

THE FOURTH-CENTURY *TAUROBOLIUM*

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IN *PERISTEPHANON* 10 Prudentius offers what is perhaps our most lurid description of Roman paganism in action. Blood from a freshly-slaughtered bull pours down through a wooden grille upon the head of a devotee standing in a pit, who "lifts up his face, presents his cheeks to the flow, puts his ears under it, exposes his lips and nostrils, and even bathes his eyes in the stream; nor does he spare his mouth, but wets his tongue, until the whole of him drinks in the black blood" (*Perist.* 10.1036–40). This rite can be identified from other literary references with the *taurobolium*, which is in turn attested in over a hundred inscriptions, most of them dedications to Magna Mater and Attis. The past generation has seen a dramatic shift in the interpretation of this material. Whereas Franz Cumont (1911: 66–69) had assigned the origins of Prudentius' "repugnant rite" to the dark prehistory of the Phrygian cult of Cybele, independent but complementary studies of the epigraphic evidence by R. Duthoy (1969) and J. B. Rutter (1968) demonstrated that in its earliest attested form the *taurobolium* was some sort of bull chase, and that the vast majority of surviving inscriptions, from the second and third centuries A.D., refer to what had become essentially a conventional bull sacrifice. Prudentius' description, concluded both (Duthoy 1969: 101–105; Rutter 1968: 239–240), applies only to a final transformation in the character of the rite, and is to be associated primarily with the collection of fourth-century inscriptions from Rome commemorating *taurobolia* conducted in the sanctuary of the Phrygianum on the Vatican.¹

Cumont's primeval rite thus became a late antique innovation; moreover, its origins were transplanted from the mysterious east to Rome itself, and associated not with exotic barbarians but with the senatorial aristocracy. The wide acceptance that has been given to this view reflects modern recognition of the self-confident vitality of late antique culture.² But although the incompatibility of Prudentius' account with the earlier inscriptions has been successfully demonstrated, there remain grave problems in reconciling the poet's testimony with the fourth-century

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¹Duthoy (1969: 14–24) supplies a catalogue of the fourth-century epigraphic evidence from Rome; of the two other *taurobolium* inscriptions surviving from the period, both from Athens (*IG* III 172–173: cf. Duthoy 1969: 9–13), one commemorates the "first" local performance. For convenience I refer to the Roman dedications collectively as the Vatican inscriptions, although the provenance is in several cases uncertain.

²"It was not the rite of a culture that had started to soften on the topic of sacrifices" (Lane Fox 1986: 72).

epigraphic evidence, and in explaining this alleged development from sacrifice to shower-bath.³

Several fundamental assumptions made by Rutter and Duthoy are already obsolete. Both scholars invoked the fourth-century context, the "baptismal" character of the Prudentian rite, and certain statements in the relevant inscriptions to explain the transformation of the *taurobolium* in connection with the contemporary triumph of Christianity: the ceremony had become a "symbol of paganism, . . . a tool in the hands of the pagan religion of Cybele in its competition with Christianity" (Rutter 1968: 242–243).⁴ This straightforward conception of pagan-Christian competition depends ultimately upon H. Bloch's thesis (1944 and 1963) that the "Oriental" cults provided spiritual sustenance for an activist bloc of pagan senators whose long struggle against the upstart religion culminated in their support for the doomed usurper Eugenius. But subsequent research has greatly narrowed the scope of the alleged "pagan reaction";⁵ the political profile of the Oriental cults has also been reduced, and the traditional public rites convincingly restored to their place of whatever political agenda Roman paganism might have had.⁶

Prudentius' extravagant rite sits uncomfortably with this revised picture. In what remains the clearest exposition of the issue John Matthews (1973: 179) classes the *taurobolium* with other mystery cults as the expression of an essentially private religiosity which although not incompatible with conventional public observances was not formally linked with them. He thereby marginalizes the *taurobolium*, diminishing it from a vital ideological statement into an act of supererogation which by its "excessive emotional indulgence" (Matthews 1973: 195) provided an easy target for Christian polemic. We are left to wonder how in such circumstances this bizarre innovation won its aristocratic clientele.

Matthews's conception of the Oriental cults, however, is assumed rather than argued for in a paper intended principally to establish the "formal reticence" of the public face of Roman paganism, as exhibited both upon commemorative monuments and in the correspondence of Symmachus. And this central point can stand without the implied contrast between this material and the self-revelatory intimacy of the *taurobolium* dedications. For the Vatican inscriptions, carved upon often sumptuous altars which presumably stood in the precincts of the Phrygianum, were not in any important sense "private"; nor do their formulae convey to the innocent reader any atmosphere of "personal and emotional intensity" (Matthews 1973: 177). To take only the best-known case, it is only

³ Vermaseren (1977b: 106) notes several difficulties with Duthoy's thesis and reserves judgement. Turcan (1992: 55–58) attempts to reassert the traditional view by applying the Prudentian account to the second-century *taurobolium* inscriptions, but his tangled interpretation only exposes the contradictions between these two sources.

⁴ Duthoy (1969: 121) likewise invokes the "obvious" influence of the "great competitor."

⁵ O'Donnell (1979) provides a forthright and persuasive statement of the minimalist position.

⁶ See Matthews 1973; cf. Markus 1974: 15–17.

after a dozen lines of meticulously itemized promotions that Sextilius Agesilaus Aedesius proclaims (across a line-break) his “eternal rebirth,” before returning firmly to the here-and-now with a precise consular date (*CIL* VI 510).⁷

Our understanding of these inscriptions, I believe, has been distorted by our habit of reading them through a Prudentian lens. The poet’s testimony has hitherto been accepted without question;⁸ I shall argue in the following section that it is largely worthless. I shall then return to the Vatican inscriptions, to reconstruct the outlines of the fourth-century *taurobolium* and to relate the rite to the changing profile of pagan practices in the public life of fourth-century Rome.

I. THE PRUDENTIAN VERSION

At first sight, Prudentius squares neatly with our other evidence for the *taurobolium*. Although he does not name the rite, two other Christian sources do so, and his account seems to flesh out their brief allusions. Firmicus Maternus had deplored the “wicked taint of blood” with which the rite “showered” pagans (*Err. prof. rel.* 27.8); an anonymous poem had mocked an unnamed prefect who was “sent beneath the earth, stained with the blood of a bull” (*Carmen contra paganos* 60). A reference in the latter text, to the prefect’s hopes of living “pure” for twenty years, corresponds in turn with information recorded upon two of the inscriptions.⁹ But although this shows that the Prudentian account rests ultimately upon solid foundations it does not provide any support for the elaborate details for which the poet is our sole source.

