Chapter 1

PASCHAL I AND THE HISTORY OF ROME

Late one night in 821 Pope Paschal attended a vigil in St Peter's church.
St Peter's was not the cathedral of Rome, indeed the saint's basilica was
located far across the city from Paschal's episcopal palace at the Lateran.
Yet the church of St Peter's had long held a special position in the hearts
and minds of Christendom and especially Romans, as it was believed
to have been built over the body of Saint Peter, the Apostle to whom
Christ had given the charge of building the Church.[1] Paschal celebrated
the saint by singing the *matutinales*, late night prayers, in front of the body
of Saint Peter, which lay beneath the altar. There, in front of the relics,
Paschal fell asleep.

In his dream a young woman, who identified herself as Saint Cecilia,
visited him. Cecilia, a Roman martyr who was very popular in the early
Middle Ages, discussed with the pope the location of her own holy
relics. She thanked the pope for having previously sought her sacred
body, which he had not been able to locate. Blame was cast on the
Lombards, who had held the city under siege some decades previously
in 756. Cecilia gave him directions to find her in the catacombs outside
the city. Upon waking, he followed the saint's instructions and went to
the Praetextatus catacombs along the via Appia, where he found Cecilia's
holy body along with linens covered with her blood – blood from the
wounds of a soldier's blows to her neck that had left her lingering for three
days before she finally succumbed to earthly death. With his own hands,
the pope brought the precious body back inside the city walls and placed
it under the main altar of the basilica dedicated to her in Trastevere.[2]
He also collected the bodies of her companions in martyrdom and her
confessor. Paschal established a monastery at the church of S. Cecilia, in

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[1] Matthew 16:13–20, Mark 8:27–30, and Luke 9:18–21. On the importance of Peter, see Arnold
Angenendt, *Heilige und Reliquien: Die Geschichte ihres Kultes vom frühen Christentum bis zur Gegenwart*
(Munich, 1994), 225–9.

[2] *LP* 100:15–17, trans. Raymond Davis, *The Lives of the Ninth-Century Popes,* Translated Texts for
Historians 20 (Liverpool, 1995), 15–8.

part to ensure that the *matutinales* and other offices would be celebrated over her relics, just as he had celebrated at St Peter's.

This episode, reported in Paschal's biography in the *Liber Pontificalis*, presents densely packed justification for Paschal's architectural programme and its claims for authority. The narrative draws upon the precedent established by Peter's body in St Peter's basilica to locate the eventual translation of Cecilia's body to a basilica within a long-standing pattern of veneration. The spiritual rewards for venerating the bodies of the saints within papal churches with the proper, orthodox prayers and chants are made clear: Paschal is rewarded with a vision of the saint. Wrongdoings of the Lombards are intimated, affirming the essential role of orthodoxy and protecting the Papal State. Specificities of Cecilia's corpse and the signs of martyrdom are rendered in sharp detail, and this is interesting for two reasons. First it serves to authenticate the relics; the faithful can be assured that they are Cecilia's relics that were moved because the papal narrative uses specific references to the narrative of the *Passion* circulating in Rome at the time.[3] Secondly, these details from the narrative of the *Passion* entered the papal vocabulary of veneration – what had been popular and unregulated is now subsumed into papal orthodoxy.[4]
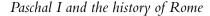
Paschal's relocation of the bodies of Saint Cecilia and her companions was one of the first translations of relics to endow an urban church, or *titulus*, in Rome. St Peter's on the Vatican Hill outside the city, of course, had housed the body of the Apostle for centuries. It and nearly all other saints' bodies in Rome lay in the catacombs, outside the city, and in churches built for the veneration of saints outside the walls. Few bodies of saints were venerated inside the city walls; those that were had mostly been imported to Rome from Byzantium or Dalmatia. On only two or three previous occasions had Roman saints' bodies been brought to urban churches, which were dedicated to the celebration of papal liturgy and the sacraments of the Christian community.[5] In translating these bodies into this church, Paschal imbued the urban church with the holiness of the saints' bodies, and created a new kind of celebration and devotion in the city. The nearly unprecedented relocation of a holy body into the city gave the church a new function and purpose. Despite the newness of his actions, and the enhanced devotional aspects bestowed upon the

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[3] On the narrative of the *Passion*, see Hippolyte Delehaye, *Études sur le légendier romain: Les saints de novembre et de décembre*, Subsidia Hagiographica 23 (Brussels, 1936), 73–95, 194–221, and below, pp. 244–50.

[4] See below, pp. 249–52.

