

The Medieval Church of S. Maria in Portico in Rome

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For Richard Krautheimer

On Sunday, 21st January 1657, Pope Alexander VII noted in his Diary that he had paid a visit to the Roman church of S. Maria in Portico¹. Some ten years later, Father L. Marracci, one of the priests in charge of the church at the time, wrote a fuller account of the purpose and circumstances of the Pope's visitation². In the first year of Alexander VII's pontificate the city of Rome was overcome by the plague. The epidemic reached Rome from Naples in May 1656 and continued unabated for several months. Besides instigating sanitary measures, Pope Alexander called on the people of Rome to pray for divine aid and ordered that the Blessed Sacrament should remain exposed in two churches in the city every day. On July 17, the feast celebrating the miraculous appearance of the icon of S. Maria in Portico to Saint Galla Patrizia – an event which was supposed to have occurred on that date in 524 – the priests of the church distributed leaflets on which were printed a prayer to the Mother of God to intercede against the plague, a short description of their image of the Virgin and Child, and an account of the miracles already performed through it. For a fortnight great crowds came to the church of S. Maria in Portico to pray and light candles before the revered icon. Then, fearing contagion, Alexander VII had the church closed. Still, the people of Rome continued to pray to Mary to intercede against the epidemic. After securing papal permission on November 29, 1656, the *Conservatori*, the governing body of the city, came privately to

¹ R. Krautheimer and R. B. S. Jones, *The Diary of Alexander VII, Notes on Art, Artists and Buildings*, in: *Römisches Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte der Bibliotheca Hertziana* 15 (1975) 204, entry 67.

There are two seventeenth century histories of S. Maria in Portico: *G. Matraia*, *Historia della miracolosa immagine della B. Vergine Maria detta S. Maria in Portico* (Rome 1627). *L. Marracci*, *Memorie di S. Maria in Portico* (Rome 1627). The latter was reprinted with notes by *G. M. Corrado* in Rome in 1871. Eighteenth century works on the church include *C. A. Erra*, *Storia dell'immagine, e chiesa di S. Maria in Campitelli* (Rome 1750) and *P. G. V. Giannini*, *Notizie istoriche sincere ed esatte... della prodigiosa immagine di S. Maria in Portico di Campitelli...* (Rome 1798). New contributions were made by *P. L. Pasquali*, *Le memorie di S. Maria in Portico in S. Omobono e la prossima edizione di una storia completa della miracolosa immagine* (Rome 1899); *P. L. Pasquali*, *S. Maria in Portico nella Storia di Roma dal secolo VI al XX* (Rome 1902/4); *idem*, *Memorie insigne di S. Maria in Portico in Campitelli* (Rome 1923).

² *Marracci* (note 1) 87 ff.

the church of S. Maria in Portico on the feast of the Immaculate Conception, December 8, and made a vow to build as a votive offering for protection against the plague a more honourable and worthy setting for the icon. To many it seemed as though the epidemic began to decline from that day.

Not long afterwards Pope Alexander VII intervened. First, we are told, he had various architects consider and measure the site of the church and its surrounding neighbourhood³. When Alexander visited the church on 21st January, 1657, he could see for himself what it was like and he was not satisfied with it; in the midst of a crowded neighbourhood, the site was rather dirty, vile and ill-adapted to the plans for a sumptuous large new church he had in mind; indeed, he had already had some drawings made for the new building by expert architects⁴, that is, by Carlo Rainaldi and his assistants. Consequently, Alexander had Carlo Rainaldi rebuild the church of S. Maria in Campitelli, which was not far away⁵, to which the title of S. Maria in Portico was transferred in June 1662⁶. The new church was completed in 1683, the precious icon set amid a Baroque vision of the heavens opening; it is still there today. In the meantime, the old church of S. Maria in Portico, renamed after Saint Galla, was demolished in the late seventeenth century and rebuilt by the Odescalchi family⁷; it has in its turn been destroyed.

Among the architectural drawings now in the Chigi volumes in the Vatican Library there are several related to Alexander VII's rebuilding of S. Maria in Campitelli⁸. Most refer to Carlo Rainaldi's projects for the new church, but one, the first in the series, would seem to be a drawing of the old church of S. Maria in Portico⁹ (Fig. 1). It shows the plan of a church and its adjacent structures, drawn in ink and reddish-brown wash; the High

³ „A tal' effetto, avendo prima da diversi Architetti fatto considerare, e misurare il sito di questa Contrada, per sapere, se era a proposito per quello, che voleva fare...“, *Marracci* (note 1) 100.

