Peter Cornelius Claussen

Die Kirchen der Stadt Rom im Mittelalter 1050–1300, vol. 2, S. Giovanni in Laterano

Corpus Cosmatorum II, 2; Forschungen zur Kunstgeschichte und christlichen Archäologie 21, Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2008, 431 pp., 255 b/w illus. € 105 (cloth), ISBN 9783515090735

This is obviously an important work in progress. Imposing German enterprises such as this one and Die Kirchen von Siena, emanating from the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florence, tend to encounter large immovable objects such as the cathedral of Siena, which slow the majestic progress of publication. Here it is the cathedral of Rome, San Giovanni in Laterano, which occupies almost the whole volume, with the exception of a densely argued section by Darko Senekovic on San Giovanni in Fonte, the Lateran Baptistery (355–93). The present volume begins not with the Lateran itself but with a section adding to and commenting on the first volume of the corpus, published in 2002, which covered Sant’Adriano to Santa Francesca Romana, and providing additional information on the signatures of Cosmati masons as a supplement to Claussen’s Magistri Doctissimi Romani of 1987. This information could surely have been more appropriately located at the back of the present volume, for it confers a provisional and at times defensive tone to the beginning of what, it must immediately be said, is an impressive achievement.

This is a substantial book on an important episode in the architectural and decorative history of one of Christendom’s greatest monuments, Constantine’s Basilica Salutaris. It is arguable whether the medieval period is by any means the defining episode in its architectural history, and it is immediately striking how much of the surviving graphic evidence stems from the preparations for Borromini’s thorough-going remodeling of 1646–50. From another viewpoint it is a book that continues a long bibliographical sequence. After the pioneering monograph of Philippe Lauer, understanding of the basilica was fundamentally revised in the fifth volume of Richard Krautheimer’s Corpus Basilarum Christianarum Romae. Krautheimer’s magisterial analysis was very largely confined to the architectural framework, and church furnishing and liturgical practice—inextricably linked yet immensely difficult to substantiate—were assigned a subordinate place. This lacuna was brilliantly addressed by Sible de Blaauw’s Cultus et Decor, which illuminated the fundamental interaction between liturgy and furnishing, and offered fundamental critiques of several of Krautheimer’s architectural hypotheses. Claussen and his collaborators have digested a huge mass of archaeological and documentary material, and with the completion of this volume, one-third of the projected corpus is now complete. Nonetheless, it remains difficult to get a clear sense of the project’s self-definition; for example, it is hard to justify the decision to exclude painting while devoting a good deal of attention to Nicholas IV’s apse mosaic. Painting can provide a terminus ante quem for walls just as effectively as mosaic.

Throughout Claussen is refreshingly unafraid to disagree with earlier scholarship. One of the modifications suggested by de Blaauw to the generally accepted architectural chronology was that the medieval transept did not form part of the Franciscan pope’s late thirteenth-century remodeling, but had been inserted over a century earlier. For Claussen this hypothesis is unsustainable, and he reaffirms the role of Nicholas IV, proposing that work on the transept continued under Boniface VIII.

The twelfth-century portico was added to a façade that was in essence Constantinian. It was the largest medieval portico in Rome and datable 1180/1200, as established by the important contributions of Ingo Herklotz. For this portico project, Claussen accepts that the guiding responsibility was the Lateran chapter. This is highly plausible, and one might remark that whereas individual patrons are given detailed treatment, the patronal role of the permanently resident body of clergy who occupied the basilica is nowhere scrutinized at length. How far Nicholas IV subsequently restored the upper element of the ancient façade is uncertain, but according to Claussen his intervention was substantial. One could object that this discussion, the fullest to have appeared in print since Volker Hoffmann’s 1978 article in the Römisches Jahrbuch, does not afford sufficient importance to the predella scene of the Dream of Innocent III in the Stigmatisation panel bearing Giotto’s signature, now in the Louvre, and originally from San Francesco in Pisa. The panel painting is considerably more detailed, particularly its glimpse into the Lateran nave, than is the fresco in the Upper Church of San Francesco at Assisi, which is damaged precisely in the area depicting the façade, and demonstrably less detailed.

One of the major achievements of this corpus volume is its detailed analysis and discussion of the Lateran cloister; both the architectural design and the sculptural decoration receive extended scrutiny. The intervention of three distinguishable sculptors is postulated. Beginning on the north walk, the cloister constitutes the first

446 JSAH / 69.3, SEPTEMBER 2010
substantial alteration of the Constantinian ground plan. For Claussen the cloister’s location is important evidence against de Blauw’s suggestion of an earlier construction date for the transept. Many valuable comments are made on the iconography. Again a wider contextualization of the Egyptianizing elements in the cloister figures would have been welcome. Here the book by Brian Curran, *The Egyptian Renaissance*, which specifically links the Colonna family with Egyptian antiquities, probably appeared too late for use. Was the site of the *Iseum Campense* near the Pantheon being notably disturbed in the period around 1200, or were sphinxes and Egyptianizing lions merely fashionable motifs? Lions, as watchers by the threshold, were an almost universal phenomenon in Italian church portals. What, however, was their role in the ideology of the cloister, and what exactly were they guarding? For Sicard of Cremona in his *Miracle*, the four sides of the cloister signified contempt of self, contempt of the world, love of one’s neighbor, and love of God. He, followed by Durandus in his *Rationale* (1.1. 410–20), connected the cloister with the portico of Solomon, whose throne was decorated with lions. For secular clergy as for monks, the cloister was a vital component of the common life.

