Porta.....	65
Figure IV-6: Lost apse sketches by Ciacconio.....	67
Figure IV-7: Lost apse sketch from the studio of Domenico Ghirlandaio	67
Figure IV-8: The Good Shepherd, Catacombs of Priscilla, Rome	69
Figure IV-9: Inscriptions in marble architrave.....	71
Figure IV-10: Plan of Sistine Lateran Baptistery with verse/side numbers annotated.....	73
Figure VI-1: Hypothetical reconstruction of the ritual by Sible de Blaauw.	91
Figure VI-2: Reconstruction of the baptismal ritual during the Sistine phase.....	94
Figure VI-3: Hypothetical reconstruction of the ceremonial positioning	99
Figure VI-4: Plan highlighting ritual.....	100
Figure VI-5: Diagram highlight participant zones during ritual.....	103
Figure VII-1: <i>The Baptism of Constantine</i> by Giovan Francesco Penni	106
Figure VII-2: "Fountain of Life"	109

Figure VII-3: "Fountain of Life"	110
Appendix Figure 1: Hypothetical Model of Sistine Lateran Baptistery.....	118

CHAPTER I

Introduction: Historical and Site Context

Early in the fifth century, Pope Sixtus III (432-40 CE) orchestrated a metaphysical Christian renewal of the memory of Rome through the renovation of the Lateran Baptistery, San Giovanni in Fonte. During his pontificate, Sixtus III was responsible for a prolific building and restoration campaign throughout Rome; this includes the appropriation and assembly of *spolia* in the colonnaded adornment above the preexisting Constantinian Lateran Baptistery's font.¹ In the rearrangement of space and the reuse of ancient artistic motifs, Sixtus III's renovation in the Lateran Baptistery appropriates old Roman architectural and artistic motifs—repurposing the ideals for the ritual washing that took place in the center of the baptistery. Therefore, we see in the Lateran Baptistery an exemplum of Christian appropriation and reuse of the Roman past. Here, Sixtus III reformulates what might be considered imperial *romanitas*—a collective sense of Roman ideals found within architectural and artistic elements—to be Christian under the control of the growing influence of the Bishop of Rome.

The Sistine Lateran Baptistery was built during an interesting stage in the Roman Empire. During the Constantinian Age, the empire's capital city shifted from Rome to Constantinople—Constantinopolis Nova Roma.² Following this shift, two emperors were established, one ruling in the East, and the other in the West; the result was that the empire now had two capitals. In the West, the emperor primarily

¹ This work is attributed to Sixtus III, as recorded by the author of the *Liber Pontificalis* (LP), compiled a century later. In the LP, he is credited with a multitude of constructions, either directly or through his requests to emperor Valentinian III (425-55 CE). Cf. LP, I, XLVI.

² See Joseph Alchermes, "Constantinople and the Empire of New Rome," in *Heaven on Earth: art and the Church in Byzantium*, edited by Linda Safran. (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 13-38.

ruled from Milan, Trier or Ravenna. However, in the early fifth century, during the pontificate of Sixtus III, Emperor Valentinian III (424-55 CE) primarily resided in Rome, alternating with Ravenna.³ Therefore, the renovations performed by Sixtus III would have taken place in the presence of the western emperor. The renovations, perhaps, might have even been encouraged by Valentinian III. This created an interesting dynamic, where precedence for the future power of the pope was conferred by, or at least allowed by and pursued in the presence of, the emperor.

The Lateran Baptistery, located on the Celian Hill just inside the Aurelian Walls, exemplified the growth of the power and importance of the bishop through the appropriation of imperial associations. The Lateran Baptistery was an autonomous building in the greater Lateran complex, which included the Constantinian Basilica (now S. Giovanni in Laterano) and the bishop's palace. Here, Sixtus III reclaimed with papal munificence the baptistery that was founded through imperial sponsorship less than a century earlier. In doing so, Sixtus III appropriated the imperial memories and history associated with the first known autonomous baptistery in the Roman Empire.

In the Lateran Baptistery, the architects of Sixtus III demonstrated a fifth-century move toward a classicizing renaissance.⁴ The *Liber Pontificalis* records that Sixtus III renovated the interior of the baptistery, adding an octagonal structure of reused porphyry columns and architraves—including new inscriptions—above the font, which brought about an articulation and spatial order to the centrally focused plan of the larger octagonal building.⁵ This set forth the Lateran Baptistery as a culturally influential building that reformulated the historical memories associated with Constantine and the Christian community under the leadership of the pope. This thesis will argue that Sixtus III's reuse of classical ideals and motifs are further complicated by their appropriation of Christian ideologies and

³ See Andrew Gillet, "Rome, Ravenna and the Last Western Emperors," *Papers of the British School at Rome* 69 (2001): 131-167.

⁴ Krautheimer, 1980, 49.

⁵ LP, I, (ed. L. Duchesne), 234.

themes within a Roman context. Within the context of the baptistery, in which an individual considered symbolically dead is made alive through threefold baptismal immersion, the Christian appropriation of classical is, in symbolic terms, a renewal. Sixtus III's reuse and renovation, in connection to the baptismal ritual, reconsiders the Roman past and its associated memories and motifs to be identified with the Christian community in the service of the church.

The Lateran complex may have originated as the fulfillment of a vow to Christ after Constantine's victory over the usurper Maxentius in the Battle of the Milvian Bridge (312 CE).⁶ Following his death, Maxentius faced official condemnation of memory.⁷ To relegate Maxentius' memory to oblivion, Constantine dismantled the imperial guard formerly housed at the Lateran complex—where supporters of Maxentius resided—while subsequently demolishing their barracks. Shortly thereafter, Constantine built a new baptistery adjacent to a basilica as a church intended to accommodate the entire Christian population in Rome. Though the site was on the edge of the city, the basilica and baptistery that replaced the barracks were perhaps of significance extending beyond the goals of either appeasing the Christian God or functioning to avoid the city center. In its topographical context, the Lateran complex's location was practical, but also inherently political. Therefore, by Constantine's patronage, the Lateran complex can be interpreted as imperial and, henceforth, associated with the cultural memory of imperial Rome that set up a context in which the creation of new memories through baptism took place.⁸ Constantine inaugurated the Lateran's dialogue with Roman memory; Sixtus III

⁶ Krautheimer 1983, 12.

⁷ Aurelius Victor, in *De Caesaribus*, 40, records that "all the monuments which Maxentius had constructed in magnificent manner...were dedicated by the senate to the meritorious services of Flavius [Constantine]."

⁸ Krautheimer, 1983, suggests that by decentralizing the basilica, he was avoiding offense with the pagan aristocracy and Senators while also upholding his vow to Christ for his victory. The removal of the imperial guard and barracks, however, suggests the more important aspect of an imperial presence through repurposing of the land—an idea supported by Curran and Bassett.

reconfigured the memory of Constantine at the Lateran and further emphasized the baptism ritual through his renovation.⁹

Sixtus III's construction of a basilica honoring Mary on the Esquiline Hill redoubled the Lateran's association with a classicizing renaissance. S. Maria Maggiore, also built by Sixtus III, closely resembles the Christian basilicas of the fourth century in architectural language and proportions. Sixtus III's interest in reviving a Roman past for the formulation of a new Christian identity consequently influenced the fifth-century Lateran renovation. By the Lateran's connection to Constantine and Sixtus III's ushering of a classical renaissance, we can begin to understand how the past was reinstated at the Sistine baptistery.

Scholarly work on the Lateran Baptistery's participation in the revival of the past has not completely elucidated why the fifth-century interventions returned to historical themes. This thesis specifically defines the meaning of restoring the past. Through the analysis of *spolia*¹⁰, typology, art and ritual, I will discuss how the Lateran Baptistery exploits and articulates imperial memories associated with the baptistery. By linking the baptistery to instances of imperial *romanitas*—the collective sense of architectural and iconographic elements that conveys a memory, whether general or specific, of the Roman Empire—I shall illuminate how the baptistery effectively recreated the identity of an individual through ritual space, integrating the neophyte into the Christian community with the pope functioning as the first among equals.

The current state of research conducted on the Lateran Baptistery has revealed questions about its original form and the nature of its foundation; until recently, the lack of secure evidence hampered investigations of the Constantinian Baptistery. This has resulted in much debate on the original shape of

⁹ Evident by the name given to the Lateran in late antiquity: the Constantinian Basilica (*Basilica Constantiniana*).

¹⁰ *Spolia* is any material reused from old buildings for new construction. This could be stripped from a building, recovered from a ruin, or found in a building material storage yard.

the Constantinian phase of the baptistery. Olof Brandt offers the most conclusive evidence. First, he published his discoveries in an article written in 2001, followed by more thorough archeological investigations and a second article co-authored with Federico Guidobaldi in 2008.¹¹ Brandt argues that the original form of the baptistery was octagonal, not round.¹² In another article, Brandt further presents the Lateran Baptistery as the forerunner of a specific baptistery typology—one with thin walls and a centrally-focused octagonal plan—anchoring his assertion that the Constantinian structure was originally octagonal, therefore generating the typology.¹³ Though an argument about the form of the Constantinian phase is not the topic at hand, it will be useful to consider its original form to affix Sixtus III's work in a late antique chronology. In so doing, we can consider the implications of Sixtus' work in relation to the spatial transformation and how it changed or emphasized the baptism ritual. Considering the evolution of the Lateran Baptistery from the Constantinian Phase to the restoration presented in the Sistine Phase will provide a context for interpreting both the architecture of the baptistery and the theological implications for sacramental practice. Therefore, this thesis will reflect upon the Constantinian phase as proposed by Brandt, but primarily will discuss the Sistine phase as a reformulated spatial design in which the architectural and artistic meanings are interpreted in light of the fifth-century ritual.

In this thesis, I will address how the Lateran Baptistery shaped memory and how neophytes perceived the past. The issue of memory is connected to the architectural materials and spaces that

¹¹ See Olof Brandt, "Il Battistero lateranense dell'imperatore Costantino e l'architettura contemporanea: come si crea un'architettura battesimale cristiana?" *Late Antiquity: Art in Context* 1 (2001): 117-144; O. Brandt and F. Guidobaldi, "Il Battistero lateranense: nuove interpretazioni delle fasi strutturali," *Rivista di archeologia cristiana* 84 (2008): 189-282.

¹² Prior to Brandt, most scholars believed that the original fourth-century baptistery was round, due to the circular foundation for the walls of the baptistery. The early argument relegated the octagonal shape of the baptistery to the fifth-century renovation performed by Sixtus III, or a phase subsequent to an early fourth-century round building (See Brandenburg, 2005).

¹³ See O. Brandt, "The Lateran Baptistery and the Diffusion of Octagonal Baptisteries from Rome to Constantinople," *Fruhes Christentum zwischen Rom und Konstantinopel: acta Congressus Internationalis XIV Archeologiae Christianae, Vindobonae 19.-26. 9. 1999* (2006): 221-27.

governed how neophytes experienced the baptistery, which in turn raises concerns about the building's typology, the display of *spolia* and mosaic decorations. Through an analysis of theology and ritual, I will explain how the baptistery reacted to the needs of the ritual and shaped audience perceptions of the past in Rome, and thus created a new Christian memory. This method of analysis will allow for a deeper discussion about the historical and theoretical ways in which the Sixtus III turned to the culture of memory in his renovations of the Lateran Baptistery. This is an aspect that has received little attention, even though the baptistery was founded within a society obsessed with the past and Rome's heritage. In each of the material expressions of memory, practices and artistic links listed above are significant to the Lateran Baptistery. Yet each conveys nuanced meaning that, when combined, gives way to the ideals that make Sixtus III's renovations a renewal of the Roman past.

A study of baptism rituals practiced in the Lateran Baptistery will yield an interpretation of regeneration. The liturgical practices of the baptistery, together with elucidating the use of *spolia* and the mosaic decorations in the vestibule's apses, offer an understanding of the building's typology. The memory associations linked to the building engaged the visitor through spatial experience during the baptism ritual. The final chapter of the thesis will reconstruct the Sistine baptism ritual. The reconstruction of the ritual will demonstrate the effective reuse of the past and the creation of memory as it is embodied during the liturgical regeneration of the baptizand. The Lateran Baptistery will then provide evidence for the papal appropriation of earlier imperial practices—likening the pope's authority and activities to late antique emperors—in the production of new memories for newly initiated Christian Romans. Consequently, I will illustrate how the Baptistery created a new identity for the catechumen in his initiation into the Christian community, an identity rooted in earlier Roman memories.

The thesis will conclude by contemplating the transmission of memories and how the centrally-planned building type specifically renders memories for the initiate through a heightened state of

emotional and intellectual experience. This was effectually accomplished through the baptismal ritual, where the initiate's identity was regenerated as he or she participated in the creation of new memories. These new memories were, in effect, linked to the Roman past embodied in the physical baptistery and the Christian community. Thus, through the experiential actions of the baptism rite, the initiate gained a personal memory of his or her baptism, in which the initiate's identity as a Christian was crucially tied to that event for both the community and the individual. The initiates would further remember this experience as they recalled their initiation into the community. The architectural devices triggered associates with the past, and the ritual consolidated new memories within the ritual space.

It should be understood that archeologically, knowledge about the original Constantinian baptistery is limited, and the dearth of evidence curtails speculation about the early fourth-century building. In response, my thesis will mostly examine Sixtus III's renovations, described above, which largely remain intact, and which can lead to informed conclusions about the implementation of memory in the Baptistery because they still stand as physical evidence. This will allow the discussion to trace the appropriation of imperial memories of Emperor Constantine that Pope Sixtus III implemented.

HISTORICAL AND SITE CONTEXT

The Lateran Baptistery is located on the Celian Hill just inside the Aurelian Walls (Fig. I-1). Figure I-1 illustrates the Lateran precinct, named after the Plautii Laterani family that had resided in the *domus* and bath that was located there (archeological remnants of the house and bath are still extant under the basilica and baptistery). A passage by Optatus of Milevis suggests the name of the house was *domus Faustae in Laterano* during the reign of Constantine; thus, some scholars believe Constantine gained

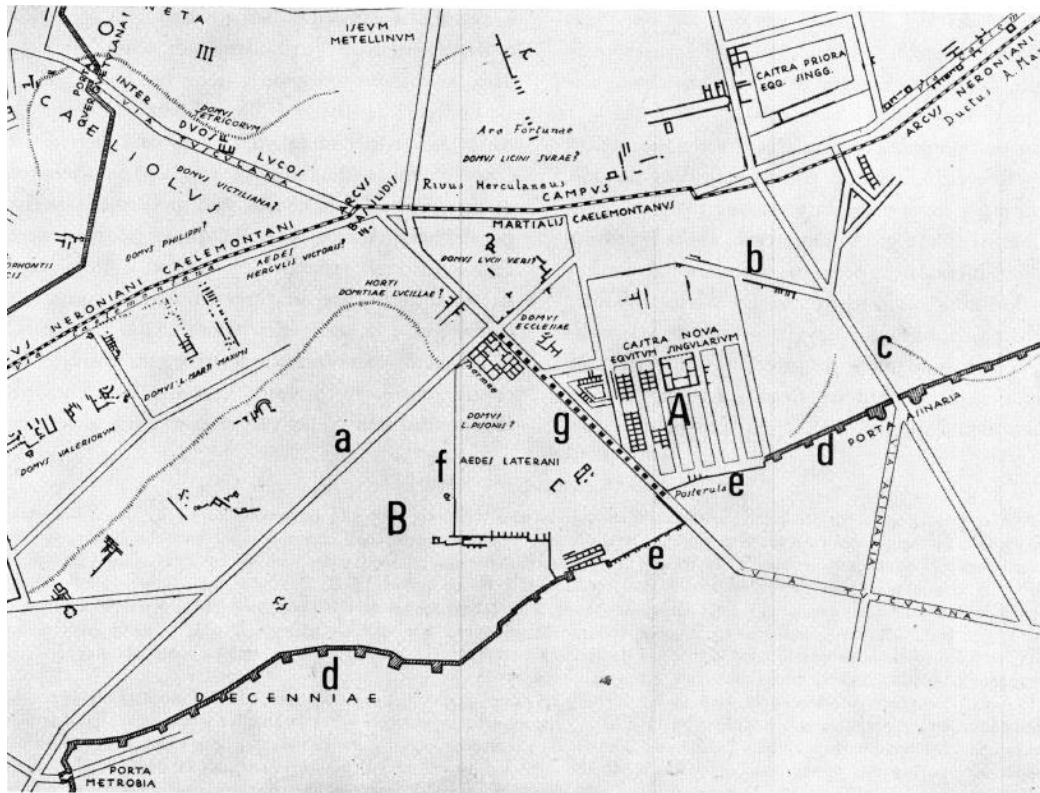


Figure I-1: Map of area known as Laterano before Constantine (from Pelliccioni, *Le nuove scoperte sulle origini del Battistero lateranense*, 1973). "A" shows the imperial guard barracks that were replaced by the Lateran Basilica. The letter "d" shows the stretch of the Aurelian Walls.

control of the *domus* palace through his wife Flavia Maxima Fausta.¹⁴ Even if this is not how the bath and *domus* became imperial property, medieval sources, including the *Liber Pontificalis*, tell scholars that the *domus* property and the barracks were handed over to Pope Silvester (314-335 CE) for the construction of the basilica, palace, and baptistery.¹⁵

The excavations of the baptistery by Giovanni Pelliccioni, published in 1973, further strengthen our understanding of the chronology of the buildings underneath the Lateran site.¹⁶ Pelliccioni reconstructed the baths and *domus* from the foundations that now exist underneath the Lateran Baptistery (Fig. I-2). His work also helps complete an understanding of the formal urban relationships among the buildings within the Lateran site as a whole. This is seen in his reconstruction in which the Lateran Basilica and Baptistery are superimposed on a plan of the baths, *domus*, and imperial guard barracks (Fig. I-3). Through Pelliccioni's work, scholars can see the transformative affect that the razed buildings had on the creation of the newer ones. Specifically, this is seen in the reuse of the *frigidarium* pool in the baptistery's font. It is interesting to consider how the spatial qualities of one building may inform the design of a subsequent building in the same location at a later date. Thus, the shape of the second-century bath's *frigidarium* was retained and embedded within the design of the fourth and fifth-century baptistery.

The Constantinian phase of the baptistery consisted of the insertion of an octagonal-shaped room into the former bath structure depicted in Figure I-3. Pelliccioni showed a possible integration of the new fourth-century baptistery with parts of the early third-century bath complex. Both Pelliccioni

¹⁴ Hugo Brandenburg suggests this assertion is not certain; however, he does concede that the passage suggests Constantine had full control over the buildings (Brandenburg, 2005, 20; cf. Optatus, 1, 23).

¹⁵ LP, I, (ed. L. Duchesne), 172-4. See also Brandenburg, 20-22.

¹⁶ See Giovanni Pelliccioni, *Le nuove scoperte sulle origini del Battistero lateranense* (Roma: Tipografia poliglotta vaticana, 1973).

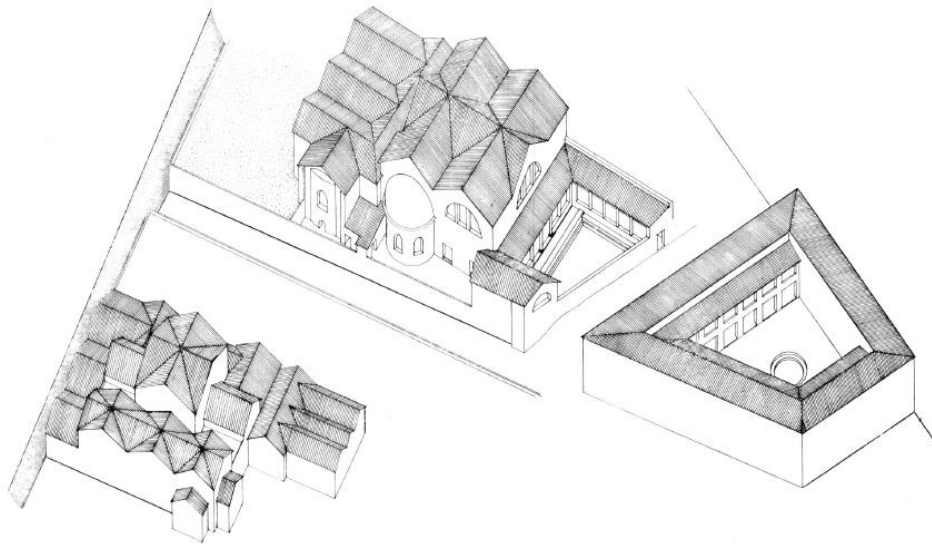


Figure I-2: Reconstruction of the ancient *domus* and bath on the site of the Lateran Baptistery (from Pelliccioni, *Le nuove scoperte sulle origini del Battistero lateranense*, 1973).

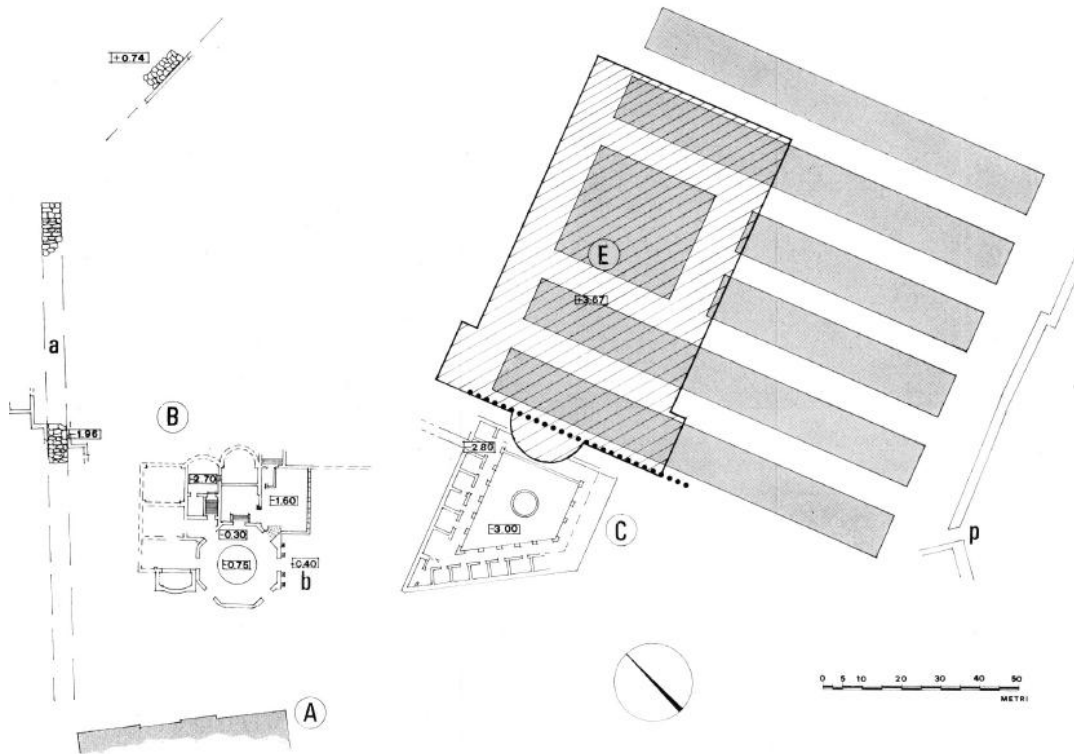


Figure I-3: Drawing showing Lateran Basilica superimposed on top of the barracks and trapezoidal *domus*. "B" shows Pelliccioni's hypothetical reconstruction of the Constantinian integration of the baptistery into the Severan *domus* bath (from Pelliccioni, *Le nuove scoperte sulle origini del Battistero lateranense*, 1973).

and Brandt hypothesized that eight columns stood in each corner of the octagon (e.g. Fig. I-4). Pelliccioni's research also presents a new understanding of the immediate surroundings for the baptistery during the Constantinian phase. He notes the following about the site context: first, the existence of a Severan period bath complex on the opposite side of the street from the baptistery; second, the likely form of an earlier *domus* bath the baptistery reused; third, the presence of a trapezoidal house; and finally, the nature of the Constantinian basilica that replaced the imperial barracks (Fig. I-5).

After Pelliccioni completed his research, Olof Brandt contributed the most detailed and substantial observations of the baptistery's phases. These emerged from a series of studies and excavations his team performed over the last decade. Some of the most important work detailing the chronology of the baptistery's phases was published in 2008 by Brandt and Federico Guidobaldi, mentioned above.¹⁷ In this article, the two authors propose a new interpretation of the conventional view that the work done by Sixtus III and Hilarus were rigidly separate. Instead, Brandt and Guidobaldi suggest the transformation of the baptistery started by Sixtus should be perceived as instigating a lengthy building campaign that spanned the pontificates of Sixtus III, Leo I (Leo the Great), and Hilarus from 432-468.¹⁸ Therefore, the exact configuration of the baptistery during any year may not be determinable; in fact, the chapel of S. Croce—traditionally attributed to Hilarus by a passage in the *Liber Pontificalis*¹⁹—may have been started under the direction of Sixtus III, making it contemporary with the colonnade around the font and the grand porch.²⁰

The full extent of the Lateran Baptistery's fifth-century physical context is rather unclear. Therefore, this thesis will focus on the symbolic nature of the architectural and artistic motifs, as well as

¹⁷ O. Brandt and F. Guidobaldi, Il Battistero lateranese: nuove interpretazioni delle fasi strutturali," *Rivista di archeologia cristiana* 84 (2008): 189-282.

¹⁸ Brandt and Guidobaldi, 2008, 278-82.

¹⁹ LP, I, (ed. L. Duchesne), 242-243.

²⁰ Brandt and Guidobaldi, 2008, 279-82.

the spatial transformations initiated by Sixtus III. While a conclusive context would be helpful in understanding the implications of the site for ritual practices, the general path of the ritual procession can be inferred from the architectural design of the baptistery. For the purposes of this thesis, though, the site will be considered to have had a set of constants and variables.