⁴ „... restò Sua Beatitudine poco sodisfatta di quel luogo per esser troppo sequestrato dal commercio, ed alquanto sordido, e vile, e insomma poco a proposito per farvi la fabbrica, che pretendeva, la quale secondo i disegni fatti fare all'ora dai più periti Ingegneri, doveva essere molto grande, e sontuosa...“, *Marracci* (note 1) 101 f.

⁵ For the church built by Carlo Rainaldi at S. Maria in Campitelli, *P. F. Ferraironi*, *S. Maria in Campitelli* (= *Le Chiese di Roma Illustrate* 33) (Rome 1934); *R. Wittkower*, *Carlo Rainaldi and Roman architecture of the full Baroque*, in: *Art Bulletin* 19 (1937) 278 ff.; *P. Tomei*, *Contributi d'Archivio: seicento romano. Documenti sulla fabbrica di S. Maria in Campitelli*, in: *Palladio* II, VI (1938) 222 and *G. C. Argan*, *S. Maria in Campitelli*, in: *Commentari* II (1960) 74 ff.

⁶ *Krautheimer and Jones* (note 1) 217, entry 574.

⁷ *Pasquali* (1902/4) 16; *Pasquali* (1923) 67 (both note 1).

⁸ Vatican Library, Chigi P. VII, 10, fols. 101 ff.

⁹ Vatican Library, Chigi P. VII 10, fols. 101^v - 102^r; the whole drawing measures 1.245 m x 0.80 m.

Altar is labelled "Altare della Madonna". The surrounding neighbourhood is also shown in ink, with, behind the church, a walled garden (suitably painted green and brown) and some houses, marked as belonging to the Fathers of S. Maria in Portico. The church opens on the "Strada che dalla Piazza della Madonna del Sole va verso Piazza Montanara". Behind it is a *vicolo* and a *piazzetta*; the *vicolo* leads on the right to another *piazzetta* and then to a third, which is identified as that in front of the church of S. Nicola in Carcere. On the Tempesta map of Rome, made in 1593, S. Maria in Portico – a small church with a nave, transept and Romanesque bell-tower – is shown to the right of Piazza Montanara and the Theatre of Marcellus¹⁰. On the Maggi-Maupin-Losi map of Rome of 1625 the church of S. Maria in Portico, with its Romanesque bell-tower, appears to the right of Piazza Montanara and S. Nicola in Carcere, which is very close to it; S. Maria in Portico opens on a street which runs straight from Piazza Montanara at the foot of the Capitoline Hill, to the square in front of S. Maria in Cosmedin and S. Maria del Sole¹¹. This street corresponds with that marked in front of the church on the Chigi plan, running from Piazza della Madonna del Sole to Piazza Montanara. The general location is, besides, that given for S. Maria in Portico – towards the Velabrum and not far from S. Nicola in Carcere – by Fra Mariano in his *Itinerary of the City of Rome* of 1518¹². Thus, it seems clear that the Chigi drawing represents the old church of S. Maria in Portico.

The plan is provided with a scale in *palmi romani* and numerous irregularities indicate that it is a careful survey drawing and not just a schematic sketch. It would indeed seem to be the result of the survey made by the various architects Pope Alexander VII sent to consider and measure the site between 8th December, 1656 and his own visit to the church on 21st January, 1657.

The Chigi plan gives some clear indications of what the church of S. Maria in Portico was like in 1656–7 (Fig. 1). It was entered through three doorways in its facade and was laid out with a nave, two aisles, a transept, and an apse. The nave was separated from the aisles by eight supports on either side in a triple sequence of two columns and a pier. Dotted lines on the plan indicate an entablature or, more probably, the arches of an arcade above them. The piers at the junction of nave and transept were more or less cross-shaped and probably supported a triumphal arch over the

¹⁰ A. P. Frutaz, *Le Pianta di Roma* (Rome 1962), vol. II, tav. 266.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, tav. 316.

¹² „Et aliquantulum Velabrum versus, in sinistra, est ecclesia Sanctae Mariae in Porticu... In ea sinistra parte non longe a sancta Maria in Porticu, contra viam quae de Capitolia venit (ecclesia) sancti Antistitis Nicolai in Carcere...“, *Fra Mariano*, *Itinerarium urbis Romae* (1518), ed E. Bulletti (Rome 1931) 58.