[5] See below, pp. 208–18; Caroline Goodson 'Building for bodies: The architecture of saint veneration in early medieval Rome' in *Felix Roma: The production, experience and reflection of medieval Rome*, ed. Éamonn Ó Carragáin and Carol Neuman de Vegvar (Aldershot, 2008), 51–80.
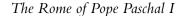
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3. S. Cecilia in Trastevere, interior.

titulus of S. Cecilia by the presence of saints' bodies, the architectural frame of his church had a distinctly traditional tone: a long, tall brick basilica with three aisles and a single apse. His building project was novel in many respects, as we shall see, yet it also perpetuated a traditional architecture of Roman church buildings as old as St Peter's.

Pope Paschal's buildings, and his reign, were bold and dynamic moments in the history of Rome and of the papacy. This study of the churches from the multiple viewpoints of their architectural frame, cult uses and functions in the papal administration demonstrates the importance of the built environment in early medieval power politics. It also suggests that the reign of Paschal I was a turning point for relations between the papacy and the Carolingians. Through his architectural pro–gramme as well as through other diplomatic and political channels, the papal court of Paschal argued for greater autonomy and independence than his predecessors had achieved, and the resultant retaliation by the Carolingians brought the rise of the Papal State to a halt.

In reconstructing three basilicas in Rome (S. Prassede, S. Maria in Domnica and S. Cecilia) and two oratories at St Peter's (SS. Processus et Martinianus and SS. Xistus et Fabianus), Paschal created new roles for urban churches. In addition to operating as *tituli*, local churches housing the papal liturgy throughout the city, two of his churches were
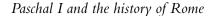
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4. S. Prassede, interior.

built to house corporeal relics of Roman saints. The churches were
the places of papal authority, an authority constructed by ceremony,
material splendour and spiritual presence. Paschal's building programme
reflects his particular concerns as a patron and supreme pontiff; it also
reveals techniques of power display common to early medieval building
in Rome and beyond.

This architectural programme is prestigious patronage; the patron is
identified and proclaimed through image and contemporary texts. The
buildings were intended to be associated with the pope and the claims
for authority that the buildings represent depend in part on visitors
recognising his role in the project. In the case of Paschal's churches, his

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5. S. Maria in Domnica, interior.

image is in each of the apse mosaics, as is his insignia in the decorations
and his name in the mosaic inscriptions. At S. Prassede, two contem–
porary marble inscriptions record his dedication of the building, one
carved into a chapel door, and another at present affixed to a pier.[6]
In addition to constructing these three buildings, Paschal renovated the
patriarchal basilica of S. Maria Maggiore and constructed two oratories
at St Peter's, which, though now lost, were described in detail in his
biography.[7] He carefully attached his name to the buildings for which he
was responsible.

[6] Its original location within the church is unknown. For the inscriptions, see below, pp. 161, 167,
228–30, 327–33, and fig. 34.
[7] It has occasionally been claimed that Paschal was involved in the construction of two other
churches, though in neither case is this correct. Early modern sources associated Paschal with
renovations to the Roman church of S. Stefano del Cacco, though this association arose from
confusion between Paschal I for Paschal II, who appeared in the apse mosaics. See Cleto Tuderti,
'S. Stefano del Cacco in Urbe', *Inter fratres* 41.2 (1991), 55–81, esp. 63, and 42.2 (1992), 209–32.
Excavations in the 1980s at S. Cornelia, Capracorum brought to light an inscription naming a
certain 'Pasqualis,' at the time considered to be Pope Paschal. Paschal, however, is always referred
to as 'Paschalis' in contemporary inscriptions and texts. See Neil Christie (ed.), *Three South Etrurian
Churches: Santa Cornelia, Santa Rufina and San Liberato*, Archaeological Monographs of the BSR
4 (London, 1991), 127 and Christoph Stiegemann and Matthias Wemhoff (eds.), *799: Kunst und
Kultur der Karolingerzeit* (Mainz, 1999), IX.42 (664–5).

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News of Paschal's projects was proclaimed in several media, not only the fabric of the buildings but also in the contemporary chronicle of the papacy, the *Liber Pontificalis* (hereafter *LP*). His biographer's diligence in recording these restorations and donations and his corroboration of the evidence from the buildings themselves allows us to reconstruct the architectural programme: Paschal rebuilt only three buildings and sprinkled the city with smaller renovations and donations of liturgical furnishings.[8] His attitude towards building patronage was unique among his contemporaries. Paschal rebuilt few buildings entirely instead of restoring many partially, as his predecessors had done. He dedicated his attention and resources to these grand projects, thereby creating showpieces of his interventions.[9] As we shall see, some consistent design choices evidently guided the building of these churches, for example a tendency towards regularity in plan and decoration and grandiosity in size, quality of materials and craft greater than among his predecessors.