In bold, heavy lines and poché, Figure I-6 represents buildings that have a level of certainty that reasonably suggests the placement and design of each of the buildings during the pontificate of Sixtus III. The buildings considered constant include the Severan baths, the Lateran Baptistery's octagon, the grand bi-apsidal porch, the attached rectangular hall, and the Constantinian Basilica with the attached papal palace. In gray tones and lines, Figure I-6 represents the oratory of S. Croce, the oratory of St. John the Baptist, the oratory of St. John the Evangelist, and the ancient trapezoidal *domus*. The three oratories and trapezoid house make up the site variables: the parts for which chronology remains unclear.

It is clear that the areas directly adjacent to the baptistery were in a state of transformation from Sixtus III to Hilarus. If Brandt and Guidobaldi's premise that Sixtus III initiated the entire renovation is valid (including the concept of the oratories, the grand bi-apsidal porch, and the font colonnade), then the remnants of the *domus* baths— save the foundations—would have been demolished in preparation for the new construction. In addition, because the plan of the Oratory of S. Croce does not coalesce with the excavated portions of the *domus* baths, the oratory would not have existed before the restoration work started by Sixtus III. As Brandt and Guidobaldi suggest, the Oratory of S. Croce was either contemporary with Sixtus' work or built shortly after in a series of construction projects that ended during the pontificate of Hilarus.

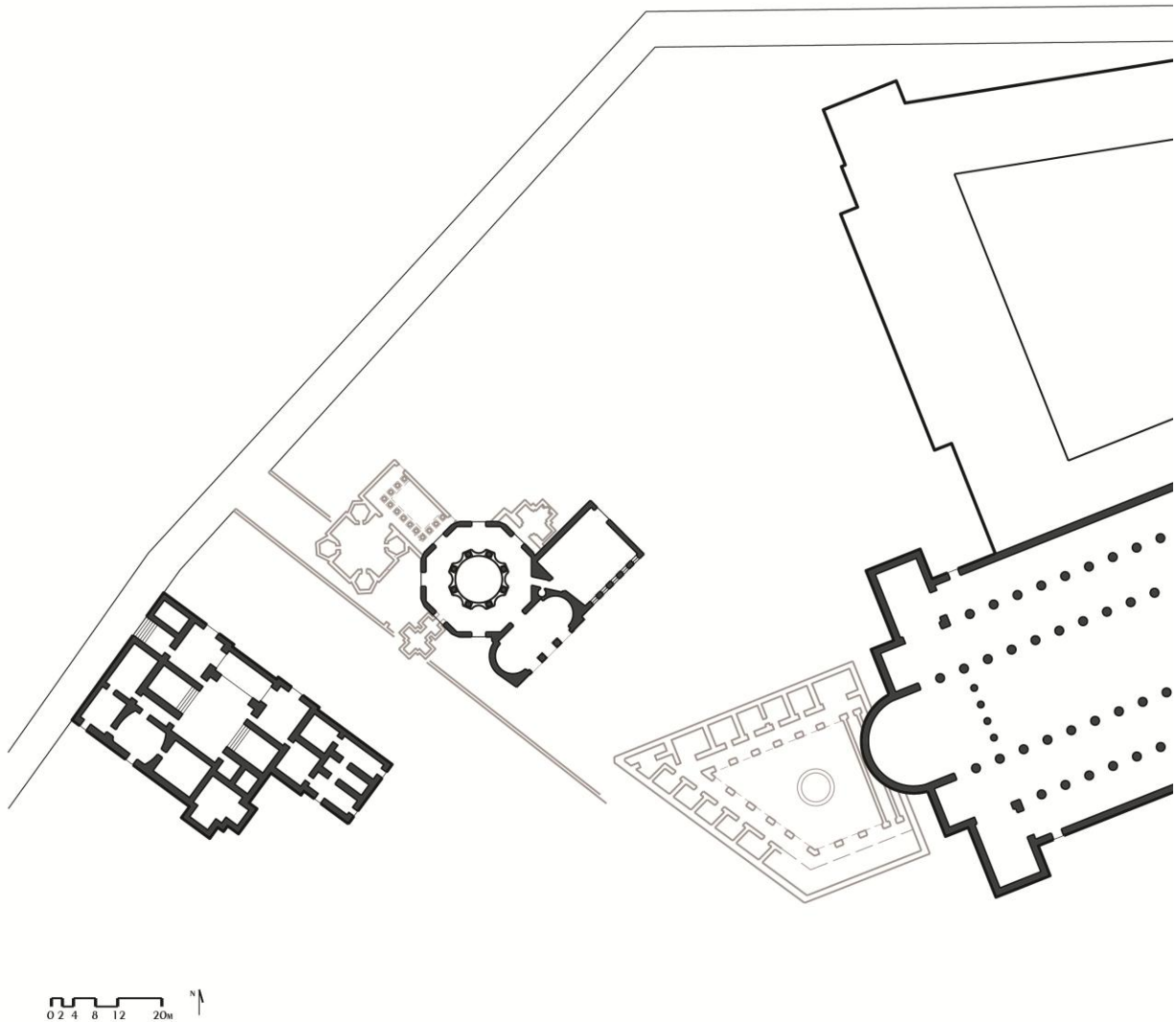


Figure I-6: Reconstruction of site context during the fifth-century renovation of the Lateran Baptistery. (Illustration by D. Tyler Thayer after Pelliccioni, *Le nuove scoperte sulle origini del Battistero lateranense*, 1973)

CHAPTER II

Sacrality as Place: Transformation through a Classicizing Renaissance

In the midst of a building renaissance of the fifth century, Pope Sixtus III (432-40 CE) initiated the transformation of the Lateran Baptistery, of fourth-century origins, into what would become the core of the building as it appears today. Subsequent to Sixtus' interventions, Pope Hilarus (461-68 CE) created a new baptistery ideal in which the Lateran Baptistery became a site for experimentation. By the end of the fifth century, the building was characterized by an architectural union of baptistery and oratory, creating an ordered building complex with a multifaceted program of use. The Sistine architectural renovations that reformulated the fourth-century Lateran Baptistery illustrate the interests of the pope by producing an influential sacred space. This was achieved through an additive process that placed new emphasis on the central font. In the course of the architectural transformations, the space was further enhanced through adding meaningful building materials, poetic inscriptions, and mosaic imagery that purposefully evoked memories of the Roman past, especially in connection with Constantine.

The story begins with the unequivocal involvement of an emperor as the baptistery's patron. After the defeat of Maxentius in 312 CE, Emperor Constantine and his family began a prolific Christian building program in Rome (though it should be noted that he is also credited with various secular projects in the ancient capital). One of the first projects founded by Constantine was the Lateran Baptistery (often cited as the "Constantinian Baptistery" throughout historical sources); indeed, the

Liber Pontificalis gives us no reason to doubt the authenticity of his imperial patronage.²¹ Thus, the first phase of the baptistery is considered Constantinian. Yet the early use of the octagonal form has been debated. Excavations of the foundation point towards an early octagonal conception (Fig. II-1).²² In light of this, Brandt links the baptistery's form to earlier octagonal structures, including Nero's Golden House and various bath structures. If this framework is accepted, the Lateran Baptistery's external form remained relatively unchanged until approximately 432 CE, after which the perimeter walls for the building's octagonal core appeared more or less as they do today; but Sixtus III transformed the primary entrance (Fig. II-2).

Sixtus III turned his attention to the Constantinian baptistery during his pontificate.²³ The *Liber Pontificalis* records a renovation that essentially altered the inside of the baptistery resulting in a highly articulated center and new roof details. Assuming that Olof Brandt's interpretations of the foundation excavations are accurate, Sixtus' architects must have primarily altered the interior of the Constantinian baptistery.²⁴

The baptistery is integrated into the Lateran complex, with the Lateran Basilica (known in antiquity as the "Constantinian Basilica") rising less than 50m southeast of the baptistery. When Constantine sponsored the first phase of the baptistery in the early fourth century, it was erected upon the remnants of an ancient bath. This allowed the baptistery to use the extant plumbing systems. Based on the archaeological record, the baptistery was fully autonomous, separate from the basilica. In this sense, the Lateran Baptistery is the earliest known extant autonomous baptistery. Separation from the basilica allowed the Constantinian baptistery to be relatively open with large doors, approximately

²¹ *Liber Pontificalis* (LP), I 172-175.

²² Brandt, 2001, 118-22.

²³ LP, I, 234.

²⁴ Even if the original baptistery was round, not octagonal, the focus of this thesis is the renovation by Sixtus III. There is no evidence to suggest that Sixtus rebuilt the entirety of the baptistery, reforming it into the shape of an octagon. Instead, based on what we know was the work of Sixtus, the octagon shape must have pre-dated Sixtus, even if only by a few years.

IL BATTISTERO LATERANENSE

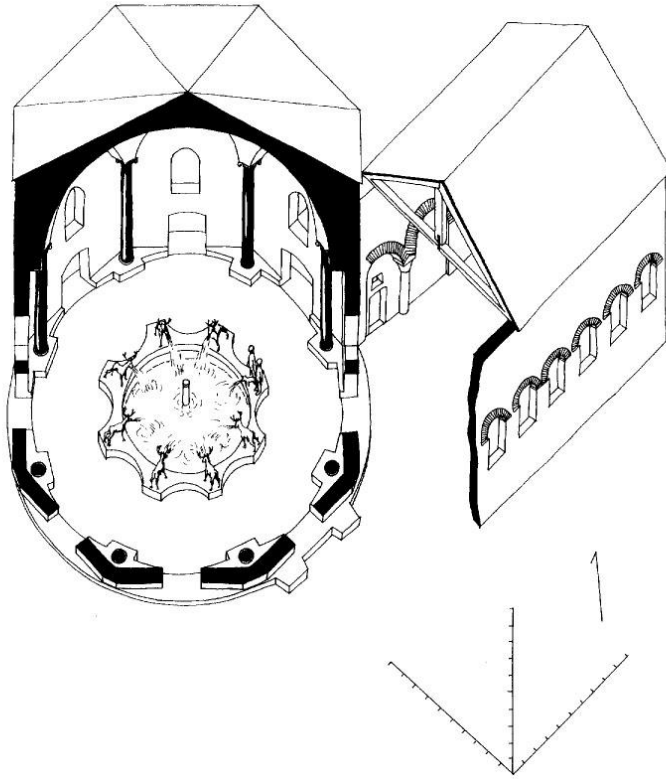


Figure II-1: Hypothetical reconstruction of Constantinian Phase (from Brandt, "Il Battistero lateranense," 2001).



Figure II-2: Exterior of Lateran Baptistery as of December 2011 (photos by D. Tyler Thayer).

3.0m wide, on each side of the octagon (Fig. II-3). These doors remained in the Sistine phase of the baptistery, though the surrounding changed with the oratories finished by Hilarus.

Each side of the Constantinian baptistery included a window above the respective door. When Sixtus rebuilt the interior, he made the walls taller and added a second set of larger arched windows above the Constantinian windows. These new windows were located above the immediate surroundings, their position is especially critical because of new construction that may have been planned to occur around the baptistery. These new windows, coupled with the new cupola in the raised roof, would have resulted in a well-lit interior. The construction of these windows would support Brandt and Guidobaldi's hypothesis that Sixtus III initiated the interior renovation and planned for the oratories that followed. Thus, the construction of new oratories would have rendered the Constantinian windows useless and necessitated new windows above the roofs of the oratories.

The excavations under the baptistery revealed a circular foundation approximately 19-20m in diameter with eight rectangular protrusions (Fig. II-4). Presumably, the protrusions were for the eight porphyry columns that would have stood in the corners, illustrated by Brandt in his reconstruction (cf. Fig. II-1). During the Constantinian phase, the circular foundation, 1.70m thick, was set into the abandoned bath complex. In the center of that foundation was a second, inner foundation ring corresponding to the third century *frigidarium*, approximately 8.50m in diameter, for the baptismal font. Rising from the outer foundation ring are the relatively thin octagonal walls that are 0.80 m thick. The walls themselves are built of brick-faced concrete, a construction technique of many buildings in imperial Rome. The



Figure II-3: Photo of Side IV of the baptistery. Note the now bricked up door and widow (photo by D. Tyler Thayer).

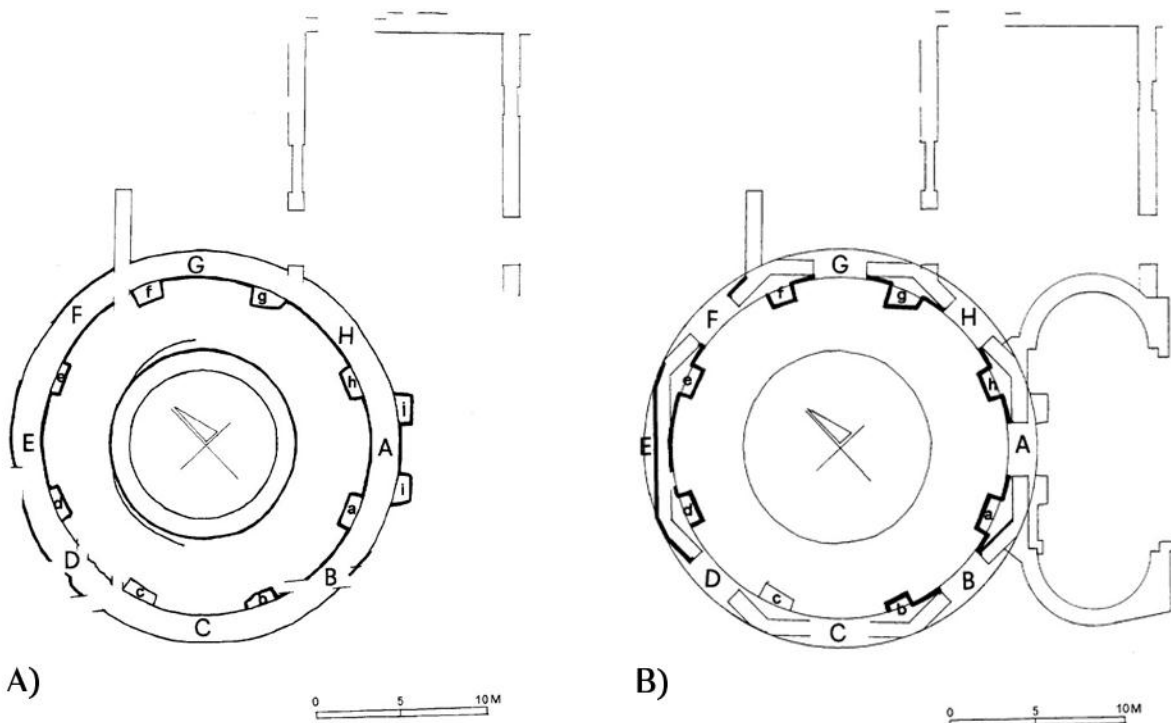


Figure II-4: Illustration of foundation and walls during A) Constantinian Phase, and B) Sistine Phase (from Brandt, "Il Battistero lateranense," 2001).

exterior of the original baptistery probably did not boast of decoration, as was customary with early church buildings.²⁵

The baptistery presently features a monumental vestibule, or porch, that Sixtus III added during the second phase of the baptistery (Fig. II-5). This possibly replaced a smaller entrance that might have existed in the same location on the fourth-century baptistery (cf. Figs. I-3, II-1, and III-9). The lavish porch provides three openings between two monumental porphyry columns. This entry porch was added to the southeast side of the octagonal baptistery conceptually—yet not physically—linking the autonomous baptistery to the Lateran Basilica. Interestingly, the new grand entrance did not address the street, but was built to face the apse of the basilica (Fig. II-6). In doing so, the fifth-century baptistery began a new and expressive dialogue with the basilica, where a greater semblance of direction, connection and significance was reinforced and emphasized in the new monumental porch. This suggests that by the mid-fifth century, the baptism ritual had developed a certain rigor, presenting an opportunity for the space to be aligned with the ritual procession in a hierarchical fashion. This new entry clearly created a spatial sequencing that was harmonious with the ideals developed in the baptism rite. The baptistery during the age of Sixtus III necessitated a significant connection to the basilica where the baptism rite would have begun and subsequently ended.

Developments in the baptism rite effectively changed the way in which the urban space was manipulated. The Sistine baptistery boasted a magnificent entrance that created a sense of directionality and spatial linking. This transformed an ambiguous, multi-entry, autonomous baptistery into a baptistery with an articulated entry sequence. Further, the flat façade of Sixtus' porch replaced the dissolved edge condition that would have been present with the octagon—where the sides of the baptistery were seen to have been constantly receding. Under Sixtus III, the entry vestibule set up a

²⁵ Cf. the exterior of S. Sabina (early 5th century). A



Figure II-5: Fifth-century Sistine porch of Lateran Baptistery as it appears today (photo by D. Tyler Thayer).

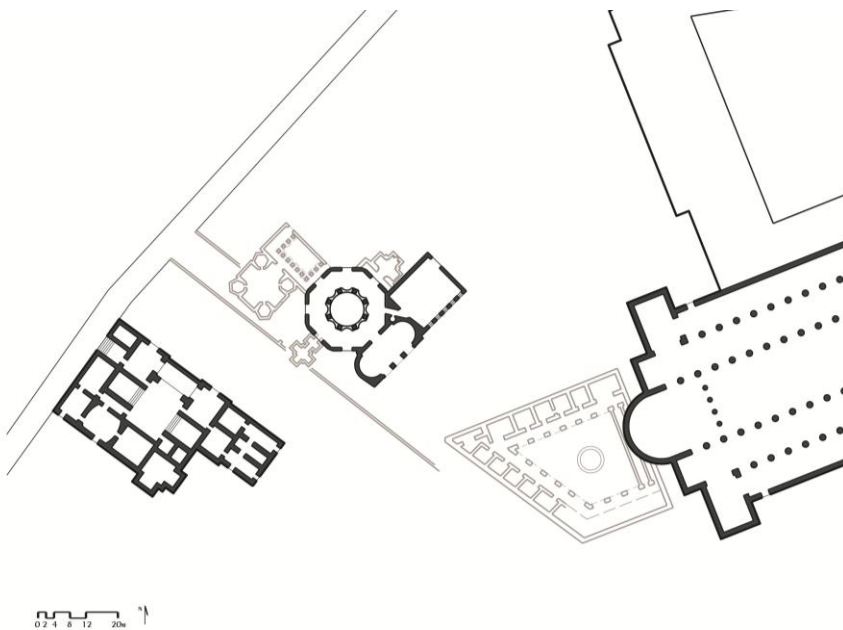


Figure II-6: Reconstruction of site context during the fifth-century renovation of the Lateran Baptistery. (Illustration by D. Tyler Thayer after Pelliccioni, *Le nuove scoperte sulle origini del Battistero lateranense*, 1973)

well-defined façade, arranged at a skewed angle with respect to the longitudinal axis of the basilica. The result was a reinforced ceremonial entry, in which the main vestibule that addressed the courtyard, defined by the edges of the basilica and protected from the public street. The work of Sixtus essentially strengthened the skewed axial alignment with the basilica, perhaps foreshadowing the end of the autonomous baptistery.

The façade of the Sistine porch was rich in architectural decoration, namely the use of *spolia*. The entry is delineated by two reused porphyry columns—the purple stone reserved in antiquity solely for imperial use. The Sistine reuse of columns in the entry façade is further demonstrated through the superbly ornate bases and composite capitals, both of which appear to be appropriated from the Trajanic or Hadrianic phases of the Temple of Venus Genetrix in the Forum of Caesar (Fig. II-7).²⁶ The edges of the entry are marked by two fluted pilasters of white marble which, together with the porphyry columns, carry an architrave. The architrave is also *spolia*—from the second century, possibly from the Temple of Hadrian on the Campus Martius²⁷—that had been reduced by a single *fascia*, or band, which removed the cornice of the entablature. The *spolia* in the entry vestibule as an ensemble sing the praises of imperial Rome. Urbanistically, the imperial identity was evidently more meaningful for the community as an inward facing element than an outward, public expression of imperial patronage.

The vestibule, sometimes called a narthex, of the Lateran Baptistery is bi-apsidal. Entering through the doors framed by the porphyry columns, one would perceive the narrow width and perpendicular length of the space. Vibrant marble revetment adorned the walls of the vestibule, of which a small segment survives, while beautifully crafted mosaics decorated each of the apses. The eastern apse mosaics portray a vine scroll that systematically unravels from a central acanthus whorl superimposed on a deep blue background. The repetition of the vine scroll is rhythmic and ordered,

²⁶ Hansen, 68-71. (cf. Käler, “Zu den Spolia im Baptisterium”)

²⁷ Hansen, 71.



Figure II-7: Details of *spolia*: architrave, capitals, porphyry columns, and base (photos by D. Tyler Thayer).

regularizing the composition as a whole. Above the vine scrolls, six dangling crosses hang from the apex of the conch interspersed with a lamb, four doves, and flowers under the canopy of heaven represented at the pinnacle of the apse mosaic (Fig. II-8).

The western apse mosaic has been lost to history. The contents of the lost mosaic are only known from Renaissance drawings and descriptions. According to this evidence, the mosaic would have had a similar scroll decoration with an idyllic-paradise scene.²⁸ The scene would have had a chicken coop and four shepherds with their flocks with relaxed and thoughtful poses that reflect the leisure and repose of paradise (Fig. II-9). The iconography and themes found within these mosaics suggest a fifth-century date, in which ancient imagery was recreated for the baptistery, in conjunction with the Sistine renovation.²⁹ I will further explore an interpretation of the mosaic themes in Chapter 3.

The most notable aspect of the Sistine renovation is the interior of the baptistery. The immense importance of this work is demonstrated by it being the only part of the renovation mentioned in the *Liber Pontificalis*:

At the Constantinian Basilica he [Sixtus III] provided adornment over the font, which had not been there before; he set up the hard porphyry columns, eight in number, in the Baptistry of the Constantinian basilica; these had been collected from the time of the emperor Constantine, and he erected them with their entablatures and adorned them with verses.³⁰

Here, Sixtus III reconfigured the font by heightening the centrality of the space. Presumably, the Constantinian baptistery featured a large pool with ample space between the font and the walls of the

²⁸ Brandenburg, 44-5.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ LP, I, (ed. L. Duchesne), 234: "*Hic constituit columnas in baptisterium basilicae Constantinianae, quas a tempore Constantini Augusti fuerant congregatas, ex metallo purphyretico numero VIII, quas erexit cum epistolis et versibus exornavit...*" Trans. R. Davies, *Book of Pontiffs* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1989), 37.



Figure II-8: Eastern apse mosaic (photo by D. Tyler Thayer).



Figure II-9: Renaissance drawings of lost apse mosaic (from Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, *Vat. lat.* 5407, ff. 195 and 200, and Codex Escorialensis 28, II.12).

octagonal baptistery (cf. Fig. II-1). Sixtus re-envisioned the font as a highly articulated and centralized font surrounded by a formal ambulatory (Fig. II-10). Brandt suggests the eight porphyry columns mentioned in the *Liber Pontificalis* were already set up in the corners of the Constantinian phase. This hypothesis seems to make sense in connection to their reuse, as their Constantinian identity and location would easily be discernible a century after their assembly. Even if they came from another location or unknown store yard, Sixtus used them to recall Constantine's imperial patronage, since porphyry was an exclusively imperial material.

The eight porphyry columns were set up around the pool and carried the same architrave that was used in the entry façade. This time, however, the architraves were reversed so that the smooth back side would face the ambulatory and the ornate front faced the font. On the smooth reverse side of the architraves, Sixtus engraved eight inscriptions. The inscriptions poetically embody the theology of baptism in a timeless prayer of blessing over the font, continually communicating the mystery of regeneration to all who enter the baptistery. Sixtus creates an architectural environment rich in meaning, which in turn is focused on the centrality of the font, the baptizand, and the bishop.

The large font (approximately 8.50 m in diameter) suggests that a large number of people were to be baptized at a time, with the inward-looking ambulatory accommodating an audience. While the physically limited space would inhibit the entire church community from participating, the space would have been ample enough to hold the catechumens to be washed, the deacons, the priests, the bishop, and the sponsors or godparents of the baptizands. Such a broad mix of individuals would have represented the community into which the catechumens were being initiated.

Sixtus III's renovations effectively created a path linking the baptistery to the basilica with its symbolism resulting from housing the Christian community of Rome—including the space to celebrate



Figure II-10: Interior; porphyry colonnade (photos by D. Tyler Thayer).

the Eucharist—and creating an extraordinary interiority and central focus within the font itself. Further, his reuse of imperial *spolia* referred to the legacy of the imperial founder: Constantine. Sixtus' implementation of the colonnaded font and the use of *spolia* on the inside and exterior of the baptistery linked the baptistery to the past. Krautheimer argued that this was a fifth-century classical renaissance.³¹ Hansen reasons that Sixtus' renaissance is not based on Vitruvian perfection, but an attempt to embrace a historical ideal found in reconfigured elements from classical antiquity.³² Sixtus' work seems to be along these lines, as a renewal of ancient ideals that would have been easily identifiable to the visitor. In light of this, the Lateran Baptistery became a part of the past and a part of something new.

³¹ Krautheimer, "Architecture of Sixtus III."

³² Hansen, 273-76.

CHAPTER III

***Spolia* and Memory: Imperial *Romanitas* in the Lateran Baptistery**

Sixtus III (432-40 CE) transformed the Lateran Baptistery into an edifice embodying a complex layering of elements that recalled the grandeur of the Roman past. The baptistery took on a series of imperial themes that harked back to the age of Constantine. The goal of this chapter is to demonstrate a continuous dialogue between space and memory in the Lateran Baptistery that can be witnessed in the fifth-century architectural transformation, evoking a sense of imperial *romanitas*. The intended effect of the Sistine renovations during this time was to construct a new Christian memory historically linked to Emperor Constantine's original patronage of the Lateran complex in the early fourth century. The memory of the Constantinian age was evoked as an imperial *romanitas*, primarily defined by materiality, *spolia*, and the baptistery's centrally planned form.

