

THE ROUTE OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE



The sanctuaries buildings in the V - VI Century



The medieval construction yard in the VIII Century



The monastic buildings in the IX - X Century

With regard to the most ancient building on the excavation site, only the south-west corner sector has been identified; thanks to its remarkable thickness it served also the function of a strong substructure on the accentuated slope to the Tiber. The brick wall-features and the materials found on the site indicate a dating between the end of the V century and the beginning of the VI century and suggest that the structure is one of the buildings erected at St Paul's under Pope Symmachus (498-514); it likely to be the remains of the "houses of the poor" (*pauperibus habitacula*) mentioned in the *Liber pontificalis*, and which the Pope set up also at the sanctuaries of St Peter's and St Lawrence's.

Along one side of the building was a water supply channel, with a lead fistula (pipe) slightly moved and fixed in the back wall of the structure, with the inscription PE(r)T(inentia) S(an)C(t)I PAULI ("belonging to St Paul") followed by a cross.

During this phase there was probably no other building in the area, perhaps because the proximity of the river and the constant danger of flooding created difficulties for settlement.



Lead pipe (V - VI Century)



Medieval depiction of a construction yard

The outdoor work-area between the monastery compound, the portico and the south side of the Basilica with its outbuildings, was used – especially during the VIII century – for different activities of the building construction. Important evidence of those activities has been found in the several basins for mixing mortar (only some of which are still visible); this cement was used to construct the walls and it was made, according to the best Roman building tradition, by mixing lime, pozzolana and concrete aggregates. The mixture was kneaded both in separate circular pits, and in square basins surrounded by wooden framework (documented in several medieval depictions), placed against the external wall of the monastery. A similar mixer, inside the portico, had a lifting device. The production of mortar usually obtained by firing marbles, is evidenced also by the presence of two column shafts with clear marks of hammering, that were then abandoned on the ground.

The widespread reuse of ancient materials (marbles, travertine, tuffs, bricks) is a typical feature of early medieval construction; this is evident in the facades where pieces of different sizes, character and origin are often found reworked.

The area was used as a construction yard during the whole medieval period, up to the important phase of monastery rebuilding promoted by Ludovico Barbo in the XV century. The "pit-shaped" limekiln found during the excavation belongs to this period.

1 A construction unit here is made up of a large room 10 m by 14 m, a compartment of the same width to the south of it extending beyond the area, and a long, narrow space, whose southern extent is still unknown. The general configuration of the rooms seems to suggest that they were used as community spaces and we may reasonably presume a connection with the monastic communities, one of women (St Stephen) and one of men (St Caesarius), documented within the Basilica during the pontificate of Gregory the Great (590-604). However, the structures brought to light, certainly datable to the first decades of the VIII century, belong to a later phase of the monastery. Maybe they can be linked to the reform that followed a crisis period, and that saw the transformation of the two monastic communities into one community of men. Written sources (the *Liber pontificalis* and the *Liber diurnus*) trace this reform to Pope Gregory II (715-731).

The excavated areas of the early medieval monastery represent only a peripheral sector, maybe used as a service zone. They were probably related to the reception of the poor and pilgrims. It is significant that one of the rooms is provided with a well, fed by a groundwater spring, which at the top reuses the upper part of a large earthenware vessel (dolium) with a seal of the early imperial period on the edge.

It can be safely supposed that the principle parts of the complex were to the East and partially under the present Abbey, which probably represents the gradual architectural reduction of the original monastery. This reduction was due to several periods of neglect and even to abandonment of the site documented from the XI to the XIV centuries.

2 The archaeological site includes part of a longer portico construction, which continued for an unknown distance to the South, and to North as far as the original atrium of the Basilica at which point some modern views posit a plugged entrance.

In the structure it is possible to identify two building phases: the second one, maybe following the collapse of part of the roof, retained the pre-existing back wall and introduced a slight elevation (about 30 cm) of the support plane of the columns (stylobate). Building techniques and materials used in the construction phases date the installation of the portico to the VIII century. It could represent work done in the pontificate of Gregory II (715-731) or of his successor Gregory III (731-741), both of whom promoted St Paul's. The second building phase may be part of the re-organization undertaken as part of the building programme of Hadrian I (772-795). The colonnaded structure was a monumental covered walkway from and to the South, for the convenience of visitors to the Basilica. It represented an early medieval extension of the long, late Roman portico mentioned for the first time by the historian Procopius of Caesarea in the first half of the VI century. It is possible, however, that a portico had already been planned with the basilica "of the three emperors" and was similar to the ones indicating the pilgrims' ways to St Peter's and to St Lawrence's. Up to the beginning of the X century, buildings - only partially excavated – were gradually constructed against the external western side of the portico. Those structures may be habitations similar to the well-documented ones beside the Vatican portico. It is likely that the construction of walls, following a decision of Pope John VIII (772-782), and the birth of "Johannopolis" made the place safer and more valued.

3 In the final decades of the VIII century a complex of buildings was inserted between the portico and the monastery; probably it was directly linked to the side of the Basilica. A series of compartments, recently identified on the northern edge of the excavation site, represented outbuildings with accessory functions. On the southern side a pilastered portico, built against the previous one, increased the covered space for the use of visitors to the Basilica. In the small quadrangular structure to the East a campanile may be identified, a unique surviving example of the first bell towers in Rome, with dimensions smaller than those of later medieval examples.

It is very likely that these buildings arose in a period of construction, intense also at St Paul's, during the pontificate of Hadrian I (772-795), the pope whom the *Liber pontificalis* describes as "amator ecclesiarum Dei" ("lover of the churches of God"). The attribution may be made because of the building techniques, similar to those used in constructions in Rome and in the surrounding area in the same period. Furthermore, a tile fragment stamped with the monogram of Hadrian I was found on the site.



Ancient dolium reused as well curb in Early Medieval Age



Brick stamp of Pope Hadrian I (772 - 795)