entrance from the nave and perhaps arches over the entrances from the aisles (since corresponding pilasters are shown against the aisle walls). The purpose of the tongues towards the transept is unclear, but they may indicate pilasters on that side. The pavement of the transept was higher than that of the nave and aisles; the plan shows one step in ink (and possibly another more feintly drawn) leading up to it from the aisles, and two from the nave to the chancel, which was closed by a balustrade or screen. In the middle of the transept and some way in front of the apse stood the High Altar, built against a wall and covered by a ciborium on four columns. Seventeenth century descriptions of the church mention that it was here that the icon was placed, above the High Altar and under a marble canopy, which was decorated with mosaic and supported by columns of precious marble. On the ciborium was a mosaic inscription:

„HIC EST ILLA PIAE GENITRICIS IMAGO MARIAE,
QUAE DISCUMBENTI GALLA, PATUIT METUENTI . . .“,

referring to the icon's miraculous appearance to Galla Patrizia¹³. An eighteenth century print showing the icon and High Altar was published by Pasquali in 1923, but its late date makes it unreliable evidence for the altar's original appearance¹⁴. In the apse wall, the Chigi plan marks what may be a column in the centre. (Martinelli in 1653 referred to an alabaster column in the apse of S. Maria in Portico, perhaps this one¹⁵. One cannot help wondering whether it originally formed part of a double-light window¹⁶.) To the right of the apse was the campanile. Although shown as a Romanesque bell-tower in earlier maps of Rome, its groundplan here is more or less keyhole-shaped, rather than rectangular. A chapel opened off each aisle of the church. That on the left was entered through what was probably a triple arcade supported by two columns, that on the right presumably through a single arched entrance. (Dotted lines on the plan would seem to indicate arches at the entrances to the two chapels, just as they would seem to indicate arcades over the supports in the nave.)

¹³ „La Sacra Immagine sta posta decentemente sopra l'Altare maggiore entro un Ciborio di marmo adornato di Mosaico, e sostenuto da quattro colonne di pietra detta porta, cotognino, e di altre pietre di gran prezzo, dove si leggono ancora due altri versi scritti con Mosaico, i quali dimostrano l'Apparizione della Sacra Immagine, e confermano l'Historia, e sono i sequenti: Hic est illa piae Genitricis Imago Mariae, Quae discumbenti Galla, patuit metuenti . . .“ *Matraia* (note 1) 37; also referred to in *Marracci* (note 1) 35. The wall behind the altar was probably post-medieval.

¹⁴ *Pasquali* (note 1) after p. 54; the print is said to date from the 1740s, some sixty years after the church had been demolished.

¹⁵ „... habetq. in abside columnam ex alabastro . . .“, *F. Martinelli*, *Roma ex ethnica sacra* . . . (Rome 1653) 235.

¹⁶ As in the main and southern apse of S. Maria in Cosmedin for example, see *R. Krautheimer*, *Corpus Basilicarum Christianarum Romae* (Vatican City 1937-77) vol. II, 298.

The function of the structures immediately next to the church is marked on the plan: on the left the old sacristy, „now the dining-room“, a passageway and another old sacristy; on the right, arranged around a courtyard, two sacristies, two rooms („stanze“), a large room („stanzone“) and two corridors. The front door of the house is marked „Porteria“ and opened on the same street as the church, while two more doors opened on the *vicolo* at the back.

Since the Chigi plan is provided with a scale, the dimensions of the church can be ascertained. Those scaled have been tabulated in palmi and metres and major dimensions have been marked in our Plan A. It was not a big church, only 114 palmi or 25.41 m in length from the facade to the outer face of the apse. Inside, the church was 107.9 palmi or 24.07 m long and approximately 53.3 palmi or 11.89 m wide. The transept was ca. 27.1–27.5 palmi or 6.04–6.14 m deep. The left aisle was slightly longer than that on the right, 74 palmi or 16.49 m as against 72.7 palmi or 16.20 m. Similarly, the left aisle was slightly wider than the right, 12.5 palmi or 2.78 m, as against 11.6 palmi or 2.59 m. The width of the nave, column centre to column centre, was 26.9 palmi or 5.98 m. The diameter of the apse was 16.1 palmi or 3.60 m, its radius ca. 8.2 palmi or 1.82 m. The columns were approximately 2.2 palmi or 0.48 m in diameter, the nave piers 4.3 palmi or 0.96 m wide. The right aisle wall was 2.4 palmi or 0.53 m wide, the back wall of the transept thicker, 3.4 palmi or 0.77 m.

