HAGIOGRAPHY AS HISTORY AND THE ENIGMA
OF THE QUATTRO CORONATI

This article traces the reception history of the hagiographical text commonly referred to as the passio sanctorum quat(t)uor coronatorum. Although by no means consigned to oblivion, this has not, for most of its existence, been a well-known text. Throughout the medieval and early modern period, the passio circulated in various versions and was discussed by scholars interested in the Christian persecutions. Starting in the mid 19th century, however, and continuing through the 1930s, the passio sanctorum quattuor coronatorum became the subject of passionate scholarly analysis and debate by western European medievalists. Their fascination with the text illustrates the allure – and tensions – involved in reading medieval hagiography for the modern enterprise of writing history.

What is at stake here is more than bringing to light the remarkable story of a scholarly obsession. These saints, the so-called ‘Quattro Coronati,’ no longer command the same interest that they did in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, but many of the individuals who discussed the passio – such as Wilhelm Wattenbach, Giovanni Battista De Rossi, and Hippolyte Delehaye – were pioneering figures who shaped the fields of medieval literature, history, hagiography and Christian archeology as we know them today. These scholars’ influence continues to shape how medieval historians, art-historians and archeologists imagine the early Middle Ages and how we work with our sources: in particular, the ever-vexed question of what constitutes valid historical proof. Stepping back to examine a subject that was of such concern to these scholars gives insight into the development of our modern criteria for evaluating hagiographical documents – and provides a salutary reminder that our scholarship is always the product of the age in which we live and the legacy of generations past.

What becomes clear in this analysis is, firstly, the degree to which the underlying concerns of scholars fuel their interpretations. The initial mid-19th-century fascination with the passio, I suggest, derived above all from the desire to find a reliable source for a

1 By ‘Quattro Coronati’ I refer to both the Pannonian and Roman saints mentioned in the passio; see summary below. My focus here is on the passio of the Quattro Coronati; accordingly, other aspects of these saints’ cult will not be discussed in depth. For an extensive but incomplete bibliography on the saints (focused on iconographic representations) see DIONIGI 1998, pp. 38-137.
period and region poorly attested in the surviving source base. Secondly, the progression of the debate highlights the reactive nature of scholarship: we can observe how generations of scholars, rather than develop new research agendas for the *passio*, generally continued to tackle the same or similar questions that had been discussed by earlier scholars. And finally, in this reactive process by which ever more refined historical methods were applied to the *passio*, we can identify a fundamental and still unresolved tension between the questions historians ask of their sources and the answers that hagiographical texts can provide.

To begin, I provide a brief summary of the *passio sanctorum quatuor coronatorum* and an overview of the various versions in which it circulated throughout the Middle Ages. **Part I** presents a few examples of which versions were known to medieval and early modern readers and how scholars read and evaluated the text. Their discussions of the *passio* indicate an interest in many of the same enigmatic features that were to catapult the text to fame in the mid 19th century. Moreover, they demonstrate how strongly 19th-century scholarship was tied to its medieval and early modern roots.

**Part II** turns to the ‘discovery’ of the text by Wilhelm Wattenbach in 1853 and what I refer to as the ‘first phase’ of fascination with the text. In this phase it is the allure of the text’s ‘authenticity’ that stands out. The *passio* seemed to provide something for everyone, ancient historians, theologians and art-historians alike. Yet internal problems with the *passio*’s narrative and attempts to correlate the *passio* with other pieces of evidence fueled further debate.

A second phase of debate (**Part III**) may be said to begin in 1910 with Hippolyte Delehaye’s publication, in the *Acta Sanctorum*, of a new edition of the *passio* with detailed commentary. Two questions regarding the cult of the Quattro Coronati, of identity and of number, came to the fore: Were the ‘real’ Quattro Coronati Pannonians or Romans? and, How to resolve a group of five saints and a group of four, all with the name ‘Quattro Coronati’? An increased attention to minute detail and an optimism that critical study could solve historiographical dilemmas caused the debate to spiral onwards.
Passio sanctorum quatuor coronatorum

What follows is a brief summary of the so-called *passio sanctorum quatuor coronatorum* as printed in Hippolyte Delehaye’s 1910 critical edition. Most manuscripts entitle the *passio* something along the lines of “passio sanctorum quatuor coronatum,” although the name “passio sanctorum Simpronian, Claudii, Nicostreti, Castorii et Simplicii,” is also found.3

In the time of the Emperor Diocletian, four stonemasons (Claudius, Castorius, Simpronianus4 and Nicostatus) labor in the stone quarries in Pannonia. They are secretly Christians, which is the reason for their artistic success. Working “in the name of Christ and with the sign of the cross” they carve marvelous works of art, such as a colossal Thasian marble statue of a sun god on a quadriga.5 The emperor is delighted and orders the construction of a temple, for which the stonemasons carve enormous porphyry columns and other ornamental pieces. They convert another stonemason, Simplicius, who is baptized by the Bishop Cyril of Antioch, also present in the quarries. The success of the stonemasons incites the envy of the *phylosophi* (*philosophi*), who are in charge of the quarrying operations. When the stonemasons refuse to sculpt the god Asclepius an investigation is conducted. The stonemasons are brought before the tribune Lampadius but refuse to sacrifice to the sun god; they are tortured and then thrown into a river, enclosed in lead coffins. This takes place six days before the Ides of November, that is, on November 8th. A certain Nicodemus buries the bodies.

Then the text narrates that after eleven months Diocletian came from Sirmium (in Pannonia) to Rome, where he ordered that a temple for Asclepius with a statue of the god be erected in the baths of Trajan. Four military adjutants (*cornicularii*; some manuscripts give their names as Severus6, Severianus, Carpoforus and Victorinus) refuse to sacrifice at the temple and are executed. St. Sebastian buries their bodies at the third milestone of the via Labicana. Thereupon:

---

4 Alternate spellings of his name abound. Throughout I follow the spelling of names as given by each scholar.
6 Alternate spellings of his name (and that of Carpoferus) are common.
[g]iven that this had happened at the very same time, but two years later, that is, six days before the Ides of November [November 8th], and since it was impossible to discover their names, the blessed bishop Militiades ordered that their commemorative anniversary should be celebrated under the names of the saints Claudius, Nicostratus, Simpronianus and Castorius.7

Some manuscripts conclude by naming its author: Porfyreus.

The Medieval Quattro Coronati

Medieval interest in the ‘Quattro Coronati’ was strongest in Rome, at the church of the Quattro Coronati (SS. Quattro Coronati) on the Caelian Hill.8 In the 9th century Pope Leo IV (r. 847-855) had the bodies of the Quattro Coronati placed under the altar of the newly renovated church, as recorded in the contemporary Liber Pontificalis.9 In the early 12th century Pope Paschal II (r. 1099-1118) rebuilt the church, partially excavating the earlier crypt in the process. 12th-century inscriptions in the church record the interventions by Pope Leo IV and Pope Paschal II. The ‘Quattro Coronati’ were also venerated outside Rome, in particular, from the later Middle Ages onward, as the patron saints of craftsmen (and later the Freemasons).10

As indicated by the manuscript tradition, the passio sanctorum quatuor coronatorum was known to audiences inside and outside of Rome. Hippolyte Delehaye’s critical edition of the passio was based on 15 manuscripts, the earliest of which is an 8th-century legendary (Paris. lat. 10861).11 In total there survive more than a

---


8 For a recent overview of the architectural history of SS. Quattro Coronati see Barelli 2009; still useful is CBCR IV, pp. 1-36.

9 LP II, p. 115.

10 Cannata 1968, p. 1288. Most famous today are the statues of the Quattro Coronati at the church of Orsanmichele in Florence sculpted, ca. 1415, by Nanni di Banco for the Maestri di Pietra e Legname, a guild of stone- and woodworkers. For a catalogue of iconographic representations, often associated with such guilds, see Dionigi 1998, pp. 154-210.

11 Acta Sanctorum, Nov. 3, pp. 4-7, 749E-751A; Bollandists 1889-1893, II, pp. 605-606, no. DXIV. This is the manuscript from which Wattenbach produced his final (1896) edition; see below, n. 123.
hundred manuscripts of the passio ranging in date from the 9th to the 16th century. 12

Abbreviated versions of the passio were also included in medieval martyrologies. 13 Particularly significant for the passio’s reception was Ado of Vienne’s (d. 875) martyrology (first recension, ca. 855; second recension, ca. 875), which modifies the passio’s narrative in two respects. On Nov. 8th, Ado summarizes the entire passio, beginning with the martyrdom of the stonemasons (Claudius, Nicostratus, Symphorianus, Castorius and Simplicius) and then that of the four soldiers in Rome. Ado’s summary, however, does not mention Pannonia. His entry begins, “At Rome, the feast day of the blessed saints…” and although he describes that the martyrs are stonemasons who labored in marble quarries, the location of these quarries is not specified. 14 Ado also adds a bit of information to the narrative. He provides the names of the Roman soldiers: Severus, Severianus, Carpophorus and Victorinus, and explains: “After many years had passed, however, their names were revealed to a certain holy man.” 15

A more abbreviated version of the passio, based on Ado, is found in Usuard’s (d. 876/7) Martyrology (first edition, ca. 865). This was, throughout the Middle Ages, the most widely circulating martyrology. Usuard again includes the two sets of saints: (1) Claudius, Nicostratus, Simpronianus, Castorius and Simplicius; and (2) the “Quattuor Coronatorum,” that is, “Severus, Severianus, Carpophorus and Victorinus.” 16 Like Ado, Usuard provides no indication

12 My figure is based on the online Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina manuscripts (http://bhlms.fltr.ucl.ac.be): BHL nos. 1836, 1837, 1837b. By far the most common version is BHL 1837 (107 manuscripts), summarized above.

13 The second version of Bede’s (d. 735) martyrology included on Nov. 8, the entry, “Romae, natale sanctorum quatuor coronatorum, id est Claudii, Nicostrati, Simproniani, Castori et Simplicii.” Florus’ martyrology (ca. 825-840) added to this a very brief description of the torture and martyrdom of the saints: RENAUD, DUBOIS 1976, p. 203.

14 Ado, Martyr. Nov. 8, ed. DUBOIS, RENAUD, 1984, p. 376: “Romae, natale sanc-torum martyrum Claudii, Nicostrati, Symphrosiani, Castorii, et Simplicii, imperan-tibus Diocletiano et Maximiano. Hi cum essent artifices insignissimi et marmorum caesores probatissimi…” [Italics indicate text that does not derive directly from Florus, Ado’s primary source.]