What makes Prudentius’ description unique (and should immediately inspire caution) is that it is our only complete literary account of the mechanics of a mystery cult.¹⁰ For other cults initiates reveal strikingly little (and then usually in metaphors) and hostile investigators seem to have been unable to secure more than isolated details, which mean little out of their context.¹¹ Firmicus Maternus, for example, takes us only to the entrance of the sanctuary through which the initiant of Cybele passed (in a rite, therefore, in some sense parallel to the *taurobolium*)

⁷ Matthews (1973: 177) also cites the invocation of Magna Mater and Attis as *diis animae / suae mentisque custodibus* by Clodius Hermogenianus Caesarius (*CIL* VI 499). But this phrase is inserted between a calendar and a consular date; the eye would probably be drawn more readily to Caesarius’ office, *praefectus urbis Romae*, emphatically placed in a single line.

⁸ “We have no reason to believe that the more important points are incorrect or invented” (Duthoy 1969: 104); “The most reliable and detailed description” (Vermaseren 1977b: 102); “A clear exposition” (Rutter 1968: 239).

⁹ *Carm. contra pag.* 62: *vivere cum speras viginti mundus in annos*; *CIL* VI 504: *bis deni . . . orbis*; VI 512: *viginti annis expletis*.

¹⁰ Although the *taurobolium* is notoriously difficult to classify, its practitioners certainly counted it among the mysteries: Rufius Sabinus is *tauroboli . . . magni dux mistici sacri* (*CIL* VI 511), Petronius Apollodorus Μυστηριόλος τελετών [τερῶν] (VI 509); cf. VI 30780, 30966.

¹¹ Burkert (1987: 90–101) offers a clear survey of the nature of the evidence.

"to his death" (*Err. prof. rel.* 18.1):¹² he can supply only the password, and is reduced to analysing its vocabulary. Moreover, this formula illustrates what seems a fundamental distinction between these other attested mysteries and Prudentius' *taurobolium*. Maternus' devotee has "eaten from the tambourine, drunk from the cymbal and learned the secrets of the rite" (*Err. prof. rel.* 18.1):¹³ the cults seem characteristically to have involved an extended period of preparation, to enable the participants to respond properly to the largely symbolic experience of the mystery itself.¹⁴ The "horrifying procedure" of Prudentius' *taurobolium*, as Burkert has remarked (1987: 98), is "totally different" from anything to which such passwords might have yielded admission: the "unforgettable experience" is in this case brutally obvious. It is possible, of course, that this uniquely grotesque crudity was responsible for the uniquely complete exposure of Prudentius' rite. But so well does the poet's account mirror Christian prejudice that we must wonder at the coincidence. The one mystery whose secrets the Christians penetrated lived up, suspiciously well, to their most lurid expectations.

Several contemporaries, significantly, seem unaware that the secrets of the *taurobolium* had been revealed. One polemicist inveighs against the "secrets" of Magna Mater, ceremonies invested with a spurious profundity because they took place behind closed doors (ps.-Paulinus *Carmen ad Antonium* 90): even if the writer is referring to a different rite, his failure to quote the *taurobolium* against the goddess is notable.¹⁵ More conclusive is the *Historia Augusta's* claim that the emperor Heliogabalus "received the rites of the Mother of the gods and was tauroboliated, so that he could steal the holy image and other sacred objects, which are kept closely hidden" (*SHA Heliogabalus* 7). If the *Historia Augusta* makes wretched history, it provides excellent evidence for what contemporaries could assume: and here it is clearly assumed that the *taurobolium* was part of a well-guarded secret, and was related to the other mysteries of Cybele. As a pagan contemporary of Prudentius (and perhaps a long-term resident of Rome) the author is unlikely to have been less well-informed than the Christian Spanish courtier.¹⁶ His testimony therefore counts heavily against the poet's.

These initial doubts about the character of Prudentius' testimony are compounded by his manner of presentation. *Peristephanon* 10 is set not in Rome but in Syrian Antioch: and only at the end of this massive poem does the persecuting magistrate Aesclepiades ask the deacon Romanus—somewhat fatuously, after a thousand lines of graphically described torture—whether the blood covering him

¹² Turcan (1982: 288–289) convincingly explains *moriturus* as editorial comment rather than liturgical formula.

¹³ Cf. Clem. Al. *Prot.* 2.15.3, for a slightly different formula; Clement's commentary again suggests little detailed knowledge of the rite.

¹⁴ See Burkert 1987: 67–71, 89–93.

¹⁵ Compare Augustine's remarks on the Galli and the *sacra* of Cybele: *nescimus quid agant, sed scimus per quales agant* (*De civ. D.* 6.7).

¹⁶ Honoré (1987) tentatively identifies the Scriptor as an official in the urban prefecture.

was really his own. Romanus replies that it was indeed his "and not a bull's" (*Perist.* 10.1007); the sharp question that follows this enigmatic retort, "You know the blood of which I speak?," marks his cue for forty lines of detailed description.

In its apparent irrelevance to its dramatic context the speech differs sharply from the dozen or so that Romanus had previously delivered. One of these is of similar length, another much longer (*Perist.* 10.123–390, 459–545): but throughout both Romanus had kept his targets doggedly in sight, goading his persecutor with short staccato bursts of questions and pointing to his wounds to illustrate a sermon to the spectators. Here, however, he seems to forget his interlocutor, and after an introductory sally ("Most wretched pagan!") does not use the second person once in the next forty lines. Nor can this be explained as a careless surrender to the temptations of ecphrasis. For the passage could hardly have been given more emphasis. The speech is not only the martyr's last, it is also a miracle: Romanus delivers it without a tongue.¹⁷

Romanus' attention to detail is the more surprising by comparison with his treatment of pagan rites elsewhere in the poem. Immediately after the present passage, for example, a vivid caricature of the gory chaos of the hecatomb, where augurs almost swim their way through a sea of blood (*Perist.* 10.1051–55), is compressed into a single stanza. Equally economical are the images of pagan worship which Romanus had conjured up in previous speeches: he expostulates briefly, with exclamations of disgust or pity, against such absurdities as consular chicken-feeding ("I am ashamed to mention it!": 146–147) and the barefoot processions of senators at the Megalesian *lavatio* ("what is more abject?": 151–160); elsewhere he speaks more obliquely about the dedication of altars to garlic and leeks (259–265) and the terror inspired by a wool-wrapped tree-stump (302). In all these passages—and examples could easily be multiplied—Prudentius is exploiting stock arguments.¹⁸ The *taurobolium* description differs not only in its far greater detail but also in the evenness of Romanus' tone: he begins with fully twenty lines of such neutral, precise description (1010–29) that we would not easily recognize him for a hostile witness, and circumstantial detail continues to prevail over outrage (which is confined to a few adjectives) until the dead bull is finally dragged away and the bloodstained priest allowed to re-emerge. Modern sensibilities might appreciate the power of the objective language and understatement in such contexts, but these subtleties are alien to the conventions of anti-pagan polemic. Far the most plausible explanation of the clarity of Prudentius' reporting is that he was helping his readers to visualize an unfamiliar scene.