The interior length of the nave, 16.20 m, is approximately $\frac{2}{3}$ the total interior length of the church, 24.7 m. The depth of the transept, 6.04 m, is about $\frac{1}{4}$ the length of the church or $\frac{3}{8}$ the length of the nave. The radius of the apse, 1.82 m, is approximately 10% less than $\frac{1}{12}$ the total length of the church, $\frac{1}{3}$ the depth of the transept or $\frac{1}{8}$ the length of the nave. The width of the building, 11.89 m, is approximately half its total length. The nave, column centre to column centre, is nearly as wide as the transept is deep, 5.98 m, as against 6.04 m. The aisles, 2.97 m and 2.88 m wide from column centre to wall face, are approximately half the width of the nave. The diameter of the apse, 3.60 m, is narrower than the width of the nave. The apse would no doubt have been framed visually by the piers at the junction of the nave and transept.

Apart from the apse, which is rather small, these dimensions would seem to fit into a modular scheme with a basic measurement or module of ca. 2.00 m. The total length of the church, 24.07 m, would then equal 12 modules, with 8 for the nave, 3 for the transept, and a little under 1 for the apse. Similarly, the total width would be 6 modules, the nave having 3 and each aisle $1\frac{1}{2}$. (All this is shown in our Plan B.)

The clarity of these basic dimensions and proportions is not reflected in the spacing of the columns and piers in the nave. Intercolumniations vary

from 4.3 palmi or 0.96 m to 7.7 palmi or 1.73 m, when taken from column face to column face or edge of pier. In some churches in Rome, later restorations enclosed columns in piers – as at S. Prassede, for example, where the piers in the colonnade also sustain diaphragm arches across the nave¹⁷. On the Chigi plan of S. Maria in Portico no such arches are marked. If there were a column within each pier in the righthand colonnade, the dimensions of the intercolumniations would be from the transept to the facade: 1.15 m, 1.58 m, 1.24 m, 1.24 m, 1.70 m, 1.36 m, 1.36 m, 1.20 m, 1.15 m, from column face to column face. Since this is very uneven it seems more likely to me that the church was originally laid out with piers interrupting the colonnades. Furthermore, except in the three nearest the facade, the space between the two columns seems to have been wider than that between a column and pier or tongue pier. Whereas the proportions of the church as a whole were clear and simple, the spacing of the colonnades shows greater variety and complexity.

A similar arrangement can still be seen in Rome in the medieval church of S. Maria in Cosmedin, as refurbished in 1123¹⁸. There, the supports on either side of the nave follow a triple sequence of 3 columns and a pier. At S. Clemente an attempt, perhaps shortly after 1084, at restoring the Early Christian basilica, incorporated two piers in the south colonnade, between the third and fifth, and sixth and eighth columns respectively, making a sequence, from the facade, of tongue pier, three columns, pier, two columns, pier, one column, tongue pier. At SS. Giovanni e Paolo, possibly as early as 1116, the supports were interrupted twice by piers in the rhythm: tongue pier, three columns, pier, four columns, pier, three columns, tongue pier; in this church the piers supported diaphragm arches across the nave and aisles¹⁹. Elsewhere in medieval Rome churches were planned with a central pier breaking each colonnade. This can be seen, for example, in what remains of the first rebuilding of SS. Quattro Coronati (1099 – before 1116)²⁰, and in the upper church of S. Clemente (ca. 1099 – ca. 1125)²¹.

¹⁷ *Krautheimer* (note 16) vol. III, 245 and Fig. 214; a fresco of thirteenth or fourteenth century date on one of the piers provides a terminus ante for their construction.

¹⁸ *Krautheimer* (note 16) vol. II, 283 ff., Figs. 218, 219 and Pl. XX. See also G. B. Giovenale, *La Basilica di S. Maria in Cosmedin* (Rome 1927).

¹⁹ *Krautheimer* (note 16) vol. I, 286 and Fig. 155. Professor Krautheimer has told me that the arches are either thirteenth century as he has suggested, or possibly twelfth century.

²⁰ *Krautheimer* (note 16) IV, 1 ff., esp. 30 f. and Fig. 31.

²¹ E. Junyent, *Il Titolo di S. Clemente in Roma* (Rome 1932), 190 ff., and J. E. Barclay Lloyd, *The Architecture of the medieval church and conventual buildings of S. Clemente in Rome, ca. 1080 – ca. 1300* (Ph. D. thesis, London University 1980), 33 ff., 287 ff.

The purpose of these piers is not clear. They may have marked the liturgical divisions of the nave – the three distinct spaces of chancel, choir and lay area at S. Maria in Cosmedin or the clergy and lay areas in the upper church of S. Clemente, where the chancel and choir together project as far as the piers²². Or, they may have been a structural reinforcement to the nave colonnades, as in the restoration of the lower church of S. Clemente; in the rebuilding of the same church, where they are topped by pilasters whose function seems to be to strengthen the clerestory walls; or in the restoration of S. Prassede and SS. Giovanni e Paolo, where they were designed to support diaphragm arches across the nave and aisles. Piers interrupting colonnades are known in some Ottonian churches in Northern Germany and France, but it seems unlikely to me that these examples, so early and so far away, could have influenced Roman church design in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries²³.