I shall discuss the church-building and renovations as a coherent campaign on the part of a pope and his administration. This campaign sought to construct and command autonomy and authority for the office and individual of the pope. The desire of the papacy, under Paschal's leadership, to present itself in this way did not arise from the particular character traits of Paschal as an individual. I argue that this movement within the papacy grew out of the events of the previous decades, both in the empire and in the papal state, and most specifically very contemporary politics. The large-scale developments of the late eighth century, battles between Franks, Lombards and Romans for control of the Italian peninsula and supreme authority within Christendom, paved the way for popes such as Paschal to assert their authority. The first decades of the ninth century witnessed the death of the Frankish emperor Charlemagne and the accession of his son Louis. The transition required a renegotiation of the respective roles of emperor and pope. These political developments and relations between Franks, Romans, Byzantines, Lombards and Western

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[8] Paschal donated liturgical vestments to the following churches in Rome: SS. Cosma and Damiano on the via Sacra, SS. Sergio and Bacco (near the Lateran), S. Arcangelo (*ad Elephantum*?), S. Ciriaco, S. Michele (at the Lateran), S. Stefano degli Abissini, S. Maria Maggiore, and several others outside the city: S. Mennas on the via Ostiensis, S. Salvator (Rieti), S. Pietro (Centumcellae) and S. Maria (Vescovio).

[9] On medieval patrons, see Gunter Bandmann, *Mittelalterliche Architektur als Bedeutungstraeger* (Berlin, 1951); *Committenti e produzione artistico-letteraria nell'alto medioevo occidentale*, 4–10 aprile 1991, Settimana di studio 39 (Spoleto, 1992); Natalia Teteriatnikov, 'Private salvation programmes and their effect on Byzantine church decoration', *Arte Medievale*, n. s. 7.2 (1993), especially 51–4; B. B. Price, 'The effect of patronage on the intellectualization of medieval endeavors' in *The Search for a Patron in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. David G. Wilkins and Rebecca Wilkins, Medieval and Renaissance Studies 12 (Lewiston, 1996), 5–18.

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Muslims will be set out in this first chapter. Each of these groups strove to assert its authority in the western Mediterranean and these negotiations of power are visible to us today through the records of theological, territorial and juridical controversies. These records comprise textual sources as well as material sources: archaeology, urban development, art and architecture. Indeed the composition and the construction of these textual and material sources are both indirect and passive expressions of political or theological allegiance and direct and outward arguments of ambition and cultural reform.

The particular appearance and the diverse functions of Rome's ecclesiastical buildings are important keys to understanding the architectural programme as an expression of political aims, and in Chapter 2 I shall explore the architectural context of the early medieval city and the institutions of the papacy. The incorporation of archaeological data from recent excavations and the examination of non-ecclesiastical buildings such as the ruins of ancient monuments, domestic architecture and utilitarian projects like walls and aqueducts – all subjects of significant recent scholarship – will reconstruct the architectural culture of Rome in the early Middle Ages, high and low, monumental and pragmatic, and the place of these churches within it.

Chapters 3 and 4 will examine the evidence for the physical appearance of Paschal's churches, considering where and how he built. Paschal's churches are among the best preserved early medieval churches in Rome. Where there have been renovations over the centuries, many of these are recorded in antiquarian or archival sources, which aid our reconstruction of the early medieval appearance of these churches. The primary function of Paschal's major church buildings lies in their role as setting the papal stational liturgy, and the third chapter will discuss the architecture of the churches in the context of this traditional function. Chapter 4 concentrates on the chapels and oratories constructed by Paschal; one is nearly entirely preserved, while others can be reconstructed in part through antiquarian records. Though they have often been ignored by other scholars in favour of larger buildings, chapels and oratories held important symbolic functions in Rome, acting as satellite *loci* of both papal presence and saintly *praesentia*.

Paschal brought about a change in function for Roman churches by translating bodies of saints into some of his basilicas and this warrants special consideration because it had lasting effects on Christian celebration and medieval architecture. Chapter 5 will examine the history of relic veneration at Rome, Paschal's transformation of that history, and new ways in which the urban churches of Rome were used. Chapter 6 draws together the historical, architectural and liturgical changes that

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Paschal's reign witnessed and examines their efficacy in terms of Roman and imperial relations with the papacy. Paschal used architecture as a means of expressing his goals for the papacy. These churches played a central role in Paschal's bid to establish his authority both within Rome and beyond, a bid that had dramatic repercussions for the office of the pope.