This neatly matches the recent interpretation of the *Peristephanon* as a cosmopolitan courtier's attempt to enlighten a provincial audience in his native Spain

¹⁷The removal of the tongue is described at *Perist.* 10.896–910; after this Romanus had spoken only once, to establish his power of speech (927–960), until the beginning of the present passage.

¹⁸Prudentius himself recycles his Egyptian vegetable-worship and ribbon-bedecked trees at *c. Symm.* 2.865–871, 1010–11.

(Palmer 1989: 94–97). Furthermore, Prudentius had visited Rome, the only place in the Latin-speaking world where the *taurobolium* is known to have been performed during his lifetime. However, the passage differs crucially from those where the poet gives his readers the benefit of his direct experience, for these are always presented in the first person. Elsewhere, too, he always provides his credentials, basing his account upon information given by a well-informed local (*Perist.* 12), or on a painting (*Perist.* 11), or both (*Perist.* 9). When he appealed to the evidence of tomb inscriptions against the paganism of Symmachus, he again invoked his own reading (*c. Symm.* 1.403–407: *lego*). There is no such signalling whatever in the *taurobolium* description, which is put into the mouth of an Antiochene deacon. Nor, for all the emphasis given the account, and the devastating force of its testimony, does Romanus rest his case upon it, but he continues with a litany of more familiar pagan excesses that weaken the rhetorical effect of the speech considerably. A sensational indictment—never before had Christian readers been shown pagans wallowing in so perfect a combination of ghastliness and silliness—thus becomes curiously inconsequential; but at the same time, in so distancing his circumstantial allegations from the surrounding context Prudentius spares himself the need to stake anything upon their accuracy himself.¹⁹

The poet had a very good reason to pull his punches. For he must have been aware of the essential fragility of his brilliantly constructed picture of pagan folly. His information was at best second-hand. He never names the *taurobolium*, although this is clearly the rite he is describing, and perhaps did not even know what it was called.²⁰ He seems wholly ignorant of the connection with Cybele and Attis, whom he fails to mention although they were a favourite target of his elsewhere;²¹ moreover, he moves from the *taurobolium*—via an eight-line swipe at the entirely unconnected practices of the hecatomb and *lectisternium* (*Perist.* 10.1051–58)—to what is presented as a new theme, an explicit attack on the “Mother Goddess” and the masochistic excesses of self-laceration and castration which her worship notoriously involved (1059–75). A more fundamental confusion is hinted at in his description of the magnificent dress of his “high priest” (*summa sacerdos*), a silk toga “bound with the Gabine knot” (1011–15). This is not only in direct contradiction to the *Carmen contra paganos*, which makes great play of the rich prefect’s dressing “in rags” for the rite, but suggests that Prudentius imagines the

¹⁹ The same applies to Romanus, whose forensic challenge, “*nempe*” (*Perist.* 10.1011)—already used by Asclepiades to introduce a decidedly unconvincing argument (584)—is much less positive than his affirmation about aristocratic participation in the Megalesian *lavatio*: “*scio*” (154).

²⁰ His vocabulary when introducing the rite is oddly indeterminate: *vestri sanguinem sacrum bovis* (*Perist.* 10.1009; cf. 1007, *bubulus*). Contrast *Carm. contra pag.* 58: *taurobolus*; 60: *pollutus sanguine tauri* (cf. *CIL* VI 1779: *taureis . . . teletis*; *AEpigr* 1923: no. 29, ταῦρον). Prudentius does not use the term *taurus* until *Perist.* 10.1021.

²¹ Romanus had already derided Magna Mater and her rites at *Perist.* 10.151–160, 196–200; cf. *c. Symm.* 1.187, 628; 2.51–52, 521–523, 863–864.

“priest” as somehow the officiant at a traditional “Roman” ceremony.²² We should not underestimate Prudentius’ ignorance of paganism. He was able elsewhere, without any apparent polemical motive, to transform a sober *quindecimvir* into a panting, foaming-mouthed *fanaticus* (*Apotheosis* 439–440), and to introduce a Zoroastrian formula (and Thessalian witchcraft) into a sacrifice to Hecate (*Apotheosis* 460–494). The living world of paganism had receded, liberating the poetic imagination.

Prudentius, then, offers a mirage: a dazzling picture, beguiling to the historian, but illusory. For more accurate bearings upon the *taurobolium* we must turn instead to Firmicus Maternus and the *Carmen contra paganos*, who stood so much closer to their pagan enemies at Rome. Their accounts are conventionally cited simply as corroboration for Prudentius; instead they should be used to control him. And in their brief and allusive references to the *taurobolium* neither suggests anything as dramatic as Prudentius’ bloodsoaked pit. Maternus brackets the drenching involved in the *taurobolium* and *criobolium* with the profusion of blood *apud idola*, which must be a reference to animal sacrifice; the *Carmen* focuses principally upon the prefect’s blood-stained clothes. Unless they were simply taking for granted their audience’s familiarity with the mechanics of the shower-bath (in which case their failure to labour the point shows unusual restraint), the obvious inference is that the most damning information these authors had against the rite was that it left the devotee’s clothes stained with blood. And this surely reflects their perspective: excluded from the mystery of the *taurobolium*, Christians could only shudder at what they could see of its results. Prudentius, moreover, suggests a likely source for their information: for he shows the ceremony culminating in that most characteristic fourth-century publicity device, an acclamation. When the priest emerges from the pit, “everyone hails him (*salutant*) and adores him from afar” (*Perist.* 10.1048). The poet keeps these spectators, whom he has not mentioned before, at a safe distance, *eminus*, an expression which is best explained as his attempt to reconcile their presence with the secrecy of the ceremony itself, and thus to make sense of his information. We might more plausibly envisage the blood-stained tauroboliate emerging from a sanctuary to display himself to an awed crowd;²³ the hero of Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses*, after his secret initiation to Isis, had likewise stood on a wooden platform to be “unveiled” for public inspection (*Met.* 11.24).

The *Carmen* also states that the prefect had been “sent beneath the earth” (*Carm. contra pag.* 60: *sub terram missus*). The phrase might appear to confirm the essential veracity of Prudentius’ account, but needs in the first place to be interpreted against the caustic obliqueness of the *Carmen* as a whole. The continuing controversy over the prefect’s identity is a sobering reminder of the

²² Porte (1989: 32) emphasizes the exclusive association of the *Gabinus cinctus* with autochthonous cult.