The term *romanitas* refers to the notion that certain architectural elements and forms, which might include iconography found within, convey a sense of a Roman ideal or a Roman way of doing things. The term suggests that architects and patrons might have desired to capture the essence of an ideological model that represented or harkened back to certain preferred ancient Roman ideals. The *romanitas* is an intangible expressed through the experience of a space. In the Lateran Baptistery, I propose this *romanitas* refers to an empire-wide notion of Rome. In some cases, the tones of *romanitas* take on imperial themes to establish a link to the imperial patron of the baptistery.

The Lateran Baptistery's fifth-century recapitulation of its first phase began with the Sistine viewer's perception of the building from the exterior. First, it must be noted that the octagonal form—

and at the very least the centralized plan—of the baptistery should be primarily associated with the Lateran’s construction by Constantine and the resulting legitimization of a Christian sacrament. Olof Brandt has provided plentiful evidence that reasonably suggests the octagonal form was the creation of Constantinian architects circa 320-330 CE.³³ The work of Sixtus III’s architects in the following century shows that Sixtus embraced the formal language of the baptistery presented in the earlier Constantinian stage, since Sixtus maintained the octagonal shape and thereby commemorated Constantine’s original foundation.

Under the direction of Sixtus III, the Lateran baptistery took on an imperially-influenced tone in materiality and form. The Constantinian phase of the baptistery was most likely an open, octagonal building with doors on all sides. The circular foundation beneath the walls retains evidence that there was a small porch adorning the primary entrance during the Constantinian phase—perhaps simply composed of two columns with a trabeation spanning the doorway—where the present monumental porch now stands (Fig. III-1). Unlike the Constantinian ornamental door jambs, Sixtus III’s addition resembled an imperial mausoleum’s *pronaos*, or porch, exemplified by vestibules for the mausolea of Maxentius, Diocletian, Tor de’ Schiavi, and the Palace Octagon at Thessaloniki (Fig. III-2). In so doing, Sixtus harkens an earlier imperial architectural type through the plan and form of an octagonal structure with an adjoined monumental vestibule.

The Sistine Lateran Baptistery resembled the imperial mausolea in many ways. First, the building was centrally planned with an implied hierarchical emphasis on the center. Brandt’s reconstruction of the Constantinian phase suggests that the octagonal Lateran building resembles the plan and position of the columns supporting the dome of the Mausoleum of Diocletian in Split, Croatia (Fig III-3). As a consequence of this architectural link to the mausoleum typology, the Lateran Baptistery

³³ This evidence is discussed more fully in Chapter 1. (cf. O. Brandt, F. Guidobaldi, “Il battistero lateranense: nuove interpretazioni delle fasi strutturali,” *RACr* 84 (2008): 189-282.)

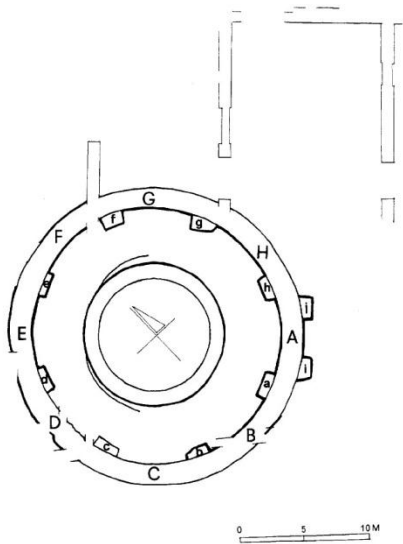


Figure III-1: Plan of Constantinian Baptistry foundation ca. 330 (from Brandt, "Il Battistero lateranense," 2001). Note the foundation footers labeled "i" as a location for a primary entry adornment, perhaps like the ones found at the Rotunda of Maxentius on the Via Sacra.

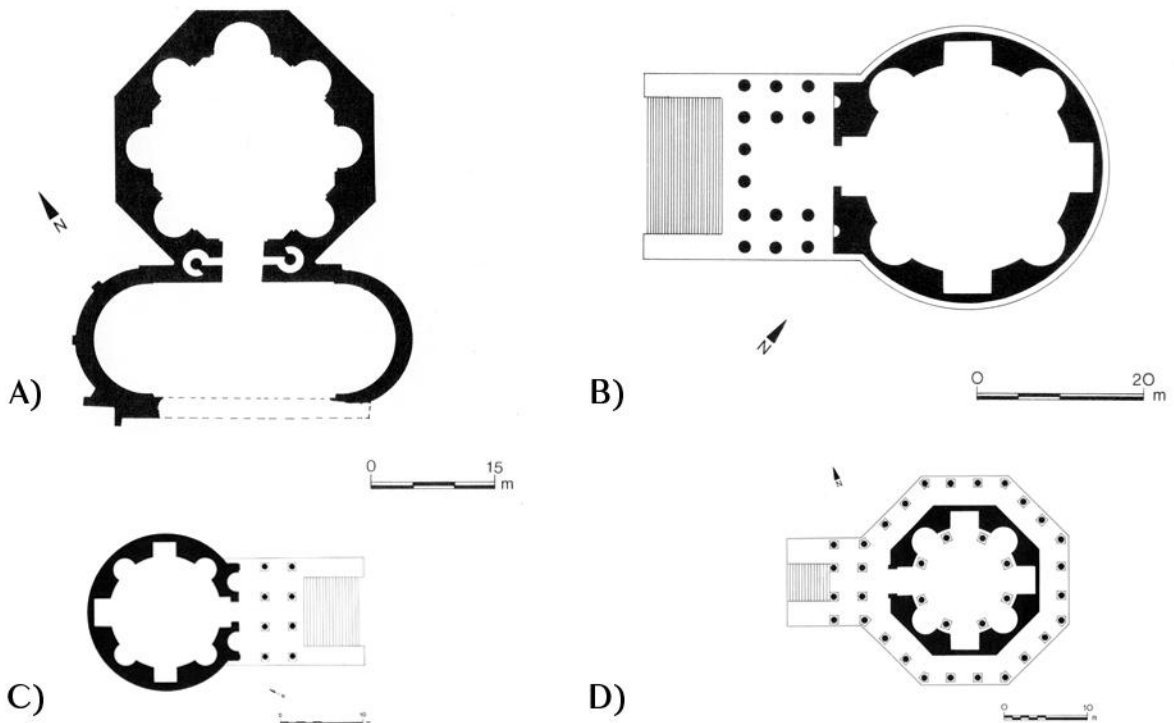
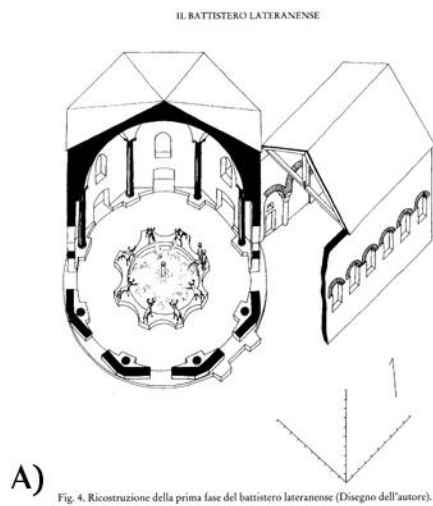


Figure III-2: Plan of A) Palace Octagon at Thessaloniki (ca. 300-310), B) Mausoleum of Maxentius (ca. 307-312), C) Tor de' Schiavi (ca. 310-320), Mausoleum of Diocletian (ca. 300-310). (from Johnson, *The Roman Imperial Mausoleum in Late Antiquity*, 2009)



B)

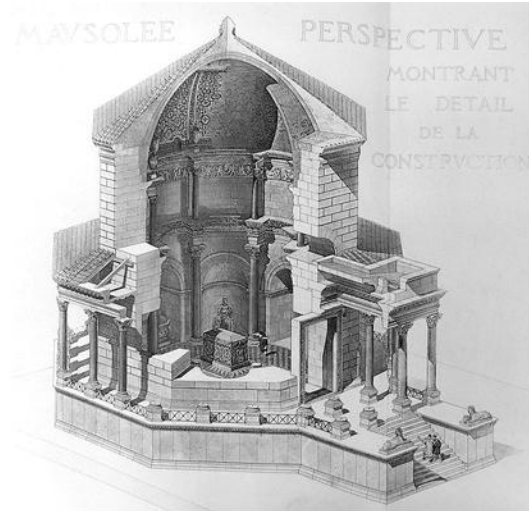


Figure III-3: Comparison of similarities between A) Reconstruction of Constantinian Phase of Lateran Baptistery (from Brandt, "Il Battistero lateranense," 2001), and B) Reconstruction of Mausoleum of Diocletian (from E. Hébrard and J. Zeiller, 1912).

illustrates Ambrose's conceptual link between baptistery and tomb. Secondly, a primary entry axis was established in the baptistery by the addition of Sixtus' porch, in which the infinitely radiating circle was disrupted by a single, primary entrance. The movement of entering the baptistery, especially during ritual processions, was likened to the movement one might have experienced entering one of the above mentioned mausolea. Therefore, the spatial experience one had while moving through the baptistery would have been similar to those of progressing through the mausolea.

Ambrose of Milan (374-97 CE) suggested that the form of the baptistery was purposefully designed to remind the baptizand of the spatial qualities of a mausoleum or tomb.³⁴ In this way, the baptistery's roughly circular form seems to borrow shape, volume and spatial order from the imperial mausolea. This does not, however, suggest that the baptistery is the direct architectural descendant of the mausoleum tradition. It is in these formal qualities alone that the baptistery can be associated to the mausoleum tradition. Its association is limited to the knowledge base of the architects, in that the centrally planned form goes beyond the mausoleum into multiple typologies that include the palace, temple, and *domus*. The complexity of associations for the Lateran Baptistery also expand when considering the qualities of light, water and decoration, for in these the baptistery related more to the tradition of Roman baths.

The Lateran Baptistery was built on top of the remains that are thought to have once been the baths of a private *domus*—at one time thought to have been the papal palace (Fig. III-4).³⁵ The design and location of the font was inspired by the *frigidarium* of the bath that existed before it; the position of the bath was transcribed to the font at the arc center point of the apsidal room. The baptistery's fourth-century circular foundation initiated by Constantine was inserted into the remains of the *domus*

³⁴ Ambrose, *De Sacramentis*, 3.1.

³⁵ For a more detailed look at the excavation finding see: Pelliccioni, *Le nuove scoperte sulle origini del battistero lateranense*, (Memoire 12, 1. Citta del Vaticano: 1973), also see Maureen Miller, *The Bishop's Palace: Architecture and Authority in Medieval Italy* (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 2000).

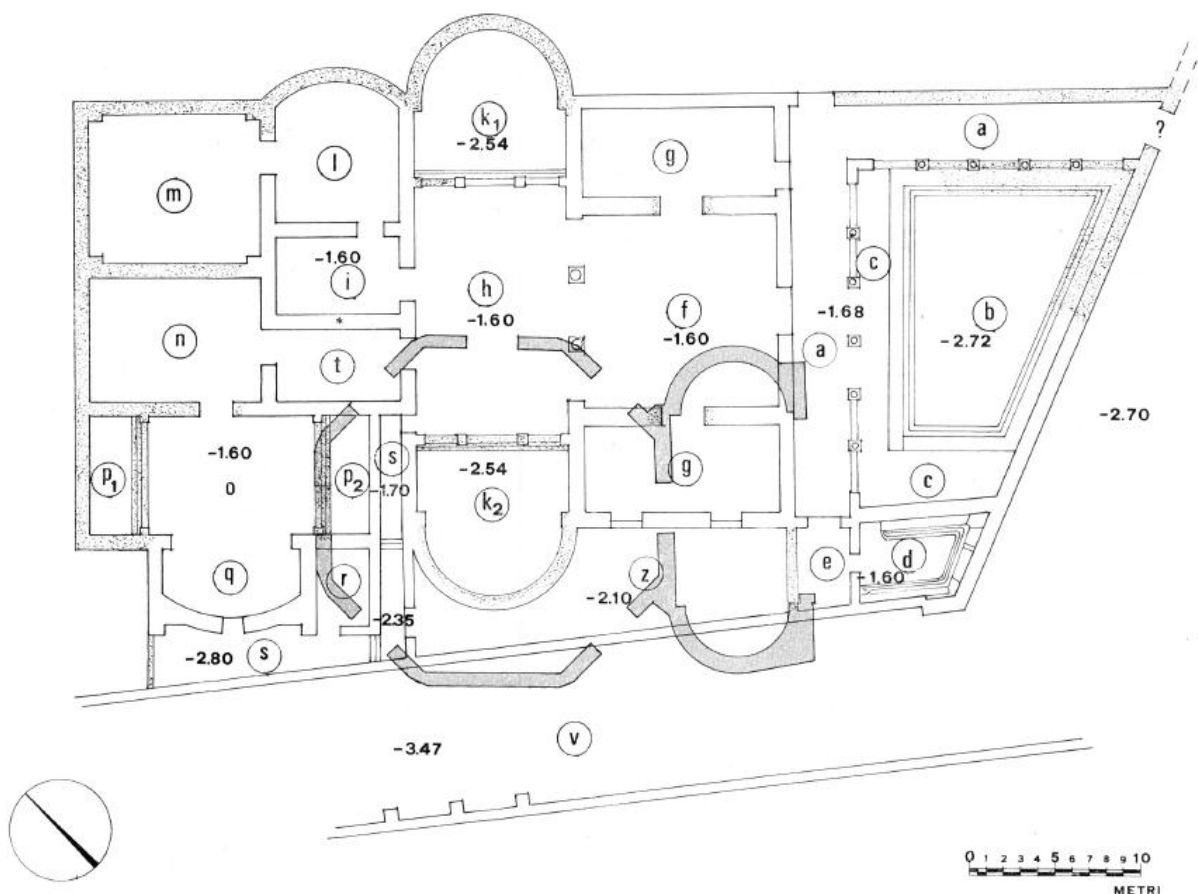


Figure III-4: Baptistery superimposed on domus bath (from Pelliccioni, *Le nuove scoperte sulle origini del Battistero lateranense*, 1973).

to enclose the new font. The octagonal hall was then built on top of the circular foundation from the bath complex. Other fourth-century baths likely influenced the form and spatial qualities of the Lateran Baptistery. An example of this is found in Ostia Antica at the Forum Baths (Fig. III-5).

The Forum Baths adjoining the southeast corner of Ostia's public forum were designed with a series of interestingly shaped rooms that protruded into the southern *palaestra*. The octagonal *heliocaminus* room was used for sunbathing, deriving its name from the Greek word for the sun, *helios*. The four southernmost edges of the room include large windows to allow in the most possible sunlight for the sunbathers. Potentially, this was also an example of ancient passive heating techniques for spaces such as the *heliocaminus*. Similar heating and light-use strategies were used in the *Heliocaminus* Baths at Hadrian's Villa in Tivoli. Ancient architects were indeed familiar with considering the sun's light and heat throughout the day. The Lateran Baptistery likewise seems to have responded to the sun's light very much like some of these baths.

When Sixtus III's architects redesigned the interior and added the bi-apsidal porch/vestibule, they must have recognized the intriguing lighting condition found in the original Constantinian phase. Each side of the baptistery contained large windows and large doors, which in some sense effectively eroded away the walls in favor of allowing an abundance of light into the space. In this way, the baptistery began to juxtapose two seemingly different design strategies: one of the thick-walled and dimly-lit mausoleum featuring soaring walls and well-lit interiors like many Roman baths. The result was rather startling and extremely unique for the first self-standing baptistery. On one hand, the baptistery could remind the community of the metaphorical death baptism represented; on the other hand, the well-lit and soaring interior would have inspired the baptizand with the promises of heaven.

The Lateran Baptistery can only be associated with mausolea and baths in-as-much as it reused architectural forms and ideals. The search for a typological ancestor of the baptistery has been proven

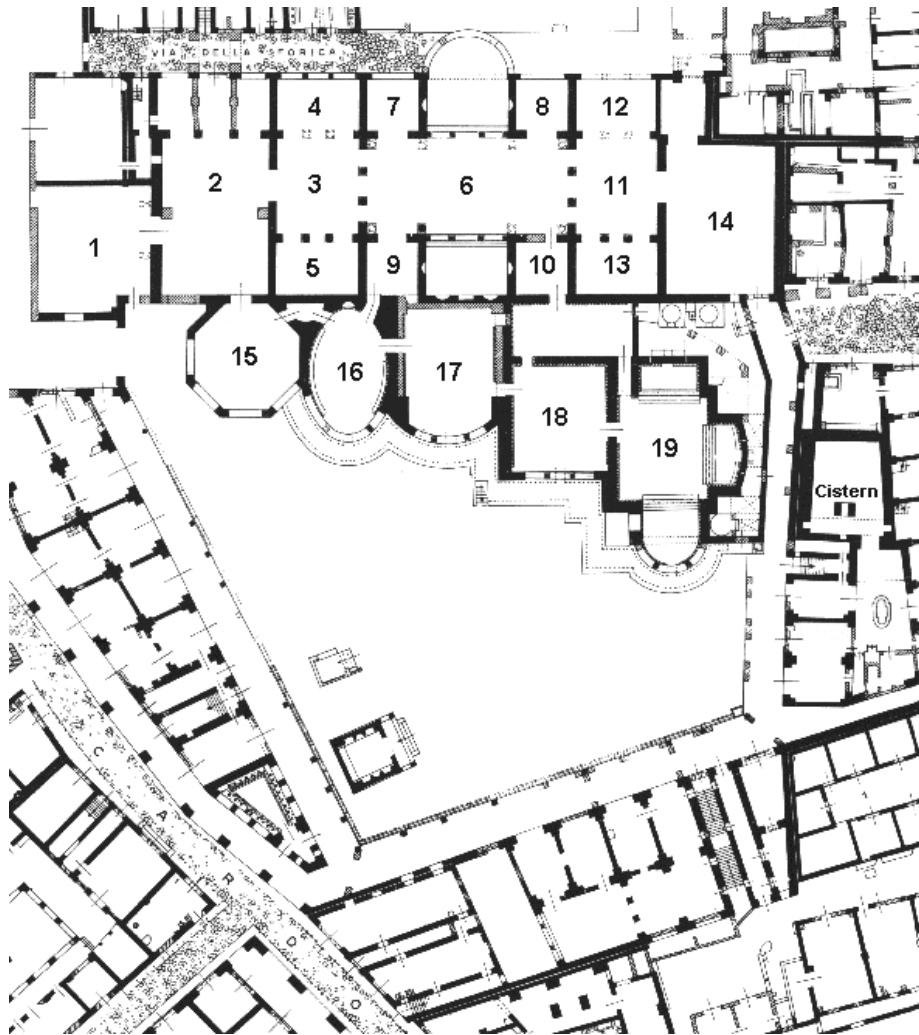


Figure III-5: Plan of the Forum Baths in Ostia Antica (from Ostia-Antica.org, after SO I, <http://www.ostia-antica.org/regio1/12/12-6.htm>, accessed April 3, 2012).

rather fruitless, particularly because there is no evidence that the baptistery has any such physical origins.³⁶ However, the baptistery does clearly implement design ideas from the mausoleum and the bath, and therefore can be associated through the architectural strategies discussed above. Nonetheless, the Lateran Baptistery actually begins the formation of its own typology that organizes itself around the baptism ritual; thus the baptistery derives the major architectural distinctions from the needs of a sacred rite for the initiation into a community.

The links found in the shape and structural form of the Lateran Baptistery were only a part of the space's interplay with Roman memory. Ambrose made the association with the mausoleum by likening a baptistery to a tomb. Jerome, likewise, said that baptism had a bath-like nature of baptism.³⁷ In a letter, Sixtus literally calls the ritual a "bath of regeneration."³⁸ The font resembled one of the pools found in the various public and imperial baths, and the ritual was equated to a spiritual cleansing much like physical cleansing practiced in the baths. The Lateran Baptistery even employed seven statues of stags and a statue of a lamb pouring water out of their mouths into the pool—statuary were also popular in imperial baths, so such an installation would have been familiar. All these things show how the baptistery took on different aspects from the physical environments of the ancient mausolea as well as the baths. The Lateran Baptistery was neither a mausoleum nor a bath, but its own type of building built for the initiation of believers.

³⁶ For a more detailed discussion of the understanding of structure and form, see Olof Brandt, "Understanding the Structures of Early Christian Baptisteries." In *Ablution, Initiation, and Baptism: Late Antiquity, Early Judaism, and Early Christianity 2*, ed. David Hellholm et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), 1587-1609.

³⁷ Jerome spoke negatively about the Roman tradition of bathing, criticizing the practice's indiscretions and immoralities: "He who has bathed in Christ has no need for a second bath," (Letters, 14.10). Though his comments may be hyperbole, the comparison is legitimate. The act of baptism was very much like the action of bathing. In the early periods of baptism, the practice was full immersion, and for all intents and purposes it was a bath.

³⁸ Sixtus III, Letter IV, in *Patrologia Latina*, 50.0593.

Constantine's architects were clearly making efforts to create a unique baptistery with links to memories of Rome's earlier buildings, evoking a sense of *romanitas*. In the fifth century, Sixtus continued these efforts of drawing upon cultural memory by maintaining the general form and shape of the fourth-century baptistery, renovating the interior above the font, and adding a grand porch to the already suggested primary ritual axis. Sixtus' desire to recapture an ancient memory of Rome would have been understood as soon as the visitor viewed the reused architectural fragments in the front porch, for the pope's fifth-century architects sought to reflect upon a memory of the past. The memory was demonstrated through the use of *spolia*. *Spolia* is material reused from old buildings in new construction— it is alternately stripped from an original building, recovered from a ruin, or found in a building material storage yard.

The primary recognizable materials implemented by Sixtus were the porphyry columns, entablatures, bases and capitals. These materials evoked a notion that was inherently imperial, and it was in this notion that the building was invested with an interestingly paradoxical complexity. Viewing the grandiose porch, a visitor to the baptistery would not have necessarily been able to discern which category of munificence the baptistery fell into: imperial or papal. In fact, the baptistery layered these two classes within its identity during the Sistine phase.

We know that the front porch of the Lateran Baptistery contained an abundance of *spolia*. The monolithic porphyry columns were *spolia* from an unknown source; the unique bases, capitals and architraves can each be identified as coming from, at the very least, a particular era, and perhaps more specifically from buildings under imperial sponsorship due to the emperor's prerogatives over porphyry prior to the fifth century. Therefore, each of these materials was certainly identifiable as imperial, and the most evident were the porphyry columns, simply because of their materiality.

In late antiquity, porphyry was a precious resource closely controlled for the exclusive use of the emperors, and, again, the *Liber Pontificalis* recounts that Constantine provided the porphyry columns inside the baptistery.³⁹ Where Sixtus retrieved the extra two columns for the porch is unknown. Presumably, however, Sixtus would have either acquired the material with blessings from the emperors [Theodosius II and Valentinian III] or the imperial control over porphyry had broken down; the extent of Sixtus' interactions with the emperors, though, would be speculative. Nonetheless, Sixtus probably acquired these two columns from a local storage yard and implemented them into his design in order to exploit the meaning inherently provided by the materiality of the columns.

Porphyry was primarily used in Roman imperial monuments and statues. The purple color of the polished stone reminded one of imperial royalty, thus explaining its guarded use by the emperors. Because the emperor controlled the porphyry quarry and it held an intrinsic value, imperial sarcophaguses like the ones for Helena and Constantina, Constantine's mother and daughter respectively, also used the stone (Fig. III-6). Emperors would also use the stone in imperially-sponsored temples and statues. This was clearly seen in two extant monuments dedicated to Roma, the deified personification of Rome. First, this is demonstrated in the *cellas* dedicated to Venus and Roma in the Temple of Venus and Rome; the columns, floors and even the lost statue of Roma were carved from the imperial stone (Fig. III-7). Secondly, the prestige of the stone is seen in another statue depicting a seated Roma (Fig. III-8).⁴⁰ Roma was clothed in a porphyry cloak while her hands, feet and head were made from cast bronze. Imperial sponsorship is clear. Porphyry evidently carried some sense of the meaning of *romanitas*. Porphyry was often used in opulent displays—in Maxentius' renovations of the

³⁹ LP, I, 234.

⁴⁰ The colossal statue is now housed in the Naples National Archaeological Museum. The statue now depicts Apollo seated and playing the lyre. The hands, head and feet which now depict Apollo instead of Roma were carved from a white marble as restored by a Renaissance sculptor; they were originally made from bronze.



Figure III-6: Porphyry Sarcophagi of A) Helena, and B) Constantina (photos by Holly Hayes).



Figure III-7: Roma *cella* of the Temple of Venus and Rome 4th C. (photo by D. Tyler Thayer).



Figure III-8: Statue of Apollo, formerly of Roma, 3rd or 4th C. (photo by D. Tyler Thayer).

Temple of Venus and Rome, for example—to link the emperor’s munificence with local cults to reinstate *romanitas* through sponsorship.

Emperors also used porphyry in the public and religious buildings they had sponsored. For example, the Pantheon utilizes beautiful porphyry revetments in the geometric marble patterns on the floors and walls. The notion of royalty was also closely linked to the Rotunda of Maxentius on the Via Sacra—erroneously named the Temple of Divus Romulus in the seventeenth century—where a large bronze door was framed by a heterogeneous collection of *spolia*. The trabeation that framed the door included two reused porphyry columns bridged by a reused entablature that did not quite fit. The use of *spolia*, including the porphyry columns, signaled imperial sponsorship and communicated to the visitors from the Via Sacra a presence of the emperor himself in the forum district.

