

25 f *percutsa quam pompam tulit !
nam ueste se totam tegit,
curam pudoris praestitit,
ne quis relectam cerneret.*

In 25 Daniel reads *percutsa*, without authority and against the metre. Mone conjectures *qua* for *quam* 'as the sense demands', which I do not understand.

In 26 the true reading *tegens* is preserved in *b d*. The present *tegit* between the two perfects would be very awkward.

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THE CATACOMB OF PRISCILLA AND THE PRIMITIVE MEMORIALS OF ST PETER.

Atti della R. Accademia dei Lincei, Serie V: Notizie degli Scavi di Antichità, 1906.

THIS volume contains a brief summary (p. 304 ff) of the discoveries made during the year 1906 in the Catacombs. The chief interest of these lies in the fact that they contributed something to the solution of what is perhaps the most important question debated in recent years in this field of study. A tradition of great antiquity placed the scene of St Peter's administration of the rite of baptism in the region to the east and north-east of Rome bounded by the Via Nomentana and Via Salaria. The Basilica and Catacomb of St Agnes adjoin the first-named of these roads, while the Catacomb of Priscilla borders on the latter. In the later recension of the list of Christian cemeteries¹ the *coemeterium fontis* (or *ad nymphas*) *S. Petri* takes its place between the *coemeterium S. Agnetis* and the *coemeterium Priscillae*; but this of course leaves its precise situation an open question. The *Gesta Liberii*, a document which Duchesne² considers to have been written not later than the beginning of the sixth century, carry us a step further. We are told by the author³ that Liberius, when ordered by Constantius to leave Rome, took up his residence *ab urbe Roma milliario tertio quasi exul in cimiterio Novellae Via Salaria*. All that we know concerning the Cemetery of Novella is contained in a passage of the Life of St Marcellus

¹ De Rossi *Roma Sotterranea* i p. 159, from the *Mirabilia Urbis Romae*.

² *Liber Pontificalis* i p. cxxii.

³ *Constant Epp. Rom. pont.* p. 90; *Migne Patrol. Lat.* viii 1391.

in the Liber Pontificalis, which runs as follows:—*hic rogavit quandam matronam nomine Priscillam et fecit cymiterium Novellae Via Salaria*. From this passage it has been concluded—though the inference is not binding—that the Cemetery of Novella was an extension of that of Priscilla, possibly due to the munificence of a descendant of the saint who gave her name to the original foundation. To return to the Acts of Liberius; we learn that as the season of Easter approached the Pope summoned an assembly of the clergy and laity and took his seat ‘in the cemetery’. The question was debated whither Liberius should repair in order to administer the rite of baptism, and Damasus (the future successor of Liberius) advised him to remain where he was—*erat enim ibi non longe a cymiterio Novellae cymiterius Ostrianus ubi Petrus apostolus baptisavit*. These words—especially the adverb *ibi*—lead naturally to the conclusion that the *coemeterium Ostrianum* (the name is not otherwise known, and its derivation is uncertain¹) is to be sought on the Via Salaria, but there remains a piece of evidence which convinced the great De Rossi that the name was applied to a portion of the Catacomb of St Agnes. This is contained in the Passio S. Marcelli, dating probably from the sixth century, which enumerates the martyrs who suffered in Marcellus’s pontificate, amongst them SS. Papias and Maurus, of whom the following words are used:—*quorum corpora collegit noctu Ioannes presbyter et sepelivit via Numentana sub die quarto Calendarum Februariarum ad nymphas S. Petri ubi baptisabat*.² Here we have to all appearance a definite statement to the effect that the spot where St Peter baptized was on the Via Nomentana; and it seems to derive confirmation from the fact that the burial-place of St Papias adjoined that of St Emerentiana, the foster-sister of St Agnes, whose crypt was discovered in 1873 and identified by means of an inscription found three years later.³ This crypt forms part of the catacomb which adjoins, but is distinct from that immediately beneath and around the basilica of St Agnes, and is designated in the Martyrologium Hieronymianum⁴ as the *coemeterium majus* in which the bodies of St Papias and St Emerentiana reposed. The same term is found in an inscription, now in the Museo Capitolino, which runs as follows:—*xvi Kal Octob Martyrom [in in cimi]teru maiore Victoris Felis[cis Papias] Emerentianetis et Alexan[dri]*; unfortunately it is not certain that the

¹ The name Ostrius occurs on a brick stamp (C. I. L. xv 1871) which Borghesi read *ex praediis Albanianis C. Ostrii Serr(ani)*.

² *Acta SS.* Jan. 16.