²³ Roueché (1984) gives a fine discussion of the role of acclamations in fourth-century public life; for acclamations in religious contexts, see also Klauser 1950.

scope for ambiguity even in such apparently explicit accusations as the betrayal of the wine supply and the demolition of old buildings;²⁴ a further reference to underground activities in the poem, where the prefect teaches a priest (probably: the text is uncertain) to “seek the sun beneath the earth” (*Carm. contra pag.* 47: *sub terra quaerere solem*), is also notably opaque. The *Carmen* does not deal much in plain description. With the *taurobolium*, moreover, the author seems to have based his attacks on the newly-tauroboliated prefect’s own claims. The latter’s alleged hopes of living “pure” for twenty years are corroborated by epigraphy; this was therefore a public announcement, probably made upon his emergence from the sanctuary. His “descent beneath the earth” can also be related to a proclamation. Given the centrality to the myth of Attis of the demigod’s underground “descent” and “rebirth,” it is only too likely that such terms recurred in the acclamations that greeted the devotee’s appearance after the *taurobolium*.²⁵ Such language was appropriate for the occasion (Apuleius’ Lucius, again, speaks of having “trodden the threshold of Proserpina” during his initiation: *Met.* 11.23) and one recipient of the *taurobolium*, it will be recalled, claimed to have been “reborn for eternity.” The use of an actual cellar in the fourth-century rite is not of course excluded by such arguments, and indeed remains a distinct possibility (cf. below, 320–321). But the shower of blood belongs to the world of fantasy: Prudentius’ account, I submit, derives ultimately not from any knowledge of the mechanics of the cult, but from the spectacle of the tauroboliate’s bloodstained clothes and dark talk of a subterranean mission. It thus corresponds almost exactly with the Thyestean banquets and promiscuous orgies that pagans conjured from reports of what went on behind the closed doors of the Christian Eucharist.

We cannot know, of course, how much of Prudentius’ account is the work of his own imagination, as opposed to his informant’s. But to do the poet justice we must recognize how beautifully the passage solves the artistic problem that he had created for himself in *Peristephanon* 10.²⁶ For in ordering the removal of Romanus’ tongue the persecuting magistrate had in effect conceded defeat: the martyr had already confounded him both by argument (*Perist.* 10.121–652) and by a practical demonstration (653–850, the confession of a small boy). But this left Romanus dangerously short of material when he miraculously regained the power of speech. He had, for example, already covered all the key points made by Lawrence in his magisterial final speech in *Peristephanon* 2: Rome’s traditional errors, “adulterous Jupiter,” and the real nature of pagan statues (*Perist.* 2.413–484; cf. *Perist.* 10.611–620 on tradition, 201–210, 221–230 on Jupiter’s

²⁴ I accept the case for Praetextatus argued by Cracco Ruggini (1979), against the undeniably forceful arguments in favour of Nichomachus Flavianus advanced by Matthews (1970) and by Musso (1979).

²⁵ Julian repeatedly invokes the *katabasis* of Attis in his hymn to the Mother of the Gods: *Or.* 5.165C, 167B, 168C, 171A, 175A.

²⁶ Palmer (1989: 246–248) gives a useful account of the relationship between Prudentius’ version and the sources.

bizarre infidelities, and 296–300 on idols). It was appropriate that the most bloodstained of all Prudentius' martyrs should turn to the absurd butchery which pagan worship involved, but even here he risked repeating himself.²⁷ The superbly controlled portrayal of the priest in the pit, however, was entirely new, and offered a delightful bonus to the weary reader (whose needs are easily missed by students of the *taurobolium*, who tend to skip the first thousand lines of the poem): never, perhaps, had Roman paganism been made to appear at once so sinister and so silly. It is thus, as a purely literary stroke, that the passage is to be appreciated. Our knowledge of Roman paganism would have been no poorer (and we would have been spared much confusion) if Prudentius had allowed Aesclepiades to kill off Romanus when he originally promised, within the first hundred lines of the poem.

II. THE VATICAN INSCRIPTIONS

The literary evidence therefore tells us more about Christian authors and their audiences than about the *taurobolium* itself. Nor, despite an assiduous search for examples of the *fossa sanguinis* (as Prudentius' pit has been termed), has the poet received any reliable support from archaeology. Several candidates have already been disposed of by other scholars: thus the well in the forum of Zadar (Duthoy 1968) or the pair of storage pits at a rural shrine near Aezani (Vermaseren 1987: 43–45). More promising has seemed the cramped cellar excavated at Ostia by Guido Calza in a corner of the precinct of Cybele; but this narrow room, enclosed within a tower in the city wall and hidden discreetly behind the temple of Attis, can hardly have accommodated the spectacular proceedings described by Prudentius.²⁸ If the site is to be associated with the late antique *taurobolium* at all (on the strength of its associations with Cybele and the epigraphic evidence for Ostian *taurobolia* in the second and third centuries: cf. Duthoy 1969: 25–27), it would again suggest that what went on underground was a secret rite on a modest scale, comparable therefore to other mysteries.

The same applies to our most persuasive (but still inconclusive) item of archaeological evidence, the square stone-walled pit excavated at Neuss in the Rhineland (an area devoid of *taurobolium* inscriptions),²⁹ which is demonstrably associated with Cybele and has been securely dated to the early fourth century.³⁰ But the cellar is only 1.4m deep, which together with the apparent lack of any provision for drainage makes it highly unsuitable for a Prudentian shower-bath.³¹

²⁷ Cf. *Perist.* 10.382–383 on animal sacrifice, 196–200 on ritual castration.

²⁸ Vermaseren (1977b: 61–62) gives a site plan and description, and accepts the identification; cf. Meiggs 1972: 363. Duthoy (1968: 623) is again sceptical.

²⁹ No relevant inscriptions have been discovered in Germania Inferior and only one (*CIL* XIII 5451) in Germania Superior.

³⁰ Petrokovitz (1960: 129–131) provides a convenient account; see also Vermaseren 1989: 4. Duthoy (1968: 623) considered the identification almost certain; cf. Rutter 1969: 240–241.

³¹ Schwertheim (1974: 9) and Turcan (1992: 68) express scepticism about the identification.

The only furnishings, a stone table and basin set into the corner, suggest an altogether more domestic ritual, which perhaps involved (to judge from the two sets of steps, far the most impressive aspect of the structure itself) a staged descent and reascent. The Neuss cellar thus again leads us away from Prudentius towards the more typical pattern of mystery cults: and the sort of underground ritual implied (separate from but perhaps associated with the killing of the bull) would be appropriate for the cult of Cybele and compatible with the suggestions made earlier, and would provide a possible starting-point for the poet's fantasies. But our isolated and inconclusive evidence cannot be pressed. The mechanics of the fourth-century *taurobolium* remain a mystery.