The arrangement of *spolia* in the Lateran Baptistery’s monumental porch closely resembles the Rotunda of Maxentius, built more than a century earlier (Fig. III-9). Both monuments created a threshold framed by porphyry columns and reused structural elements. Interestingly, the Lateran Baptistery goes beyond the Rotunda of Maxentius in its scale and use of *spolia*. Thus, it appears that Sixtus was concerned with evoking a memory of imperial Rome through the ideals associated with the displayed *spolia*.

Aside from the porphyry columns, the notion of imperial *romanitas* is further understood through the columns’ bases, capitals, and the architrave that spans the porch’s threshold. The fifth-century architects reused capitals that date to a Trajanic or Hadrianic period and originate from the Temple of Venus Genetrix in the Forum of Caesar (Fig. III-10).⁴¹ If the viewer recognized the capitals’ origin from the Forum of Caesar, this would have greatly reinforced the notion of imperial *romanitas* in

⁴¹ Hansen, 68-71.



Figure III-9: Rotunda of Maxentius, early 4th C. (photo by D. Tyler Thayer).

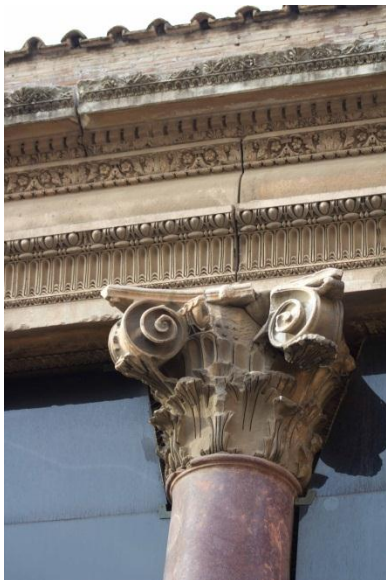


Figure III-10: *Spolia* capital and architraves at the front porch (photo by D. Tyler Thayer).

the porch. The unusually ornate bases also date to the same period, but their origin is not currently known (Fig. III-11). The architrave that spans the opening of the porch is also from the Hadrianic time period, resembling the entablatures from the Temple of Hadrian in the Campus Martius (Fig. III-12).⁴² The same entablatures were also used in the double arcade that circumvents the font. These were set up so that the backsides faced out to provide a smooth surface for the engraved verses—according to the *Liber Pontificalis*, Sixtus III supplied these verses.⁴³

The font's arcade also displayed reused capitals from the Hadrianic and Trajanic eras, but they were reworked under the restoration provided by Urban VIII in the seventeenth century.⁴⁴ During the Sistine phase of the baptistery, the eight porphyry columns on the interior carried four Ionic capitals set up on the primary north-south axis, two Composite capitals on the west side, and two Corinthian capitals on the east side (Fig. III-13).

John Onians and various additional scholars have suggested that the different orders presented by the capitals above the font might have played a symbolic role during the baptism ritual.⁴⁵ The thought would be that as one entered the baptistery, he or she proceeded along the primary axis marked by the Ionic capitals. Then, during baptism, one would be re-aligned on the Corinthian-Composite axis. The elegance and hierarchy of the Corinthian and Composite orders might have reminded the baptizand of the grandeur and excellence of heaven. Thus, the two axes were established to create a juxtaposition of ideas based on the regeneration of one's self in the font. As one was baptized and initiated into the community, one was elevated in identity, from catechumen to one of the faithful (cf. Fig. III-13).

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ LP, I, (ed. L. Duchesne), 234.

⁴⁴ Note the Barberini Bee included in much of the reworked architectural elements of the present day baptistery.

⁴⁵ John Onians, *Bearers of Meaning* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 62-3.



Figure III-11: *Spolia* base and column at front porch (photo by D. Tyler Thayer).



Figure III-12: Remains of the Temple of Hadrian at the Campus Martius (photo by D. Tyler Thayer).

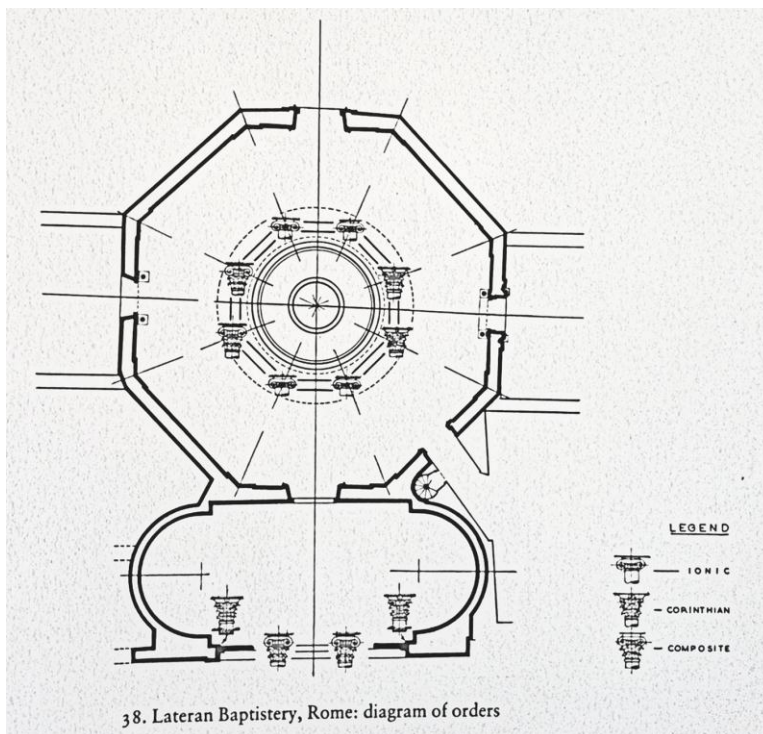


Figure III-13: Diagram of capitals (from John Onians, *Bearers of Meaning: The Classical Orders in Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance*, 1988).

The hypothetical reconstruction of this meaning raises a question. Were the capitals indeed meant to be interpreted as symbols of the transforming purpose of water during baptism? In the Lateran Baptistery we have little evidence to prove the scenario either way. It is known that Ambrose of Milan used architectural features and spaces as a reference for the ideas he was trying to communicate to his followers, and as such, the bishop and priests of the Lateran may have similarly used the arrangement of capitals to reinforce the baptism ceremony of the Lateran Baptistery. However, this is not certain, even if plausible. In fact, it is an intriguing thought. If the capitals were indeed meant to represent theological ideas, then the choreography of the ritual was intended to engage the architectural fabric of the baptistery. Thus, various subtle connotations, recognized by scholars today, would have been critical to the interactions of the baptizand to his or her spatial environment. Either way, the surest of explanations may be that the capitals should be associated with Sixtus' use of *spolia*.

The Lateran Baptistery's eight porphyry columns that surrounded the font each had different heights and diameters. To match the varying column sizes, the capitals also varied in order and size. The Ionic capitals were shallow in depth and sit atop the tallest and thickest of the porphyry columns. The Corinthian and Composite capitals, however, were carved with sprouting acanthus leaves resulting in a deeper profile. These sat atop the shorter and more slender of the porphyry columns. The result was an irrefutable heterogeneity in the structural parts of the Lateran Baptistery.

The heterogeneous mixture of *spolia* was a consistent theme throughout the baptistery. The porch threshold and the interior arcade were both completely made up of *spolia*. The *spolia* were clearly from a multitude of various types of buildings and places, thus resulting in a variety of orders, shapes and sizes; their common factor was their imperial provenance. The parts were unified in their inherent nature; therefore, there was a deliberate and very exacting melding of the heterogeneous. The different parts were carefully fashioned in such a way that they made a seemingly cohesive whole. This

cohesiveness is most intriguing. The parts varied, but they all produced a similar sense of the past; in effect, the *spolia* contained a memory of the past by presenting a cohesive imperial *romanitas*.

Through a visitor's engagement of the baptistery space, the structural *spolia* and the decoration—the decoration will be discussed in the following chapter—were all manufacturing a memory of imperial Rome. The imperial nature of the building would have been evident by the abundance of *spolia*, which is inherently memorable. The fifth-century architects were creating a link to the past through the new construction in order to improve on the imperial heritage already provided by Constantine a century earlier. The evidence for Sixtus' renaissance is provided only by the edifices he built, including the classical basilica styling of S. Maria Maggiore and the classical-imperial renovation of the Lateran Baptistery.

Sixtus thoughtfully issued the assembly of materials that adorned the baptistery with the materiality fit for an imperial sponsored building. Textual and archaeological evidences have suggested that the Lateran Baptistery's porphyry columns were indeed erected under the Sixtus renovation. The author of the *Liber Pontificalis* explains:

At the Constantinian basilica [Sixtus] provided adornment over the font, which had not been there before; he set up the hard porphyry columns, eight in number, in the Baptistery of the Constantinian basilica; these had been collected from the time of the emperor Constantine, and he erected them with their entablatures and adorned them with verses.⁴⁶

Sixtus' architects were participating in the manufacturing of memories. The content of the *Liber Pontificalis*—which scholars believe the church started compiling in the sixth-century from records in a

⁴⁶ LP, I, (ed. L. Duchesne), 234: "*Hic constituit columnas in baptisterium basilicae Constantinianae, quas a tempore Constantini Augusti fuerant congregates, ex metallo purphyretico numero VIII...*" Trans. R. Davies, *Book of Pontiffs* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1989), 37.

papal archive which may have been in the Lateran⁴⁷—suggests that the interest in Constantine’s patronage and activity at the Lateran continued well into the Middle Ages. It is impossible to know whether later myths were the result of the imperial meanings found in Sixtus’ renovation, but the specifics of Sixtus’ thoughts are not necessary to see that his building program was directly incorporating imperial themes into the façade, internal structure, and decorations of the baptistery.

It is possible that Sixtus was choreographing an earlier form of myth-making about the history and relationship between Constantine and Silvester. The church popularized the legend of Constantine’s baptism in the Lateran. At the latest, it began in the end of the late antique period and it continued to grow through the medieval ages, as exemplified by the *Actus Silvestri*, a collection of legends about Pope Silvester.⁴⁸ By remembering an overly-emphasized closeness between Silvester (314-35 CE) and Constantine (306-37 CE), Sixtus may have been creating a stage in which his relationship with the emperor Valentinian III (425-55 CE) was publicly displayed. At this time, Valentinian was the one of the few legitimate emperors who was actively lived in Rome—at least for some of his reign—as the western Roman emperor. It is known that there were many laws passed during the reign of Valentinian III and Theodosius II (408-50 CE), in which Christianity was turning into the only legally viable religion. One law decreed during the pontificate of Sixtus III forbade pagan sacrifices, and pagan temples and shrines were to be destroyed and purified by the sign of the cross.⁴⁹ The link between

⁴⁷ See Kate Blair-Dixon, “Memory and authority in six-century Rome: the *Liber Pontificalis* and the *Collectio Avellana*,” in *Religion, Dynasty, and Patronage in Early Christian Rome: 300-900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

⁴⁸ The historical myth-making of Constantine and Silvester is corroborated by the *Liber Pontificalis*, in which the author claims that Constantine was baptized by Silvester in the font of the Lateran Baptistery (*LP*, I, 174). However, this statement is in contradiction with the history provided by Eusebius of Caesarea (263-339 CE), in which Constantine was recorded being baptized by the Arian bishop, Eusebius of Nicomedia on his deathbed. The error lies within the character of the first half of the *Liber Pontificalis*. The LP as originally composed in the seventh century, well after the events recorded, was a mixture of factual historical document, legend, purposeful alterations and human error. The document can be seen a blending of a fragmented history with the legends popular to the church at the beginning of the Medieval Ages.

⁴⁹ *Codex Theodosianus*, 16.10.25.

Sixtus III and Valentinian III is important, as it suggests the probable encouragement by the emperor for Sixtus' building campaign.

Interestingly, when a person first visited the Lateran Baptistery, it would have been quite difficult to perceive an overly Christian or Sistine theme. If not for its proximity to the basilica, the baptistery would primarily communicate a notion of imperial sponsorship and homage to a *romanitas* ideal. One would not have necessarily seen indications of Sixtus in the façade of the building—there were no known inscriptions and no symbols signaling Christian affiliation on the exterior. Instead, one would have had to see the memory of Rome through a historical connection between emperor and church. This would be evident by the adjacency of the baptistery to the basilica and its primary spatial involvement within the Lateran complex as a whole. The baptistery is shrouded in the memory associated with imperial *romanitas*. Thus, the meaning of the building had to be formulated with that heritage in mind. The Lateran Baptistery was imperial by construction and Christian by ritual.

An issue is raised in relation to the traditional role of patronage in Rome within the Lateran Baptistery of Sixtus III. Sixtus obtains and effectively utilizes *spolia* from past imperial monuments in the Lateran, so that he appeared to be bestowing the essential emblems of past great emperors upon this sacred building. Imperial patronage of this type would often be associated with the creation of public monuments. Like an emperor, Sixtus was participating in a new role for the pope as patron in his use of these materials. The new role challenges the old conceptions of the patron.

The baptistery was not a public building in the same sense as a bath would have been. Though, admittedly, anyone may have technically been able to enter the building—it is not known—its primary use was for those who were being initiated through baptism. In those terms, the baptistery was for the community of believers and those about to become members, less so for the Roman public. The patronage of Sixtus was therefore like that of an emperor donating a structure to Rome, but instead as a

pope to the church. In the architecture of the Lateran Baptistery, Sixtus was recalling themes of *romanitas* in order to legitimize the growing power of the pope, likening his buildings to past imperial buildings. In fact, Sixtus was literally taking parts of buildings from the past and renewing their purpose in a new construction for the Christian church, but again not for Rome. Sixtus' actions demonstrate the future inclusion of Rome's identity within the Catholic Church.

Sixtus' use of *spolia* was for the implementation of Roman memory within the baptistery. The baptistery itself was a building designed expressly for the purposes of the central event: baptism. In baptism, the issue of memory is of foremost importance, for baptism was about the creation of a new memory for the baptizand as a part of the larger communal memory for the local believers. In the Sistine Lateran Baptistery, a baptized Christian would have been anointed, if not baptized, by the pope, the chief leader of the orthodox Christian world. A Christian baptized in the Lateran would identify with the pope, and thus his or her memory would associate the baptismal event with place and person. An imperial-like place exalted an emperor-like leader.

Sixtus was effectively creating a ritual experience in which he and the baptizand were set in the center of a building that exuded deeply integrated themes of imperial *romanitas*. Sixtus demonstrated in the Lateran Baptistery the church's ability to appropriate ancient Roman themes and ideals in order to reinvent their purposes within the context of the Christian worldview for the unity of the orthodox church.

CHAPTER IV

The Regeneration Motif: Mosaics and Inscriptions

As the reach and power of the Christian community grew in the fifth century, so did the church's appropriation of ancient imagery that conveyed themes of renewal and prosperity. Sixtus III's architectural projects, primarily seen in the Lateran Baptistery, effectively typified the reuse of iconographic motifs much in the same terms as his reuse of *spolia*. Typically, the term *spolia* designates a modern understanding of physical building elements reused in the construction of a new building or monument. The term, however, aptly expresses the reasons behind Sixtus' reuse of ancient imagery motifs in the mosaics of the Lateran Baptistery. Here, Sixtus III implemented ancient imagery types to communicate a new Christian message of regeneration, which was emphasized and conceptually framed by eight Sistine poetical couplets, engraved in *spolia* architraves, which expounded the theology of baptism.

The Sistine Lateran Baptistery demonstrated the appropriation of *spolia* consistent with the theme of *romanitas* that triggered associations with its imperial patronage. Sixtus reformulated the various historical meanings associated with the *spolia* and the baptistery's formal typological associations in order to set a stage in which the fifth-century baptism ritual would take place. The baptistery and all its symbolism were crafted for the express purpose of highlighting the ritual that took place in the central font. Sixtus created an environment in which the details, symbolism, and historical associations of his many references to the past all inherently conveyed the concept of *romanitas* he must have appreciated, prompting an association with the collective ideologies of a prospering Roman

Empire. The references to the past allowed the Lateran Baptistery to gain historical legitimacy, in which the sacrament of baptism would be highlighted. Because the focus was on baptism, the imagery adduced themes of regeneration. As will be demonstrated below, the theme of regeneration was displayed in images and inscriptions.

The cultural associations exhibited in the baptistery were tied to baptism; because baptism in the Lateran was a Christian sacrament, the interpretations of the motifs took on biblical tones. Importance was placed on the ritual, for baptism was essential to one's conversion and thus centrally important an individual's Christian identity. The baptistery's dialogue with memory started with the structural associations with the Roman past, but then it continued with the formation of new memories as one experienced the ritual space. The ritual procession was replete with the descriptive language of regeneration. In this way, the formal structure and spatial characteristics of the baptistery formed the cultural context in which the theatrical ritual of regeneration took place. Therefore, the meaning of the space focused on the importance of baptism: to the regeneration of one's soul and the joining as a renewed self in a wider community.

Sixtus created an interesting paradoxical juxtaposition of meanings by his sponsorship of the baptistery renovations. If in ancient Rome the use of porphyry was reserved for the emperors, then the Lateran Baptistery presents a seeming contradiction that arises with the unusual papal sponsorship that implemented porphyry throughout the baptistery. Sixtus III achieved an interesting layering of meanings that, perhaps, demonstrated his desire to establish an imperial-like papacy. On one level, the baptistery presented the ritual with a built context that typified imperial sponsorship. On a second level, however, the imagery and inscriptions suggested that the true meaning of the building was not explained by the imperial themes, but explained by the baptism sacrament. The physical context that

defined the *romanitas* essentially represented the importance of the sacrament, and allowed it to be understood as essential to the Christian religion.

The baptistery demonstrated the importance of baptism. Therefore, the imagery must be explained in light of that important sacrament. In fact, the placement of the baptistery in Rome allows one to understand the mosaics more fully, for the cultural associations of imperial Rome explains the motifs used in the mosaics. The imagery in the mosaics specifically reflects motifs found in several Augustan era monuments, including the Ara Pacis Augustae and the Augustus of Prima Porta. Most importantly, the acanthus vine scrolls of the apse mosaic nearly replicate that acanthus vine decorations on the Ara Pacis. It's clear that the context provided clues to reading the mosaics.

The mosaics must have been executed by an artist familiar with ancient imagery, for the apse mosaics employed these themes in a way that reflected the sacrament of baptism. The bi-apsidal porch contained two apse mosaics that make up the primary source for the evidence of this study. In addition, as discussed in previous chapters, the Lateran Baptistery utilized a barrel vault over the ambulatory during the pontificate of Sixtus III. These vaults probably incorporated mosaic decorations much like the vaulted ambulatory in the mausoleum of Constantina in northern Rome, now S. Costanza. The existence of the ambulatory mosaics are recorded by the Renaissance scholar Onofrio Panvinio (1529-68 CE), but unfortunately the content of those mosaics are uncertain.⁵⁰

The eastern apse mosaic is still extant—though it has been heavily restored over the centuries, including Renaissance restoration where paint was used to fill in sections where tesserae have fallen.⁵¹ The mosaic is imbedded within the same mortar construction as the porch's eastern apse.⁵² Therefore, the mosaic dates to the fifth century, the same century as the porch. Scholars most often have

⁵⁰ Brandenburg, 2005, 43.

⁵¹ Brandenburg highlights the restored aspect of the apse mosaic, though, he does not find reason that the content is still largely fifth century in origin (Brandenburg, 2005, 43-48).

⁵² Brandt and Guidobaldi, 2008, 241-243; Pelliccioni, 1973, 101-104.

attributed the porch and apse mosaics to the restoration done under Sixtus III.⁵³ However, some of the latest archeological studies performed by Brandt and Guidobaldi have suggested that the fifth-century renovations should be viewed as a continuous building campaign initiated by Sixtus but actually executed during the pontificates of three popes: Sixtus III, Leo the Great, and Hilarus.⁵⁴ Thus, the division of what work belongs to which pontificate is unclear; however, the porch is decidedly the first of the additions attached to the octagonal baptistery and therefore most likely a part of Sixtus' renovation. The color palette used in the apse mosaics was different from the one used in the oratories added under Hilarus—the apse mosaics shown figures on a beautiful deep blue ground, while the oratories used a glimmering gold ground. This suggests the vestibule apse mosaics were created at a different time than the S. Croce, St. John the Baptist, and St. John the Evangelist oratory mosaics. This reinforces the attribution of the vestibule apse mosaics to Sixtus.

The eastern apse mosaic is the primary artistic element that contributes to the interpretation of an artistic program initiated by Sixtus III in the baptistery. In this apse Sixtus further appropriated ancient themes and reformulated the meanings associated with the motifs to convey the Christian meaning of baptism.

The overall unifying artistic device in the eastern apse mosaic is the acanthus vine that establishes the geometric rhythm of the mosaic (Fig. IV-1). The mosaic is divided horizontally into three parts. The central, and largest, of the horizontal zones contains the acanthus vine. The acanthus whorls sprout from the ground in the center of the apse. From the central calyx grows a vertical green tree-like trunk that consists of a series of ovals stacked on top of one another, representing the vertical growth and blooms on the vine stalk. To each side of the calyx spread the geometrically-ordered acanthus

⁵³ Brandt and Guidobaldi, 2008, 276; Giovenale, 1929, 117-127; Brandt, 1998, 48; Brandenburg, 2005, 47-48; Pelliccioni, 1973, 99-100.

⁵⁴ Brandt and Guidobaldi, 2008, 272-282.



Figure IV-1: Eastern apse mosaic (photo by D. Tyler Thayer).

whorls. There are eight whorls—four on each side—that uniformly grow up towards the apex of the apse.

Embedded within the acanthus vine are blooms and flowers, displayed at frontal and oblique angles. The vine whorls circle and frame these flowery blooms throughout the mosaic. The flowery blooms begin to take the shape of a cross, though this may simply be coincidence. Above, six golden and jewel-studded crosses hang from the upper realm indicating the heavens. At the ground line of the conch, the acanthus grows from a grassy field that spreads from one side of the apse to the other.

The acanthus leaves, vine, and blooms were clear references to ancient Roman imagery. The acanthus vine was nearly a direct replication of the decoration found on the Ara Pacis Augustae altar (Fig. IV-2), which was built between 13-9 BCE to honor and preserve the memory of the peace brought forth by the Roman Emperor Augustus.⁵⁵ The acanthus leaves and vine scroll were incorporated into the Ara Pacis as a symbol of continuous renewal and peace in an act of preserving the memory of Augustus by the Roman Senate.⁵⁶ The Lateran Baptistery's eastern apse mosaic employed the same acanthus vocabulary in its mosaic. The symbolism, however, had been appropriated by the Christians as a motif of renewal, growth, and the eternal life given by God. The similarities between the meaning found in the Augustan altar and the meaning ascribed to the acanthus scrolls in the early Christian church are easily perceived, and the visual connections would have solidified a link to the Roman past for anyone who entered the baptistery.

⁵⁵ The Ara Pacis altar's use of the acanthus scroll is significant in that the program of the monument was intentionally symbolic, using decorative imagery and motifs to communicate a sense of Roman ideology.

⁵⁶ The purpose of the altar is described in *The Deeds of the Divine Augustus* (*Res Gestae Divi Augusti*, 14 CE) recorded by Augustus in his funerary inscription. He states: "12. By the authority of the Senate, a part of the praetors and tribunes of the plebs, with consul Quintus Lucretius and the leading men, was sent to meet me in Campania, which honor had been decreed for no one but me until that time. When I returned to Rome from Spain and Gaul, having successfully accomplished matters in those provinces, when Tiberius Nero and Publius Quintilius were consuls (13 B.C.E.), the senate voted to consecrate the altar of August Peace in the field of Mars for my return, on which it ordered the magistrates and priests and Vestal virgins to offer annual sacrifices." (Trans. Thomas Bushnell, <http://classics.mit.edu/Augustus/deeds.html>)



Figure IV-2: Ara Pacis acanthus vine scroll decoration (photo by D. Tyler Thayer).

The Ara Pacis was commissioned by the Senate to commemorate the restoration of the Rome as a place of prosperity and power. The vines probably originated from an early natural motif that was popular decoration on buildings, monuments, statues, and even pottery throughout the republic.⁵⁷ The vine on the Ara Pacis created a framework in which imagery connoting fertility and abundance was displayed clearly, and in which every creature and blooming flower suggested the growth of nature.⁵⁸ In this sense, the altar was about renewal, abundance, prosperity, and the Augustan peace that created these attributes in the Roman Empire. The acanthus vine was traditionally associated with the ideas of renewal, life, and even fertility; therefore, Augustus was communicating new Roman ideologies that he had restored after years of decay. Augustus pictured a Roman Empire full of life, and as such, Romans appreciated the vine for its symbolism of life, growth, prosperity, and peace. As Paul Zanker asserts, the vine and the imagery on the Ara Pacis were meant to “characterize the new age as a paradise on earth.”⁵⁹

Late antique Christians appropriated this imagery, but they employed the imagery in mosaics—allowing the acanthus to become the central focus of the half dome. When comparing the Ara Pacis acanthus panel with the Lateran Baptistery apse, the similarities are striking. The primary difference is found in the rigid order that the Christians created in their half dome mosaic. The Ara Pacis vine is symmetrical, but the vine was allowed to appear as if it grew without constraint; however, the fifth-century apse mosaic created a geometric order that regularized the entirety of the piece.