³ Cf. Armellini *Scoperta della cripta di Santa Emerensiana*, Rome, 1877. It was thought that the letters SANC PET could also be read on this wall of this crypt, but this seems very doubtful. St Emerentiana is said in the Acts of St Agnes to have been buried in *confinio agelli beatissimae Martyris Agnetis*.

⁴ Sept. 16, ed. De Rossi-Duchesne, p. 121.

name of St Papias was contained in the missing portion. De Rossi, arguing from the passage in the *Passio S. Marcelli* quoted above, had, even before the discovery of the crypt of St Emerentiana, identified the *coemeterium Ostrianum* of the *Gesta Liberii* with the *coemeterium majus* adjoining that of St Agnes,¹ and his opinion was shared by all students of Christian archaeology until the year 1900, when excavations were carried on in a portion of the Catacomb of Priscilla which had been superficially examined by De Rossi in 1889, but had failed to attract his attention by reason of the absorbing interest attaching to the crypt of the Acilii Glabrones and the basilica of St Sylvester, which were discovered at the same time. The excavations of 1900 brought to light a subterranean reservoir or *piscina* approached by a broad flight of steps. At the foot of the stairway was a chamber paved with travertine and terminating in an apse in which was a rectangular niche pierced with an opening giving access to the *piscina*.² Comm. Marucchi saw that this was no ordinary reservoir like others found in the same catacomb, which doubtless belonged originally to the *Villa* of the Acilii Glabrones, transformed into a Christian cemetery; he recognized in it a primitive baptistery, appealing in support of his view to a fragmentary inscription scratched on one of the arches surmounting the *piscina* which reads QVI SITET VEN [iat ad me et bibat]; the quotation is one naturally inscribed at a spot where baptism was administered, and was employed by St Damasus in lines written for a baptistery.³ Marucchi was at first inclined to think that the excavations had revealed the spot where Liberius baptized in his enforced retirement from the city (*v. supra*), but he soon became convinced that a site to which so great importance was attached must have been hallowed by more august traditions, and that, in fact, this was none other than the *fons S. Petri*. Upon reviewing the question, he found that there were certain indications pointing to the neighbourhood of the Via Salaria as the scene of St Peter's ministry. The most important of these was contained in the famous parchment of Monza, which gives a list—or, to speak more accurately, two lists—of the oils collected at the tombs of the martyrs for the Lombard Queen Theodolinda in the time of St Gregory the Great.⁴ The collection was made by a certain Johannes, who wrote the names of the saints on slips of parchment attached to the vials containing the oils, and afterwards made a list of the whole number. We possess both the slips and the list transcribed from them (which must not be taken

¹ *Roma Sotterranea* i p. 191; *Bull. Crist.* 1867, p. 40.

² These remains are described and illustrated in the *Bollettino di archeologia cristiana* for 1901.

³ Cf. *Ihm Damasi epigrammata* p. xvii.

⁴ First published by Marini *Papiri diplomatici* (1805) p. 208 f.

to indicate the order in which the catacombs were visited), and on each slip we find a group of names belonging to the same region. Now one of these slips is thus inscribed :—

‘Sedes ubi prius sedit S^c Petrus ex oleo¹
S^ci Vitalis S^c Alexander S^c Martialis S^c Marcell
us S^ci Silvestri S^ci Felicis S^ci Filippi & ali
orum multorum S^corum.’

All the saints here mentioned were buried on the Via Salaria—the first three in the so-called ‘Cimitero dei Giordani’, which is contiguous with the catacomb of Priscilla, the remainder in that catacomb itself. It may be reasonably inferred that the *Sedes S. Petri* was to be found on the Via Salaria, and the importance of the site would naturally lead to its mention at the head of the list which refers to that region. Marucchi found a second argument in support of his theory in the fact that in the ‘Sylloge of Verdun’, a collection of Christian inscriptions formed about the eighth century A.D.,² the epitaphs of the saints and martyrs buried in the Basilica of St Sylvester in the Catacomb of Priscilla are immediately followed by two inscriptions relating to the rite of baptism. The first of these (No. 25) bears the heading *isti versiculi sunt scripti ad fontes* and contains in its closing lines an allusion to St Peter and the Apostolic See, which, owing to the corruption of the text, is wrapped in obscurity; the second (No. 26) is prefaced by the words *isti versiculi scripti sunt ubi pontifex consignat infantes* and evidently belonged to a baptistery of some importance, since it ends with the words :—

‘Tu cruce suscepta mundi vitare procellas
disce magis monitus hac ratione loci.’