Such conclusions might seem disappointingly negative. They nevertheless provide the starting-point for a fresh appraisal of the *taurobolium* inscriptions of fourth-century Rome, which provide not only our most direct evidence for the rite in late antiquity, but also our fullest dossier on pagan activity among the senatorial aristocracy under the Christian empire. Without Prudentius these inscriptions give no grounds to suppose that the *taurobolium* had changed dramatically since the third century, when a conventional bull sacrifice had been followed (according to our most detailed epigraphic evidence, although variations are entirely possible) by the consecration of the animal's *vires*, its testicles, which were "handed over" by an officiant to the dedicator.³² Thus in 376 Faventinus vows to "slaughter" some (plural) sheep, their horns gilded in the traditional way (*CIL* VI 504); Ga[...]lios "brings" a bull and ram to Attis (*AEpigr* 1923, no. 29: ἤγαγε). Nothing in the phrasing of the fourth-century inscriptions suggests any dramatic break in continuity. Rutter (1968: 239) emphasizes the frequent relegation of the *taurobolium* from the main clause to an ablative absolute; but the two inscriptions erected at the end of the third century by Scipio Orfitus, each using one of the two formulae, prove decisively that this change was purely stylistic.³³ Nor is Duthoy (1969: 101–103) justified in inferring a wholesale transformation from the appearance of a new verb, *percipere*, in *taurobolium* inscriptions. Fourth-century usage is not consistent, and several inscriptions hark back to earlier formulae: in 313 Severianus is still employing the standard term from the second century, *taurobolium facere* (*CIL* VI 507);³⁴ moreover, the formula used by Caesarius in 374, *taurobolio criobolioque perfecto* (VI 499), echoes—down to the ablative absolute—two inscriptions from Mactar in Africa which record the last attested *taurobolia* offered on the emperors' behalf, almost a century previously (VIII 23400–401). The eight occurrences of *percipere* thus represent a variant within a

³² This is the "second phase" for both Rutter (1968: 235–238) and Duthoy (1969: 92–101); Duthoy omits Rutter's "first phase" and divides his second in two.

³³ *CIL* VI 505–506: *taurobolium sive criobolium fecit; taurobolio sive criobolio facto*.

³⁴ Cf. *CIL* VI 505 (above, n. 33); and (to give merely a sample) *CIL* X 4726 (from Ager Falernus, A.D. 186), XIII 504–509, 522–525 (all from Lactora, Aquitania, second century), XIII 1752–54 (from Lugdunum, second century).

well-established system. Although no example has been found from before the fourth century, many third-century inscriptions use *accipere*, and both *excipere* and *suscipere* also occur:³⁵ a further new prefix should therefore not be invested with too much significance.

One of these inscriptions in fact provides explicit evidence for continuity. In 319 a certain Serapias recorded her *taurobolium criobol(iumque) caerno perceptum* (CIL VI 508): although the precise meaning of *cernus* is disputed, this is conclusive evidence that she (and, we might reasonably surmise, the others who used the same verb) “received” the rite not through a grille, but in some sort of bowl.³⁶ Moreover, not only does the terminology include the phrase, *perfectis ritae sacris cernorum crioboli et tauroboli*, but a parallel supporting cast of priests is invoked, who “handed over” what can only be the *cernus* that she “received”.³⁷ We might therefore envisage the ritual culminating, as before, with the consecration of the *cernus* and its contents, whether blood or testicles or both. Such dedications provide the most economical explanation for the Vatican altars, whose careful dating implies a specific ceremony associated with their erection; moreover, one of them makes the connection explicit, stating that the two dedicants, having performed the *taurobolium* and the *criobolium*, “placed an altar above the mystically solemnized blood” (CIL VI 30780).³⁸

This last phrase is the only epigraphic reference to the blood that so obsessed our Christian sources.³⁹ So sensitive were the latter upon this subject, moreover, that the significance of their testimony is difficult to assess: a sprinkling of blood could have sufficed to provoke the horror of Maternus and the *Carmen*, and ultimately to inflame the imagination of Prudentius or his informant. We are therefore unable to do more than conjecture the introduction into the rite of a ceremonial “blooding,” connected with either the bull-sacrifice itself or the subsequent “handing over.” At no period, we should bear in mind, do the epigraphic sources give anything like a complete account of the proceedings. What the Vatican inscriptions do illustrate, however, is an important change in the presentation of the rite. The supporting cast of priests, *collegia*, and flautists

³⁵ *Accipere* occurs in a series of inscriptions at Lactora, CIL XIII 512–519 (all dated 8 December, 241), and frequently elsewhere; *excipere* occurs at CIL XIII 510, also from Lactora (discussed by Rutter, 1968: 237–238), *suscipere* at II 5521.

³⁶ For discussion, see Duthoy (1969: 74–75, 98–99) and Rutter (1968: 238). Vermaseren (1977b: 49), suggests that the *cernus* was not associated directly with the *taurobolium*, but belonged to Serapias as a priestess of Proserpina: this seems very implausible.

³⁷ Compare *AEpigr* 1961, no. 201, from Utica: *cerno et criobulo de suo acceptis . . . tradente C. Rascio Aprile*.

³⁸ The expression αἵμασι μυστιπύλοις βωμὸν ὑπερτίθεσθαι is of course difficult to reconcile with a Prudentian baptism: Vermaseren (1977b: 51) suggests that the placing of the altar was “symbolic,” but there seems to be a close parallel from the second century in CIL XII 1567, *loco vires conditae*.

³⁹ Various emendations have, moreover, been proposed for αἵμασι: Duthoy (1968: 22) reports the reading ἡμασι, and Vermaseren (1977: 55) [ἐρ]ημασι. These emendations, however, seem designed principally to restore compatibility with Prudentius.

disappear from the record entirely after Serapias: subsequent dedicants share their inscriptions exclusively with Magna Mater and Attis.

The explicit and intimate bond occasionally claimed with these deities, as the “saviours” of one dedicant (*CIL* VI 500) and the “preservers” of another (VI 512), and the “guardians” of yet another’s “soul and mind” (VI 499), should not, as was remarked earlier, be taken to imply a specifically “Oriental” style of personal devotion. Such phrases are nevertheless doubly significant. They reflect, first, the sheer exuberance of these inscriptions, the variety of whose formulae marks them out as individual commissions; the claims that the dedicants make upon the gods, especially when taken together with the quantity of prosopographical information they supply about themselves, also bring home the extent to which these individuals dominate the inscriptions. The main novelty in the fourth-century evidence, in fact, is this arrogation by the dedicants of the epigraphic spotlight. It is a reasonable supposition that the same applied to the ceremony itself. The *taurobolium* had become not “personal,” but personalized.