The appropriation and reuse of the imagery is undeniable. It is evident that Sixtus III and his artists were steeped in imperial art and propaganda, and that they understood the significance of such imagery. The message would have been quite potent; Sixtus was claiming attributes that Augustus

⁵⁷ Paul Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1988), 179-183.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 181.

deployed, those of life and abundance. The difference is that Sixtus was purposely appropriating these in order to reformulate the original meaning by implicating the ideas of baptism. The vine did not just convey the ideas of life, abundance, prosperity, and fertility. In the baptistery, it conveyed ideas of rebirth, regeneration into everlasting life, and the prosperity that awaited in paradise for all who were baptized. Here, we see the effectual Christian appropriation of pagan imagery, quite literally re-transcribed in the baptistery.

The upper part of the apse contains a different pictorial scene than the acanthus vines that dominate the center section. The apex depicts the graceful canopy of heaven (Fig. IV-3). The canopy represented the presence of God and the protections of the heavens. Directly under the canopy of heaven is a scene including animals and blooming flowers—once again recalling the Ara Pacis. In the center of the upper scene, there is a frontal view of a lamb surrounded by profiles of four doves, two on each side looking inwards toward the lamb. The lamb is central, on axis with the central stalk of the acanthus vine in the scene below. The lamb commands an important position in the piece; though it is small and relatively indecipherable from the rest of the objects that form the rhythm of the piece, the lamb is a subtle focal point.

Interestingly, the mosaic was conceived in such a way that each register of vine scrolls in the apse mosaic is presented as progressively diminishing in scale. Together, the eight whorl sprouts of the acanthus vine incrementally shrink as they rise toward the apex of the half dome. The six crosses are all of equal size and splendor; the crosses at the bottom band of the apse are all equal in size as well. Finally, the lamb and doves are all equal in size and placement. The distribution of the elements within the entire scheme of the mosaic is about order and symmetry. In this, the mosaic creates a symmetrically harmonious pattern from a collection of motifs.



Figure IV-3: Upper section detail of eastern apse (photo by D. Tyler Thayer).

The center is the hierarchical focus, yet, the symmetry of the composition and verticality of the stalk lead the eye towards the lamb, most likely representing the Lamb described in Revelation, “And I saw: and behold in the midst of...the four living creatures and in the midst of the ancients (elders), a Lamb standing, as it were slain.”⁶⁰ The Lamb was most likely interpreted to represent Jesus Christ, while the doves are less clear. However, the apocalyptic beasts mentioned in Revelation are absent. Therefore the passage only elucidates the representation of the Lamb; alternatively, the more prominent vine imagery would have clearly referenced Christ as the vine in the Gospel of John. Conceivably, the doves could have represented various ideas of holiness, peace, or the liberation of the soul and the freedom from earthly bonds through baptism—the mosaic connects these to themes of paradise. Often, the dove was associated with the presence of the Holy Spirit, as described at the baptism of Jesus where the Holy Spirit descended on him like a dove.⁶¹ In addition, the Ara Pacis nature theme also included many types of birds. In any case, the doves and Lamb would have been interpreted in terms of Christian iconographic themes and would have presented an image saturated with the connotations of the garden of paradise, holiness, life, and protection under the heavens.

Animals and plants portrayed in art was not a new idea in the fifth century. Take the Ara Pacis for example. Animals and nature abound in the altar’s decoration scheme, and on the whole they conveyed the idea of plentiful prosperity. In one of the panels on the Ara Pacis, the goddess Pax is likened to the earth goddess Tellus and to Venus, who is often associated with fertility.⁶² The earth goddess, Tellus, explains the depictions of crops, animals, and children as symbolizing abundance, prosperity, and fertility, linking to the ideas of life and fertility found in the acanthus plant (Fig. IV-4). The Lateran Baptistery, though, demonstrated the Christian appropriation of these types of images, causing them to mean something new to the Christian viewer. The lamb is no longer about animal

⁶⁰ Revelation 5:6, Douay-Rheims, 1790.

⁶¹ Luke 3:22; Matthew 3:16

⁶² Zanker, 1988, 174.



Figure IV-4: Ara Pacis, Pax Romana scene (photo by D. Tyler Thayer).

husbandry, but may refer to Christ or even Christians as sheep of the Good Shepherd. Likewise, the acanthus vine, which once carried a meaning of fertility and life, now speaks to the rebirth of the catechumen. Perhaps this recalled the imagery of the Gospel of John, where Jesus says, “I am the vine, you are the branches,” associated the baptizand with the regeneration of baptism.⁶³

The canopy of heaven bears a close resemblance to the imagery once used to convey a pagan ideal. Similar canopy imagery can be seen in the breastplate of the Augustus of Prima Porta (Fig. IV-5). The sculpted statue of Augustus was propaganda for the new emperor.⁶⁴ Statues like this would have been found throughout the empire during the reign of Augustus. The physical representation of the emperor paired with imagery of the favored gods was so effective for propagandistic purposes that other emperors continued the tradition throughout late antiquity.

The breastplate of Augustus of Prima Porta conveyed a very important idea about the stability and victory Augustus had brought to Rome. The scene depicts a Parthian returning the Roman standard to Augustus, forever memorializing Augustus’ restoration of Roman honor.⁶⁵ The entire scene unfolds under the protection of a canopy of the heavens spread by Caelus, the god of the sky or heavens.⁶⁶ This canopy is found at the top of the breastplate, just under the chin of Augustus. Augustus carefully gave credit and linked himself to the gods, for his claim was that his success was achieved under the protection and for the enjoyment of the gods. Sixtus may have adopted the canopy imagery to communicate similar protective attributes of God in Heaven.

This Christian appropriation of pagan imagery is similarly demonstrated in the use of the acanthus vine described above. The reuse of pagan imagery in the mosaics parallels Sixtus’ reuse of architectural *spolia*; in both, Sixtus appropriates old ideas to represent something new for the purposes

⁶³ John 15:5, Douay-Rheims, 1790.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 186-192.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ See Zanker, 1988, 189-192.



Figure IV-5: Detail of August of Prima Porta, breastplate (from Vatican Museums, http://mv.vatican.va/4_ES/pages/z-Patrons/MV_Patrons_04_03.html, accessed April 3, 2012).

of baptism. In other words, Sixtus appropriated and reformulated the cultural memory associated in both *spolia* and certain reused pagan imagery. The artistic elements found in this mosaic would have been recognizable to the average citizen, for the same imagery was used in imperial propaganda themes. For example, the vines on the Ara Pacis would have conveyed ideas of nature, growth and abundance to its viewer; similarly, Sible De Blaauw suggests the meaning of the vines would have reminded the viewer of the garden of paradise, instilling hope in the catechumen.⁶⁷

The Lateran Baptistery's lost apse mosaic presented an intriguing dichotomy when coupled with the eastern apse. Most scholars agree that the lost apse repeated the acanthus vine scroll pattern and replicated the same dark blue background as found in the eastern apse.⁶⁸ The other content of the mosaic, however, is only known through two sets of Renaissance sketches and descriptions: two sketches are from the work of Ciacconio and one sketch is from the Codex Escorialensis.⁶⁹ The first two sketches by Ciacconio show four shepherds with their herd (Fig. IV-6). The sketch found in the Codex Escorialensis shows a fenced chicken coop with a woman feeding the chickens (Fig. IV-7).

It is not known exactly how these images were set within the apse mosaic. Since the Ciacconio sketches and Codex Escorialensis sketches are merely vignettes of the apse mosaic, so a better understanding of the placement of the figures is simply unclear. The shepherds and chicken coop scene may have occupied the upper section of the conch, the same as the lamb and doves. Another possibility is that the vignettes were found underneath the acanthus vine scroll, standing on the grassy ground. The first option seems more plausible, since the ideas of paradise found in the upper portion of the eastern apse would have been reflected in the thoughtful and leisurely bucolic imagery of the shepherds.

⁶⁷ De Blaauw, 1994, 151. "*Gli alberi dale ricche fronde popolate da diversi animali che vi erano rappresentati erano infatti i simboli per tutti riconoscibili del giardino del paradiso.*"

⁶⁸ Brandenburg, 2005, 44-45

⁶⁹ Ciacconio, 1590, Cod. Vat. Lat. 5407, ff. 195 and 200; Codex Escorialensis (28, II, 12), in Hermann Egger, *Codex escorialensis, ein skizzenbuch aus der werkstatt Domenico Ghirlandaios* (Wien: A. Holder, 1906).



Figure IV-6: Lost apse sketches by Ciacconio (from Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, *Vat. lat.* 5407, ff. 195 and 200).

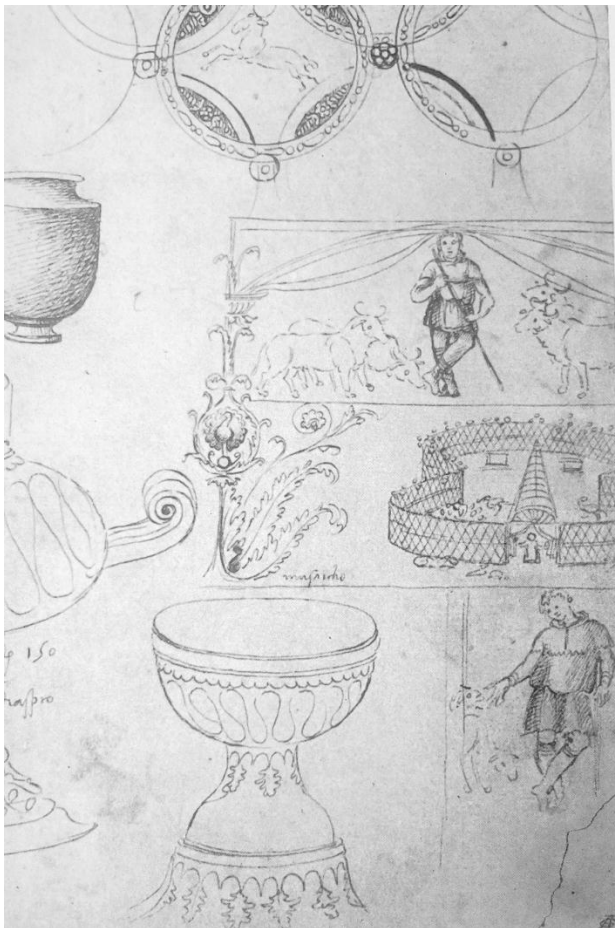


Figure IV-7: Lost apse sketch from the studio of Domenico Ghirlandaio (from Codex Escorialensis 28, II.12).

The iconography of this apse is subtly different than the extant apse mosaic. It seems logical that these vignettes would have been regularly sized like the Lamb, doves and crosses in the eastern apse. Therefore, the images would not have commanded the attention of the viewer to the degree of the acanthus vine. Yet, the seemingly unusual imagery cannot be ignored for its significance. Two thoughts prevail in the analysis of their meaning. First, the four shepherds might have recalled an earlier Christian Good Shepherd motif. This early motif is illustrated in a fresco on the ceiling of the Catacombs of Priscilla in Rome (Fig. IV-8); though, the mosaic would have lacked the singularity and emphasis on the central Good Shepherd symbolizing Jesus Christ. More plausibly, the shepherds and flocks could have represented an interest in bucolic imagery.

There seems to have been an interest in the lore of the pastoral life. Bucolic imagery would have also been reminiscent of ancient traditions of bucolic poetry—e.g. Virgil's *Georgics*—and as such would have presented an interesting complement to the imagery found in the eastern apse. The eastern apse presented figures representing spiritual ideologies which brought forth regeneration; whereas the lost western apse may have presented figures that represented the regeneration of a fallen world into a new paradise. The relaxed and thoughtful poses of the shepherds (cf. Fig. IV-6) reflected the leisure and repose of the promised paradise for all who were baptized. Through the uniting acanthus framework of regeneration, both Heaven and the regenerated Eden, or paradise, were represented.

The Lateran Baptistery's reuse of these themes was not just a novelty; the ideas and meanings were specifically reformulated for baptism. The acanthus vine decoration is the most important evidence to consider. As described above, the acanthus plant is featured in many different types of imperial projects from Rome's imperial age. The primary example is the Ara Pacis, associated with Emperor Augustus, in which the vine is nearly replicated leaf for leaf and coiled whorl for whorl. In the



Figure IV-8: The Good Shepherd, Catacombs of Priscilla, Rome (from Vatican Pontifical Commissions, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_commissions/archeo/inglese/documents/rc_com_archeo_doc_20011010_cataccrist_en.html, accessed April 3, 2012).

baptistery, though, the meaning historically associated with the acanthus received a nuanced understanding. For the Christians, the acanthus leaf was clearly associated with regeneration—specifically it was associated with the new life that was given by Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. The regeneration of a soul was confirmed through baptism, and since this was a momentous event that took place once in a Christian’s life, it would have been appropriate to use of the acanthus to bear the meaning of regeneration. Therefore, the acanthus vine dominated the mosaics, for the message found in the regeneration motif was clear.

The regeneration motif that appeared throughout the baptistery’s mosaics was enhanced by the poetic verses inscribed on the entablatures circling the font, which were sponsored by Sixtus III (Fig. IV-9).⁷⁰ There are no records of any other inscriptions left by Sixtus III in the baptistery—the eight verses are only attributed to Sixtus’ sponsorship via the records found in the *Liber Pontificalis*; the verses are unsigned. The inscriptions around the font were written in a Latin poetry: eight distichs (or couplets) composed of hexameters and pentameters illuminating the meaning and significance of baptism. They give a commentary in verses of the baptism ritual, forever embodying the baptismal meaning and ideas in the stone that would surround the font:

- I. Here is born from life-giving seed a people, consecrated to another city,
 Whom the Spirit brings forth from the fertile waters.
- II. The plunge [*mergere*] in the holy purifying flood the sinner,
 Whom the wave receives as old but gives forth as new.
- III. None reborn is different from those it makes one,
 One font [*fons*], one Spirit, one faith.
- IV. Mother church as a virgin brought forth those who are born,
 Whom she conceived by the divine breath and brought into
 being in the flowing water.
- V. The person who wants to be innocent is here made clean by washing,
 Whether from the guilt of the first parent or one’s own.
- VI. Here is the font of life which bathes the whole world,
 Its ultimate source the side of Christ wounded.

⁷⁰ Cf. LP, I, (ed. L. Duchesne), 234.



Figure IV-9: Inscriptions in marble architrave (photo by D. Tyler Thayer).

- VII. Reborn in this font for the kingdom of heaven,
 The blessed life does not receive those born only once.
- VIII. Be not afraid of the number or kind of your sins,
 For the one born in this river will be holy.⁷¹

The inscriptions, as listed above, start with verse I and rotate counterclockwise around the font from the primary entrance (Fig. IV-10)—this order is convention; they could be read in either direction. Each couplet could stand alone. But together, the eight couplets form a rather comprehensive understanding of the baptism theology. In one way, the eight couplets function as a type of eternal prayer or blessing for the font, dedicating the waters to the important sacrament of baptism—perhaps, explaining the lack of a signature. Alternatively, they fit into the concept of poetic inscriptions added to various sites in Rome, a tradition started by Pope Damasus (366-84 CE). The inscriptions’ clear description of the regenerative nature of baptism is essential to the interpretation of the importance of the baptistery space. If we were to assign value to the couplets, verse I would arguably be the most important, in that it is the first to be seen on the primary axis of the monumental entry. It therefore is not surprising that this verse captures the heart of baptism. The first line of the inscription proclaims the regenerative power of the font. From in the font, the baptizand is “born” anew as a part of the community of believers. In other words, all those who were baptized in the font were regenerated and consecrated for heaven (“another city”). The verse also ends by ascribing the action of the rebirth to the Holy Spirit, often linked to the likeness of a dove.

⁷¹ ICR, II, 424, 44. (Trans. Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 769.) *Gens sacrandae polis hic semine nascitur almo/Quam fecundatis spiritus edit aquis// Mergere peccator sacro purgande fluente/ Quem veterem accipiet proferet unda novum// Nulla renascentem est distantia quos facit unum/ Unus fons unus spiritus una fides// Virgineo fetu genetrix ecclesia natos/ Quos spirante deo concipit amne parit// Insons esse volens isto mundare lavacro/ seu patrio premeris crimine seu proprio// Fons hic est vitae qui totum diluit orbem/ Sumens de Christi vulnere principium// Caelorum regnum sprete hoc fonte renati/ Non recipit felix vita semel genitos// Nec numerus quemquam scelerum nec forma suorum/ Terreat hoc natus flumine sanctus erit.*

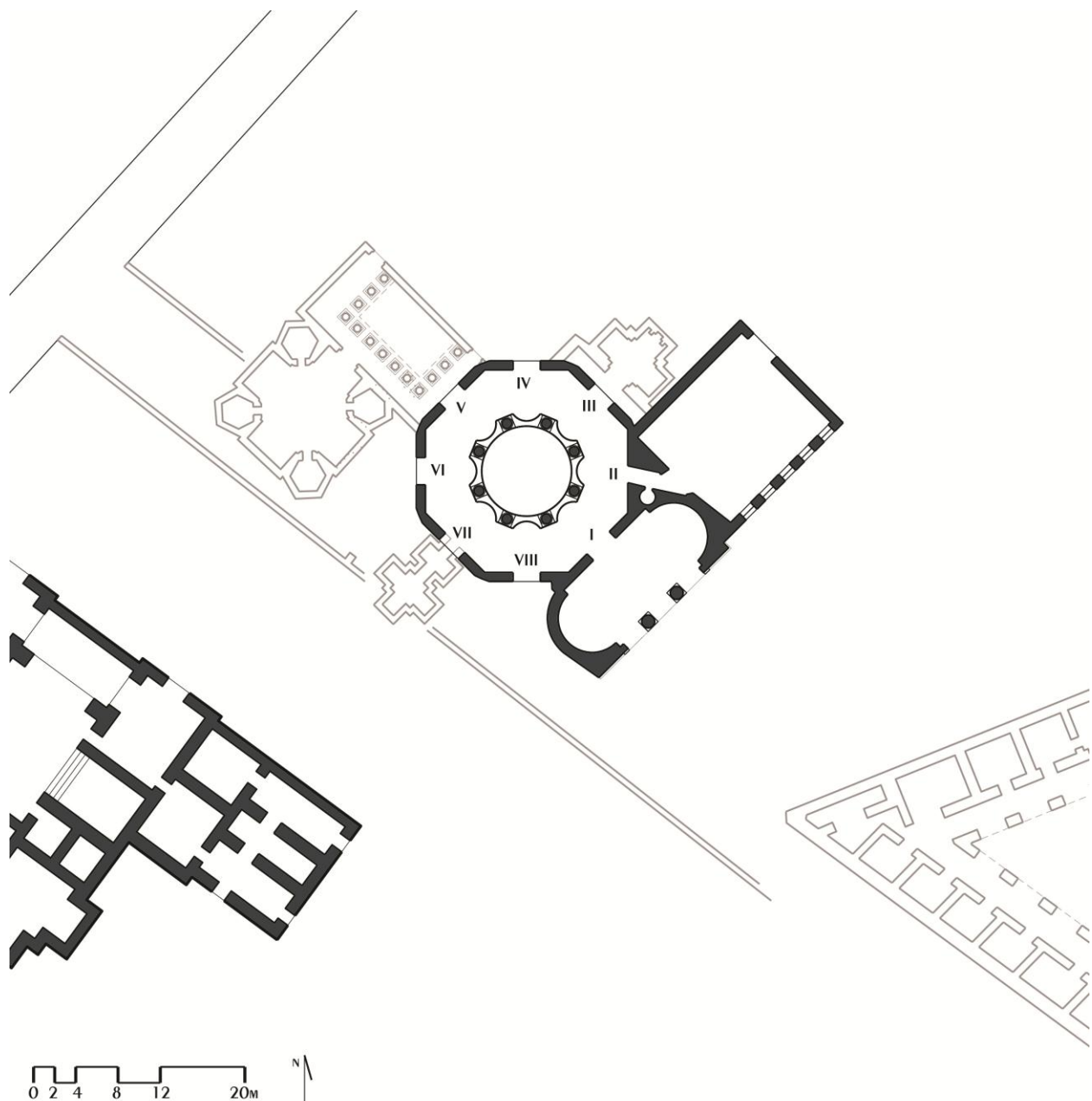


Figure IV-10: Plan of Sistine Lateran Baptistery with verse/side numbers annotated. (Illustration by D. Tyler Thayer)

The language of the inscriptions makes a clear reference to the regeneration motif. Therefore, the font forever embodies the act of baptism by the inscriptions, thus, preserving and sustaining a memory of the theology, process and hopes of regeneration.

The intentions of Sixtus III to incorporate the regeneration motif in the experience of the ritual was capitalized in the inscriptions. The renewal is further echoed the appropriation and reuse of *spolia* that surrounded the font. The reuse of the various ancient iconography, capitals, bases, architraves, and columns were all a conscious act of appropriation and should be interpreted—in association with the apparent theme in the Lateran Baptistery—as an act of regeneration. The baptistery’s reuse of the ancient imagery and *spolia* symbolically washed the civic practice, meanings and associated memories by the ritual it enclosed. Thus, Sixtus renewed and activated the Roman past within the baptistery, creating an essentially Roman Church through his sponsorship.

The theology of baptism, though concisely expressed in the inscriptions and imagery found in the baptistery, cannot simply be explained as introducing the theme of regeneration. In fact, fifth-century baptistery theology was quite complex and nuanced. The following chapter will begin to unravel and expound on the meaning of regeneration through baptism. This will shed light onto the deep theological motivations of the catechumen who patiently waited for three years before finally being allowed to join the community for the Easter Eucharist celebration through his or her personal baptism.

CHAPTER V

The Theology of Baptism

I indeed baptize you in water unto penance (repentance), but he that shall come after me, is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you in the Holy Ghost and fire. Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly cleanse his floor and gather his wheat into the barn; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire. (Matthew 3:11-12, Douay-Rheims, 1790.)⁷²

The nature of the Lateran Baptistry is in itself indebted to the controversial growth and formulation of Christian doctrines documented in texts dating from the second to the fifth century. Baptism was one of two sacraments originating in the reports of Christ's activities found in the Gospels, the second being the Eucharist.⁷³ The early church, likewise, paired the two sacraments for adult initiates who were newly welcomed into the community at Easter. Baptism finds its scriptural origins in first-century writings, such as the passage above from the Gospel of Matthew. However, the importance of the ritual can be seen in the many debates over who should and should not receive baptism in fifth-century Rome.⁷⁴ From these documents, the theology of baptism furnishes textual

⁷² Note: Throughout the thesis I have cited the Douay-Rheims translation of the Bible from the Latin Vulgate in an effort to more accurately represent the content that fourth and fifth-century theologians would have been reading. The Douay-Rheims translation that was published in 1790 was revised to eliminate archaic words and English Latinisms. Yet, at times the language used remains elusive to the meaning, purpose, or reference of the passage. In an effort to make the reading more clear, I have added parenthetical words and phrases to clarify any difficulties due to archaic diction or lack of context.

⁷³ Matthew 28:19.

⁷⁴ Often the debate was between various ante-Nicene church leaders. Issues of power and validity were discussed in relation to heresy. The primary question might be understood as such; 'Should a returning soul to the Catholic Church from a heretical sect be re-baptized?' Cyprian of Carthage (ca.249-258) wrote on both sides of the debate, arguing earlier for a re-baptism, or as he referred to it as the "one baptism" (Epistle 71.1). By Eusebius of Caesarea's time (ca. 325 CE), the church seems to have mostly decided that a second baptism was not necessary, and that a prayer and the bishop's laying on of hands was all that was needed (*Historia Ecclesiastica*, 7.2).

evidence to supplement the interpretations presented in the previous chapters. This chapter focuses on these historical texts so as to define the meanings and concepts of baptism in the mid-fifth century.

In order to complete a logical sequence for the theology of baptism, the following investigation will begin with considering the New Testament, followed by a survey composed of texts by Tertullian (ca. 160-220 CE), Eusebius of Caesarea (ca. 263-339 CE), Ambrose (340-397 CE), and Pope Leo I (440-461 CE). This chapter will use these sources to trace the early Christian theology of baptism relative to the practice in Rome. The following chapter will illuminate the baptism ritual by reconstructing the rite as it would have taken place in the fifth-century Lateran Baptistery, renovated under Sixtus III (432-440 CE). The goal is to provide a historically accurate understanding of baptism will reveal the experience of the neophyte and the community of believers in the Lateran Baptistery.

The passage above, from the Gospel of Matthew, recounts the words of John the Baptist; the text makes reference to the Book of Isaiah, which anticipated the coming Messiah, and provides a key insight for Christian theologians.⁷⁵ In the Matthew text, John the Baptist links baptism with repentance. Further, in this passage, John does something audacious, for he calls on the Jews to be baptized—a practice used by the Jews for ritually washing Gentile converts who wished to join the faith.⁷⁶ The meaning of the baptismal sacrament for Christian initiates is derived from this point. By the fifth century, water baptism was more complex and included baptism of the Holy Spirit in the ritual sequence. Furthermore, the baptism rite was crucial to the initiation of the neophyte—so much so that the rite is metaphorically referenced as the “door of salvation” in a letter written by Leo I.⁷⁷ Thus, the baptism ritual was a point of great importance to the new Christian.

⁷⁵ Isaiah 40:3

⁷⁶ Allison, 612, n.2.

⁷⁷ Epistle 166.1, in *NPNF*, 12.1.108.