15 Ado, Martyr. Nov. 8, ed. DUBOIS, RENAUD, 1984, p. 377: “Intercurrentibus tamen annis, cuidam sancto viro etiam nomina eorum revelata sunt.” This addition is only found in some of the versions of Ado’s Martyrology (the first family of manuscripts).

16 Usuard, Martyr. Nov. 8, ed. DUBOIS 1965, pp. 337-338: “Romae, via Lavicana, passio sanctorum Claudii, Nicostrati, Simproniani, Castorii et Simplicii, # qui pri-mo in carcerem trusi, # deinde scorpionibus gravissime sunt caesi, sed cum a fide Christi mutari non possent, # iussi sunt a Dioclitiano # in medio mari praecipites dari. # Item, via Lavicana, natalis quattuor coronatorum Severi, Severiani,
that the first set of saints were martyred in Pannonia; and, like Ado, Usuard narrates that the names of the second set of saints, the Quattro Coronati, were revealed at a later point in time. Furthermore, however, Usuard’s much abbreviated summary no longer specifies that the first group of saints were stonemasons.

We should also note a reworking of the passio by the subdeacon Peter (fl. late 10th century?), dedicated to Peter, archbishop of Naples.17 As Peter’s preface explains, the purpose of his work was to elevate the style of the preexisting text. Indeed Peter has significantly reworked the text; in content and structure, however, it remains much the same as the older passio sanctorum quatuor coronatorum. There also survives, in a single 12th/13th-century manuscript from the monastery of Grottaferrata, 20 km south-east of Rome, but now in the Vatican, a Greek version based on the older passio.18

Various versions of the passio, with some noteworthy textual variants, thus circulated throughout the medieval world. According to the extended passio, the story involved a group of five Pannonian stonemasons and a group of four soldiers in Rome (whose names were sometimes provided). Abbreviated versions in martyrologies gave names to all nine saints and suggested that all the saints were martyred in Rome (but, in some versions, gave no indication that any of these saints were stonemasons). Depending on the version at hand, readers might arrive at significantly different understandings of who the ‘Quattro Coronati’ were and where they were martyred.

Carpofori et Victorini, qui # iubente Dioclitiano # ictibus plumbatarum usque ad mortem caesi sunt. # Horum nomina cum minime potuerint reperserir, quae Domino revelante interiectis annis postea ostensa sunt, statum est ut anniversaria dies ipsorum sub nominibus supradictorum quinque martyrum recolentur. #” [Italics indicate where Usuard has modified his earlier sources (here a combination of Ado and Florus). The # signals where Usuard has omitted parts from these same sources.]

17 Acta Sanctorum, Nov. 3, pp. 780A-748E; discussion by Delehaye, pp. 14-17, 752E-753B. There survive only a handful of manuscripts with Peter’s passio.

18 Acta Sanctorum, Nov. 3, pp. 765-779C (edited from Rome, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, gr. 1608, f. 119v-125); discussion by Delehaye, pp. 11-12, 751E-752D. Delehaye argued that this translation was composed in the 12th century at the monastery of Grottaferrata.
PART I:
READING THE PASSIO SANCTORUM QUATUOR CORONATORUM BEFORE 1850

A survey of some prominent medieval and early modern scholars reveals their interest in the passio sanctorum quatuor coronatorum as a hagiographical narrative, but also as a source for imperial and Christian history and archeology. Variant versions of the passio continued to circulate, impacting scholars’ interpretations of the saints. Meanwhile scholars’ assessments of the passio ranged from wholehearted endorsement to scathing skepticism. These scholars also articulated many of the difficulties of using the passio as a historical document that were to continue to trouble later generations.

Thomas of Split: Explaining Roman Pannonia

The 13th-century archdeacon Thomas of Split (d. 1268) references the passio of the Quattro Coronati in his Historia Salonitano-rum atque Spalatinorum Pontificum. Thomas’s work narrates the region’s history with special focus on the church of Split. Drawing on Lactantius’ 4th-century On the Deaths of the Persecutors, Thomas describes Diocletian as a terrible persecutor of Christians. Diocletian had wanted to execute all Christians but was warned by his advisors of the depopulation that this would cause, so he relented and sentenced many Christians to labor in mines and sand quarries: a conclusion that, it seems, Thomas extrapolated in part from the passio sanctorum quatuor coronatorum.

Thomas refers more explicitly to the passio in describing Diocletian’s building frenzy throughout the Empire:

In Rome, apart from many other buildings, he had baths built, and in Pannonia by the border of Ruthenia he constructed a splendid building out of porphyry, which, although it is in ruins, is a sight that to this day evokes wonder in those who pass by, just as one reads in the history of the quatuor coronati.

---

Thomas draws on numerous elements of the *passio*: porphyry, a grand temple in Pannonia, baths in Rome and Christians forced to labor in mines. He seems to have in mind particular ruins of a grand Roman temple, which local tour guides must have explained with reference to the *passio*. Already in the 13th century, then, the *passio sanctorum quatuor coronatorum* was a document that could be mined for its historical and topographical information.

**Compiling the Passio**

Late medieval and early modern scholars who sought to assemble more comprehensive collections of Christian hagiography were generally familiar with the *passio sanctorum quatuor coronatorum* or abbreviated versions found in medieval martyrologies. Their compilations made certain versions of the *passio* more widely accessible to subsequent scholars.

The Dominican archbishop of Genoa Iacopo da Varazze/Jacobus de Voragine (d. 1298) included a brief entry about the saints in his *Legenda Aurea*. Jacobus’s narrative is derived from earlier martyrologies but is rearranged to forefront the Roman soldiers. It begins, “The Quattro Coronati were Severus, Severianus, Carpoforus and Victorinus,” and describes how these were martyrs under the Emperor Diocletian, whose names were later rediscovered. Jacobus then explains that since these saints’ names were initially unknown, the saints were commemorated under the names of five other saints, the artisans, Claudius, Castorius, Symphorianus, Nychostratus and Simplicius. The *Legenda Aurea* enjoyed widespread circulation for centuries thereafter; it was translated into multiple languages and was among the earliest texts printed in the later 15th century.

The late 14th-century Petrus de Natalibus (d. 1400-1406), bishop of Equilio (in the Veneto region), included an abbreviated version of the *passio* in his twelve-book *Catalogus sanctorum et gestorum eorum*. He narrates the martyrdom, in Pannonia, of

---

24 Petrus de Natalibus 1493, Bk. 10, Chs. 36-37.
five stonemasons (Claudius, Nicostratus, Symphorianus, Castorius and Simplicius). Then, in the subsequent chapter, he tells of the “Quattuor coronati, that is, Severus, Severianus, Carpophorus and Victorinus,” martyred in Rome.\(^{25}\) Petrus’s account, although abbreviated, indicates his familiarity with the longer passio sanctorum quatuor coronatorum (for example in detailing the marble pieces crafted by the stonemasons), as well as with Ado’s/Usuard’s (or another similar) account of the Quattro Coronati, since it includes the names of the Roman saints and recounts how these names were rediscovered at a later date.\(^{26}\)

The Quattro Coronati were also included by Bonino Mombritio/Boninus Mombritius (1424-ca. 1500) in his Sanctuarium seu Vitae sanctorum.\(^{27}\) Mombritius’s edition printed a full version of the passio; orthographical, linguistic, and grammatical differences notwithstanding, this text is clearly recognizable as that printed in Delehaye’s 1910 critical edition (BHL 1837).\(^{28}\) As far as I am aware, this was the only complete version of the passio printed prior to the 19th century.

In contrast to Mombritius, Lorenz Sauer/Laurentius Surius (1522-1578) did not include the passio in his six-volume De probatis sanctorum historiis (first edition, 1570-1575). Perhaps Surius was not familiar with the passio, but it is also possible that he was doubtful of the text; at any rate some later scholars were to interpret his omission in this way.\(^{29}\) The second edition of the De probatis sanctorum historiis, however, published after Surius’ death, included a seventh volume, prepared by Jacob Mosander, a fellow Carthusian monk in Cologne. This seventh volume supplements the earlier six volumes with additional saints from through-

\(^{25}\) Petrus de Natalibus 1493, Bk. 10, Ch. 36: “Claudius: nicostratus: symphorianus: castorius atque simplicius martyres passi sunt apud pannoniam sub diocletiano imperatore”; Bk. 10, Ch. 37: “Quatuor coronati videlicet seuerus: seuerianus: carpophorus: & victorinus romae passi sunt sub diocletiano imperatore.”

\(^{26}\) Petrus de Natalibus 1493, Bk. 10, Ch. 37 (end): “Et licet processu temporis eorum nominis reperta fissent: vsus tamen obtinuit: vt quatuor coronati dein-ceps vocarentur.”


\(^{28}\) It is a version of the passio that includes the names of the Roman soldiers (Severus, Severianus, Carpophorus and Victorinus) and narrates that because these saints’ names were forgotten, they were commemorated under the names of the saints Claudius, Nicostratus, Symphorianus, Castorius, and Simplicius, but, unlike the versions in Ado and Usuard, does not mention how these saints’ names were rediscovered.

\(^{29}\) For example, De Rossi thought that, “Il Surio non li stimò degni d’essere ammessi in intero nelle Vitae probatorum sanctorum; e si attene all’epitome adoniana”: De Rossi 1879, p. 45.
out the entire liturgical year and also prints a version of Ado’s *Martyrology*. Accordingly, on Nov. 8th, the volume included Ado’s abbreviated version of the *passio*. A third edition of the *De probatis sanctorum historiis* was printed in 1618, thus rendering Surius’ collection one of the most widely accessible collections of hagiographical texts (especially for scholars north of the Alps).

### The Quattro Coronati in Rome: 1) Baronius

**Cesare Baronio/Baronius** (1538–1607), the leading early modern scholar of early Christianity in 16th-century Rome, included the saints in his *Martyrologium romanum*, intended as the definitive martyrology for the Catholic Church. He also discussed the saints in his monumental ecclesiastical history, the *Annales ecclesiastici*. Although Baronius regarded the *passio* as a valuable source for Roman and Christian history and art-history, he was troubled by the *passio*’s chronology and felt compelled to modify its account accordingly.

In his *Martyrologium romanum* Baronius presents an abbreviated version of the story that derives from Ado/Usuard’s martyrologies: “At Rome, on the via Lavicana, at the third milestone from the city, the *passio* of the martyrs, saints Claudius, Nicostratus, Symphorianus, Castorius, and Simplicius…whom Diocletian ordered to be thrown headlong into the river,” and “Likewise, on the via Lavicana, the feast day of the four crowned brothers, Severus, Severianus, Carpophorus and Victorinus.”

Baronius accepts the localization of both sets of saints in Rome, as well as Ado’s account of how the Quattro Coronati’s names were later discovered.