The only comparable emphasis in earlier inscriptions had been reserved for the titulature of the emperors, in those ceremonies held for their benefit. The key development of the fourth century might therefore be identified as the merger of the “public” and the “private” types of *taurobolium*, which (as far as we can tell) had involved essentially the same ritual but had differed in their intended beneficiaries and the degree of publicity;⁴⁰ but now the pomp and spectacle of the public rites were at the disposal of private individuals. An important aspect of this “privatization” is indicated by the participation of members of the “highest and most holy college of quindecimvirs” in Serapias’ *taurobolium* in 319 (*CIL* VI 508). Only public *taurobolia* had previously merited the presence of members of priestly colleges; and these provincial celebrations were on a more modest plane altogether.⁴¹ Although no subsequent inscription, as noted above, mentions the quindecimvirs (or any other officiants), we should not doubt that they continued to attend. Being several notches higher socially than the *honesta femina* Serapias, the other *taurioboliat*es could take their presence for granted; of the twelve male fourth-century dedicants, moreover, five were themselves *quindecimviri*. Female participation also added a new dimension to the traditional clubbiness of Roman paganism. The puzzling statement that Praetextatus “honoured” his wife with the *taurobolium* (VI 1779: *teletis honoras taureis*) might plausibly be interpreted as a reference to his participation in the ceremony, in his office as a quindecimvir.

⁴⁰ Rutter (1968: 236–237) emphasizes the crucial distinction between “public” and “private” *taurobolia*; a series of inscriptions at Lactora (*CIL* XIII 511–519) record one public and eight private ceremonies concluded on the same day by the same priest; the former is graced also by the *ordo* and two *curantes*.

⁴¹ A generation before Serapias, at a *taurobolium* on behalf of the emperor Probus at Mactar, the same office had been performed by an equestrian pontifex: *CIL* VIII 23400. I consider it wholly likely, *pace* Matthews (1970: 178), that the *quindecimviri* “were there in their official capacity as members of the college.”

Serapias juxtaposes her quindecimvirs with the "Phrygian supreme priest" Antonius Eustochius, whose titlature identifies him as an *archigallus*, chief of the eunuch priests of Cybele.⁴² An inscription of over a century previously shows a *taurobolium* in distant Lyons being authorized by the "vaticination" of the *archigallus* (*CIL* XIII 1752); the fourth-century concentration of the rite upon Rome itself, and the greater emphasis upon its mystic character, ought logically to have enhanced the role of the priests who had traditionally guarded the secret rites of the Great Mother.⁴³ Like the quindecimvirs, then, the *archigallus* and his subordinates might be envisaged playing a role in the rite. But the Galli are absent not only from the inscriptions but also, despite their value to contemporary polemicists at Rome,⁴⁴ from our Christian accounts of the *taurobolium*. This must mean that they were successfully kept from sight. Their conspicuous absence from Prudentius' description can be explained by the poet's lack of information;⁴⁵ but even the author of the *Carmen* leaves unanswered the question of who "persuaded" the prefect to undergo the rite, missing the opportunity to pin the responsibility upon the notorious Galli.⁴⁶ His account has room for only one main character, thus mirroring the Vatican inscriptions; indeed, this is one of the few passages where the prefect's disreputable company is not counted against him. The effacement of the Galli is thus indicative of a significant transformation: in being captured by the Roman aristocracy the fourth-century *taurobolium* had gained, not lost, respectability.

We hardly notice the absence of the officiating priests, so loudly do the Vatican tauroboliate trumpet their own sacerdotal associations. Faventinus tops the list with five (an augurate, and priesthoods of Mithras/Sol, Liber, Hecate, and Isis) and is closely followed by Aedesius, Sabinus, and Kamenius with four apiece; the one inscription which fails to record any priesthood (*CIL* VI 512) commemorates a repetition of the rite, and perhaps stood alongside an altar giving a fuller account of the dedicant's career.⁴⁷ The *taurobolium*, it appears, had become the preserve of priests. This seems to have been taken for granted

⁴²The arguments in Thomas (1971: 55-65) against the identification depend upon acceptance of Prudentius' account of the rite.

⁴³ Augustine associates the Galli with those rites of Cybele *quae tenebris operiuntur*, alluding darkly to *quid in occulto agant*, at *De Civ. D.* 6.7; at 7.24 he again links the Galli to the *praeclara mysteria* of the goddess.

⁴⁴For typical sallies see Ambrosiaster *Quaestiones veteris et novi testamenti* 114.7-8, 10, and ps.-Cyprian *Carmen ad senatorem* 8-15; cf. below, n. 45-46, for Prudentius and the *Carmen contra paganos*.

⁴⁵Galli duly appear later in Romanus' speech, at *Perist.* 10.1066-75.

⁴⁶The poet seems subsequently to allude to Galli in the prefect's entourage at the Megalesian Games: *Carm. contra pag.* 66, *lasciva cohors*; 77, *vocem . . . frangere*. I follow the poem's most recent editor (Shackleton Bailey 1982: 20) in taking *taurobolus* (*Carm. contra pag.* 57) as a vocative.

⁴⁷The inscription, on a now lost altar described as *rudis et male habita*, seems to give only an incomplete account of the dedicant's career: the title *vir illustris* is not justified by the only office recorded, a vicariate. We cannot explain the silence over priesthoods by the late date of the inscription (Matthews 1970: 182): cf. *CIL* VI 503, of exactly the same date.

by Prudentius, whose tauroboliate is a *summus sacerdos*. The poet indeed deepens the sacerdotal associations by making his rite the priest's "consecration."⁴⁸ But although Praetextatus' wife Paulina seems to equate her *taurobolium* with her priesthood of Cybele and Attis, there is no such suggestion in any of the Vatican inscriptions;⁴⁹ and the repetition of a consecration would be very difficult to explain. Nevertheless, Prudentius' error over this point is understandable, for there seems to have been a deliberate attempt to assimilate the *taurobolium* to a priesthood. The title *tauroboliatus* appears among the priesthoods listed on monuments commemorating Praetextatus (*CIL* VI 1779) and also Kamenius, where it is sandwiched between the quindecimvirate and pontificate.⁵⁰ Mystic initiations were not normally advertised in this way;⁵¹ the practice again indicates the unusually high public profile of the rite, and shows that it was presented in a sacerdotal context.