The importance of baptism is enhanced by the *catechesis* process required by the church for new believers. In the *Apostolic Tradition*—most likely the product of various writers in Rome during the early third century⁷⁸—Hippolytus (ca. 170-235 CE) explains that the catechumen must first reject all his past sins, including any lifestyles that could not be reconciled to the church.⁷⁹ This rejection of sin is echoed in the text of Tertullian, who writes, “We are not washed in order that we may cease sinning, but because we have ceased.”⁸⁰ With the fourth-century acceptance of Christianity and the building of Constantinian basilicas for the express purpose of Christian worship, it would not be hard to imagine the influx in those interested in joining the faith. Therefore, Hippolytus and Tertullian show that the church had developed a process to teach and examine the lives of the new comers testing conversion in anticipation of baptism. In effect, the church elders desired a delay in baptism so that the adult initiate would have achieved a certain level of maturity in the faith before becoming one of the faithful.⁸¹

Hippolytus notes, “The catechumens should hear the word for three years.”⁸² In another section, he writes, “When those who are to receive baptism are chosen their lives should be examined; whether they lived uprightly as catechumens, whether they honored the widows, whether they visited the sick, whether they were thorough in performing good works; and if those who brought them bear witness that they have acted thus, so they should hear the Gospel.”⁸³ It’s evident that the catechumen preparing to be baptized would have gone through a demanding and extensive period of purification. All the while, those who sponsored the new convert would have been closely watching and teaching the newcomer how to live and understand the doctrines of the church. Undoubtedly, over the three years of teaching, the catechumen would have gathered a deep respect and understanding for baptismal theology.

⁷⁸ Cf. Introduction by Stewart-Sykes, *On The Apostolic Tradition*, 11-16.

⁷⁹ Hippolytus, 15.1-15.

⁸⁰ Tertullian, *De Poenitentia*, 6, in ANF, 3.662.

⁸¹ Ambrose tells us that in Rome, “the Baptized are called the faithful.” (*De Sacramentis*, 1.1).

⁸² Hippolytus, 17.1.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 20.1-2.

As Easter drew near, the catechumens would have gone through a heightened state of contemplative introspection routing out all sins in preparation for baptism. Tertullian is one of the earliest writers to urge a rigorous time of fasting immediately preceding the baptism rite. He explains, “Those who are about to enter baptism ought to pray with repeated prayers, fasts, and bending of the knee, and vigils all the night through, and with the confession of all bygone sins, that they may express the meaning even of the baptism of John: ‘They were baptized,’ saith (the Scripture), ‘confessing their own sins.’”⁸⁴ Following a fast and an all-night vigil of praying and teaching, the catechumens would assemble to be baptized by the bishop on Easter. They would then follow the extensive ritual that had been passed down as tradition for centuries. The catechumen would enter the font and leave as a neophyte, a new member of the church. After baptism they would break their fast with the celebration of the Eucharist and partake of the sacred cup of milk and honey.⁸⁵ By the end of this initiation process, the neophyte of fourth- and fifth-century Rome would have effectively experienced the theology of baptism expressed within the orchestrated spaces of the Lateran Baptistery.

THE THEOLOGY OF BAPTISM: MYSTICAL WATER

Fifth-century baptismal theology can be characterized by seven main points of belief. The first-century writers, like Matthew and Paul, lay out the basic understanding of the meaning of baptism. However, as theologians wrestled with that meaning, attempting to make a universal ritual for initiation, baptism took on a nuanced complexity. This complexity would be demonstrated in the Sistine Lateran Baptistery and experienced through ritual. A ritual reconstruction of based on the writings of Ambrose of Milan and John the Deacon of Rome will affirm those seven themes in the next section. The early

⁸⁴ Tertullian, *De Baptismo*, 20, in *ANF*, 3.678-9. (cf. *Didach*, 9.5)

⁸⁵ Milk and honey represents the land of promise in the Old Testament and the land of resurrection promised in the New Testament (cf. John the Deacon, *Letter to Senarius*, 12; Leviticus 20:24; Exodus 13:5.)

church believed baptism affected the initiate in seven ways: [1] the remission of sins, [2] deliverance from death by resurrection, [3] regeneration of the initiate, or rebirth, [4] the gift of the Holy Spirit, [5] a seal of assurance, [6] the renunciation of Satan and union with Christ and his church, and [7] submission to the bishop, as a sheep to a shepherd.⁸⁶ Different authors have mentioned each of these in varying degrees of importance, but in their totality, each introduces an important concept necessary to understanding the complexity of the baptism rite.

The baptism ritual was extremely crucial to the identity of the new Christian. The environment in which the actions took place opened a dialogue with the human perception of memory. The importance of remembering one's baptism is expressed in Leo I's letter to Neo, the Bishop of Ravenna:

For at the instance of certain brethren we have discovered that some of the prisoners of war, on their free return to their own homes, such to wit as went into captivity at an age when they could have no sure knowledge of anything, crave the healing waters of baptism, but in the ignorance of infancy cannot remember whether they have received the mystery and rites of baptism, and therefore in this uncertainty of defective recollection their souls are brought into jeopardy, so long as under a show of caution they are denied a grace, which is withheld, because it is thought to have been bestowed...And so wherever the man himself who is anxious for the new birth does not recollect his baptism, and no one can bear witness about him being unaware of his consecration to God, there is no possibility for sin to creep in, seeing that, so far as their knowledge goes, neither the bestower or receiver of the consecration is guilty....We know indeed that an unpardonable offence is committed...[whenever] anyone is forced twice to enter the font, which is but once available for those who are to be re-born, in opposition to the Apostle's teaching, which speaks to us of One Godhead in Trinity, one confession in Faith, one sacrament in Baptism. But in this nothing similar is to be apprehended, since, what is not known to have been done at all, cannot come under the charge of repetition....And when it is established that the man who requires the sacrament of baptism is prevented by a mere baseless suspicion, let him come boldly to obtain the grace, of which he is conscious of no trace in

⁸⁶ In part this list is inspired by a list developed by Allison, *Historical Theology*, 613-21. In addition, Tertullian gives us a similar outline in *Adversus Marcionem*, 1.28.

himself. Nor need we fear thus to open the door of salvation which has not been shown to have been entered before.⁸⁷

Leo discusses the ramifications of a second baptism in the case of a child prisoner of war, and he seems to place a significant importance on three things: [1] there should be only one baptism,⁸⁸ [2] the healing waters of baptism must be remembered, and [3] there should be a multitude of witnesses. In essence, the baptism ritual creates a memory, both in the baptizand and in the community, and the legitimacy of a person's position in the Christian community rested on the memory of the baptism. If one could not remember his own baptism, a witness would suffice. If no one remembered, even if baptism had occurred, it was rendered meaningless. When considering the power of baptism, it should always be considered in connection to memory. Therefore, when further considering the following seven themes that describe the theology of baptism, they should be closely connected to the neophyte's memory of the rite.

First, the link between baptism and the remission of sins is integrally important to the theology that Tertullian opens his treatise *De Baptismo*, "Happy is our sacrament of water, in that, by washing away the sins of our early blindness, we are set free and admitted into eternal life!"⁸⁹ The Gospel of Matthew records John the Baptist saying, "I baptize you with water for repentance." Leo I explains, "...that the sin, which that sacred conception (baptism) overthrew, may be taken away by this mystical washing."⁹⁰ It becomes evident that the washing symbolized in baptism is first a washing away of the catechumen's sins, making him/her pure for acceptance by the church. The foundational cause and effect of baptism is made clear by Ambrose, "so you were baptized and came to believe."⁹¹

⁸⁷ Leo I, Epistle 166.1, in *NPNF*, 12.1.108. (Emphasis added by author.)

⁸⁸ Cf. *Book of Ephesians*, 4:4-6; Cyprian, *Epistle LXXI*, Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.*, 7.2; Leo I, *Epistle CLXVI*, 1.

⁸⁹ Tertullian, *De Baptismo*, 1, in *ANF*, 3.669.

⁹⁰ Leo I, Sermon 24.3, in *NPNF*, 12.1.135.

⁹¹ Ambrose, *De Sacramentis*, 1.1.

Second, baptism was the deliverance from death by resurrection for the catechumen. Tertullian explains that baptism represented the metaphorical burial of the sinner when he asks the question, “How could he (God) deliver from death, who has not been delivered to death?”⁹² Ambrose echoes this logic in one of his sermons on the sacraments:

You were asked for a second time: ‘Do you believe in our Lord Jesus Christ and in his cross?’ You replied: ‘I believe’ and you were immersed: which means that you were buried with Christ. For one who is buried with Christ rises again with Christ.⁹³

Ambrose gave another sermon the following day further elucidating the sacrament, in which he ties the theme of death and burial to an architectural typology: “Yesterday the subject of our instruction was the font, which has the shape and appearance of a sort of tomb.”⁹⁴ Here, Ambrose clearly references the shape and form of the Milan baptistery—similar in shape to the Lateran Baptistery (Fig. 4.1)—which was like late antique mausolea. The point would have been poignant in the minds of the neophyte; the physical submersion in the font presented metaphoric death of an old self and the subsequent rising out of the water as a resurrection into a new life. This is primarily seen in two passages from the New Testament:

In whom (Christ) also you are circumcised with circumcision not made by hand in despoiling (putting off) of the body of the flesh: but in the circumcision of Christ. Buried with him in baptism: in whom also you are risen again by the faith of the operation of God who hath raised him up from the dead. And you, when you were dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, he hath quickened together with him, forgiving you all offences: Blotting out the handwriting of the decree that was against us (record of debt), which was contrary to us. And he hath taken the same out of the way, fastening it to the cross.⁹⁵

...when they waited for the patience of God in the days of [Noah], when the ark was a building: wherein a few, that is, eight souls, were saved by

⁹² Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem*, 1.28, in *ANF*, 3.293.

⁹³ Ambrose, *De Sacramentis*, 2.20.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.1.

⁹⁵ Colossians 2:11-14, Douay-Rheims, 1790.

water. Whereunto baptism, being of the like form, now saveth you also: not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the examination of a good conscience towards God by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Who is on the right hand of God, swallowing down death that we might be made heirs of life everlasting...⁹⁶

Though the act of immersion is compared to death and burial, the most important aspect is the act of emerging from the immersion: the raising, in which the purpose is the washing away of the old flesh and receiving a new life, Tertullian further explains, "...a man is dipped in water, and amid the utterance of some few words, is sprinkled, and then rises again, not much (or not at all) the cleaner, the consequent attainment of eternity is esteemed the more incredible...Is it not wonderful, too, that death should be washed away by bathing?"⁹⁷ The baptistery then takes on the function of spiritually washing away sin, death, and the old life. Yet, at the same time, Tertullian later clarifies that the soul does not receive sanctification from the baptism act itself, but the power demonstrated in the baptism that originates from the "answer" that is, from the source of baptism's power is the resurrection of Christ.⁹⁸

Third, baptism was the threshold of regeneration, or the re-birth of the neophyte with the new promised everlasting life. Baptism's link to regeneration is found early in the first century in the Epistle to Titus, where Paul lays the foundation for the responsibilities of the church elder. In the letter to Titus, Paul exhorts the church leaders to remind the people of their common faith in the doctrine taught by Paul himself. In a latter section of the letter, in response to division within the community, he commands the leaders to remind the people to be submissive to authorities and to remember their point of commonality in their regeneration:

But when the goodness and kindness of God our Savior appeared: Not by the works of justice, which we have done, but according to his

⁹⁶ 1 Peter 3:20-22a, Douay-Rheims, 1790.

⁹⁷ Tertullian, *De Baptismo*, 2, in *ANF*, 3.669.

⁹⁸ Tertullian, *De Resurrectione Carnis*, 48, in *ANF*, 3.582.

mercy, he saved us, by the laver ("*lavacrum*") of regeneration, and renovation of the Holy Ghost...⁹⁹

In this passage, saving regeneration is reference by Paul in the Vulgate as *lavacrum regenerationis*, or "the bath of regeneration." Sixtus III used the same language to refer to the two sacraments the heretics were avoiding during his reign, baptism and the mystical communion.¹⁰⁰ He specifically references baptism as "*lavacrum regenerations*," revealing Sixtus III's own belief that the bath of regeneration and mystical communion were critical for orthodox Christians.

Tertullian ends his treatise on baptism describing the significance of the re-birth through terms of regeneration linking the neophyte to the church and the community:

Therefore, blessed ones, whom the grace of God awaits, when you ascend from that most sacred font of your new birth, and spread your hands for the first time in the house of your mother (the Church), together with your brethren, ask from the Father, ask from the Lord, that His specialties of grace and distributions of gifts may be supplied you.¹⁰¹

Likewise, in the fourth century, Eusebius distinctly ties regeneration to water. He described the rejection of the Mosaic covenant to be replaced by what he described as a new "covenant announced to all men by [the] Savior, I mean regeneration by water, and the word and law completely new...Thus it takes away what belongs to the Mosaic law, and introduces in its place another mode of the forgiveness of sins, through the washing of salvation and the life preached in accordance with it..." In the fifth century, Leo I described the effects of baptism on his congregation:

And each one is a partaker of this spiritual origin in regeneration, and to everyone when he is re-born, the water of baptism is like the Virgin's womb; for the same Holy Spirit fills the font, who filled the Virgin, that

⁹⁹ Titus 3:4-5, Douay-Rheims, 1790.

¹⁰⁰ Sixtus III, Letter IV, in *Patrologia Latina*, 50.0593.

¹⁰¹ Tertullian, *De Baptismo*, 20, in ANF, 3.679.

the sin, which that sacred conception overthrew, may be taken away by this mystical washing (*"ablutio"*).¹⁰²

....But you, dearly beloved...remain firm in that Faith, which you have professed before many witnesses, and in which you were re-born through water and the Holy Spirit, and received the anointed of salvation, and the seal of eternal life.¹⁰³

The washing of baptism was evidently considered highly sacred, and upon rising out of the water, one was "re-born."¹⁰⁴ Leo I's account demonstrates the pivotal role baptism played in the life of the Christian. In his sermon, Leo asks the congregation to remember their experience in the baptistery, creating in the mind a link between baptistery, ritual and regeneration. Water, font and community seemed to be an important mechanism in the perseverance of a Christian in the Faith; baptism served as a rite of initiation and as an experiential memory to be recalled for perseverance and identity with the community, or "many witnesses."

Fourth, baptism bestowed the Holy Spirit. As the ritual of baptism develops through the centuries, the two baptisms described in the third chapter of Matthew—baptism with water and baptism with the Holy Spirit—become a part of a single baptismal rite. In Tertullian's list for the purpose of baptism, he explains that, after new life is imparted from regeneration, baptism serves to bestow the Spirit.¹⁰⁵ It should now be clarified that there are two baptisms that take place within the baptismal rite. First, the baptism by water, and second the baptism by the Spirit. Tertullian notes this distinction in his

¹⁰² Leo I, Sermon 24.3, in *NPNF*, 12.1.135.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 24.6, in *NPNF*, 12.1.136.

¹⁰⁴ Interestingly, the imagery of the womb in connection to the re-birth of the neophyte through baptism seems to prevail quite literally in some of the fourth and fifth-century fonts of North Africa. The fourth or fifth-century font of S. Vitalis in Sbeitla demonstrates a unique development in the shapes of baptistery fonts. Many scholars believe that this font may have represented the birth canal of a woman, literally embodying the symbolism mentioned in Leo's sermon above. For more on the baptisteries of North Africa see Robin Jensen, *Living Water: Images, Symbols, and Settings of Early Christian Baptism* (Boston: Brill, 2011).

¹⁰⁵ Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem*, 1.28, in *ANF*, 293. (cf. Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.*, 6.43) Eusebius contemplates the implications of not receiving the full "ministrations" and the "sealing by the bishop" which is usually conducted in the baptismal ceremony. He asks in response, "Failing these, how could he receive the Holy Spirit?"

treatise, explaining that the gift of the Holy Spirit follows baptism by water with the unction and the imposition of hands. He explains:

Not that in the waters we obtain the Holy Spirit, but in the water we are cleansed and prepared for the Holy Spirit. In this case also a type has preceded; for thus was John beforehand the Lord's forerunner, 'preparing His ways.' Baptism 'makes the paths straight' for the Holy Spirit, who is about to come upon us, by the washing away of sins, which faith, sealed in (the name of) the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, obtains....After this, when we have issued from the font, we are thoroughly anointed with a blessed unction ('chrism')....In the next place the hand is laid on us invoking and inviting the Holy Spirit through benediction.¹⁰⁶

It is also interesting to note that in the fifth century, though it had been decided that a heretic's baptism counted as a legitimate "mystery of regeneration," Leo declares that only a Catholic bishop could confer the "power of the Holy Spirit by the laying on of the Bishop's hands."¹⁰⁷ Ordinarily, this would occur during the same ritual ceremony at Easter, and the distinction between the two baptisms would be blurred. However, Leo's letter is evidence for a baptismal doctrine that contains two separate baptisms, one of water and one of the Spirit, and that the latter solely rested in the authority of the Catholic bishop.¹⁰⁸

Fifth, baptism provides a seal of assurance. As discussed above, baptism was closely tied to a person's salvation, and thus to that person's role in the community of believers. Leo likens baptism to a "door of salvation," and is relentless on the need for an individual's recollection of baptism.¹⁰⁹ He further links baptism to a person's identity in the community in which one would profess faith before many witnesses, be reborn through water and the Holy Spirit, and receive the anointing of salvation and

¹⁰⁶ Tertullian, *De Baptismo*, 6-8.

¹⁰⁷ Leo I, Epistle 166.2, in *NPNF*, 12.1.108. In a sermon, Leo states that the same Spirit who filled the Virgin's womb also fills the font. (Sermon 24.3, in *NPNF*, 12.1.136.)

¹⁰⁸ More about the laying of hands in Annabel Jane Wharton, "Ritual and Reconstructed Meaning: The Neonian Baptistry in Ravenna," *Art Bulletin* 69, no.3 (1987).

¹⁰⁹ Leo I, Epistle 166.1, in *NPNF*, 12.1.108.

the seal of eternal life (*chrisma*).¹¹⁰ The seal, chrism, and unction were perceivably the same anointing of oil mentioned in almost all texts describing the early baptism rite. Eusebius describes the seal as a sign: “To crown all, who beholding all them that believe in Christ using as a seal the sign of salvation, would not rightly be astounded hearing the Lord saying in days of old, ‘And they shall come and see my glory, and I will leave my sign upon them;’”¹¹¹ and “they will be manifest if sealed, as is our custom, with the seal of Christ on their foreheads.”¹¹² The chrism was a seal that only a Christian could obtain, symbolizing that the Holy Spirit had sealed the Christian for the assurance of salvation. The imagery associated with the cross being drawn on one’s forehead would have conceivably reminded the now-enlightened neophyte of the words in the Book of Ephesians: “In whom (Christ) you also...you were signed with the Holy Spirit of promise. Who is the pledge of our inheritance, unto the redemption of acquisition, unto the praise of his glory.”¹¹³

Sixth, baptism was the explicit renunciation of Satan that preceded entrance into the Church community. Tertullian makes it clear that the one to be baptized must have already ceased sinning.¹¹⁴ Thus, a newcomer could not be involved with Satan or any of his works. Tertullian described, “When we are going to enter the water, but a little before, in the presence of the congregation and under the hand of the president, we solemnly profess that we disown the devil, and his pomp, and his angels.”¹¹⁵ The power of Satan’s grasp on the convert’s life required that he/she renounce Satan, so as to embrace Christ fully. The importance of this renunciation is seen in the ritual in which the catechumen would face west, renounce Satan, then turn to the east to receive Christ and proceed to the font.

¹¹⁰ Leo I, *Sermon XXIV*, 24.6, in *NPNF*, 12.1.136.

¹¹¹ Eusebius, *Demonstratio evangelica*, 6.25.1.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 9.14.1.

¹¹³ Ephesians 1:13-14, Douay-Rheims, 1790.

¹¹⁴ Tertullian, *De Poenitentia*, 6, in *ANF*, 3.662.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, *De Corona*, 3, in *ANF*, 3.94-95.

Finally, baptism positioned the neophyte under the authority of the bishop, as if a sheep to a shepherd. Tertullian explains that the primary giver of baptism is the bishop:

Of giving it, the chief priest (who is the bishop) has the right: in the next place, the presbyters and deacons, yet not without the bishop's authority, on account of the honour of the Church, which being preserved, peace is preserved. Beside these, even laymen have the right; for what is equally received can be equally given. Unless bishops, or priests, or deacons, be on the spot, other disciples are called i.e. to the work. The word of the Lord ought not to be hidden by any: in like manner, too baptism, which is equally God's property, can be administered by all. But how much more is the rule of reverence and modesty incumbent on laymen—seeing that these powers belong to their superiors—lest they assume to themselves the specific function of the bishop!...Let it suffice assuredly, in cases of necessity, to avail yourself of that rule, if at any time circumstance either of place, or of time, or of person compels you (so to do); for then the steadfast courage of the succourer, when the situation of the endangered one is urgent, is exceptionally admissible.¹¹⁶

As the centuries pass, the moderate position of Tertullian gives way to a more strict understanding of the rite of baptism. Authors begin to emphasize, even more than Tertullian, the authority of the bishop for baptism, effectively denying the ability of the laity to perform the rite. This is clearly seen in the mid-fifth century, when Leo emphasizes the need for the “Bishop's hands” in conferring the Holy Spirit in baptism.¹¹⁷ As such, without the authority of the bishop in baptism, salvation and the seal—each one a crucial element in the baptismal rite—are rendered meaningless.

The position of the bishop as a shepherd is a type of the Good Shepherd, a figure for Christ, named in the Gospels.¹¹⁸ The thematic imagery in baptism is clear. Eusebius describes in his *Proof of the Gospel*:

For each one of them in the churches which he established by Christ's help, nourished two sheep, that is to say two orders of disciples coming

¹¹⁶ Tertullian, *De Baptismo*, 17, in *ANF*, 3.677.

¹¹⁷ Leo I, Epistle 166.2, in *NPNF*, 12.1.108.

¹¹⁸ John 10:11.

like sheep into the sheepfold of Christ, the one as yet probationary, the other already enlightened by baptism...¹¹⁹

The neophytes were initiated into a “sheepfold” in which the teaching, caring and protective shepherd was the bishop. As the neophyte was baptized and sealed by the bishop, he would clearly identify himself not only with Christ, as a resurrected and regenerated believer, but also with the bishop who performed the sacred mysteries. The result must have been what the apostle Peter charged to the church: “The ancients (elders) therefore that are among you, I beseech...feed the flock of God which is among you, taking care of it, not by constraint but willingly, according to God: not for filthy lucre’s sake but voluntarily; Neither as lording it over the clergy but being made a pattern of the flock from the heard. And when the Prince of Pastors (or Shepherd, Christ) shall appear, you shall receive a never fading crown of glory.”¹²⁰

The theology described above supports a belief that baptism held a transformative power that created a new identity for a neophyte through ritual. The end for the neophyte was participation in the church, and primarily in the hitherto inaccessible Eucharist sacrament. The implications of fifth-century baptismal theology were great. One’s baptism was the only explicit and irrefutable statement about the condition of his or her soul and status in the Christian community. Further, if one could not remember his or her baptism, or if the community had no remembrance of it, the person’s Christian identity was rendered essentially nonexistent. Therefore, the baptism ritual held immense significance for creation of the initiate’s new identity. The next chapter will expound historical texts in order to reconstruct the Sistine ritual as it took place in the Lateran Baptistery.

¹¹⁹ Eusebius, *Demonstratio evangelica*, 2.3.36.

¹²⁰ 1 Peter 5:1-4, Douay-Rheims, 1790.

CHAPTER VI

Creating Identity: Transformative Memory in Ritual Regeneration

The fifth-century Lateran Baptistery during the pontificates of Sixtus III, Leo I, and Hilarus was within a period of time that now lacks a clear voice describing the ritual as it would have taken place in the newly renovated baptistery. However, there have been attempts at reconstructing the baptism ritual through various texts. Annabel Jane Wharton has reconstructed the ritual for the Orthodox Baptistery in Ravenna using Ambrose's descriptions of the Milan baptism ritual, and Sible de Blaauw has reconstructed a fourth-century and a twelfth-century version of the ritual at the Lateran Baptistery using the *Actus Silvestri*, the Canons of Hippolytus, Ambrose, and the letter by John the Deacon (Fig. VI-1). If proximity in time is considered, the sermons by Ambrose (ca. 390) and the letter by John the Deacon (ca. 500) are, perhaps, the most accurate and trustworthy descriptions of the ritual at the Sistine Lateran Baptistery. In addition, because of the strong correlation among the theological interpretations from the preceding centuries cited above that explain baptism practice at the Sistine Baptistery, the ritual would have most likely remained relatively the same throughout late antiquity.

In the western empire, particularly in Milan, the practice seems to be that the churches would look primarily to Rome for the baptism ritual's form of liturgy. Further, there is support for this assertion from Ambrose's *The Sacraments* in which he says in reference to the washing of feet:

We are not unaware of the fact that the Church in Rome does not have this custom, whose character and form we follow in all things. Yet it does not have the custom of washing the feet. So note: perhaps on account of the multitude this practice declined. Yet there are some who say and try to allege in excuse that this is not to be done in the mystery,

nor in baptism, nor in regeneration, but the feet are to be washed as for a guest...In all things I desire to follow the Church in Rome...¹²¹

It is evident from Ambrose's sermon, in circa 390, that the Roman church led the "character and form" of ritual and building in Milan. The need for Ambrose to clarify his intentions in the above section of his teachings seems to suggest a concern of the people of Milan to perform the liturgy as Rome does, and that Rome is the source, in liturgical matters of Milanese worshipers. Because of this apparent concern and adamant resolve of both the people and the bishop of Milan, there must be solid fourth-century connections and consistencies between the two cities, and their baptisteries. At the Lateran Baptistery we can reconstruct the fourth and fifth-century ritual from its counterpart in Milan. Likewise, the ritual as it took place in the Sistine Lateran Baptistery was effectively shaped by the transformation of the architecture and space by Sixtus.