The medieval Roman churches discussed so far were not planned with a transept, as at S. Maria in Portico, but others were: S. Bartolomeo in Isola (1113?), S. Nicola in Carcere (consecrated in 1128), S. Crisogono (1127) and S. Maria in Trastevere (ca. 1130–48)²⁴. Unlike S. Maria in Portico, these medieval transept basilicas do not have piers interrupting their colonnades.

The Chigi plan shows the church of S. Maria in Portico as it stood in December 1656 – January 1657. When, in 1627, G. Matraia wrote a history of the building from its origin to his day and when, in 1667, L. Marracci wrote his account, they both seem to have relied on documentary evidence then in the archives of the church²⁵. Both authors believed that the church originated in the palace of Saint Galla Patrizia, who had received the icon of the Virgin and Child from seraphim in a vision in 524. Subsequently, they believed, her palace had been converted into a church and consecrated

²² R. Malmstrom, *The colonnades of High Medieval churches in Rome*, in: *Gesta* 14 (1975) 37 ff.

²³ Piers alternating with columns appeared in such churches as St. Michael, Hildesheim (996), St. Servatius, Quedlinburg (ca. 997), in the church at Wunstorff (first half of the tenth century), at Gernrode (959–961), Herdecke (eleventh–twelfth century), Werden, St. Luzius (begun 995), Zyfflich (first quarter of the eleventh century) and the cathedral of Besançon (1050–61). See F. Oswald / L. Schaefer / H. R. Sennhauser, *Vorromanische Kirchenbauten* (Munich 1966) 119 ff., 263 ff., 385 f., 98 f., 112, 371 f., 398 f. and L. Grodecki, *L'Architecture Ottonienne* (Paris 1958) 67 f. The same sort of arrangement characterized the church of H. Demetrios, Saloniki.

²⁴ The date 1113 appears on the lintel of the main doorway of S. Bartolomeo; a plaque in S. Nicola in Carcere bears an inscription related to its date of consecration. For S. Crisogono, see B. M. Apollonj Ghetti, *S. Crisogono* (= *Le Chiese di Roma Illustrate* 92) (Rome 1966) esp. 72 ff. and for S. Maria in Trastevere, D. Kinney, *S. Maria in Trastevere from its founding to 1215* (Ph. D. thesis, N. Y. U. 1975).

²⁵ Marracci refers in particular to a document giving the history of the church from its origin until 1464, hence possibly a fifteenth century source, *Marracci* (note 1) 7.

by Pope John I. Very little was known about this church until Pope Alexander II (1061–1073) founded a company of laymen called the Society of Santa Maria in Portico²⁶. In 1073 the old sixth century church was restored by Pope Gregory VII, who laid it out in the form in which Matraia and Marracci knew it, „accommodata in quella forma che adesso si trova“²⁷. Pope Gregory VII consecrated it, as attested by inscriptions still to be seen in the seventeenth century on the High Altar²⁸.

As to the legend of Saint Galla Patrizia and her sixth century palace and church, modern authorities tend to be sceptical²⁹. The miraculous icon itself has been dated to the period between the ninth and twelfth centuries³⁰. Nothing certain is known about Pope Alexander II's lay society, but the High Altar of Gregory VII was discovered in the early years of this century in the Baroque church of St. Galla, which had replaced medieval S. Maria in Portico³¹. It is a reworked Ancient Roman altar, with the following medieval inscriptions:

„SEPTIMUS HOC PRESUL ROMANO CULMINE FRETUS
GREGORIUS TEMPLUM XPO SACRAVIT IN EVUM“; and
„AD HONOREM DNI NRI IHU XPI ET BEATE MARIE
SEMPER VIRGINIS
GENITRICIS EI' DOMINE NOSTRE ET OMNIUM
SANCTORUM CONSECRATUM
EST HOC ALTARE TEMPORE DOMNI GREGORII VII.
PP. ANNI DNI
MIL. LXXIII INDICIONE XI MENSE IULIO DIES VIII“,

with a list of relics. Thus it would seem to be sure at least that Pope Gregory VII consecrated the church on 8 July 1073.

Matraia and Marracci tell of later additions and restorations. In 1514 the titular Cardinal, Bernardo Divitio, „refounded and restored“ the church, but we do not know the extent of this campaign. In 1590 Ugo Verdala, Grand Master of the Knights of Malta and Cardinal Deacon of S. Maria in Portico, provided a gilded ceiling and built the facade of the church from the foundations³³. (The three entrances to the church shown

²⁶ *Marracci* (note 1) 34 f.