Our sole explicit statement about the purported effect of the *taurobolium* comes from the *Carmen*, whose prefect allegedly hoped "to live pure for twenty years" (*Carm. contra* pag. 62). A heavily ironical contrast with his alleged dirtiness and corruption emphasizes the word *mundus*, but there are many puzzles about this purification, which was apparently the consequence of the mystery rather than a preparatory rite; applied to the future rather than the past; and was valid only for a specified period.⁵² Nevertheless, the *Carmen's* testimony is of great importance for its indication that purity, like priestliness, was advertised as a conspicuous aspect of the rite. Moreover, the focus upon the tauroboliated priest as an individual rather than as a member of his college, and upon his purified condition rather than the performance of any specific ritual actions, suggests a subtle redefinition of pagan priesthood which seems strikingly appropriate for the times: the emphasis upon being a priest perhaps helped mask the fact that as the fourth century continued, with the erosion of their traditional ritual territory, there was so much less for the colleges to do. If this shift of emphasis was deliberate policy (as the participation of the quindecimvirs at the *taurobolium*,

⁴⁸ *Perist.* 10.1012: *in profundum consecrandus mergitur*. The poem amply illustrates the broad scope of *consecrare*, using it to mean immortalize (83), deify (215, 384), divinize (of vegetables, 262), and dedicate to the gods (379, 1080); these categories of course overlap.

⁴⁹ The force of both verb and accusative noun is unclear in Paulina's statement that Praetextatus "honoured" her, "priestess of Cybele and Attis," with the *taurobolium* (*CIL* VI 1779: *tu Didymenes Atteosqu[e] antistetem . . . honoras*); but note that elsewhere, in a list of her priesthoods (VI 1780), she designates herself simply as *tauroboliata*. The woman commemorated in VI 502, celebrating a repetition of the rite, calls herself *sacerdos maxima*; Serapias (VI 508) is *sacr(ata) [Deum] Matris*.

⁵⁰ *CIL* VI 1675 (cf. VI 31940; *EphEp* VIII, 648). Kamenius' quindecimvirate, which precedes his *taurobolium* on all three of his commemorative inscriptions, is not mentioned upon his *taurobolium* altar (*AEpigr* 1953, no. 238): this might conceivably imply that his *taurobolium* was held to celebrate his appointment to the priesthood.

⁵¹ Note the contrast between *CIL* VI 1778 and 1779, both commemorating Praetextatus: both record his *taurobolium*, but only the latter, a funeral monument designed to emphasize his piety, mentions his initiation at Eleusis.

⁵² For discussion see Duthoy 1969: 105–110; Vermaseren 1977b: 103.

noted above, might suggest), the development of the rite might be interpreted as evidence that paganism retained something of its traditional flexibility and vitality, and continued to adapt to meet the challenges of new circumstances.

But what remains certain is that the fourth-century *taurobolium* was a significant public event. It follows from the interpretation of the ceremony proposed earlier that every *taurobolium* will necessarily have involved the dedication of an altar, for the blood and/or *vires* of the bull;⁵³ the acclamations posited above would also have belonged to this phase. These dedications therefore represent the public aspect of the *taurobolium*; nor is there any reason to doubt that these probably infrequent ceremonies (although a highly movable feast, the *taurobolium* seems not to have been performed on more than one occasion a year)⁵⁴ continued throughout the fourth century to attract enthusiastic crowds to the Vatican. As such, they will have afforded pagan aristocrats (as has been said of their Christian peers, in another context) "the opportunities so essential to them, to be seen by whole crowds, active in the public pursuit of their religion" (Matthews 1975: 365).

But above all, the inscriptions set the *taurobolium* firmly in a context of competitive publicity and family loyalties that should be familiar to every student of the senatorial aristocracy. It can have been no coincidence, for example, that Claudius Hermogenianus Caesarius underwent the rite during his term as urban prefect, a gesture that can be paralleled by the ostentatious piety of Caesarius' (probable) relative Clodius Hermogenianus Olybrius, who had held the same office five years earlier and had pointedly "bowed the Ausonian axe to Christ" (Prud. *c. Symm.* 1.557).⁵⁵ Invested in the dignity of their office, prefects could create a sensation at temple and church alike.⁵⁶

The prestige of office was spectacular but ephemeral; more tenacious was the power of the family. And a remarkable proportion of the evidence from Rome

⁵³ A corollary of this is that the Vatican altars should represent a significant sample of fourth-century *taurobolia*. We might note in this respect how neatly the most recent finds from the Vatican excavations conform to existing material: *AEpigr* 1953, no. 238 commemorates the *taurobolium* of Kamenius, which is attested elsewhere, and bears the same date as another altar; the altar published in *RendPontAcc* 42 (1969–70) 195–199 (Vermaseren 1977a: 61) has the same date, and records several of the same priesthoods, as two other altars (below, nn. 54, 61).

⁵⁴ Multiple *taurobolia* are attested for 19 July 374 (*CIL* VI 499, *AEpigr* 1953), 13 August 376 (*CIL* VI 504, 510, and the altar mentioned in the previous note), 5 April 383 (*CIL* VI 501–502), 23 May 390 (VI 503, 512). The two altars dedicated in 377 (VI 500, 511) bear different dates: but VI 500 does not record a *taurobolium*, and perhaps commemorates a different type of dedication.

⁵⁵ Barnes and Westall (1991: 53) suggest that Olybrius' *Ausoniam . . . securem* might refer to his praetorian prefecture, but the adjective far better suits a post held in Italy than his praetorian prefectures in (Eastern) Illyricum and Oriens, and the passage occurs in a catalogue of urban prefects (cf. Barnes and Westall 1991: 59). These lines (*c. Symm.* 554–557) seem to establish a symmetry between Olybrius' consulate and urban prefecture (*fasti: abolla; fuscus: securis*), emphasizing the two offices most relevant to the Roman theme. For the presumed family relationship between Olybrius and Caesarius, see *PLRE* 1.172.

⁵⁶ It was during his urban prefecture of 376/377 that Furius Maecius Gracchus destroyed a Mithraeum and received baptism: Hieron. *Ep.* 107.2, Prud. *c. Symm.* 1.561–565.

leads back to one family in particular, that of C. Caeonius Rufius Lampadius Volusianus, who is associated with the *taurobolium* together with no fewer than three of his children. Lampadius' own *taurobolium* is attested only indirectly, upon the dedication on a statue at Ostia (*AEpigr* 1945, no. 55); but his family amply compensate for his absence from the Vatican. Nomenclature alone identifies Rufia Volusiana, who took the rite together with her husband Petronius Apollodorus (*CIL* VI 509), as a daughter, but with the other two children we are on firmer ground. Both proclaim their paternity upon their inscriptions: in 377 Sabina styled herself (in Greek) the "daughter of great-souled Lampadius" (VI 30966), while fully half of the inscription erected in 390 by Caeonius Rufius Volusianus is occupied with the titles of his father and of his mother, Caecina Lolliana (VI 512).⁵⁷ So striking is this phenomenon—that there is nothing remotely comparable in any of the other inscriptions—that we might suggest a recognized family connection with the Phrygianum.