Interestingly, Ambrose and John the Deacon—though, separated by a little over a century in time and approximately 600 km distance between the cities of Milan and Rome—remarkably refer to practically the same liturgical practices. Both texts suggest that late antique baptism was more rightly viewed in association with the catechumenate process, in which the process of teaching—most notably during Lent—was considered a part of the whole of the rite.¹²² In light of this, the moment of sacramental immersion is a culmination of months, or even years, of preparation in which the catechumen eagerly awaits the day they were to be considered a competent.¹²³ Because John the Deacon's and Ambrose's accounts are so similar and Deacon John's account originates in Rome from a time when he would have been using the Sistine Baptistery, I shall use his account, guided by Sible de Blaauw's work, to reconstruct the Sistine ritual.

¹²¹ Ambrose, *Sacraments*, 3.1.5.

¹²² This idea is briefly discussed by De Blaauw in *Cultus et Deocor*. The association between the teaching of the catechumens during the observance of Lent is supported by multiple documents, but, perhaps, most clearly *The Gelasian Sacramentary* (*Liber Sacramentorum* or *Reginesis* 316 in Whitaker, *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy*), an early sixth century manuscript.

¹²³ John the Deacon, 4, in *DBL*, 209.

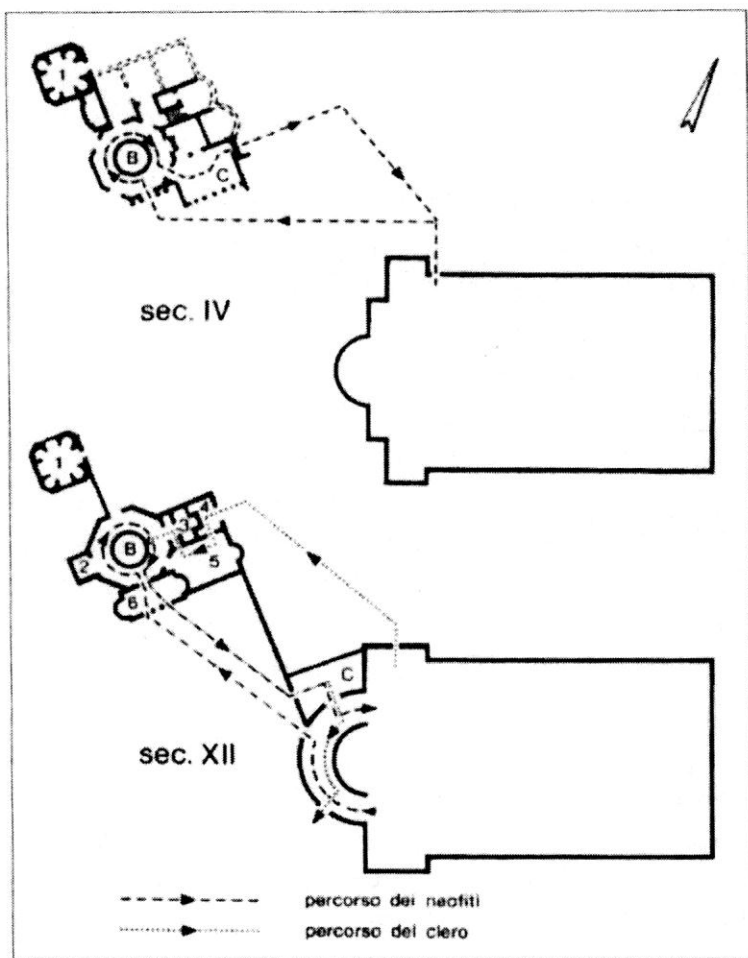


Figure VI-1: Hypothetical reconstruction of the ritual by Sible de Blaauw. (from Sible De Blaauw, *Cultus et decor*, 1994)

The baptism ritual highlighted the transformation of the individual. The ritual created a new identity for the initiate, so that he or she would be a new person within the Christian community. Therefore, the initiate took on different names during his or her transformational experience. The initiate was known as a catechumen during the time of learning, which could last up to three years before baptism. During the baptism ritual, the initiate was called a baptizand, and after receiving the sacrament he or she was a neophyte, a new member of the church community. Therefore, the changing title given to the initiate throughout the stages of the initiation reflected the transformation that was taking place in the identity of the person.

John the Deacon opens his letter by emphasizing that there must be, beyond any doubt, a certainty that the catechumen has renounced the devil when first becoming an initiate “with a true confession.”¹²⁴ The result is what he calls, “the classroom of the catechumens.”¹²⁵ As De Blaauw suggests, during Lent, it is most likely that the catechumens would enter the basilica where teaching a large number of people could occur—though it might be noted that the adjoining hall to the baptistery, now the Chapel of St. Venantius, would have been able to accommodate a large gathering during the fifth-century. During the time of Sixtus III, that hall had not yet been converted into a chapel. The education of the catechumens during Lent culminated in a meeting, probably on the Sunday before Easter, in which the catechumens received final instruction (*catechesis*), received exsufflation from the priest, were exorcized, and would receive the “blessed salt...to signify that just as all flesh is kept healthy by salt, so the mind which is drenched and weakened by the waves of this world is held steady by the salt of wisdom and the preaching of the word of God...to come to stability and permanence.”¹²⁶ This

¹²⁴ Ibid., 3, in *DBL*, 208-9.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

meeting then ended with the “frequent” laying on of the hands, in which the bishop or a designated priest anointed the initiate’s head three times, which was to honor the Trinity.¹²⁷

Immediately following the final class of instruction, the anointed catechumens would have entered the basilica, if they were not already there, to receive the words of the Apostles’ Creed, which was, as De Blaauw suggests, the profession of faith that Augustine recounts in his *Confessions*.¹²⁸ Afterward, each catechumen would have now been called “a competent or elect...for he was conceived in the womb of Mother Church and now he begins to live.”¹²⁹ As a competent, the initiate would be intensely scrutinized with questions until the heart was discerned as faithful and the confession true.

De Blaauw argues that at this point in the liturgy that the baptizands would proceed to the baptism ceremony, exiting the basilica through a north-west door near the transept arm; though, there are few documented details to precisely determine this movement.¹³⁰ The ordering by John the Deacon and Ambrose, however, suggest the Opening of the ears and nostrils would have occurred before the procession entered the baptistery. The bishop would perform the Opening by touching the elect’s ears and nostrils with oil, opening the elect’s mind to the word of God.¹³¹ After the Opening, the baptizands—who were arranged in a single file, ordered from the youngest child, to the men and, finally, the women¹³²— would have, at some point in the liturgical ceremony, exited the basilica from a door near the north transept, crossed the courtyard/alley between the basilica and baptistery, and entered the Lateran Baptistery through its porch (the main vestibule, now the chapel of Sts. Rufina and Secunda) shortly after their profession of the Apostles’ Creed in front of the community (Fig. VI-2). The initiates would enter the porch and first experience the newly crafted mosaics glittering in the light

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ De Blaauw, 149; John the Deacon, 4, in *DBL*, 209.

¹²⁹ John the Deacon, 4, in *DBL*, 209.

¹³⁰ De Blaauw, 150-1.

¹³¹ Ambrose, *Sacraments*, 1.2-3. John the Deacon, 4 and 5.

¹³² *Apostolic Tradition*, 21.4-7. Multiple sacramentary, including the *Gelasian Sacramentary* and *Ordo Romanus XI*, record the practice of ordering the catechumens to be baptized.

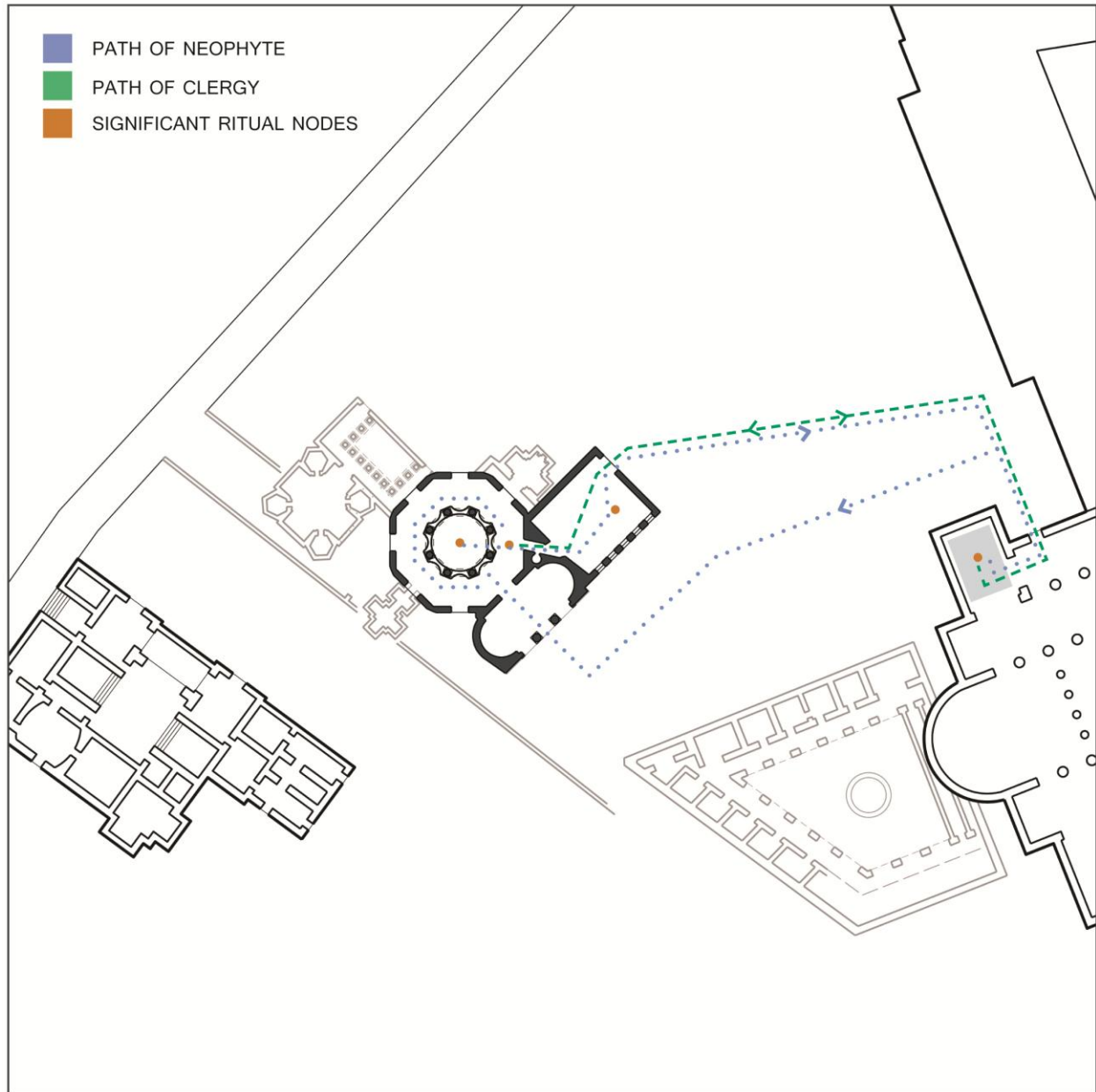


Figure VI-2: Reconstruction of the baptismal ritual during the Sistine phase of the Lateran Baptistery. (Illustration by D. Tyler Thayer)

probably produced by the many lamps held by the acolytes—those Christians who helped perform the ceremony.¹³³ Looking to the right, the baptizand would see the apse illustrating a garden expressing the hope, through mesmerizing blues and gold colors, for eternal life in the pictorial garden of paradise represented by the acanthus vine pattern. Then, through a second door, the gaze of the believer would move upward following the tall porphyry columns that, in their beautiful imperial color, contained and separated the ambulatory from the mystical water.

De Blaauw proposes that a group of the baptizands would enter into the baptistery and move to the west where they would disrobe and deposit their clothing in a niche on the western side of the ambulatory. By moving to the side of the ambulatory, the baptizands would be out of view from anyone outside of the structure. From here, De Blaauw suggests the baptizands descended into the font, were baptized, and then exited to the east as neophytes. This account principally follows the step-by-step procedure recounted in various sacramentaries and treatises including those of John the Deacon and Ambrose of Milan. I propose, in addition to this type of movement through the space, that the nature of the centrally planned building provides a context in which the witnesses referred to by Leo I,¹³⁴ gathered by standing around the font in the ambulatory. The audience who witnessed this portion most likely comprised the sponsors of the neophytes together with deacons, priests and the bishop. The Lateran Baptistery's spatial organization offers the formal opportunity for the presence of an audience, which is later confirmed in the *Ordo Romanus XI* (ca. 700 CE). The *Ordo* states:

90. When this is done, the pontiff and all the priests go in procession from the church until they come to the fonts, singing the litany, that is *Kyrieleison*: the notaries go before the pontiff, holding on high two lighted candles the height of a man, with censers and incense, and they begin the litany which follows: *O Christ, hear us*, and the rest.

¹³³ The presence of the acolyte during the ritual is noted in the *Ordo Romanus XI*, a late sixth century (ca. 700 CE) document recording the supposed Roman sacrament step by step (*Ordo Romanus XI* in *DBL*, 244-51). In addition, Brandenburg dates the mosaics to the fifth century, most likely the work of Sixtus III (Brandenburg, 45-6, 151-2).

¹³⁴ Leo I, Sermon 24.6, in *NPNF*, 12.1.135; *Ibid.*, Epistle 166.1, in *NPNF*, 12.1.108.

91. When the litany is finished, the whole clergy and people stand round about the font, and when silence has been made the pontiff says: *The Lord be with you.* And all the people reply: *And with your spirit.*¹³⁵

In light of the communal nature of the liturgy—the rite of baptism is the symbolic entrance and initiation of the neophyte into the Christian community, the Lateran Baptistery’s form welcomed the presence of an audience actively surrounding the baptismal font at the moment of initiation through immersion.

Once the community of believers was inside the Lateran Baptistery, surrounding the font by filling the ambulatory, John the Deacon explains that the “oil of consecration is used to anoint their breast, in which is the seat and dwelling place of the heart.”¹³⁶ The elect then were “commanded” to descend into the font naked and once the “catechumen [had] advanced in faith by these spiritual conveyances”¹³⁷ —perhaps a reference to what Ambrose described as the “renunciation” of the devil and worldly possessions¹³⁸—the initiate would be baptized by threefold immersion in honor of the Trinity. The initiate would cross the threshold of the inner colonnade and descend the stairs into the circular font. Inevitably, the catechumen would have gazed into the dome that soared above as he or she was plunged into the pool three times to emerge a regenerated person. The combination of heightened emotions and the spatial expanse would have induced a response of awe during this sacred moment. After experiencing the regeneration of baptism, with spiritual hopes instilled deep into the core of his being, the neophyte would then ascend from the font to be dressed in white vestments and anointed with the “unction of the sacred chrism.”¹³⁹ Together these symbolized the neophyte’s regeneration, the seal, and entrance into the fold of the Christian community. John the Deacon explicates, “All the neophytes are arrayed in white vesture to symbolize the resurgent Church...‘white as

¹³⁵ *Ordo Romanus XI*, 90-91, in *DBL*, 250.

¹³⁶ John the Deacon, 6, in *DBL*, 210.

¹³⁷ John the Deacon, 6.

¹³⁸ Ambrose, *Sacraments*, 1.4,5.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

snow;” the neophyte was now a regenerated individual, forgiven of sin, and prepared for the “table of the heavenly bride groom.”¹⁴⁰

After the baptism ceremony, the neophytes, priests, deacons, bishop and the remaining community members would return to the basilica. Then a special sacrament of the Eucharist would have been given to the newly-baptized in which ‘milk and honey are placed in a most sacred cup’ and offered to the neophyte.¹⁴¹ The special Eucharist sacrament is given to remind the neophyte of the Lord’s promise to his people: “I shall lead you into a land of promise, a land flowing with milk and honey.”¹⁴² At the culmination of the Eucharist and baptism, the neophyte is considered a “faithful” and allowed to participate in the Eucharist Mass as a member of the Christian community.¹⁴³

The precise ritual details of the baptism ceremony are not recorded with regard to the era of Sixtus III, but a hypothetical reconstruction can nonetheless be proposed. The sequencing provided by De Blaauw is a simple and well-informed conclusion. However, taking into consideration the transformation of the space by Sixtus, the ritual as outlined by De Blaauw, and the textual evidence expounded above, the ritual movement might be further deduced to suggest the following hypothesis.

The experience of the fifth-century ritual was distinctly transformed by the changes that took place from the Constantinian to the Sistine phase. During the pontificate of Sixtus III, the ritual reinforced or altered the ideas found in the earlier baptistery in order to focus the space around the ritual, the bishop and the baptizand. Sixtus’ transformations primarily emphasized two conditions in the baptistery: ceremonial threshold and spatial hierarchy. The final *catechesis* lesson, including the proclamation of the Apostles’ Creed, and the ceremonial blessings most likely took place in the north

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 12, in *DBL*, 211.

¹⁴² Leviticus 20:24.

¹⁴³ Ambrose, *Sacraments*, 1.1.

transept of the basilica. From there, the baptism ritual procession was made up of a series of ritual nodes characterized by different ceremonial thresholds and spaces (cf. Fig. VI-2).

The clergy would have left the transept before the baptizands and sponsors in order to prepare the font with a blessing. The clergy most likely took a separate back door entrance into the baptistery through the side hall, now the chapel of St. Venantius. The clergy, including the bishop, priests, and possibly the deacons, would have formed in place on the east side of the octagon, in front of the door leading to the side hall (Fig. VI-3). Here the clergy and bishop would wait as the baptizands entered the baptistery.

The baptizands would enter shortly after the font had been prepared by the clergy. Sixtus' transformations of the baptistery created two thresholds that were architecturally significant to the ritual. First, the ceremonial procession passed through the grand vestibule, allowing the baptizand to walk through the two monolithic porphyry columns (Fig. VI-4). This threshold marked the ceremonial beginning of the baptism, reserved, on this day, for the honor of the baptizand.

Sixtus greatly reformed the interior space of the baptistery, and its effects on the ritual were crucial to the central focus of the space on the baptism of the catechumen and the authority of the bishop. The new inner colonnade that surrounded the font was important to the newly articulated ritual ceremony. The colonnade spatially separated the mystical waters of the font from the new ambulatory. Upon entering the octagonal ambulatory, the baptizands would have naturally oriented themselves to circumnavigate the font. In this hypothesis, the clergy would be stationed to the right of the baptizand that was entering from the vestibule (cf. Fig. VI-3). This would have signaled the baptizands to circle the font opposite the clergy, until all the procession had filled in and stood still, in silence, looking to the bishop (cf. Fig. VI-4).

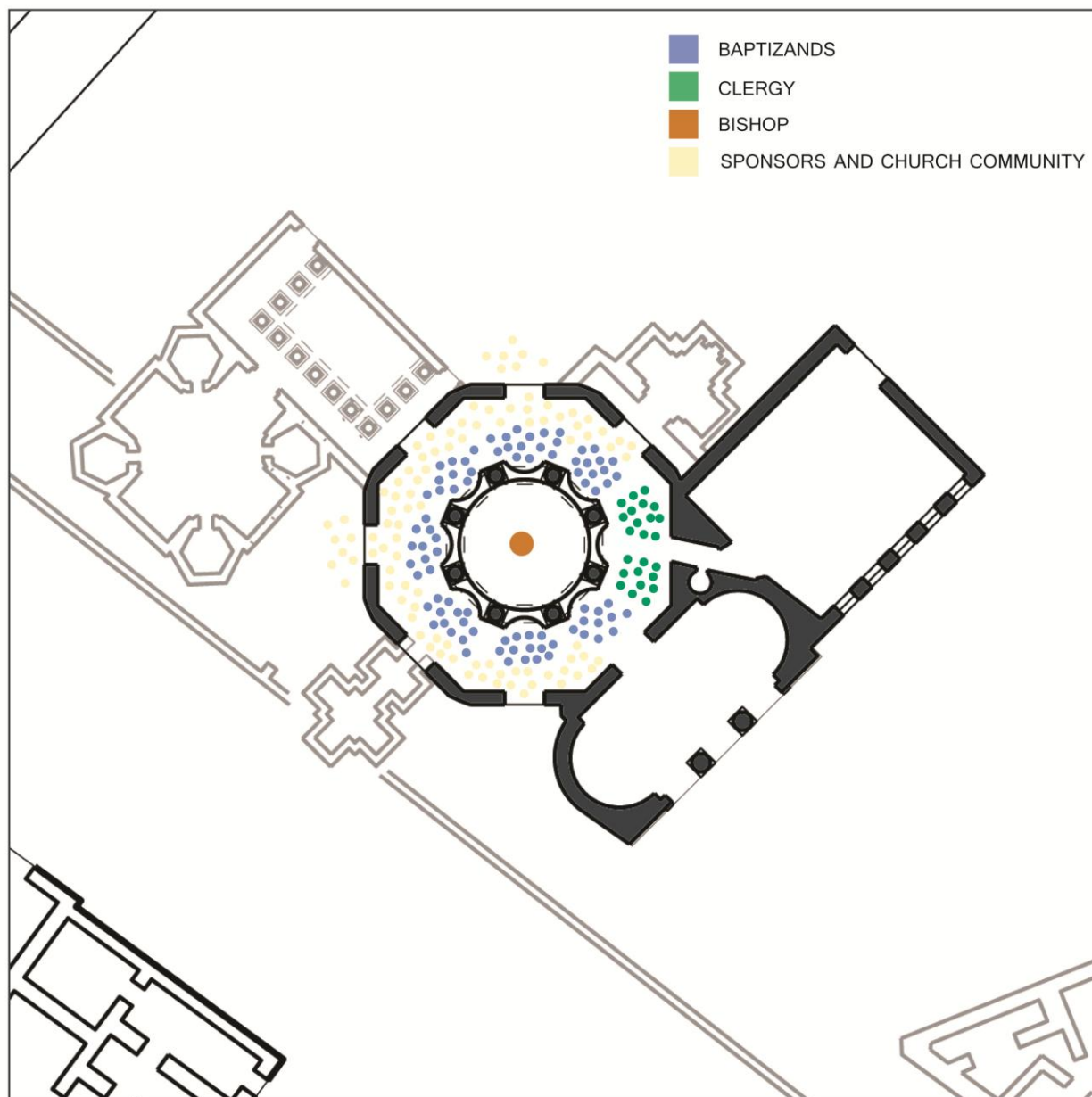


Figure VI-3: Hypothetical reconstruction of the ceremonial positioning of the baptizands, clergy and community at the beginning of the baptism ritual. (Illustration by D. Tyler Thayer)

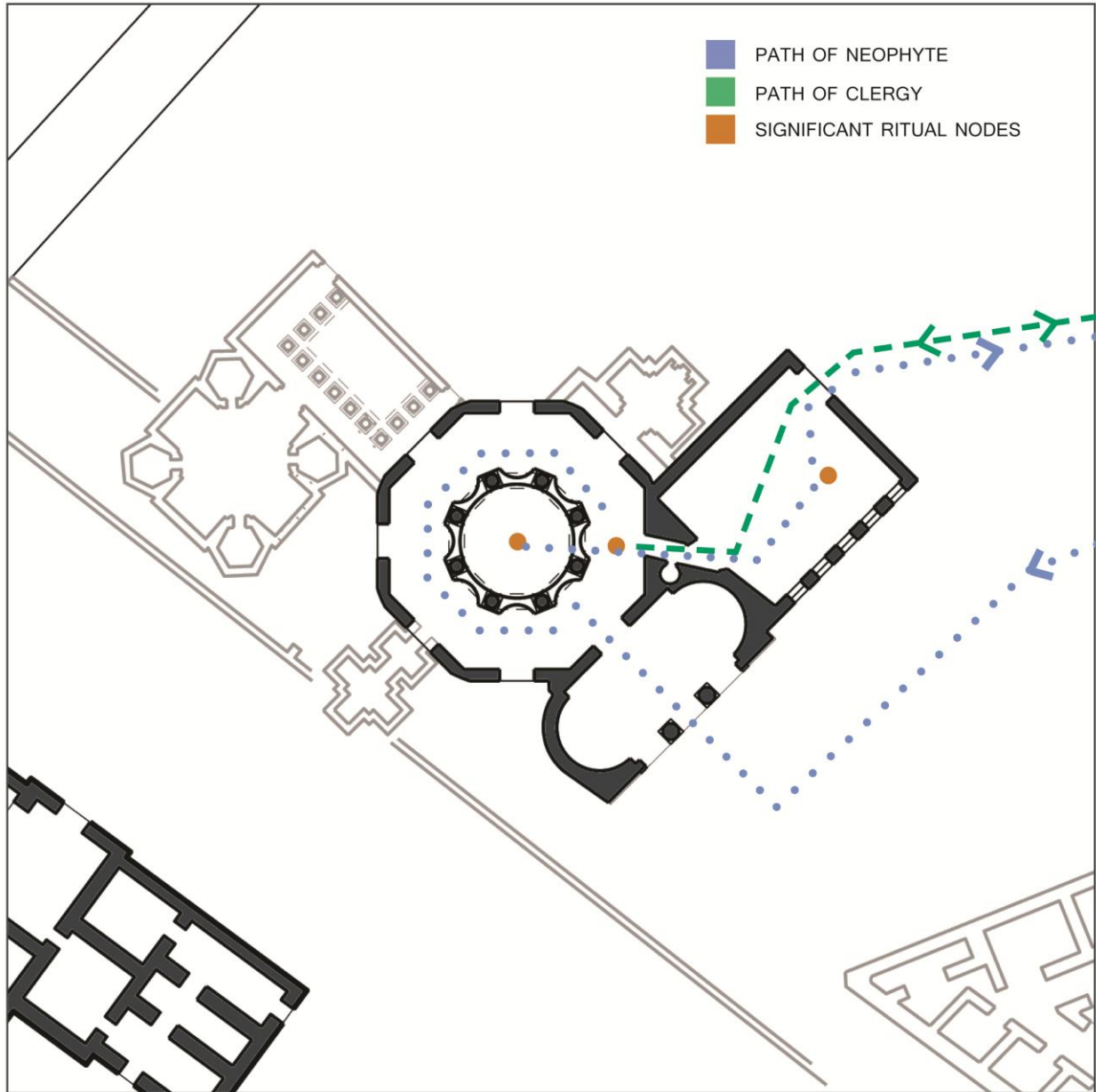


Figure VI-4: Plan highlighting the hypothetical reconstruction of how the participants moved through the space. Orange dots highlight significant event nodes occurring throughout the ritual. (Illustration by D. Tyler Thayer)

When the baptistery was silent, after the baptizands and any sponsors and/or family had filtered into the space, the bishop would have commenced the baptism with a prayer. Then he would have crossed the colonnaded threshold and descended into the deep waters of the font. This point in the ritual is significant, because prior to Sixtus' transformation, a large column occupied the hierarchic center of the font, upon which stood a large candle and flame.¹⁴⁴ Sixtus removed this column, providing an open center now occupiable by the bishop—in the case of the Lateran, the bishop is the pope—during the ritual ceremony. To further enhance the center of the baptistery, Sixtus lifted the new cupola higher and filled the font with a greater amount of light, flooding in from the windows above. At this point, the bishop would beckon the first baptizand to step into the font to be baptized. The baptizand would, for the first time, fully sense the great height and the amount of light in this central space. The moment of the initiate's full immersion baptism would have been an awe inspiring, memory creating event in the neophyte's life.