These two inscriptions are followed by four others copied within the city (at the SS. Apostoli, S. Maria Maggiore, the Lateran, and the Vatican), with which the collection closes, and it is not, therefore, certain that they belong to the cemetery of Priscilla. De Rossi, in fact, supposed that they were copied in the baptistery of St Damasus appertaining to the Vatican basilica,³ but only on the ground that no baptistery was known to exist on the Via Salaria. Since the recent discoveries have removed this objection, Marucchi’s conjecture seems highly probable.

Thus positive indications are not wanting which point to the cemetery of Priscilla or its immediate neighbourhood as the traditional site of

¹ In the list of oils we find the expression *oleo de sede ubi prius sedit S^c Petrus*.

² De Rossi *Inscr. Christ. Urbis Romae* ii 131 ff.

³ *Inscr. Christ. Urbis Romae* ii p. 178 f.

St Peter's ministry, and nothing could be on *a priori* grounds more likely than that the memorials of the Apostle should be found in this, the earliest of the Catacombs, whose remains carry us back to the sub-apostolic age. The passage from the *Passio S. Marcelli* quoted above seems, however, to raise a serious difficulty in the way of this identification. On a closer examination, however, the objection loses much of its force. Although the Acts of St Marcellus mention both saints, our other authorities refer only to St Papias as buried in the *coemeterium maius*; on the other hand, the *Liber de locis SS. martyrum* couples a St Maurus¹ with SS. Crescentianus and Marcellinus, who suffered martyrdom in the same persecution and were certainly buried in the Catacomb of Priscilla. This suggests that the passage from the *Passio S. Marcelli* stands in need of correction, and that the words *Via Numentana* refer to St Papias only, while the note *ad nymphas S. Petri ubi baptizabat* applies to the burial-place of his fellow martyr. The order of the words is, however, in any case unusual, for in the parallel sections of the *Passio* which deal with other martyrdoms the date is always given at the end. Now the opening words of the passage relating to SS. Papias and Maurus run as follows:—*post dies duodecim iussit Laodicus praefectus Papiam et Maurum milites qui baptisati fuerant a B. Marcello episcopo sibi praesentari in circo Flaminio, &c.* Hence it has been conjectured by Marucchi that the words *ad nymphas S. Petri ubi baptizabat* in the later passage are a marginal note which has been displaced and should be read immediately after *episcopo*; the subject of *baptizabat* will then be St Marcellus and not St Peter. The conjecture is undoubtedly attractive; and in any case the uncertainty attaching to the interpretation of the text of the *Passio S. Marcelli* renders the argument based thereon by De Rossi inconclusive.

Nevertheless, the use of the phrase *ad nymphas* is of great importance, inasmuch as it clearly implies that the place where St Peter baptized was marked by the presence of abundant sources of water. Now this is especially true of the Catacomb of Priscilla, and the excavations of 1906 have placed the fact in a clearer light than before. In the first place, the region adjoining the baptistery brought to light in 1900 was more fully excavated, and it was found that the *piscina* was surrounded on all sides by galleries containing tombs, which were earlier than the monumental staircase giving access to the baptistery, but themselves cut through ancient conduits in the tufa which here covers a stratum of clay about $1\frac{1}{2}$ metres in thickness. The presence of this stratum causes the subsoil to be impregnated with water, and the excavation of

¹ Not to be identified with the child-martyr buried with his mother Hilaria, whose tomb is mentioned by William of Malmesbury.

Christian burial-places in such surroundings is unexampled and would be unintelligible were it not that the baptistery was an exceptionally hallowed site. Nor was the *piscina* found in 1900 the only reservoir regarded with veneration in the cemetery of Priscilla. In the lower level of the catacomb, not far from the crypt of the Acilii Glabrones, but at a considerably greater depth,¹ is a second *piscina*, likewise approached by a flight of steps.¹ The recent excavations have demonstrated that this stairway was prolonged until it reached the surface of the ground by the Basilica of St Sylvester. It is evident, therefore, that we have here another site hallowed by early Christian tradition; and the view that the *nymphae* which furnished St Peter with the means of baptism have been brought to light is likely to be very generally accepted. It must be further remembered that the Basilica of St Sylvester itself appears to have been specially adapted for the administration of the baptismal rite; but the questions relating to this building, the remains of which have now been rendered accessible to archaeologists by the kindness of the King of Italy, upon whose property they are situated, must be reserved for future discussion.

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¹ De Rossi had already suggested that this was used for baptismal purposes (*Bull. Crist.* 1887, p. 17).