An omission, however, indicates a significant critique of the *passio*: Baronius makes no mention of either St. Sebastian or Pope Militiades. Their absence is explained by Baronius’s decision (as is made explicit in the *Annales Ecclesiastici*), to date Sebastian’s martyrdom to 286, but that of Claudius, Nicostratus, Symphorianus, Castorius, and Simplicius to 303. Furthermore, Baronius dates the pontificate of Pope Melchiades (Militiades) to 311-313. Baronius tackles these chronological inconsistencies by excising St. Sebastian and Pope Militiades from the *passio*, thus also implicitly casting doubt on the authenticity of the latter part of the *passio*.

---

30 *Mosander* 1581, pp. 1213-1214.
31 *Baronio* 1586, pp. 504-505 (Nov. 8): “Romae via Lavicana tertio ab Vrbe milliario, passio sanctorum martyrum Claudij, Nicostrati, Symphoriani, Castorij, & Simplicij…iusi sunt a Diocletiano in fluiium praecipites dari. Item via Lavicana natalis sanctorum quattuor Coronatorum fratrum, Seueri, Seueriani, Carpophori, & Victoriani…”.
Nonetheless Baronius continued to regard the *passio* as a valuable historical source. In the second volume of his *Annales Ecclesiastici* (first published in 1590), which covers the period from 100 to 306, Baronius includes both groups of saints as martyrs of the Diocletianic persecution in Rome. Furthermore, Baronius mines the *passio* as a source for late antique art-history:

> It is certainly worth mentioning how, as the number of Christians grew, the art of sculpture was forgotten. For just about all the craftsmen of that art had converted to the Christian faith (since they judged it unworthy to consider as gods those whom they had sculpted with their own hands) and accordingly preferred to die rather than fashion gods or anything consecrated to the gods. And thus the art of sculpture was deprived of nearly all its sculptors and remained internally collapsed. Indeed, clear evidence of this fact and sure proof to all are the statues of that period that are still to be seen in Rome, which are judged to be artless, much inferior to those from more distant times. As an example let suffice (so that we may avoid speaking of them one at a time) those which are seen by all in the triumphal arch which Constantine erected a few years after the defeat of Maxentius. On account of the lack of craftsmen skilled in sculpture, it was necessary to construct this arch, for the most part, out of the memorials for Trajan and Marcus Aurelius and other noble monuments of the city; the remaining pieces, which were crafted anew at that time, are truly judged to be rough and formless likenesses, so that in their construction it seems (as the poet says) that a horse’s neck is joined to a human head [cf. Horace, *Ars Poetica*].

Reading the *passio* side-by-side with the Arch of Constantine, Baronius offered a theory for the ‘decline’ of late antique art.

---

32 *Baronio* 1590, anno 303, p. 728.
33 *Baronio* 1590, anno 303, pp. 728-729: “Est plane observatione dignum, quo modo crescente numero Christianorum, ars quoque statuaria exoleuerit; nam eius facultatis opifices omnes propemodum ad Christianam fidem conuersi, indignum rati, opinari deos, quos ipsi manibus exculpsissent, mori potius delegerunt, quam deos, vel sacranda diis effigiarent; sicque ars statuaria sculptoribus ferme omnibus destituta penitusque collapsa remanserit. Est quidem eius rei euidens atque perspicuum omnibus argumentum, quod quaecumque visuntur Romae, huius temporis statuae, crustae Minervae esse noscuntur, ab antiquioribus longe dispares: sit in exemplum (vt de singulis dicere pratenmittamus) quae visuntur ab omnibus Romae in arcu triumphali, qui post paucos annos ob debellatum Maxentium erectus est Constantino, qui & ob inopiam sculpturae artis opificum, ex Traiani, & Marci Aurelii memoriosis, alisque nobilibus Vrbs monumentis, maiori ex parte eum oportuit construxisse; reliqua vero quae tunc fuerunt elaborata, adeo rudia atque informia esse simulacra noscuntur, vt comparatione illorum, humano capiti (secundum poeticum illud) iuncta videatur ceruix equina.” The phrase “crastae Minervae,” is also used by Horace.
**The Quattro Coronati in Rome: 2) Bosio**

Baronius’ art-historical interpretation of the legend is paralleled by the treatment accorded it by his contemporary, the Christian archeologist Antonio Bosio (d. 1627). Bosio includes the saints in his *Roma sotterranea* (published posthumously in 1634), as part of his discussion of saints buried on the via Labicana. Like Baronius, Bosio regards all the saints as Roman martyrs. A grave, at the third milestone, so he claims, must once have contained the relics of the nine saints: Claudius, Nicostratus, Sinforianus, Castorius, and Simplicius, skilled sculptors who were thrown into the Tiber River and then retrieved and reburied by Nicodemus; and the four Christian soldiers known as the Quattro Coronati.

Bosio provides extensive textual documentation in support of this interpretation. He cites the martyrologies of Bede and Ado, and also makes note of “acts” that he discovered “in very ancient codices.” He admits that he has not found archeological evidence for the site of the saints’ burial on the via Labicana, but regards the textual evidence as conclusive. Bosio then proceeds to correlate the history of the saints’ relics with that of the church on the Caelian Hill. He cites the *Liber Pontificalis*’s account of Pope Leo IV’s relic translation (from the catacombs to the church) in the 9th century. He also references, as further evidence for this translation, the rediscovery of the saints’ relics under the church in 1624, an event at which he himself was present.

**Excavating the Quattro Coronati in Rome: Memmolo**

These archeological investigations were described in depth by Decio Memmolo (fl. early/mid 17th century) in his 1628 tract, *Della vita, chiesa e reliquie de’ Santi Quattro Coronati*. The work is dedicated to Cardinal Giovanni Garzia Mellini, the titular car-

---

34 *Bosio* 1634, p. 319 (Bk. 3, Ch. 33). (Although the frontispiece gives the date as 1632, the papal brief at the preface of the work dates it to 1634, as shown by *Ditchfield* 1997, p. 344).
36 *Bosio* 1634, p. 319: “gli Atti di questi Santi manoscritti, da noi ritrouati in antichissimi Codici...”.
37 Bosio, like his contemporaries, refers to the *Liber Pontificalis* as the work of Anastasius Bibliothecarius.
38 *Bosio* 1634, p. 320: “alla quale inuentione fui chiamato; e de tutti i particolari di essa ne feci all’ora memoria; ma per non tediare il Lettore lascio di riferirla in questo luogo; essendo la medesima descritta, e data in luce dal Canonico Fedino, che vi fu ancor’egli presente.” There is no evidence, to my knowledge, for this work by Domenico Fedini: cf. *Valeri* 1900, p. 43 n. 2.
Memmolo’s work begins with a lament for the neglect of Christian antiquity in Rome. He is eager to present the archeological excavations as an example of what sort of riches remain to be rediscovered for the Catholic Church in Rome. Memmolo also assures the reader of his scholarly method. He describes how he has made use of numerous manuscripts, from the Vatican Library, S. Maria Maggiore, S. Cecilia, the Chiesa Nuova and elsewhere, including the Archiepiscopal Library of Benevento and even Belgium. Memmolo then narrates the martyrdom of the Roman soldiers (Ch. 1) and that of the sculptors in Pannonia (“today called Hungary,” as he explains to his readers) (Ch. 2). Although Memmolo freely embellishes his account with poetic elaborations, it is clear that he, unlike Baronius and Bosio, was familiar with the extended *passio*.

Memmolo argues that the *passio* is, in its entirety, a truthful and accurate text. He is well aware of Baronius’ emendation removing St. Sebastian and Pope Melchiades from the story. However, Memmolo states that, despite his great respect for the learned judgment of Baronius, he cannot bring himself to question the testimony of the ancient manuscripts.

In addition to wishing to uphold the tradition preserved by these ancient manuscripts, Memmolo has a particular motivation in maintaining St. Sebastian’s involvement in burying the Quattro Coronati. For among the relics discovered in the excavations was also the head of St. Sebastian. Memmolo’s tract is aimed at authenticating this precious relic (as well as those of the Quattro Coronati). Memmolo is confronted with the fact that other churches in Rome claimed to possess relics of St. Sebastian, including his head. The *passio*’s narrative serves to bolster Memmolo’s theory that the relic of Sebastian’s head ended up with the saints that he had buried.

The relics of the Quattro Coronati were less controversial in that no other church in Rome laid claim to possess these relics. However, Memmolo does encounter a textual problem in his attempt to claim for the church both the five Pannonian stonem-

---

39 The dedication is dated 1625. I follow the later reprint: Memmolo 1757.
40 Memmolo 1757, p. 8: “...nella Pannonia, oggi detta Ungaria...”
41 Memmolo 1757, pp. 6-7: “Ma per quel che tocca al Baronio, siccome io stimo grandemente l’autorità di tutt’uomo; così intenderei volentieri con qual autorità, o ragione egli si sia mosso; ed intanto non sò come poter negar fede a più manoscritti, a’quali e l’antichità, e l’uniformità acquista credenza.”
42 Toubert 2013, pp. 236-238.
sons, as well as the four Roman soldiers. As we have seen, Memmolo was working with the *passio sanctorum quattor coronatorum*, rather than an abbreviated summary of the saints. Thus he accepts that the stonemasons were martyred in Pannonia (not in Rome). This raises the question: how did the Pannonian saints’ bodies get to Rome? The *passio sanctorum quattor coronatorum* provides no indication that the bodies of these Pannonian martyrs were brought to Rome, nor did another medieval text supplement this narrative. Yet Memmolo assumes that this must be the case since it follows from his interpretation of the archeological evidence, as well as the *Liber Pontificalis*’s description of Pope Leo IV’s translation of the saints from the catacombs into the church. Thus Memmolo concludes that a translation of the saints’ relics from Pannonia to Rome must have occurred: “although I cannot find written testimony of the person responsible for this translation, I do not wish, by rendering certain the doubtful, to render doubtful the certain.”

In the remainder of his tract Memmolo narrates the history of the church: Paschal II’s partial rediscovery of the relics, and finally (Chs. 6-8) the remarkable rediscovery of the relics under Cardinal Mellini. The first excavations are conducted in secret, then there is great excitement as the first layer under the altar is excavated and quantities of bones are removed, washed and displayed in the sacristy. The excavators intend to stop here, but Antonio Bosio visits the scene and recommends that they continue; another level of relics is discovered. Finally, the relics are processed around the church, an event attended by a “small but distinguished” group of visitors. The relics are then redeposited under the altar.

*A Skeptical Voice: Tillemont*

To conclude this brief survey of early modern readers, we may end with a later more skeptical voice. Contrasting sharply with Memmolo’s enthusiasm for the Quattro Coronati was Louis-Sébastien le Nain de Tillemont’s (1637–1698) damning judgment.