²⁷ *Matraia* (note 1) 35 f.; confirmed by *Marracci* (note 1) 35: „... che al presente si vede...“.

²⁸ *Matraia*, 36 f.; *Marracci*, 35 ff. (both note 1).

²⁹ *C. Huelsen*, *Le Chiese di Roma nel medioevo* (Florence 1927) 359 f.

³⁰ *C. Cecchelli*, *La Vergine Dendrofora*, in: *Bollettino d'Arte N. S. III* (1923/4) 529 ff.; and *id.*, *La Madonna di S. Maria in Portico*, in: *Roma 2* (1924) 23 ff.

³¹ *Pasquali* (1902/4) (note 1) 18 ff.

³² *Matraia* (note 1) 39.

³³ *Ibid.*

on the Chigi plan may date from this time and the medieval church may have had only one central doorway). Cardinal Bartolomeo Cesis in 1600 provided sumptuous new furnishings and restored the church; he had the walls painted with scenes representing the story of the appearance of the miraculous icon; he renewed the old tabernacle, removing a very old grill and adding statues and other ornaments³⁴. The chapel off the left aisle, dedicated to the Purification of the Virgin Mary, was built, decorated and provided with furnishings by the Chandlers' Company³⁵; most probably it was a post-medieval addition to the church. The chapel on the right was built by the Serlupi family and was dedicated to the Assumption of the Virgin; it too was probably a sixteenth century addition to the church. Between this chapel and the entrance, however, there were in the seventeenth century some traces of another older chapel with the same dedication, built by the old noble Roman family of Pierleone; the remains of a very ancient tomb with the inscription, „FIRMIANI DE PERLEONIBUS“ stood in that part of the church³⁶. This chapel, unusual at that time, may have been contemporary with the church, since the Pierleone family rose to prominence in Rome in the late eleventh century. They were close supporters, and perhaps even relatives of Pope Gregory VII³⁷. In 1088, Pope Urban II died in their house, which the writer of the *Liber Pontificalis* describes as being close to the church of S. Nicola in Carcere and thus not far from S. Maria in Portico³⁸. The Pierleone seem, then, to have been one of the prominent families in the immediate vicinity and it would not be surprising if they had built a chapel in S. Maria in Portico. Indeed, one wonders whether they were behind the eleventh century building of the church and whether they persuaded Gregory VII to consecrate it.

From Matraia and Marracci's accounts it would seem that the Chigi plan shows the church consecrated by Gregory VII in 1073. The date of consecration is significant for two reasons. On the one hand Gregory in July 1073 had only been Pope for three months, so it is quite likely that when he became Pope the church was already standing, built either by the Pierleone family who lived nearby or by his predecessor Pope Alexander II³⁹ – in which case there may well be some truth in the seventeenth century

³⁴ *Matraia*, 39 f.; *Marracci*, 66 (both note 1).

³⁵ *Matraia* (note 1) 40.

³⁶ *Matraia*, 40; *Marracci*, 66 (both note 1).

³⁷ *R. Morghen*, *Gregorio VII e la Riforma della Chiesa nel secolo XI* (revised ed., Palermo 1974) 11, 64, 75 and 160. The theory that Gregory VII was related to the Pierleone is based on a passage in the *Annales Pegavienses* (*Mon. Germ. Hist. SS. XVI*, 238), which refers to Petrus Leonis as Gregory VII's uncle, see *ibid.*, p. 218, note 19.

³⁸ *Le Liber Pontificalis*, ed. *L. Duchesne* (Paris 1886–92) vol. II, 294 and note 13.

³⁹ This opinion was put forward in the 1871 edition of *Marracci*, ed. *G. M. Corrado*, p. 44, note 17.

claim that Alexander II founded a lay society of S. Maria in Portico. Until 1601 the clergy in charge of the church were canons and the buildings adjacent to it on the Chigi plan may represent the early canonry, possibly built at the same time. Alexander II and Gregory VII, it would seem, were particularly interested in the reform of canons, so such a foundation would have been in line with their policies of Church reform⁴⁰.

On the other hand, the date 1073 is significant because it comes only two years after Pope Alexander II had consecrated the new abbey church built by Abbot Desiderius at Montecassino. The church at Montecassino has also disappeared, but it is known from a contemporary written description, a plan made by Antonio and G. Battista da Sangallo in the sixteenth century, and from recent excavations⁴¹. It was a basilica with a nave, two aisles, a transept and three apses, the central one framed by two columns. The nave was separated from the aisles by ten columns on either side; the pavement of the transept was ca. 2.00 m higher than that of the nave and aisles. The High Altar stood more or less in the middle of the transept.