PASCHAL AND THE PAPACY

It was once commonplace for studies of the early Middle Ages to speak of a practically monolithic papacy, unified in aim and form over decades.[10] This tendency is historically valid in part: the papal court often sought to legitimise its activity by projecting continuity and consistency. Tradition and papal precedent were often invoked in letters, biographies and legislation. Some popes produced much writing over long reigns, seeming to reflect individual personalities, such as Pope Hadrian I (772–95); but others, like Paschal, left little of their own voices in the textual record. Only five of Paschal's letters remain.[11] The images of Hadrian and Leo III (795–816) which emerge from sources produced during their reigns, especially their correspondence with Charlemagne, have perhaps overly shaped the conventional image of the early medieval papacy. This scholarly habit unfortunately neglects what are often quite significant differences between papal reigns. The real problem with this homogenisation is not so much that different individual character traits are not recognised – it would be very difficult to recognise them in any case and, I believe, the personalities left relatively little mark on the institution and its administration in this period. This is not to take away from the role of individuals in shaping early medieval history. Sometimes major political events occurred on a very personal small scale, such as the brief supposed marriage between Charlemagne and the daughter of Desiderius,

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[10] For examples of this tradition, see Walter Ullmann, *The Growth of Papal Government in the Middle Ages: A study in the relation of clerical to lay power*, 3rd edn (London, 1970); Peter Llewellyn, *Rome in the Dark Ages*, 2nd edn (London, 1993); Paul Hetherington, *Medieval Rome: A portrait of the city and its life* (London, 1994).

[11] Jaffé 2546 confirming possessions of the abbey of Farfa; Jaffé 2547 to a Frankish abbot about to become the archbishop of Vienne, and Jaffé 2549 when he had become archbishop; Jaffé 2550 to Louis the Pious concerning priests; Jaffé 2551 confirming privileges to the church of Ravenna (a papyrus which is preserved in the Biblioteca Ambrosiana and reproduced in Ludovico Muratori, *Rerum italicarum scriptores* (Milan, 1723), 2.1 220); and Jaffé 2553 commending Ebbo the archbishop of Reims as *missus*. Jaffé includes the spurious letters, as well. On Jaffé 2546 (=*Regesto di Farfa compilato da Gregorio di Catino*, Biblioteca della Società Romana di Storia Patria (Rome, 1879–1914), n. 225 (II, 186–7)), see recently, Marios Costambeys, *Power and Patronage in Early Medieval Italy: Local society, Italian politics and the Abbey of Farfa, c. 700–900* (Cambridge, 2007), 339.

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king of the Lombards, which raised the ire of Pope Stephen III in a famously angry letter.[12] Rather, it is my intention to situate the actions of Pope Paschal and his papal court within the larger circles of influence and antagonism of the early ninth century. I also aim to demonstrate the ways in which close examination of this papal reign helps to shed light on the strategies of power that other clerics and kings may have employed.

Paschal was apparently of Roman origin, though nothing is known of his family.[13] His biographer states that Paschal had served as subdeacon, priest and as the abbot of the monastery of S. Stefano degli Abissini at the Vatican under Leo III. This *curriculum vitae* indicates a long clerical and monastic career prior to his reign. Early modern antiquarians often reported that prior to becoming pope, Paschal had been given the cardinalate of S. Prassede by Leo III, a plausible though unsubstantiated tradition.[14] The suggestion that Paschal was affiliated with S. Prassede prior to his papacy probably arose from a desire to explain the attention that the pope so lavishly and prominently paid to that church later in his career. Although the chief priests of titular churches were called cardinals by the mid-eighth century, there are very few instances of this usage indeed.[15] Paschal took the papal throne one day after the sudden death of Stephen IV (24 January 817) and his reign lasted just over seven years.[16] During these years, in addition to launching his architectural programme, Paschal acted to confirm the agreements made between his predecessors and Charlemagne and Louis the Pious concerning lands of the See of Saint Peter and papal jurisdiction in that territory and in Rome. He promoted the diffusion of Christianity in northern territories

[12] *MGH Epistolae* III, 560–3; Rosamond McKitterick, *Charlemagne: The formation of a European identity* (Cambridge, 2008), 84; on the significance of the text, see Walter Pohl, 'Alienigena uxor: Bestrebungen zu einem Verbot auswärtiger Heiraten in der Karolingerzeit' in *Die Bibel als politisches Argument,* ed. A. Pecar and Kai Trampedach (Munich, 2007), 159–88.