Tillemont’s monumental sixteen-volume *Mémoires pour servir à l’histoire ecclésiastique des six premiers siècles* (published 1693-
1712) briefly discusses the *passio* twice.\(^{46}\) Tillemont first makes reference to the saints in the context of St. Sebastian (vol. 4) since a very similar, but not identical, set of saints appeared in the *passio* of St. Sebastian. In his notes (at the end of the volume) he discusses three sources for these two sets of saints, both supposedly martyred under the Emperor Diocletian. Citing Petrus de Natalibus, Tillemont describes the first set of saints as stonemasons who were martyred in Pannonia, but remarks in brackets – which Tillemont uses throughout the work to signal anything that is his own opinion rather than a citation: “But this story is very suspect.”\(^{47}\) Then (outside of brackets) he continues:

> For their acts, which are in Mombritius, are, according to Baronius, in need of correction in certain passages; and Surius found them so obscure and so full of faults that he preferred to content himself with what Ado says of them [although he is not a great authority.] Baronius says that there are manuscripts of them, which are longer [but does not say that they are better.] Of these acts, we copied some, which are, in effect, quite long [which have, in truth, more the air of a bad novel than a real history. And I do not see how one could reconcile them with the authors of the time; besides their style feels utterly like the barbarity of later centuries....]\(^{48}\)

Tillemont’s second discussion of the *passio* occurs with respect to the Diocletianic persecutions (vol. 5). In the main text, but in brackets, he writes, “The martyrs called the Four Crowned are famous in the Church, but regarding their history we have found nothing other than the martyrologies and the acts of SS. Symporianus, Claudius, Catorius and Simplicius, whose authority is, at best, very mediocre.”\(^{49}\) In his notes he discusses the chronologi-

---

\(^{46}\) Tillemont 1701, pp. 528, 745-746 n. 6, Eadem 1702, pp. 123-124, p. 634 n. 55.

\(^{47}\) Tillemont 1701, p. 745 n. 6: “Car on pretend que c’estoient des ouvriers en pierre & en marbre, & qu’ils furent martyrizez dans la Pannonie sous un Tribun nommé Lampade, comme on le peut voir amplement dans Pierre des Noels [& dans Adon. Mais cette historie est bien suspecte.]”

\(^{48}\) Tillemont 1701, p. 745 n. 6: “Car leurs actes qui sont dans Mombritius, ont besoin, selon Baronius, d’estre corrigez en quelques endroits: & Surius les a trouvez si obscurs, & si pleins de fautes, qu’il a mieux aimé se contenter de ce qu’en dit Adon, [ quoique ce ne soit pas une grande autorité.] Baronius dit qu’il en a de manuscrits qui sont plus longs, [mais il ne dit pas qu’ils soient meilleurs.] Nous en avons en effet de fort longs, copiez sur un manuscrit, [qui en verité ont plus l’air d’un mauvais roman, que d’une veritable historie. Et je ne voy pas comment on pourroit les accorder avec les auteurs du temps; outre que leur style sent tout a fait la barbarie des siecles postérieurs....]”

\(^{49}\) Tillemont 1702, p. 123: “[Les Martyrs appellez les Quatre Couronnez sont celebres dans l’Eglise: mais pour leur histoire nous n’en trouvons rien que dans
cal difficulties presented by the legend of the Quattro Coronati on account of the description of their burial by St. Sebastian and Pope Melchiades.\footnote{TILLEMONT 1702, p. 613 n. 55.} Tillemont also finds unbelievable the story that the feast of four saints would have been commemorated under the names of five saints, and that these saints’ names were later discovered.\footnote{TILLEMONT 1702, p. 613 n. 55: “[Et il n’est pas mesme aisé de comprendre ce que c’est que faire la feste de quatre Saints sous le nom de cinq autres.]”} He does admit, however, that the saints are found in martyrologies, concluding (not in brackets): “so it is permitted to believe in them, if one wishes.”\footnote{TILLEMONT 1702, p. 613 n. 55: “& ainsi il est permis de la croire, si on le veut.”}

This summary does not do justice to the range of medieval and early modern opinions on the Quattro Coronati, but these examples suffice to demonstrate a few salient features of the passio’s reception history prior to the 19th century. Firstly, variant versions played a major role in the interpretation of the saints. Secondly, attempts to pinpoint the precise date of the saints’ martyrdom and the location of their relics (prior to their 9th-century translation to the church of SS. Quattro Coronati on the Caelian Hill) presented problems. Thirdly, the passio’s double story and its artistic dimensions stood out as rather unusual compared to other hagiographical legends. This intrigued scholars who attempted to correlate the passio’s account with artistic/archeological evidence but also caused a hesitation to accept the passio at face value. Finally, it is important to stress the limited circulation of this early modern scholarship. Much of it remained fairly inaccessible or unknown to subsequent 19th-century scholars.

\section*{Part II.}
\textbf{An Authentic Text of the Diocletianic Persecution}

Beginning with Wilhelm Wattenbach in 1853, German-language scholarship focused in on one particular version of the passio: the ‘old’ passio (previously published only by Mombritius). This text was heralded as an authentic document of the Diocletianic persecution which merited special study by ancient historians, medievalists, theologians, art-historians, archeologists and even natural scientists. Initially, discussion of the passio was limited to a small group of German-speaking colleagues, but by the end of the centu-
ry the *passio* had attracted the attention of a wider group of scholars, including the eminent Giovanni Battista De Rossi in Rome.

**1853: Wattenbach’s Discovery**

In the session held on the 16th of February, 1853, at the Imperial Academy of Sciences (*Kaiserliche Akademie der Wissenschaften*) in Vienna, Wilhelm Wattenbach (1819-1897) presented a new text: the *passio sanctorum quatuor coronatorum*.53 He offered the academy a transcription of the text (which he did not read aloud) that he had discovered in a 14th-century manuscript in Gotha.54 He noted that, to his knowledge, only brief and insignificant versions of this text had hitherto been printed, excerpts that “lack everything that makes this legend remarkable.”55

Wattenbach then briefly summarizes the features that he regards as so extraordinary. His observations focus on the Pannonian part of the *passio*. First and foremost Wattenbach stresses the authentic feel of the *passio*: the text provides a “still-life” of the Pannonian stone quarries under Diocletian and vividly portrays how Christianity took root and spread among these craftsmen.56 He also notes that the text offers a new perspective on Diocletian, who does not, as in other hagiographical texts, appear as a blood-thirsty tyrant, but rather as an “art-loving monarch.”57

A careful and respected philologist, Wattenbach was not, according to contemporaries, a persuasive speaker.58 If the audience was not sufficiently impressed by Wattenbach’s comments, the subsequent remarks by the president (from 1851) of the academy’s historical-philosophical section, Theodor Georg Ritter von

---

53 WATTENBACH, KARAJAN 1853.
54 Gotha, Forschungs- und Landesbibliothek, 2°64. This manuscript is B 12 in Delehaye’s edition. Like Mombritius’ edition, this manuscript includes the names of the Roman soldiers: “Serinus, Severianus, Carpoforus, Victorinus” (p. 126).
55 WATTENBACH, KARAJAN 1853, p. 115: “Gedruckt sind bis jetzt, so viel ich habe in Erfahrung bringen konnte, unter diesen Titel nur kurze und unbedeutende Berichte, welche sich zu dieser Erzählung wie ein dürftiger Auszug verhalten, und denen alles fehlt was diese Legende bemerkenswerth macht.”
56 WATTENBACH, KARAJAN 1853, p. 115: “…und unerwartet entrollt sich hier vor unsern Augen die Darstellung eines Stilllebens in den Steinbrüchen, wovon kein anderer Schriftsteller uns etwas berichtet hat; lebendig tritt es uns entgegen, wie unter diesen Arbeitern das Christenthum Eingang fand und sich allmählich verbreitete...”
58 RODENBERG 1898.
Karajan (1810-1873) would certainly have made them sit upright in their chairs. With rhetorical flourish Karajan emphasized the importance of Wattenbach’s remarkable ‘discovery.’ Karajan contrasts the passio’s account with the general worthlessness of most hagiographical legends: “here a piece of real life is depicted in simple strokes, everywhere here truth and naturalness greet us, while rich dialogues enliven and add zest to the alluring painting.” Texts like this, he cautions his audience, are rare and must be treated with “care and love.”

Wattenbach and Karajan’s excitement still leaps off the page of the session’s written proceedings. For both, the chance to present such a remarkable discovery came at an opportune moment in their careers. In 1851 Wattenbach had completed his habilitation in Berlin and established himself as a private teacher in the hopes of receiving a professorship. This was not forthcoming (and two years after his presentation of the passio to the Viennese Academy, Wattenbach would accept, in 1855, a position as an archivist in Breslau). Meanwhile Karajan had, in 1850, become the University of Vienna’s first-ever professor for German Language and Literature. This was to be a short-lived success. The following year, after the government’s decision to deny the post of Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy to a Protestant professor, Karajan, who was himself Greek-Orthodox, laid down his own professorship in protest.

Wattenbach and Karajan’s enthusiasm by no means blinded them to problems in the text, but these inconsistencies, minor in their opinion, did not dispel their enthusiasm for the passio as an authentic document of the Christian persecution. Wattenbach admits that the appearance of Pope Militiades/Melchiades is a chronological inconsistency which indicates that the text cannot be contemporaneous to the events that it describes. Nevertheless, he argues that the mild portrayal of Diocletian, the restrained description of the martyrs, minimal addition of miracles, and, above all, the vivid memories of the stone quarries clearly still alive in the text (and further attested in the technical expressions used in the text) indicate that the passio cannot long postdate the events it describes:


60 WATTENBACH, KARAJAN 1853, p. 127: “Stücke dieser Art treten nur selten zu Tage und es wird zur Pflicht, sie mit Sorgfalt und Liebe zu hegen.”

61 REIFFENSTEIN 1977.
One can scarcely doubt that the stone quarries were still in use when our author was active, yes, even that he had worked in them himself.... After the incursion of the barbarians into the Roman Empire one could hardly have continued to speak of acanthus leaves [i.e., on the capitals].\footnote{x}

The ‘barbarian invasions’ and the ‘collapse of Roman civilization’ loom large in Wattenbach’s conception of the Middle Ages: they are a sharp break dividing the ancient and medieval periods. A text that describes aspects of Roman art and culture must have been written before this break in history.