In some ways the plan of S. Maria in Portico resembles that of the abbey church of Montecassino: nave, lateral aisles, transept and apse. Yet there were also some obvious differences: piers interrupting the colonnades and no columns framing the apse, of which there was only one in the Roman church. In splendour and size there were further variations. The abbey church at Montecassino was richly decorated with mosaics, frescoes and a "Cosmatesque" *opus sectile* pavement. Although a few chips of porphyry and serpentine from what may have been such a „Cosmatesque“ pavement were found beneath the church of Saint Galla in the early twentieth century, there is no evidence that the medieval church of S. Maria in Portico had mosaic or fresco ornamentation⁴². Compared with Abbot Desiderius' basilica at Montecassino, S. Maria in Portico was plain and it was tiny. Indeed, it was roughly half the size of the abbey church, whose interior length from facade wall to apse was ca. 48.25 m, as against 24.07 m

⁴⁰ For the importance of canonical reform from the eleventh century see: *La Vita comune del clero nei secoli XI e XII*, Atti della Settimana di Studio Mendola, September 1959 (Milan 1962) 2 vols. At the Lateran synod of 1059 Hildebrand, later Pope Gregory VII, spoke in favour of priests living in canonical communities, as recorded in *J. Mabillon*, *Annales Ordinis S. Benedicti*... (Lucca 1739) 538; see also *G. Bardy*, *Saint Gregoire VII et la reforme canoniale au XI^e siècle*, in: *Studi Gregoriani I* (1947) 47 ff. and *G. Morin*, *Réglements inédits du pape Saint Gregoire VII pour les chanoines réguliers*, in: *RBén 18* (1901) 177 f., which includes the text of a Rule for canons written by Gregory VII.

⁴¹ *Chronica Mon. Cassinensis*, M. G. H. SS. VII (1846) 716 ff. for the contemporary description by Leo Marsicanus; *A. Pantoni*, *Le Vicende della Basilica di Montecassino* (Montecassino 1973) Fig. 24, for the Sangallo plan and *Ibid.*, *passim*, for the archaeological evidence.

⁴² *Pasquali* (1902/4) (note 1) 45.

at S. Maria in Portico, and whose interior width was between 19.95 m near the entrance and 20.62 m in the transept, as against 11.89 m in the transept of the Roman church. The nave of the basilica at Montecassino was ca. 11.50 m wide, the aisles ca. 4.25 m; the transept was ca. 9.7 m deep; the radius of the apse ca. 2.80 m⁴³. Proportionately these measurements also differ from those at S. Maria in Portico: nave to aisles 3:1 at the South Italian abbey, 2:1 in the Roman church; the nave wider than the depth of the transept at Montecassino, equal in Rome; the nave nearly $\frac{3}{4}$ the entire length of the monastery church, but only $\frac{2}{3}$ the length of S. Maria in Portico.

The difference in size of these two churches is remarkable. It was obviously related to their function. Abbot Desiderius' basilica was built for the liturgical offices of the monastery and had to hold the monks' choir in its broader nave⁴⁴. S. Maria in Portico seems to have been built to house an icon and perhaps for the services of a lay devotional group.

Given the dates of consecration, 1071 and 1073, it is likely that the plan of S. Maria in Portico reflects the influence of the abbey church at Montecassino. Indeed, the lay-out of the two churches is very similar and the Roman church is curiously close to half the size of the South Italian one.

As we have seen, other medieval churches in Rome, with slight variations, were of similar design. All seem to have been part of a revival of Early Christian church planning, although sometimes combined with such typically Roman medieval features as piers interrupting the colonnades. The eleventh century description of Abbot Desiderius' rebuilding of the abbey church at Montecassino stresses this conscious revival of Roman Early Christian church design⁴⁵.

In plan the high medieval churches of Rome and Abbot Desiderius' new church borrowed their basic layout from Rome's Early Christian basilicas, the Lateran, St. Peter's and S. Paolo f. 1. m⁴⁶. These venerable churches were huge, with a long broad nave flanked on either side by double aisles, leading up to a transept (at St. Peter's and S. Paolo f. 1. m, but not at the Lateran) and an apse. At Montecassino and in medieval Roman churches like S. Clemente and S. Maria in Trastevere the decoration also attempted

⁴³ Measurements taken from or scaled from the survey drawing of the excavations published by *Pantoni* (note 41) between pp. 98 and 99.