A surprising finding is the apparent absence of a medieval floor. The quattrocento floor was laid directly over the Constantinian pavement, which had apparently survived until that date. More about this replacement floor is now to be found in the monograph by Angela Dressen.” This fifteenth-century floor was, among other things, a proud reassertion of Colonna influence over the church. The millennial competition between the Vatican and Lateran basilicas during the period from the accession of Nicholas IV in 1288 until the death of the Colonna Pope Martin V in 1431 also could be seen reflected in aristocratic family rivalries. Saint Peter’s was firmly in Orsini hands, and they and their allies had famously forced the Emperor Henry VII to be crowned in the Lateran in June 1312. Orsini hegemony at the Vatican also meant that Colonna dominance could be ostentatiously demonstrated only in those churches under their control, the Lateran and Santa Maria Maggiore. Martin V’s bronze tomb took its place in this competition.

That an apsidal throne should receive more emphasis under a Franciscan pope is somewhat surprising. The earlier throne in the Upper Church at Assisi must reflect a precedent Roman model, for it is a generation earlier in date than the Lateran throne proudly recorded in Nicholas IV’s mosaic inscription. Claussen regards the Upper Church throne as a model for the Lateran. Here again, the open texture of this book is disconcerting—one should surely expect a corpus to be answering questions rather than posing them. What hard evidence indicates that the lions now flanking the pastiche throne in the apse of Cardinal Baronius’s titular church, SS. Nereo and Achilleo, come from the Lateran, as is suggested here?

The discussion of the architecture of the medieval transept is important, and likely to prove of lasting value; indeed, it is sufficiently good to make one wish it were longer. For Claussen the north transept towers are best explicable as a fire precaution. The extent of the damage caused by the 1308 fire is notoriously difficult to assess from the overheated verse of the anonymous *Lateranensis basilicae combustus*, which regarded it as a divine judgment. Stones split, mosaics were blackened with smoke, and the silver ciborium melted. The Aragonese ambassadors at the Curia simply report that the Lateran roof burnt throughout the night. Certainly repairs and refurbishment must have occupied a substantial time. A letter to Pope John XXII of 1321/22, not noticed by the author, reveals Abbot Adinolfo of San Paolo fuori le mura desperately anxious that two beams of “marvelous size” donated by Robert I d’Anjou for roof repairs at San Paolo, which had been delivered in error to the Lateran, should not be cut down to fit that church, thus rendering them useless for the wider nave of San Paolo.

In 1370 Urban V’s elaborate Gothic ciborium was completed, with the aid of a substantial financial contribution from Charles V, the French king. Significantly missing here is any sense of the wider context. We now know, from recent findings by Claudia Bolgia, that the Lateran tabernacle was promptly reflected in the Felici family tabernacle that was once in Santa Maria in Aracoeli, which raises important questions about the accessibility, display and efficacy of icons. Another important dimension is the Lateran ciborium’s resonance internationally. There is considerable evidence that it was swiftly imitated in the destroyed reliquary ciborium for the new Franciscan Saint Elzéar de Sabran (d. 1323), who had been canonized in Rome by Urban V in April 1369. It stood above the high altar of the order’s church at Apt, and the saint’s relics were translated there by the pope’s brother, Cardinal Anglic Grimoard, in June 1373. In the Lateran ciborium the presence of an elevated reliqu platform is traced back, for this reader somewhat implausibly, to an eleventh-century model. An earlier French king, Louis IX, had given the elevation of relics enormous cachet in his Sainte-Chapelle, and the practice had been promptly taken up in Rome by the Capocci tabernacle of 1256 in Santa Maria Maggiore.

Our understanding of medieval tombs in Rome was immeasurably extended by the researches of the Austrian Academy, and the present volume makes excellent detailed use of their findings. The discussion of Arnolfo di Cambio’s incomplete monument for Riccardo Annibaldi (d. 1289) eschews the interpretative excesses of recent scholarship, although Cardinal Guillaume de Bray’s name continues to be misspelled (229), as does that of Magister Cassetta (254). Equally, Stefano Surdi was never a cardinal (250); his epitaph describes him as papal chaplain, and his tomb, like that of the papal notary Riccardo Annibaldi, is significant largely for illustrating how the Roman effigial tomb had ceased to be the exclusive preserve of popes and cardinals. Where were the Lateran canons themselves usually buried? Not all the new suggestions may be equally convincing. The engraved tomb marker of Cardinal Gerardo Bianchi of Parma (d. 1302) can never have been oriented. The customary practice of tomb orientation was fundamentally changed by Arnolfo di Cambio’s tomb of Boniface VIII, which was certainly complete by mid-1296, when the pope was still living.
Gerardo Bianchi’s tomb did not imitate Boniface VIII’s liturgical *volte face*.

One of the most enigmatic surviving sculptural fragments is the kneeling pope now located in the Cappella del Crocifisso. Its background heraldry has been manipulated and is now untrustworthy. Claussen may well be right in identifying it, as earlier had Gerhard Ladner, with Boniface VIII. What has not been noticed (and is now invisible beneath layers of institutional plaster and paint) is that the two monumental standing figures of Peter and Paul possess a similar marble ground, decorated with inset lines of mosaic. This was briefly visible in the early 1970s (as this reviewer can testify), but was brusquely plastered over. All three figures originally formed parts of a unified ensemble. An extremely useful catalog of erratic sculpture in the cloister is included. This will be of endur-

Among the many sterling virtues of this book is its forthrightness. Juxtaposing photographs of the cloister lions taken in the 1960s with their present crumbling condition demonstrates the shocking level of physical degradation that has been allowed to occur. The Lateran cloister is a shameful example of willful neglect. Not only have fragile monuments been arbitrarily moved and demonstrably damaged, elementary methods of conservation are still largely absent. This book is to be wholeheartedly commended for bringing this unflinchingly to public notice.

Notes


JULIAN GARDNER
University of Warwick