Wattenbach concludes his address with the hope that other scholars “will reap the harvest” from this long hidden monument of antiquity.\footnote{y} In his discussion of the passio Karajan proceeds to do exactly that. Karajan characterizes his comments as an attempt “to secure the legend historically,” and he offers much more precise chronological and topographical conclusions.\footnote{z} Like Wattenbach, Karajan acknowledges the chronological inconsistencies posed by the presence of both Pope Melchiades and Diocletian in the text. To solve this he proposes the emendation of Pope Marcellinus for Pope Melchiades. Based on the references to Diocletian’s travels and Bishop Cyril of Antioch (mentioned by Eusebius), Karajan dates the martyrdom of the Pannonian stonemasons to 294/295. As for the composition of the text, he proposes (based on the text’s citation of a biblical verse from the Itala, rather than Jerome’s Vulgata, and based on the artistic and legal terminology used in the text) that it can hardly have been written later than the mid-4th century.

Finally, and with particular flourish, Karajan identifies the precise location of the stone quarries: Fruška Gora (a mountain today located at the border between Croatia and Serbia). Karajan reaches this conclusion based on the passio’s references to Thasian, Proconnesian and porphyry marble. He acknowledges that these

\footnote{x} WATTENBACH, KARAJAN 1853, p. 117: “Man kann kaum bezweifeln, dass diese Steinbrüche zur Zeit des Verfassers unsere Legende noch bearbeitet wurden, ja dass er selbst bei denselben thätig war...Nach dem Einbruch der Barbaren in das römische Reich wird man schwerlich noch von Akanthusblättern geredet haben.”

\footnote{y} WATTENBACH, KARAJAN 1853, p. 117: “...nur noch den Wunsch hinzuzufügen, dass bald Andere nachtragen mögen was er [i.e., Wattenbach, as editor] unterlassen musste, und die ganze Ernte einheimen welche aus diesem so lange verborgenen Denkmale der Vorzeit sich wird gewinnen lassen.”

\footnote{z} WATTENBACH, KARAJAN 1853, p. 127: “Ich will es daher versuchen, die in der Legende erzählten Vorgänge geschichtlich zu festigen, und zwar in Bezug auf Zeit und Ort...”
types of marbles refer, respectively, to the marble quarried from the island of Thasos in the Aegean sea, the island of Marmara near Istanbul and the Egyptian porphyry quarries. However, he points to the presence, in Pannonia, of fairly similar types of marbles: granular limestone and so-called green porphyry. Fruška Gora fits the requirements of the *passio* perfectly in that both types of stone are present and that there is evidence for Roman ruins in the area. Furthermore, the mountain is not far from what had once been the capital of the Roman province of Lower Pannonia: Sirmium (modern Mitrovica).

Karajan’s precise conclusions, together with Wattenbach’s edition of the *passio*, laid the foundations for further historical evaluation of the text. The *passio sanctorum quatuor coronatorum*, or more precisely its Pannonian part, was singled out as distinct-ly different from the mass of unreliable hagiographical texts: it was a historical document, not a legend. This was heralded as a text rich in realia, whose interpretation would benefit from the expertise of scholars from different disciplines. As Karajan readily acknowledges in the footnotes to the printed version of the session, his topographical identification of the location of the Pannonian quarries was the fruit of scholarly collaboration: Paul Partsch at the *Kaiserliche und Königliche Mineral-Cabinet* and the Greek-Orthodox Bishop of Neusatz, Platon Althanaskovicz, are thanked for providing information about the mineralogy and the Roman ruins of the region.65

**Enthusiasm and Minor Reevaluations**

In the decades that followed, as Wattenbach and Karajan had hoped, the *passio sanctorum quatuor coronatorum* attracted the interest of the scholarly community. Scholars, in particular their colleagues and friends from the German-speaking world, rose to the challenge of evaluating the *passio* as a valuable new source on Roman Pannonia (or rather, from their perspective, as a source for ‘Austrian’/’German’ history). In this first phase of the *passio*’s 19th-century reception, scholars expressed some hesitations regarding the text and proposed revisions to Wattenbach’s and Karajan’s initial assessment of it. However, as the text bounced back and forth between scholars of Roman history, ecclesiastical history, theology and art-history, each referenced other disciplines’ conclusions as safeguards against any doubts they had regarding the overarching ‘authenticity’ of the *passio*.

65 WATTENBACH, KARAJAN 1853, p. 136 nn. 2-3.
Quick to spot the potential of the text as a document of ‘Austrian’ history was Max Büdinger (1828-1902). Büdinger briefly refers to the passio in his Österreichische Geschichte bis zum Aushange des dreizehnten Jahrhunderts (published in 1858, a year before Büdinger’s first visit to Vienna and long before he converted to Catholicism, in 1878, and became professor of Universal History at the University of Vienna). Büdinger discusses the passio sanctorum quatuor coronatorum with reference to the spread of Christianity. Büdinger lauds the passio as a highly reliable source that reflects many of the trends that were at the heart of the Christian persecutions: the reorganization of the Roman state and army, the emerging coalition between traditional paganism and Neoplatonic thinking (symptomatic of this are the phylosophi in the passio) and, lastly, personal animosity toward Christians. Büdinger accepts Karajan’s dating of the saints’ martyrdom to 294/295, although, in a footnote, he does suggest that the original text could have been written in Greek, a theory which implicitly accords the Latin passio less weight.

The same year as Büdinger published his Österreichische Geschichte, Wattenbach published the first edition of his monumental Deutschlands Geschichtsquellen. Here Wattenbach singles out the passio sanctorum quatuor coronatorum as one of the very few authentic texts attesting to the Christianization of “Roman Germany” – a phrasing qualified by Wilhelm Levison (1876-1947) in his revision of Wattenbach’s masterpiece.

Wattenbach emphasizes how useless most hagiographical texts are as historical evidence. He refers his readers to Friedrich Wilhelm Rettberg’s two-volume Kirchengeschichte Deutschlands (1845-1866).
1848) as the first levelheaded attempt to apply a comprehensive, systematic and rigorous source-critical approach to hagiographical texts. Wattenbach comments that although scholars had earlier recognized individual elements in many hagiographical texts as unreliable, “again and again one tried nonetheless to extract historical material from this desert of fables.” Even now, Wattenbach laments, scholars continue to try to use parts of otherwise discredited sources: a “thoroughly unhistorical endeavor.” Especially problematic, among hagiographical texts, are those that narrate the beginnings of Christianity. Few such hagiographical texts deserve to be taken seriously. Together with the passio of St. Florian, he singles out the *passio sanctorum quatuor coronatorum* (which was unknown to Rettberg) as one of these few exceptions.

A more restrained but likewise enthusiastic discussion of the text was offered by Theodor Keim (1825-1878) in an article published in 1865. Keim’s discussion of the *passio sanctorum quatuor coronatorum* closely follows that of his “friend and colleague Max Büdinger,” who had brought the text to his attention. His article however, is directed to a different audience. Keim was a professor of theology in Zurich (1860-1873) who had made his name with his research into the history of the Reformation in Swabia. His article on the Quattro Coronati appears in the second volume of Heidenheim’s *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Englisch-Theologische Forschung und Kritik*, which, as Heidenheim’s preface explains, aimed to present Protestant approaches to textual criticism.

Keim presents the *passio sanctorum quatuor coronatorum* as a hitherto neglected source for theology and church history. Like Wattenbach, Karajan, and Büdinger, Keim emphasizes the authenticity (*Wirklichkeit*) of the *passio*. From a theological perspective it presents a “life-like depiction of the two rival religions, their seem-
ing compatibility and their quickly erupting conflicts. Keim does identify a number of aspects that make the text more ahistorical than Wattenbach and Karajan had claimed, in particular the ease with which the Christian stonemasons produce artistic masterpieces by saying the name of Christ or making the sign of the cross on the stone. Keim also contests Karajan’s dating of the life of the Bishop Cyril and argues that the *passio* must have been written in “the West,” not, as Karajan had claimed, “far from Rome.”

Nevertheless, these considerations do not prompt Keim to reevaluate the fundamental worth of the text. Instead, he concludes that the *passio* was most probably written during the time of Constantine when the name of Christ and the cross had taken on special significance (as attested by Eusebius). As such the *passio* remains a remarkably authentic text of particular interest for the history of the early church. It also proves, Keim argues, that Diocletian had already begun to persecute Christians soon after he became emperor.

Lastly, as an addendum to his article, Keim references the fact that the mid-4th-century list of martyrs from Rome (*Depositio Martyrum*), which Theodor Mommsen had recently published, seemed to include both sets of saints mentioned in the *passio*: on November 9th, a set of saints with names very similar, but not identical, to those of the Pannonian stonemasons, “Clementis, Semporiani, Claudii, Nicostrati”; and on August 8th, the names of the Roman soldiers, “Secundi, Carpophori, Victorini et Severiani.” Keim remarks as noteworthy that this Roman calendar differentiates the two sets of saints and that, by the mid-4th century, “the memory of Pannonia seems already to have disappeared from the Roman cult.”

The following year, in 1866, Wattenbach published the second edition of his *Deutschlands Geschichtsquellen*. His discussion of the *passio sanctorum quatuor coronatorum* remains unchanged, although he has slightly modified his footnotes. He now referenc-

---

75 *Keim* 1865, p. 6: “...eine lebensvolle Schilderung des Standes der zwei rivalisirenden Religionen...”

76 *Keim* 1865, p. 8: “Bis auf bessere Belehrung möchte ich annehmen, dass die Legende in jetziger Gestalt jedenfalls in der ersten Hälfte des vierten Jahrhunderts geschrieben sei, und zwar im Occident und wohl nicht (mit Karajan) 'in der Ferne von Rom.'”

77 *Keim* 1865, p. 11 n. a: “...unter den depositiones martyrum das Begräbniss unsere Märtyrer mit einzelnen Abweichungen genannt hat.”

78 *Keim* 1865, p. 11 n. a: “Bemerkenswerth ist, dass die zwei Märtyrer-Reihen hier getrennt sind [...]; noch wichtiger, dass die Erinnerung an Pannonim [read: Pannonien] dem römischen Kult schon erloschen scheint.”

79 *Wattenbach* 1866, pp. 32-34, here pp. 33-34 n. 2. Here Wattenbach also expresses his skepticism towards Büdinger’s theory of a Greek original.
es Keim’s recent article and comments that, “It is strange that the exclusively Roman martyrology of the Chronographer of 354 [Deposito Martyrum] has the names [of these saints] and knows nothing of Pannonia...”\(^8\) As a possible explanation, Wattenbach cites a hypothesis of his colleague, the historian Ernst Dümmel (1830-1902), namely that the Pannonian legend was early on attached to “the empty names of these Roman workers.”