⁴⁴ *A. Pantoni*, *La basilica di Montecassino e quella di Salerno ai tempi di San Gregorio VII*, in: *Benedictina* 10 (1956) 23 ff.

⁴⁵ *H. Bloch*, *Montecassino, Byzantium and the West in the earlier Middle Ages*, in: *DOP* 3 (1946) 165 ff.

⁴⁶ For this revival in Rome, *R. Krautheimer*, *Rome: Profile of a City, 312-1308* (Princeton 1980) 176 ff. For the Lateran, Old St. Peter's and S. Paolo f. 1. m., *Krautheimer* (note 16) vol. V, *passim*.

to rival the splendour of Early Christian interiors, with their precious marble inlay, their frescoes and mosaics. Even the larger medieval churches, such as that at Montecassino, S. Crisogono and S. Maria in Trastevere, were much smaller than the Lateran, St. Peter's or S. Paolo f. 1. m. They had only two aisles and their proportions were narrower and steeper. Nonetheless, all seem to have been part of a conscious revival of Rome's Early Christian art and architecture, a revival which seems to have begun at Montecassino in the late eleventh century and continued in Rome in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

In recent years this Early Christian revival and the role played in it by the rebuilding of the church at Montecassino have been the subject of academic debate⁴⁷. While there appears to have been such a revival at Montecassino as early as 1071, which sparked off similar building projects in South Italy – for example Salerno Cathedral or S. Angelo in Formis – Rome seems to have lagged behind. Most Roman churches of revived Early Christian type – with the exception of the restoration of the lower church of S. Clemente, probably shortly after 1084 – date from after 1099, nearly thirty years after the dedication of Abbot Desiderius' basilica. Within this conspectus the little church of S. Maria in Portico, consecrated by Pope Gregory VII in 1073, only two years after the dedication of the church at Montecassino, may have a significant position as a „missing link“ between the revival of Early Christian architecture in the South Italian basilica and Roman church building of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

⁴⁷ H. Toubert, *Le renouveau paléochrétien à Rome au début de XII^e siècle*, in: *Cah Arch* 20 (1970) 99 ff.; *idem*, *Rome et le Mont Cassin...*, in: *DOP* 30 (1976) 3 ff.; E. Kitzinger, *The first mosaic decoration of Salerno Cathedral*, in: *idem*, *The Art of Byzantium and the Medieval West* (Bloomington and London, 1976) 271 ff.; M. Manion, *The frescoes of S. Giovanni a Porta Latina – the shape of tradition*, in: *Australian Journal of Art I* (1979) 93 ff.; R. Krautheimer (note 46) 178 ff.

S. MARIA IN PORTICO

Dimensions scaled from Chigi plan

	palmi	metres
length from outer face of facade to exterior of apse	114	25.41
length of church interior	107.9	24.07
interior length of transept and left aisle	101.5	22.63
interior length of transept and right aisle	99.8	22.24
interior length of left aisle	74	16.49
interior length of right aisle	72.7	16.20
depth of transept (right)	27.1	6.04
depth of transept (left)	27.5	6.14
interior width of transept	53.3	11.89
interior diameter of apse	16.1	3.60
radius of apse	8.2	1.82
width of nave (column face to column face)	24.9	5.55
width of nave (column centre to column centre)	26.9	5.98
width of left aisle (column face to wall face)	12.5	2.78
width of left aisle (column centre to wall face)	13.4	2.97
width of right aisle (column face to wall face)	11.6	2.59
width of right aisle (column centre to wall face)	12.9	2.88
diameter of columns	2.2	0.48
width of piers	4.3	0.96
width of arcade	2.2	0.48
width of right aisle wall	2.4	0.53
width of back wall of transept	3.4	0.77

S. MARIA IN PORTICO

Intercolumniations from transept to facade

	right aisle		left aisle	
	palmi	metres	palmi	metres
tongue pier to column face	5.2	1.15	5.2	1.15
column face to column face	7.1	1.58	7.3	1.63
or, centre to centre	9.2	2.06	9.5	2.11
column face to edge of pier	4.3	0.96	4.3	0.96
length of pier	4.3	0.96	4.3	0.96
pier face to column face	4.7	1.05	4.7	1.05
column face to column face	7.6	1.70	7.7	1.73
or, centre to centre	9.5	2.11	9.5	2.11
column face to edge of pier	5.2	1.15	5.4	1.20
length of pier	3.4	0.77	3.7	0.82
pier face to column face	5.8	1.29	6.0	1.34
column face to column face	5.4	1.20	5.4	1.20
or, centre to centre	7.3	1.63	7.3	1.63
column face to tongue pier	5.2	1.15	5.4	1.20