[13] '*natione Romanus, ex patre Bonosus*' (of Roman origin, son of Bonosus) *LP* 100: 1. The *Liber Censuum* presents a different family name for the pope: '*ex patre Marino*', a noble family which produced other popes, but may be a mistake. Paschal's predecessor Stephen IV was from the Marinus family; *Le Liber Censuum de l'église romaine*, ed. Paul Fabre and Louis Marie Duchesne (Paris, 1889–1952), 325. On Paschalis as a baptismal name, not a vocational name, see Peter Llewellyn, 'The names of the Roman clergy, 401–1046', *Rivista della storia della chiesa in Italia* 35 (1981), 364.

[14] See for example, Onofrio Panvinio, *Romani Pontifices et Cardinales SRE ab posteriores a Christi Natali anno creati* (Venice, 1557), f. 44; Pietro Ugonio, *Historia delle stationi di Roma* (Rome, 1588), f. 298r; Don Benigno Davanzati, *Notizie al Pellegrino della Basilica di Santa Prassede* (Rome, 1725), 227–8.

[15] On the title of cardinal in Rome, see Stephan Kuttner, 'Cardinalis: The history of a canonical concept', *Traditio* 3 (1945), 146–52.

[16] Davis, *Lives of the Ninth-Century Popes*, 5, n. 1. Davis provides a clear summary of the events of Paschal's reign reported in both the *LP* and external sources.

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and strove to defend orthodoxy with respect to the return to iconoclasm in the Byzantine Empire, as we shall explore below.

LIBER PONTIFICALIS AND OTHER TEXTS

The *LP* is the primary textual source for Paschal's reign, indeed for information about most early medieval popes. For the period in question, the biographies in the *LP* are considered to be contemporary records, composed in the Lateran *vestarium* by individuals close to the events at hand, presumably working from chancery material.[17] The texts' compilers stressed divinely inspired actions of beneficence, adjudication and punishment and, sometimes, the political affairs of the papacy, giving a not-entirely complete institutional history of the head of the Church.[18] Unfortunately, the *LP* gives precious little information about goings-on in Rome beyond the papal administration at the Lateran. Few contemporary events were included even when there was little risk of portraying the papacy in an unflattering light. The *LP* often provides very detailed information about papal expenditures, including building campaigns and gifts to institutions in the city, though few expenses or donations other than papal (or occasionally royal) donations were recorded. Other kinds of sources that are often useful for analysing politics and culture in early medieval cities are absent for this period in Rome.[19] We have very few property documents from Rome prior to the mid-ninth century and very limited legislative and juridical sources: this is a marked difference from other cities such as Naples or Ravenna.[20]

[17] *Ibid.*, x.

[18] *Ibid.,* xii; see also the overview in Thomas F. X. Noble, 'A new look at the Liber Pontificalis', *Archivum Historiae Pontificiae* 23 (1985), 356. For discussion of these issues in particular, see Franz Alto Bauer, *Das Bild der Stadt Rom im Frühmittelalter: Papststiftungen im Spiegel des Liber Pontificalis von Gregor dem Dritten bis zu Leo dem Dritten*, Palilia 14 (Wiesbaden, 2004), 27–48; Herman Geertman, *Hic fecit Basilicam: studi sul Liber Pontificalis e gli edifici ecclesiastici di Roma da Silvestro a Silverio* (Leuven, 2004); *More Veterum: il 'Liber Pontificalis' e gli edifici ecclesiastici di Roma nella tarda antichità e nell'alto medioevo*, Academiae Rheno-Traiectinae Instituto Archaeologico 10 (Gronigen, 1975).

[19] E.g., property documents, monastic chronicles or personal correspondence. On the sources for Rome, see Thomas F. X. Noble, 'Paradoxes and possibilities in the sources for Roman society in the early Middle Ages' in *Early Medieval Rome and the Christian West: Essays in honour of Donald A. Bullough,* ed. J. M. H. Smith, The Medieval Mediterranean 28 (Leiden, 2000)*,* 56–7.

[20] See Paul Arthur, 'Naples: A case of urban survival in the early Middle Ages' in *MEFRM* 103 (1991), 759–84; *Naples: From Roman town to city-state: An archaeological perspective*, Archaeological monographs from the BSR 12 (Rome, 2002) on Naples, and Thomas S. Brown, *Gentlemen and Officers: Imperial administration and aristocratic power in Byzantine Italy, AD 554–800* (London, 1984); 'Louis the Pious and the papacy: A Ravenna perspective' in *Charlemagne's Heir: New perspectives on the reign of Louis the Pious (814–840),* ed. Peter Godman and Roger Collins (Oxford, 1990),