Soon thereafter, in 1868, Otto Hunziker (1841-1909), in a work dedicated to his teachers, Büdinger and Keim, referenced the passio in his study of the Emperor Diocletian.\(^8\) Hunziker, like Keim, was interested in the chronology of Diocletian’s persecutions. He concludes, on the basis of Lactantius and Eusebius, that there is no evidence for a significant persecution of Christians prior to 303. However, Hunziker admits that there is hagiographical evidence for a handful of individuals persecuted prior to this date; among the more reliable pieces of evidence he includes the passio sanctorum quatuor coronatorum.\(^8\) He agrees with Keim’s positive assessment of the passio (citing, above all, its realistic descriptions of the stone quarries) but remains less wholeheartedly to endorse the text as authentic.\(^8\) Instead, he proposes that the Pannonian part of the passio is fairly authentic, but that the entire text was redacted, at a significantly later point in time, in Rome.\(^8\)

Fifteen years on from Wattenbach’s presentation of the passio in Vienna, confidence in the text had wavered slightly. Scholars admitted that some emendation or explanation was necessary to resolve the chronological discrepancies presented by the appear-

---

\(^8\) Wattenbach 1866, p. 34 n. 2: “Befremdend ist, dass schon das ausschliesslich römische Martyrologium des Chronographen von 354 die Namen hat und dem entsprechend auch die ausführlichen Martyrologien nur von römischen Arbeitern reden, von Pannonien nichts wissen. Es wäre nach einer Vermuthung Dümmlers möglich, dass die zufällig erhaltene pannonische Legende an die leeren Namen der römischen Arbeiter schon früh geknüpft wäre.”

\(^8\) Hunziker 1868, pp. 262-265.

\(^8\) Although he cites Wattenbach’s Deutschlands Geschichtsquellen (2nd ed.), Büdinger and Keim, Hunziker uses Surius’ abbreviated version of the legend, not the full passio.

\(^8\) Hunziker 1868, p. 263: “Wenn ich diese Ansichten Keims über die Legende im ganzen als höchst einleuchtend theile, so glaube ich doch in Betonung der Ungeschichtlichkeiten noch einen Schritt weiter gehen zu müssen....”

\(^8\) Hunziker 1868, pp. 264-265: “…die sirmische Legende ist nach allen inner Spuren uralt, und wol wie Keim darthat mit Sicherheit in die constantinische Zeit zu verlegen; aber erst in Rom ist sie – und für diesen Ort der Ueberarbeitung stimme ich wiederum mit Keim überein –, ihrem wesentlichen Inhalte nach getreu aufgenommen, mit den römischen Legenden in Verbindung gebracht worden, und zwar erst bedeutende Zeit nach ihre ersten Aufzeichnung.”
ance of the Emperor Diocletian, Pope Melchiades, St. Sebastian, and Bishop Cyril of Antioch in the text. Nor was the passio devoid of the ‘miraculous’ elements, which, in their opinion, differentiated the genre of hagiography from history proper. The similar, but not identical, information provided by the Depositio Martyrum also added a further puzzle, which, like the final section of the passio, pointed to Rome and not to Pannonia. Nonetheless, a circle of German-speaking scholars remained confident about the passio’s historical worth as a document attesting to the Christianization of Pannonia.

*Reassessing the Passio*

Scholarly collaboration on the passio sanctorum quatuor coronatorum across disciplines reached its peak in 1870 in a joint publication spearheaded by Büdinger and published in the third volume of his series, Untersuchungen zur römischen Kaisergeschichte. Included in this volume was an improved text of the passio by Wattenbach, archeological remarks by Benndorf and chronological remarks by Büdinger himself. Through careful analysis these scholars sought to put the passio on solid historical footing and bring it to the attention of a wider scholarly audience. The volume also included, in a separate section, Hunziker’s reconsideration of the passio. Hunziker proposed re-dating the martyrdom of the Pannonian stonemasons to 306, a further piece of evidence in support of his earlier thesis that Diocletian had not persecuted Christians prior to 303.

Wattenbach’s new edition of the passio was based on four additional manuscripts (besides the Gotha manuscript from which he had first published the text), as well as the version in Mombrius’ Sanctuarium, which had, by now, been brought to his attention. Wattenbach claims that his new edition prints a version of the passio that is much closer and more faithful to the original archetype, in contrast to the Gotha manuscript, which offered a “fairly heavily reworked” text. While significantly different in

---

85 Wattenbach, Benndorf, Büdinger 1870.
86 Hunziker 1870.
form, in content the passio printed in Wattenbach’s new edition
remains essentially the same.

The archeologist Otto Benndorf (1838-1907), a professor in
Zurich (who would go on to become the director of the Austrian Archeological Institute in Vienna), then offers his reflections
on the passio. Benndorf begins by remarking that the text, in its
current form, presents many enigmas, which perhaps only a better
edition may be able to solve. However, Benndorf assures his
readers that, from an archeological standpoint, the passio appears
to be a reliable historical document, which can, in turn, provide
valuable historical information about ancient marble quarrying.88
Benndorf proceeds to draw a number of such historical conclusions
from the text; for example, that the Pannonian marble quar-
ries must have belonged to the imperial fisc and that prisoners
were forced to work in quarries. He correlates some of these con-
clusions with archeological evidence. For example, he argues that
the recently excavated marble emporium in Rome near the Aven-
tine likewise indicates that marble sculptures were carved at the
quarries before they were shipped to their destination.89

Furthermore, Benndorf gives special attention to the specific sculptures
and ornamental pieces described in the passio, as well as to what
this activity reveals about Christian attitudes to Roman art, namely,
that Christians only objected to those pieces that gave expres-
sion to pagan beliefs, not all artistic works per se.

Finally, Büdinger provides a detailed discussion of the passio’s
chronology. Like Benndorf, Büdinger frames his contribution as
an investigation into the reliability of the passio. Büdinger astute-
ly remarks that the various misgivings raised about the text might
lead one to expect that the passio will eventually be downgraded in
worth, as has happened to so many other hagiographical texts that
have not withstood critical inquiry.90 Nonetheless, Büdinger, in his
subsequent discussion of the passio, proceeds from the assumption
of the text’s general reliability; in particular, he references Ben-
ndorf’s preceding remarks in support of this conclusion.

Büdinger then assembles a wide range of later evidence about
the saints, including itineraries of the Roman catacombs and later

---

88 Benndorf 1870, p. 339: “...einen Beitrag zum sachlichen Verständniss
des Textes, und begründen an ihrem Theil die Ueberzeugung, dass die Legende
ächte alte Aufzeichnungen enthält, welche uns neue werthvolle Belehrungen
bieten....”

89 Benndorf 1870, pp. 341-342.

90 Büdinger 1870, p. 357: “Doch haben sich neben bestätigenden Beobacht-
tungen für ein hohes Alter auch mancherlei Bedenken geltend gemacht, so dass
man erwarten konnte, diese Legenden allmählich zu dem historischen Unwerthe
Anderer herabsinken zu sehen.”
martyrologies. He also proposes various solutions to the chronolog-ical dilemmas presented by the text and the other pieces of evidence. Most innovative is his suggestion that the Roman soldiers were actually martyred under the late-3rd-century Emperor Claudius Gothicus, not Diocletian. Büdinger thus sees a strong editorial hand at work, in Rome, redacting the text. Nonetheless he emphasizes the underlying historical value of the passio’s description of Pannonia.

**Scholarship Continues...**

The articles published in Büdinger’s Untersuchungen zur römischen Kaisergeschichte were successful in bringing the passio to the attention of a wider group of scholars. In the years that followed, publication on the text accelerated. From an art-historical perspective, Albert Ilg (1847-1896) – who would go on to work as curator at the Museum for Art and Industry in Vienna and then the imperial collection (today the Kunsthistorisches Museum) – published a brief article in 1872 discussing the passio’s significance from the perspective of Christian attitudes to pagan art. The historian (and Prussian officer) August von Cohausen (1812-1894), best known for his publications on Roman and medieval fortifications, and the theologian, Ernst Wörner (d. 1875) cite the passio in their co-authored 1876 volume on the Roman quarries of Felsberg. In the same year, Albert Dunker (1843-1886) tackled the chronology of the passio in a brief article.

A more ambitious article in 1878 by Edmund Meyer (1840-1905) set out to investigate two questions: (1) Who were the ‘real’ Quattro Coronati: the Pannonian stonemasons or the Roman soldiers? and (2) What was the relationship between these two sets of saints? Meyer’s article presents a convenient retrospective of the 19th-century trajectory of the text and demonstrates, very explicitly, the degree to which scholars’ evaluations of the passio were dependent on how they imagined the Early Middle Ages.

Meyer firmly differentiates the enterprise of 19th-century historical scholarship from what came before. He describes that although

---

91 Büdinger 1870, p. 365: “Wie hätten die ganz unbefangenen Schlussworte sonst einem Sinn, die Namen der vier Hingerichteten seien schon zu Papst Melchiades Zeit (2 Juli 311 bis 11. Januar 314) und gar schon zwei Jahre nach dem Martyrium (cum post duos annos evenisset idem VI idus Nov.) vergessen gewesen?”
92 Ilg 1872.
93 Cohausen, Wörner 1876, pp. 52-62.
94 Dunker 1876.
95 Meyer 1878.
Mombritius had included the passio in his Sanctuarium, it was only Wattenbach who “wrested the text from undeserved oblivion” and recognized its worth.\textsuperscript{96} This 19\textsuperscript{th}-century critical approach to hagiography is in sharp contrast to the way Meyer envisions the formation of the medieval passio. According to Meyer, it is undoubtedly the Pannonian stonemasons who are the true Quattro Coronati, since the narrative focuses on them: the term must refer to the first four stonemasons excluding Simplicius whom they convert. Later, however, a medieval redactor was puzzled as to how the name ‘Quattro Coronati’ could refer to a text about five Pannonian stonemasons. As a result the medieval redactor reasoned that the term ‘Quattro Coronati’ must refer to a different group of four saints and so added both the story of the four Roman soldiers, which he had come across in the church’s “treasure-chest of legends,” and also the names of four saints, Severus, Severianus, Carpophorus, Victorinus (included in the Depositio Martyrum), to whom no story was attached.\textsuperscript{97} Meyer comments:

In essence, he [the hagiographer] had merely produced a hybrid [of names and legends], indeed a hybrid which, for his time, was not all that bad; but clumsy as medieval scholarship was – since, being carried along by subjective belief, it did not distinguish between probability, likelihood and certitude – he expressed his conjecture as secure fact and perhaps even believed that he had offered a small contribution to the greater glory of God by having so neatly accommodated the legend and the four saints.\textsuperscript{98}

According to Meyer’s reading, medieval piety has shrouded the original text with additional fables. The task of the historian, as he understands it, is to strip these away, using reasoned conjecture, and salvage the authentic bits, secure facts, from the credulous world of medieval hagiography.