Perhaps, indeed, it was Lampadius himself who set the fashion for the high-profile *taurobolia* of the latter half of the century. He possesses the necessary qualifications. His competitiveness is attested by his hunger for praise even for the excellence of his spitting, and his flair for publicity by his practice of inscribing his own name upon the buildings that he restored; he had associations with the Vatican, too, dating back to the time of his praetorship (*Amm. Marc.* 27.3.5–7). A specific reason can also be suggested for his organizing a spectacular demonstration of piety in the aftermath of his urban prefecture of 365 (a secure *terminus post quem* for his *taurobolium*):⁵⁸ the desire to erase the humiliation of his flight across the Milvian bridge while an angry crowd tried to storm his house (*Amm. Marc.* 27.3.8–9).

The family association is strengthened by the appearance of two other Caeonii, Alfenius Caeonius Iulianus Kamenius (*AEpigr* 1953, no. 238) and Rufius Caeonius Sabinus (*CIL* VI 511), among the Vatican inscriptions.⁵⁹ There is also a further Lampadian connection. Sextilius Agesilaus Aedesius is conspicuous among the *tauroboliates* for the length and geographical scope of his political career (VI 510): he evidently owed his distinction to his long years of meritorious service rather than to noble birth.⁶⁰ His presence in the blue-blooded company of the Vatican is best explained by the workings of patronage. Aedesius is reported at court in 355 during the praetorian prefecture of his "very good friend" Lampadius, to whom he was beholden for an invitation to the consular ceremonies of that year; he repaid the favour by participating in the shabby conspiracy against Silvanus (*Amm. Marc.* 15.5.4). The same connection, we may presume, continued to

⁵⁷ Volusianus' declaration that he was repeating the *taurobolium* after twenty years suggests that he might originally have performed the rite with his sister Rufia in 370.

⁵⁸ The Ostia inscription (*AEpigr* 1945, no. 55) styles him *ex praefectis tauroboliatus*.

⁵⁹ *PLRE* 1.1136 conjecturally makes Sabinus a first cousin of Lampadius.

⁶⁰ Matthews (1973: 182) offers the attractive conjecture that Aedesius had "failed to gain access to the exclusive circles of the aristocratic *collegia*."

stand him in good stead after his retirement to Rome.⁶¹ The exceptionally potent claim that he made for himself, as “reborn for eternity” through the *taurobolium*, would in this context suggest not anti-Christian fanaticism but the over-eagerness of the parvenu.

Such details are fragmentary but coherent, and correspond well with what is otherwise known of aristocratic society. They also suggest significant parallels between the activities of the Phrygianum and what went on in the vast basilica of St Peter’s that stood directly adjacent. The famous Petronius Probus, probably a relative of the tauroboliated prefect Caesarius, who was laid to rest in the basilica about the time that the last recorded *taurobolia* were being performed, celebrated his worldly fame and intimacy with the divine with as much gusto as any tauroboliate (*CIL* VI 1756b: omitting, like the senators of the Phrygianum, any mention of priestly intermediaries);⁶² in the feasts that he hosted there Pammachius exhibited a talent for showmanship that quite recalls his uncle Lampadius;⁶³ senatorial wives are conspicuous in both places.⁶⁴ The key parallels between the Roman *taurobolium* and Roman Christianity in the fourth century are to be sought at this level. Far more significant than any shared soteriological promise or “Oriental” character is their common function as a means for senatorial self-expression. Both reflect the aristocracy’s recapture of the city after the final departure of the emperors.

But although the two sites operated beside one another for a generation, spectacular advertisements for their rival faiths, there is not the slightest indication that Christians and pagans so much as acknowledged each other’s presence on the Vatican. Pope Damasus (during whose papacy the great majority of the attested Roman *taurobolia* occurred) took an active interest in the Vatican, but never unleashed his notorious *fossore*s upon the sacrilegious rites next door;⁶⁵ nor is there any reason to suppose that the activities of the Phrygianum were interdicted during the construction of St Peter’s.⁶⁶ Instead, their mutual indifference indicates the aristocratic hauteur that—in fourth-century Rome—characterized both Cybele

⁶¹ Other connections can also be surmised: Aedesius took his *taurobolium* on the same day as two fellow-priests of Hecate and Mithra, the augur Ulpius Egnatius Faventinus and the anonymous dedicant of the inscription published in *RendPontAcc* 42 (1969–70) 195–199 (Vermaseren 1977a: 61); Faventinus and Aedesius were both *archibuculi* of Liber.

⁶² See the discussion in Matthews (1975: 195–197), with the additional remarks in the postscript to the reprint (Matthews 1990: 400–401).

⁶³ For Pammachius’ charitable exhibitions, see Hieron. *Ep.* 48.4: also Paulinus of Nola *Ep.* 13. *PLRE* 1.1138, stemma 13 presents the connection with Lampadius.

⁶⁴ Hieron. *Ep.* 22.32 gives a memorable vignette of almsgiving by a *nobilissima* matron (complete with attendant eunuchs) at St Peter’s.

⁶⁵ Damasus commemorates his *magnum laborem* of draining the Vatican in *Epigramma* 3 (*ILCV* 1760). His readiness to use violence against his Christian enemies is deplored at *Collectio Avellana* 1–2.

⁶⁶ Guarducci (1982) argues at length the thesis of a twenty-eight year suspension of activities. The sole evidence is an undated inscription, *AEpigr* 1923, no. 29: but the association is purely conjectural, and this somewhat crudely decorated altar (see the description by F. Fabre, reproduced at Duthoy

and Saint Peter: ultimately, neither cult was alien from the world of Symmachus. For both offered their clients not only spiritual fulfilment, but also a means of showing themselves off to advantage before their peers, through the applause of the appreciative paupers who haunted the Vatican,⁶⁷ and who, we should not doubt, presented themselves at basilica and Phrygianum alike. Nor was it yet obvious, during the age of Damasus and Praetextatus, that the former site was better adapted to the needs of the senators of Rome.⁶⁸

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1969: 23) is an improbably modest commemoration of so significant a resumption. The twenty-eight years of "night" can be referred without difficulty to the dedicant's own relationship with Attis.

⁶⁷ At his praetorian games, Lampadius summoned *quosdam egentes* from the Vatican to the Circus, and bestowed great wealth upon them, a gesture that was still remembered a half-century later (Amm. Marc. 27.3.7). Jerome implies a certain professionalism in the conduct of the Vatican poor (Hieron. Ep. 22.32, *ut usu nosse perfacile est*).

⁶⁸ We should remember the constraints that a high-profile papacy imposed upon lay Christian self-expression and exhibitionism: hence, perhaps, Praetextatus' famous quip to Damasus, that he would become a Christian immediately if he were made bishop of Rome (Hieron. *Contra Iohannem Ierosolymitanum* 8).

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