It should be noted that in the fifth century, there would have been hundreds of individuals being baptized at Easter. In response, the ceremony could not have continued as described above, lest it take hours; the fact that the community waited in the basilica to celebrate the Eucharist with the neophytes, suggests the need for efficiency. In years where the amount of baptisms to be performed were in the hundreds, the bishop would have performed a set amount of the baptisms then conferred his authority to the priests and/or deacons to finish.¹⁴⁵ This would allow the bishop to step out of the font to perform the chrism and laying on of hands for all those who were just baptized, an act that could only be

¹⁴⁴ Cf. LP, I, (ed. L. Duchesne), 174.

¹⁴⁵ John the Deacon does not go into detail as to who performed what functions during the ceremony. The *Ordo Romanus XI* records the conferring of authority to the deacons and presbyters bishop; however, the *Ordo's* dating is unresolved and probably reflects a practice that occurred after the fifth century. Therefore, there is little evidence that dictates the details of the fifth-century baptism. The hypothesis outlined above is informed by the facts that 1) there were hundreds of baptizands, 2) the spatial arrangement of the baptistery allows for an "assembly line" type approach to the baptizing of hundreds of individuals, and 3) later documents show this type of practice and they may have evolved from the earlier Sistine practice.

performed by the bishop—while baptism had a long tradition allowing deacons, priests, and even laymen, under the authority of the bishop to perform the immersion part of the ritual.

The neophytes that emerged would have been given white vestures, most likely at the point where they stepped out of the font.¹⁴⁶ When they were clothed in their white robes, they would move to the bishop to receive the chrism. Since there would have been multiple baptism occurring at the same time, it seems probable that the bishop might have performed the chrism just inside the rectangular hall where the clergy emerged (cf. Fig. VI-4). In this hall, the bishop could sign their foreheads with the cross, lay his hands on them, and bless them. This large hall would then act as a space for the staging of the neophytes before they proceed back to the basilica for their participation in a special Eucharist celebration.

The transformations sponsored by Sixtus were significant to the symbolic nature of the baptism ritual. The central focus of the space reflected that the transformational power of the ritual was taking place in the center of this baptistery. Even when the bishop was not there, but in the side hall performing the chrism, his conferment of authority rested upon those performing the rite. The baptistery was circular, so that all who stood round the font were witnesses to the changing identity of the baptizand. Therefore, the round, inwardly facing baptistery space was symbolic of the witnesses of the Christian community (Fig. VI-5). It can be imagined that as initiates were being baptized, family members and sponsors were moving in and out of the doors on the sides of the baptistery, allowing the witnesses to shift based on who was being baptized. Clearly, the baptistery could not hold the entire Christian community of Rome, but the doors allowed for a constant subtle changing of the witnesses. These witnesses moved in and out, symbolically representing the entire church receiving the baptizands into the community.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. John the Deacon, 6.

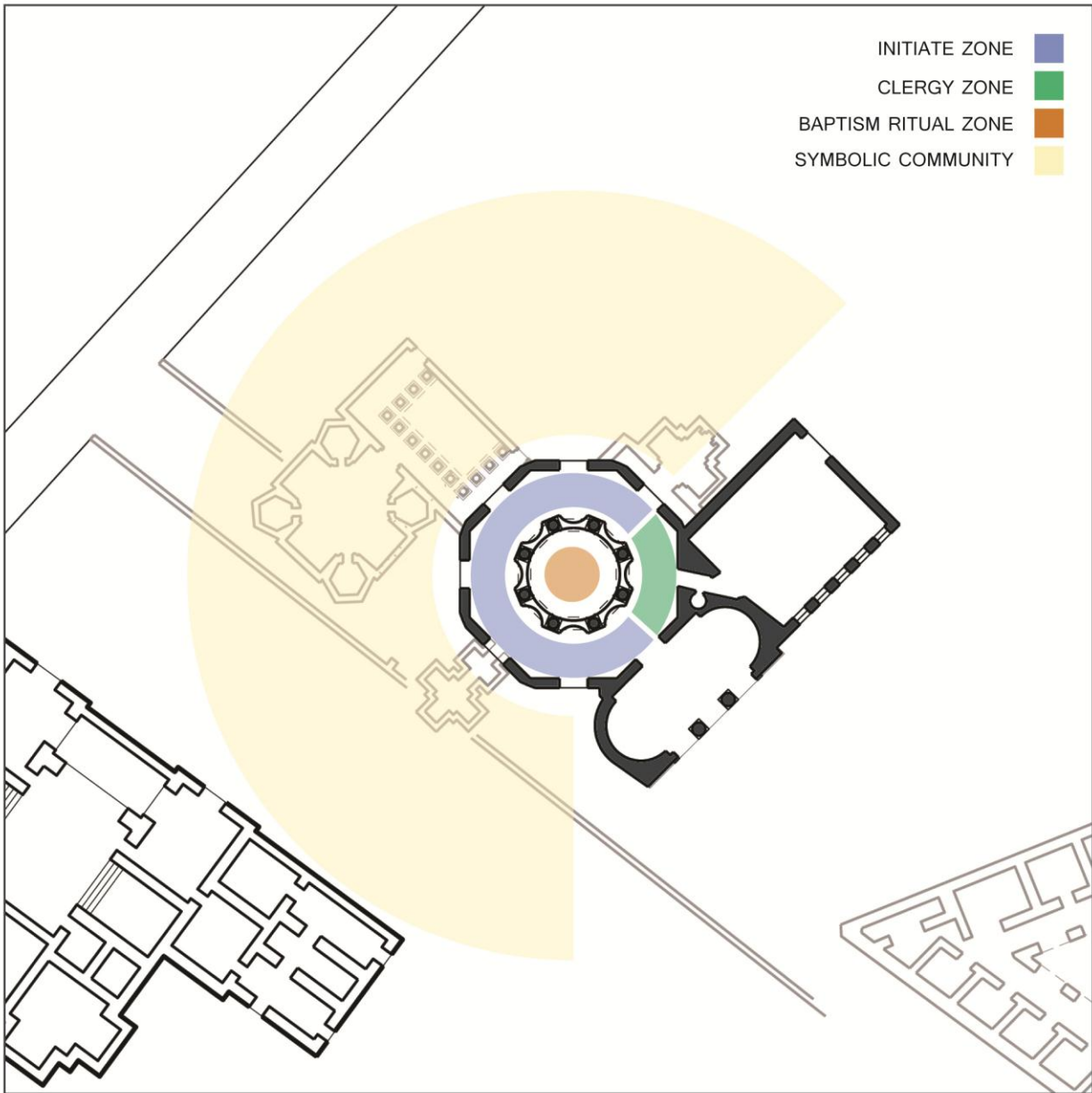


Figure VI-5: Diagram highlight participant zones during ritual, including the larger community which symbolically exists because of the inherent nature of the round baptistery. (Illustration by D. Tyler Thayer)

Sixtus' renovation enhanced the baptism ritual through a series of spatial transformations. The transformations reflected the rigors of the baptism theology and the increase of the papal power in the Christian community. However, the greatest effect was on the ritual procession as it moved through the spaces. The baptism ritual was chiefly about the initiation of a converted individual into the Christian community. Before this sacrament was publically taken by the catechumen, he or she was without an identifiable heritage that bonded the Christian to the community. The ritual was in effect an important symbolic moment in one's life that allowed the community and the neophyte to identify with one another through a common shared memory. The communal memory was essentially rooted in the collection of all the individual baptisms that included not only the neophyte but also the observation of his or her sponsors, the deacons, the priests, the bishop—a collected audience that effectively represented the community as a whole. Through the ritual, the initiate gained a new identity, both theologically and symbolically. The neophyte was reborn with the memories associated with the baptismal ritual, now had a new identification and social association with the Christian community that was publicly celebrated. The memory of one's baptism forever linked that person to a continuing history of baptisms in the Lateran Baptistery.

CHAPTER VII

Concluding Thoughts

The renovations initiated by Sixtus III in the Lateran Baptistery were crucial to the reconfiguration of the baptistery in response to the heavily nuanced ritual developed in the fifth century. Sixtus emphasized the notion of imperial sponsorship in the baptistery throughout his work. In so doing, he was weaving a legendary history into the fabric of the baptistery by remembering the early fourth-century imperial sponsorship of Constantine. The effects are unquestionable. In a text composed a century after Sixtus' renovation of the baptistery, the *Liber Pontificalis* records the baptism of Constantine happening in the Lateran Baptistery—now known to be only legend.¹⁴⁷ In the sixteenth-century this legend continued to propagate. Pope Clement VII (1523-34 CE) commissioned the finishing of *The Baptism of Constantine*, a wall fresco in the Apostolic Palace in Vatican City (Fig. VII-1). In this fresco Constantine is illustrated being baptized by Pope Silvester (314-335 CE) in the Lateran Baptistery. Though Constantine was not baptized in the Lateran Baptistery, the memory of his sponsorship was evidently very important and became a crucial part of the legendary history surrounding the baptistery.

Sixtus III carefully renovated the Lateran Baptistery in order to promulgate its link to the imperial patron. He used *spolia* in order to create a sense of *romanitas* to form a context in which the baptistery would exhibit the splendor and sophistication deserved for a Roman baptistery and the significance of the sacrament. Sixtus' renovation was entirely unusual, because he achieved the

¹⁴⁷ LP, I, (ed. L. Duchesne), 172-4. For a better understanding of dating the *Liber Pontificalis* see Kate Cooper and Julia Hillner, *Religion, Dynasty, and Patronage in Early Christian Rome: 300-900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).



Figure VII-1: *The Baptism of Constantine* by Giovan Francesco Penni, early sixteenth century (from Vatican Museums, http://mv.vatican.va/3_EN/pages/x-Schede/SDRs/SDRs_01_03_005_big.html.)

splendor by the means usually only afforded to an emperor. Sixtus' use of the *spolia* he collected from around Rome, and perhaps from elsewhere in the empire, must have reflected his desire to lead the Christian community and increase the future power and significance of the pope as a major figure in the future of the Roman Empire.

The use of *spolia* was further accented in the appropriation of ancient imagery motifs. The baptistery's apse mosaics characterized the reconfiguration of ancient imagery for the purposes of presenting the Christian message of regeneration. The most significant of the appropriations was the reuse of the acanthus vine scroll that has been identified as emulating the Ara Pacis Augustae. The vine motif was clearly not new. Sixtus' artists borrowed the imagery and the meanings of regeneration and abundance the motifs communicated, but transformed the connotations to fit the Christian ritual of baptism. Thus, the vines took on a meaning of regeneration, in which the baptistery as a whole can be interpreted as providing ritual benefits to the neophytes.

The greatest effect of Sixtus III's renovations had been on the ritual experience. The *Liber Pontificalis* described the Constantinian phase of the baptistery as having a porphyry column standing in the center of the font holding a large basin of pure gold weighing 52 lbs. with flame burning 200 lbs. of balsam.¹⁴⁸ Before Sixtus renovated the baptistery, the center of the baptistery was occupied by a ceremonial flame, which gave off a radiating light throughout a very open baptistery. When Sixtus III transformed the interior, he did two very important spatial moves. First, he brought the eight porphyry columns from the edge of the space inwards to the font while increasing the verticality of the central font space. That spatial move also created an important ceremonial threshold between the ambulatory and the water, which required the baptizand to step up through the colonnade immediately before his or her baptism and symbolic transformation into a neophyte. Second, Sixtus removed the central

¹⁴⁸ LP, I, (ed. L. Duchesne), 174.

column of light, so that the central space could be occupied by the bishop and the baptizand—a move that places the initiate under the authority of the bishop. This heightened the perception of centrality for the moment of baptism. Baptism became the central focus for the community that was looking from within the ambulatory.

The ritual had clearly gained a rigor that responded to the transformation. As such, the Lateran Baptistery became the iconic symbol of baptism in the ancient capital. The importance of the effect of these transformations and the specific legendary history of the Lateran Baptistery becomes apparent by looking at manuscripts produced in the subsequent centuries. In the late eighth century, Charlemagne (768-814 CE) commissioned the production of an illuminated manuscript, known as the *Godescalc Gospel Lectionary*, to commemorate his procession to Rome to meet Pope Adrian I (772-95 CE), who baptized his son, Pepin. In this manuscript an illumination of the “Fountain of Life” visual commemorates the Pepin’s baptism (Fig. VII-2). In the ninth century, Louis the Pious (813-840 CE) commissioned the *Gospel s of St. Medard de Soissons*. This Carolingian manuscript also featured an illumination of the “Fountain of Life” (Fig. VII-3). Both the *Godescalc* and *Soissons Gospels* show fonts that appear to be inspired by the Lateran Baptistery—both contain a font full of water surrounded by eight porphyry-like columns, covered by a canopy. In the Middle Ages, especially under Charlemagne and his sons, the Lateran Baptistery had become an ideal that had been abstracted into a font type in these manuscripts. It was important for the emperor’s son to be baptized in Rome and therefore in the Lateran Baptistery.

The transformation of the Lateran Baptistery under Sixtus III made it the typological ideal for baptisteries. On one hand, the baptistery’s history is particularly unique—it was the baptistery of the cathedral church in Rome and its official patron was Constantine the Great. At the same time, the renovations by Sixtus III created a transformative experience in which the memory of the individual,



Figure VII-2: "Fountain of Life" (from Godescalc Evangelistary, folio 3v 781-3, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale)



Figure VII-3: "Fountain of Life" (from The Gospels of St. Medard de Soissons, folio 6v, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France)

community and the legendary historical past were all engaged through the ritual that took place within its walls. Through the work initiated by Sixtus III, the Lateran Baptistery became iconic.

In conclusion, it is important to consider Sixtus III's reasons for implementing a project that so greatly interacted with issues of memory. Sixtus clearly used imperial themes for the Lateran Baptistery, a building absolutely essential to the confirmation of a Roman Christian's identity. Sixtus seems to have engaged memories of the imperial past for two reasons: 1) to elevate the stature of the baptistery and, therefore, the papal role in the Lateran Baptistery, and 2) to activate an interchange with the role of memory in the ritual practice.

The first thought is coupled with the unusual papal use of imperial themes in the baptistery's architecture and imagery. Sixtus' sponsorship honored Constantine's imperial sponsorship of the Lateran complex through the materials he implemented. Sixtus' reuse of the porphyry columns and imperial grade *spolia* reflected his honoring of Constantine's sponsorship. It appears that Sixtus used imperial themes to legitimize his position of authority in the church and the importance of the baptism sacrament to the Christian community. It is true that Sixtus' power as the bishop of Rome was increasing, but the use of these items seems to blur the lines of traditional roles in sponsorship. The splendor of these elements and the imperial past associated with them matched the significance of baptism.

The final thought to be considered deals with how one connects the memories of the imperial past with the ritual practice of baptism within the Lateran Baptistery. The building evoked various memories of the past, and this thesis has argued that these memories are generally connected to Constantine's sponsorship in the fourth century. This move by Sixtus and his architects was to initiate a dialogue with the practice of memory within the space. The result, as a baptizand would have experienced the space, would have impressed the significance of the ritual upon the initiate by

substantiating this with tones of imperialism. The neophyte may not have fully remembered, or realized, the specific imperial themes, but the primary, lasting purpose of the ritual to create a memory would have been achieved. Therefore, the memories of the imperial past in the baptistery were connected to the ritual by way of the practice of memory making. As Sixtus was constructing a memory within the art and architecture of the Lateran Baptistery, so was the ritual constructing memories of the baptism that took place among the splendors of the Roman empire. These memories were then forever implanted within the minds of the neophyte and the Christian community in Rome; linking the neophyte to the community, the community to the bishop, and the bishop, by way of the baptistery, to Rome.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alchermes, Joseph. "Constantine and the Empire of New Rome." In *Heaven on Earth: Art and the Church in Byzantium*, edited by Linda Safran. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998.
- _____. "Spolia in Roman Cities of the Late Empire: Legislative Rationales and Architectural Reuse." *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 48 (1994): 167-78.
- Allison, Gregg R. *Historical Theology*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011.
- Ambrose, and Roy J. Deferrari. *Saint Ambrose: Theological and Dogmatic Works*. Washington: Catholic University of American Press, 1963.
- Anderson, James C. *The Historical Topography of the Imperial Fora*. Bruxelles: Latomus, 1984.
- Bassett, Sarah. *The Urban Image of Late Antique Constantinople*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Blaauw, Sible de. *Cultus et decor : Liturgia e architettura nella Roma tardoantica e medievale : Basilica Salvatoris, Sanctae Mariae, Sancti Petri*. Città del Vaticano: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1994.
- _____. "Imperial Connotations in Roman Church Interiors: The Significance and Effect of the Lateran Fastigium." In *Imperial Art as Christian Art, Christian Art as Imperial Art : Expression and Meaning in Art and Architecture from Constantine to Justinian*. Roma: Bardi, 2001.
- Bork, Robert Odell, William W. Clark, and Abby McGehee. *New Approaches to Medieval Architecture*. Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2011.
- Bosman, Lex. *The Power of Tradition, Spolia in the Architecture of St. Peter's in the Vatican*. Hilversum: Uitgeverij Verloren, 2004.
- Brandenburg, Hugo, and Arnaldo Vescovo. *Ancient Churches of Rome from the Fourth to the Seventh Century : The Dawn of Christian Architecture in the West*. Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2005.
- Brandt, Olof. "Constantine, the Lateran, and Early Church Building Policy." In *Imperial Art as Christian Art, Christian Art as Imperial Art : Expression and Meaning in Art and Architecture from Constantine to Justinian*. Roma: Bardi, 2001.
- _____. "Il Battistero lateranense dell'imperatore Costantino e l'architettura contemporanea: come si crea un'architettura battesimale cristiana?" *Late Antiquity: Art in Context* 1 (2001): 117-144.
- _____. "L'oratorio Della Santa Croce." *Melanges de l'Ecole française de Rome Antiquité* 116, no. 1 (2004): 79-93.
- _____. "The Lateran Baptistry and the Diffusion of Octagonal Baptisteries from Rome to Constantinople." *Fruhes Christentum zwischen Rom und Konstantinopel : acta Congressus Internationalis XIV Archeologiae Christianae, Vindobonae* 19.-26. 9. 1999 1 (2006): 221-27.
- _____. "Understanding the Structures of Early Christian Baptisteries." In *Ablution, Initiation, and Baptism: Late Antiquity, Early Judaism, and Early Christianity*, edited by David Hellholm. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010.
- _____. *Battisteri oltre la pianta. Gli alzati di nove battisteri paleocristiani in Italia*. Città del Vaticano : Pontificio Istituto di archeologia cristiana, 2012.
- Brandt, Olof, and Federico Guidobaldi. "Il Battistero lateranense: nuove interpretazioni delle fasi strutturali," *Rivista di archeologia cristiana* 84 (2008): 189-282.

- Brenk, Beat. "Imperiale - Cristiano - Pagano - Privato. Dal Contesto Al Significato." In *Imperial Art as Christian Art, Christian Art as Imperial Art : Expression and Meaning in Art and Architecture from Constantine to Justinian*. Roma: Bardi, 2001.
- _____. "Spolia from Constantine to Charlemagne: Aesthetics versus Ideology." *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 41 (1987): 103-09.
- Cabrol, Fernand, and Henri Leclercq. *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie*, vol. 2. Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1924.
- Christie, Neil. *From Constantine to Charlemagne: An Archaeology of Italy Ad 300-800*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006.
- Cullhed, Mats. *Conservator Urbis Suae : Studies in the Politics and Propaganda of the Emperor Maxentius*. Stockholm: Distributor P. Åström, 1994.
- Davis, Raymond. *The Book of Pontiffs (Liber Pontificalis) : The Ancient Biographies of the First Ninety Roman Bishops to AD 715*. Liverpool: Liverpool Univ. Press, 2000.
- Deliyannis, Deborah Mauskopf. *Ravenna in Late Antiquity*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Doig, Allan. *Liturgy and Architecture from the Early Church to the Middle Ages*. Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2008.
- Eusebius. *The Church History*. Translated by Paul L. Maier. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007.
- _____. "The Life of Constantine." In *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series*, edited by Philip Schaff, 481-559. New York: Cosimo Classics, 2007.
- Ferguson, Everett. *Baptism in the Early Church : History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2009.
- Flower, Harriet I. *The Art of Forgetting*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006.
- Gillet, Andrew. "Rome, Ravenna and the Last Western Emperors." *Papers of the British School at Rome* 69 (2001): 131-167.
- Hansen, Maria Fabricius. *The Eloquence of Appropriation: Prolegomena to an Understanding of Spolia in Early Christian Rome*. Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 2003.
- Hedrick, Charles W. *History and Silence: Purge and Rehabilitation of Memory in Late Antiquity*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000.
- Hippolytus, Gregory Dix, and Henry Chadwick. *The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolytus of Rome, bishop and martyr*. London: Published for the Church Historical Society by Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1968.
- Holloway, R. Ross. *Constantine & Rome*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004.
- Jensen, Robin M. *Living Water: Images, Symbols, and Settings of Early Christian Baptism*. Leiden: Brill, 2011.
- Johnson, Mark Joseph. *The Roman Imperial Mausoleum in Late Antiquity*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- Kähler, Heinz. "Zu Den Spolien Im Baptisterium Der Lateranbasilika." *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archaeologischen Instituts, Roemische Abteilung* 52, no. 1 (1937): 106-18.

- Kelly, J.N.D. *The Oxford Dictionary of Popes*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986.
- Kinney, Dale. "The Church Basilica." In *Imperial Art as Christian Art, Christian Art as Imperial Art : Expression and Meaning in Art and Architecture from Constantine to Justinian*. Roma: Bardi, 2001.
- _____. *Spolia : Damnatio and Renovatio Memoriae*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997.
- Klauser, Theodor. *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum; Sachwörterbuch zur Auseinandersetzung des Christentums mit der antiken Welt*, Lie. 171, 172. Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 2007.
- Kostof, Spiro. *A History of Architecture : Settings and Rituals*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.
- Krautheimer, Richard. *Rome, Profile of a City, 312-1308*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980.
- _____. *Three Christian Capitals: Topography and Politics*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983.
- Mackie, Gillian Vallance. *Early Christian Chapels in the West: Decoration, Function, and Patronage*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003.
- Miles, Margaret R. *Carnal Knowing: Female Nakedness and Religious Meaning in the Christian West*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1989.
- Miller, Maureen C. *The Bishop's Palace: Architecture and Authority in Medieval Italy*. Ithica, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000.
- Onians, John. "Architecture, Metaphor and the Mind." *Architectural History* 35 (1992): 192-207.
- _____. *Bearers of Meaning: The Classical Orders in Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988.
- Ousterhout, Robert. "The Holy Space: Architecture and the Liturgy." In *Heaven on Earth: Art and the Church in Byzantium*, edited by Linda Safran. 81-120. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998.
- Saradi, Helen. "The Use of Ancient Spolia in Byzantine Monuments: The Archaeological and Literary Evidence." *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 3, no. 4 (1997): 395-423.
- Scott, Susan C. *The Art of Interpreting*. University Park, Penn.: Dept. of Art History, the Pennsylvania State University, 1995.
- Smith, J. Warren. *Christian Grace and Pagan Virtue: the Theological Foundation of Ambrose's Ethics*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Wharton, Annabel Jane. "Ritual and Reconstructed Meaning: The Neonian Baptistry in Ravenna." *Art Bulletin* 69, no. 3 (1987).
- Whitaker, E. C., and Maxwell E. Johnson. *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy*. Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2003.
- White, L. Michael. *Building God's house in the Roman world: Architectural Adaptation among Pagans, Jews, and Christians*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990.
- Zanker, Paul. *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1988.

APPENDIX



Appendix Figure 1: Hypothetical reconstruction of Sistine Lateran Baptistery (Model and photo by D. Tyler Thayer)

VITA

David Tyler Thayer was born in Nashville, Tennessee. He attended the College of Architecture and Design at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, and graduated in 2010 with a Bachelor of Architecture. Upon further considering his future, he decided to pursue a post-professional Master of Architecture degree before continuing to gain his professional licensure.

During his two years in the graduate program, Tyler met a beautiful girl and fell in love. Somehow he managed to marry her while she was pursuing a doctorate in audiology and he was writing a thesis. Her name is Erica Lauren, and they both live in Knoxville.

Tyler plans to pursue licensure, start a family, and design structures that he hopes will be as impressive and influential as the Lateran Baptistery.