\textsuperscript{96} MEYER 1878, p. 579: “Die Legende der Heiligen Vier Gekrönten, obwohl bereits 1563 in dem Sanctuarium des Mombritius und 1570 in den Vitis probatorum Sanctorum des Surius gedruckt, ist einer unverdienten Vergessenheit dennoch erst durch Wattenbach entrissen worden,...”

\textsuperscript{97} MEYER 1878, p. 600: “Da traf er in dem Legendenschatze der Kirche, der damals vermutlich viel größer war, als wir jetzt nachweisen können, auf eine Legende von vier namenlosen Flügelmännern.”

\textsuperscript{98} MEYER 1878, p. 600: “Er hatte im Grunde nur eine Kombination gemacht, und zwar eine Kombination, die für seine Zeit gar nicht so schlecht war; aber täppisch, wie die mittelalterliche Wissenschaft war, die von subjectivem Glauben getragen zwischen Möglichkeit, Wahrscheinlichkeit und Gewißheit nicht unterschied, gab er seine Vermuthung als sichere Gewißheit aus und glaubte vielleicht noch kleinen Beitrag zum größeren Ruhme Gottes geliefert zu haben, wenn er eine Legende und vier Heilige so gut untergebracht hatte.”
**De Rossi Weighs in on the Quattro Coronati**

Up to this point scholarship on the *passio* had been exclusively in German and focused, almost entirely, on the Pannonian part of the *passio*. Büdinger had even gone so far as to claim that the *passio* had been entirely forgotten in Rome.\(^9^9\) There was at least one Italian scholar, however, who no one doubted was familiar with the *passio*, and Benndorf (who was in much closer contact with contemporary scholarship in Rome than Büdinger) had begun his article by expressing his hope that this expert would soon weigh in on the debate: Giovanni Battista De Rossi (1822-1894).\(^1^0^0\)

In 1879 De Rossi was almost at the peak of his fame. In 1878 he had become prefect of the Christian Museum at the Vatican (*Museo cristiano del Vaticano*), even as he delicately maneuvered between the papal administration and the new Italian state. His discussion of the Quattro Coronati appeared in his *Bulletino di archeologia cristiana*.\(^1^0^1\) De Rossi sets out to tackle what he describes as “one of the tangles, most intricate and difficult to solve, which ancient Roman hagiography poses to us.”\(^1^0^2\) His article has two primary aims: firstly, to evaluate whether the text merits the high esteem “German scholars” have accorded it and, secondly, to introduce new evidence into the debate.\(^1^0^3\)

De Rossi concluded, along the lines of earlier 19th-century scholarship, in particular with reference to his own and Benndorf’s archeological observations and, above-all, based on the genuine feel of the text, that indeed the *passio* is “worthy of honor and learned studies.”\(^1^0^4\) Still, this should not, he states, make one oblivious to the chronological problems that led Tillemont to discredit the text.\(^1^0^5\)

---

\(^9^9\) BÜDINGER 1870, p. 379: “In Rom selbst war sie verschollen und ist sie wohl auch heute noch unbekannt.”

\(^1^0^0\) BENNDORF 1870, p. 339.

\(^1^0^1\) DE ROSSI 1879.

\(^1^0^2\) DE ROSSI 1879, p. 45: “La storia, i nomi, le memorie scritte e monumentali dei così detti santi Quattro Coronati sono uno dei viluppi più intricati e difficili a sciogliere, che ci presenti l’antica romana agiografia.”

\(^1^0^3\) DE ROSSI 1879, p. 46: “I dotti Alemanni...”

\(^1^0^4\) DE ROSSI 1879, p. 60: “Dalle osservazioni sopra epilogate o da me nuovamente proposte è chiaro, che la *passio Quatuor Coronatorum* immernitamente spregiata è degna dell’onore e dei dotti studii, di che è divenuta obbietto speciale da circa dieci anni.”

\(^1^0^5\) DE ROSSI 1879, p. 61: “Siffatto inviluppo inestricabile di anacronismi sgormenterebbe qualsivoglia cronologo e critico; ed il Tillemont sopra essi, meglio che sulle osservazioni sopra riferite, avrebbe potuto fondare il suo giudizio contro la sincerità del controverso racconto. Ma gli intrinseci suoi pregi sopra notati ed il genuino colore, che dal suo fondo sostanziale traspare, hanno animato gli odier- ni critici all’ardua impresa di conciliare le predette anomalie cronologiche.”
Drawing on a wide range of sources, textual and material, De Rossi then proposed his own solutions to the chronological problems posed by the text. De Rossi demonstrates that a Parisian manuscript, which he judged to date from the 11th century (Paris, Lat. 10861), unknown to Wattenbach, specifies the author of the *passio*: “censualis a gleba actuarius nomine porfyreus gestam scripsit”; from this De Rossi concludes that the author was a notary in charge of the census.106 This manuscript also gave the title of the text not as the “passio sanctorum quatuor coronatum,” but as the “passio sanctorum Simproniani, Claudii, Nicostrati, Castori et Simplicii.” According to De Rossi, then, the Quattro Coronati were not originally the Pannonian saints (as Meyer had proposed), but rather the Roman soldier-saints. Meanwhile, the Pannonian notary Porfìrius recorded the *passio* of the Pannonian saints; then, at a later point, this story was combined with that of the Roman soldiers, the true Quattro Coronati. Furthermore, this combination had not occurred (as Meyer would have it) on account of the uncritical attitude of a medieval redactor, but rather on account of the proximity of the bodies of the two sets of saints: both buried at the same site on the via Labicana.

From De Rossi’s perspective, the presence of the Pannonian martyrs in Rome was confirmed by Pope Leo’s translation of their bodies to the church of the SS. Quattro Coronati in the 9th century. De Rossi (like Memmolo before him) was, however, confronted with the problem that there was no textual evidence explaining how and when these stonemasons had been translated from Pannonia to Rome. De Rossi has an ingenious solution. He points to a variant manuscript reading “cum venissent” (that is, in the third-person plural, rather than in the third-person singular), in describing Diocletian’s arrival in Rome.107 De Rossi proposes that these words initially belonged to a longer phrase that had described the physical translation of the bodies of the Pannonian saints to Rome. This solves what for De Rossi is the most puzzling aspect of the whole story: “Why solemnly celebrate, in Rome, five artisan martyrs from Pannonia?”108 Although Benndorf had not lingered

106 De Rossi 1879, p. 69.
107 De Rossi 1879, p. 78: “A me la notabile variante del codice di Verona pare un vivo raggio di luce nel più fitto delle tenebre. Le parole *cum venissent* io stimo residue d’una lunga frase perita, ove era accennata la venuta a Roma dei corpi dei santi Claudio e compagni, forse post duos annos dal loro martirio; e la sepoltura loro data presso i quattro anonimi.”
108 De Rossi 1879, pp. 74-75: “Perché festeggiare solennemente in Roma i cinque martiri artefici della Pannonia? ...Non parmi si possa in guisa veruna paragonare l’importanza della chiesa africana con quella delle chiese pannoni-
on the question, already he had found it necessary to address the issue, suggesting that perhaps these stonemasons were, by birth, Romans who had been forced to labor in the Pannonian stone- quarries. De Rossi points to the fact that, according to the *Depositori Martyrum*, the only foreign saints venerated in mid-4th-century Rome were the African saints, St. Cyprian, and Sts. Perpetua and Felicity. Their inclusion, from his perspective, was easily explained by the stature of these saints and the North African Church at the time. Such an explanation would not suffice to explain the Pannonian saints. Instead, the physical presence of these saints was, from his perspective, the only reason that would adequately explain why the Roman church would have so highly respect ed these saints.

In this way De Rossi’s theory accounted for the Pannonian martyrs (translated to Rome and buried on the via Labicana) and the Quattro Coronati (the nameless Roman martyrs likewise buried on the via Labicana). He also provided a solution for the names of the Roman soldiers Severus, Severianus, Victorianus and Carpophorus. De Rossi demonstrated that these names were not specified in any of the earliest references to the ‘Quattro Coronati’ as such. However, the names in question did appear in early sources (in particular the *Depositori Martyrum*), referring to a group of four martyrs buried on the via Appia in Albano (15 km from Rome). Thus, De Rossi argued, at some later point in time, the names of the martyrs from Albano were mistakenly believed to be the those of the Roman Quattro Coronati. This was to be the solution that, further refined, would be almost unanimously accepted by subsequent scholars.

**Scholarship Continues...**

German-speaking scholarship continued apace in the following years. In 1880, the classical philologist Michael Petschenig (1845-1923) undertook a linguistic analysis of the *passio*, arguing that it was written in 5th/6th-century Latin. Petschenig qualified this conclusion by stating that the author must have had available to him an oral or written tradition that made possible his lively depiction of local affairs in Pannonia at the beginning of the 4th century. The
following year **Carl Erbes** (1853-after 1899) argued that Porphyrius must have been the author of both the Roman and the Pannonian parts of the *passio*, not, as De Rossi had claimed, of the Pannonian part alone.\(^{112}\) In 1883 the geographer **Oskar Schneider** (1841-1903) made the radical proposal, largely ignored by his contemporaries, that the stone quarries discussed in the *passio* were not those in Pannonia, but rather in Egypt: the only known source of purple porphyry.\(^{113}\) In 1885, **Otto Hirschfeld** (1842-1922) discussed the *passio* with reference to a 4th-century inscription from a Dalmatian quarry mentioning column capitals.\(^{114}\)

In 1886 **Edmund Meyer** published a heated response to De Rossi (and also Erbes), a fairly short but polemical tract.\(^{115}\) At this point Meyer was an instructor at the Königlichen Luisen-Gymnasium in Berlin; his piece appears in the school’s publication series. Meyer maintains his original thesis, namely that the original Quattro Coronati were the Pannonian stonemasons, not the Roman soldiers.

Meyer inveighs against De Rossi’s argumentation style as “bold (*kühn*),” especially with respect to De Rossi’s claim that the *passio* had originally described a translation of the Pannonian saints to Rome.\(^{116}\) He contrasts De Rossi’s willingness to see a corruption in the text with De Rossi’s high respect for Church tradition.\(^{117}\) Meyer himself regards such a translation of saints from Pannonia to Rome as highly unlikely: “What after all would have been the occasion for translating the relics of these five stonemasons to Rome?”\(^{118}\) Instead, Meyer imagines a scenario by which stonemasons in Rome venerated the Pannonian stonemasons as patrons of their trade (as was the case in the later Middle Ages) and thus secured their inclusion in the Roman martyrology.\(^{119}\)

For Meyer, this willingness of the Roman church to incorporate new saints and legends went hand-in-hand with the church’s credulous and uncritical attitude towards relics and saints’ cults more generally:

\(^{112}\) Erbes 1882.
\(^{113}\) Schneider 1883, 81ff. (I have not been able to access a copy of this text.)
\(^{114}\) Hirschfeld 1885, pp. 20-25.
\(^{115}\) Meyer 1886. Meyer had already noted De Rossi’s article and indicated his own intention to respond to it: Meyer 1881, p. 128.
\(^{116}\) Meyer 1886, p. 16: “In dieser Beweisführung wird zunächst jedem auffallen, dass Rossi mit der schriftlichen Überlieferung kühn umgeht.”
\(^{117}\) Meyer 1886, p. 17.
\(^{118}\) Meyer 1886, p. 18: “Ich glaube es nicht [referring to De Rossi’s claimed translation of the relics from Pannonia to Rome]: was sollte wohl den Anlass gegeben haben, die Gebeine jener fünf Steinmetzen nach Rom zu bringen?”
Who after all stands by the fact that the relics that Leo translated from the crumbling catacombs were, in fact, the real ones? When it came to the discovery of saints’ relics, the Middle Ages were, after all, as uncritical as humanly possible; pious, often exulted, fantasy was always able to find everything that one wished, and dreams often played an important role in the process.\textsuperscript{120}

\textbf{Wattenbach’s Last Words}

In the sixth edition of his \textit{Deutschlands Geschichtsquellen} (1893), although Wattenbach added mention of Porphyrius as the \textit{passio}’s author and supplemented the footnotes with further bibliographical references, he did not significantly modify his discussion of the \textit{passio}.\textsuperscript{121} As he had done in previous editions, Wattenbach affirmed that the \textit{passio} must have been written before Pannonia was inundated by barbarians and was very likely an eyewitness account.\textsuperscript{122}

Although he continued to work on the subject, De Rossi did not publish again on the Quattro Coronati before his death in 1894. Wattenbach, however, in 1896, shortly before his own death, weighed in one last time on the Quattro Coronati. His article published yet another edition of the text (his third) based on the Paris manuscript to which De Rossi had drawn attention and which Bruno Krusch had dated to the 8th century (Paris, Lat. 10861).\textsuperscript{123} Philologically significant is that Wattenbach’s new edition does not include the names of Roman soldiers (which De Rossi had argued...
were the names of the martyrs of Albano). This further supported De Rossi’s conjecture that these names were a later addition.

Wattenbach’s article also provided a bibliographic overview of 19th-century scholarship on the passio. Wattenbach writes with an authoritative and confident voice, evaluating the theories that other scholars have proposed and passing judgment on them. He accords De Rossi particular respect and explains that he had not previously published a new edition of the text because De Rossi had intended to do so.

In his discussion of previous scholarship Wattenbach comments on the question of the relics’ translation from Pannonia to Rome. Although he expresses respect for Meyer’s scholarship, he objects to Meyer’s attitude to the period as too flippant:

In my opinion he [Meyer] gives too little credit to the weight of ecclesiastical tradition. I cannot imagine that a cult, which had developed only on the basis of a legend brought from Pannonia, would have discovered and translated these presumed relics [that is, from the catacombs to the church on the Caelian Hill]. In the Middle Ages, when such issues became connected to speculation for profit through pilgrimage and donors attempted thereby to establish their position, such occurrences often took place, but not in this earlier period, when one still regarded such things very much in earnest.

Wattenbach is also concerned to disprove the idea that the passio dates only from the 5th/6th century (as Petschenig’s linguistic analysis had claimed). His new edition, he hopes, will make an earlier date seem more feasible. In general, however, Wattenbach is not interested in reentering all the nitty-gritty disputes about the precise chronology and development of the text: “I do not want to delve into all these difficult questions: it suffices that the high worth of the Pannonian legend is not doubted.”

124 Wattenbach comments in a footnote that all the other manuscripts introduce these names into the text: WATTENBACH 1896, p. 1302 n. 2, referring to the phrase in the text “quattuor quidam cornicularii”: “Hier schieben die übrigen Handschriften die Namen ein: Severus, Severianus, Carpoforus et Victorinus.”

125 WATTENBACH 1896, p. 1290: “Von ihm ist nun meines Erachtens das Gewicht der kirchlichen Tradition zu gering angeschlagen; ich kann mir nicht vorstellen, dass nur aus Anlass einer aus Pannonien gebrachten Legende der Cult entstanden, die vermeintlichen Gebeine gefunden und übertragen waren; im Mittelalter, als man mit diesen Dingen Speculationen auf Geldgewinn durch Wallfahrten verband und die Stifter sich damit den Rang abzulaufen suchten, ist dergleichen oft genug geschehen, aber nicht in so früher Zeit, wo man es damit noch sehr ernsthaft nahm.”

126 WATTENBACH 1896, p. 1291: “Doch ich will mich in diese schwierigen Fragen nicht vertiefen; es genügt, dass der hohe Werth der pannonischen Legende unbezweifelt ist.”
Divergent Opinions Continue

One scholar whom all this scholarship did not seem to convince was Adolf von Harnack (1851-1930). In his Geschichte der altchristlichen Litteratur bis Eusebius (first edition, 1893-1897; second revised edition published 1904), Harnack relegated the passio to a footnote with the comment that it could not be included among his discussion of authentic or particularly valuable martyr acts—"although it contains some believable material."127

Meanwhile, Albert Dufourcq (1872-1952), in his Étude sur les Gesta martyrum Romains, published in 1900 and dedicated to Bosio, Tillemont and De Rossi, focused his attention on the Roman soldier-saints, who he argued were the ‘true’ Quattro Coronati.128 According to Dufourcq’s scenario, this group of Roman soldiers was buried on the via Labicana and, subsequently, the church of the Quattro Coronati, which was located near to the baths of Trajan where the soldiers had been martyred, also became closely associated with their cult. Then, after the barbarian invasions of Pannonia in the late 5th century had brought refugees to Rome, the Roman community on the Caelian Hill learned of the Pannonian stonemasons and also acquired their Pannonian passio. This resulted in the fusion of the two stories and gave rise to the mistaken belief that the Pannonian saints were likewise buried in Rome. Consequently in the mid-9th century when Pope Leo IV sought out the bodies of these Pannonian saints in the catacombs, “How would he not have found them? One had for such a long time believed in their presence in this place!”129

To summarize briefly: what had begun with Wattenbach as a question of evaluating a single text, the passio sanctorum quatuor coronatorum, had, by the turn of the century, become an intricate puzzle of how to fit together various pieces of evidence about the development of the cult of two sets of saints: the five Pannonian stonemasons and the four Roman soldiers. This was a discussion

127 HARNACK 1904, II.2, pp. 478-479 n. 2: “Die Passio quattuor coronati ... kann nicht hierher gerechnet werden, obgleich sie Glaubwürdiges enthält.” Harnack explains the purpose of this chapter on “Martyrien” as follows: “Ich muß mich bei dem gegenwärtigen Stande der Forschung darauf beschränken, diejenigen echten oder besonders wertvollen Märtyrerakten zu nennen und zu datieren, die nach Umgang und Bedeutung ein Anrecht auf eine Stelle in der Litteraturgeschichte haben” (HARNACK 1904, II.2, pp. 463-464).

128 DUFORCQ 1900, pp. 153-160: “Qu’est-ce que ce culte du Celius? Que désigne l’expression IV Coronati? Qu’elle ait désigné d’abord les cornicularii, c’est un point très vraisemblable: les marmorarii étaient cinq; d’autre part, leurs noms étaient connus...” (p. 156).

129 DUFORCQ 1900, p. 160: “....et comment ne les eût-on pas trouvés? Il y a avait si longtemps que l’on croyait à leur présence en ce lieu!”
that involved a much wider range of archeological and textual evidence, all of which needed to be read side-by-side with the *passio*. The solutions scholars proposed depended on the evidence, but also on what sorts of textual interventions and relic translations they imagined would have been possible and plausible in late antique/early medieval Rome.

**PART III.**

**THE QUATTRO CORONATI ENTER THE 20th CENTURY**

It is somewhat misleading to begin a new section with the turn of the 20th century. The central questions, concerns and methodologies involved in the 'Quattro Coronati' debate remained largely the same. Moreover, the scholars who weighed in on the debate were well-aware of working within the preexisting tradition of scholarship on the saints. What changed in this phase, however, was the degree of precision involved. Accurate readings of texts and precise dating of evidence took on increased importance as scholars attempted to judge the relative value of the different pieces of evidence. This was a task assisted by the publication of new critical editions: above all, Delehaye’s new, rigorous edition of the *passio sanctorum quatuor coronatorum*. Questions of historical plausibility did not vanish, but they too could be framed much more precisely.

**A Critical Edition for the Quattro Coronati: Delehaye**

November 8th marks the feast day of the Quattro Coronati. For that reason the saints had not yet been the subject of study in the ambitious Bollandist *Acta Sanctorum* that had, beginning in the 17th century with the month of January, published critical editions and detailed commentary of the materials pertaining to every saint of the Catholic Church. Among the most tireless of the new generation was Hippolyte Delehaye (1859-1941), who in 1891 began work on the *Acta*.

In 1910 the third volume of November was published; Delehaye was responsible for the Quattro Coronati. By then Delehaye had already published *Les légendes hagiographiques*, a book which aimed, as he explained in the preface,

---

130 For an introduction to the enterprise see Knowles 1958.

131 Delehaye 1910.
To indicate briefly the spirit in which hagiographic texts should be studied, to lay down the rules for discriminating between the materials that the historian can use and those that he should hand over as their natural property to artists and poets, to place people on their guard against the fascination of formulas and preconceived systems.\(^{132}\)

Delehaye deftly explained to the non-specialist reader the difference between hagiography and history: a distinction, he emphasizes, that had not existed in the Middle Ages.\(^{133}\) Hagiographical texts might be historical documents, but most were legends, whose documentary value had been corrupted by the popular imagination and by hagiographers. Delehaye’s work met with acclaim, but also vehement critique from religious conservatives, who accused him of taking a rationalist approach to Christianity.\(^{134}\) By 1910, the work had already been translated into German, Italian and English.\(^{135}\)

Delehaye’s edition and commentary on the Quattro Coronati exemplifies his discriminating approach to medieval hagiography. In addition to Porphyrius’s version of the *passio*, Delehaye also edited the Greek version of the text and its reworking by the 10th-century Peter of Naples. His critical editions are all characterized by careful attention to philological detail.

Delehaye was familiar with but by no means deterred by the voluminous 19th-century bibliography on the *passio*. He confidently proposed his own solutions to the enigmas that had puzzled earlier scholars. What is important to stress is the continuity of Delehaye’s approach vis-à-vis earlier scholars. Delehaye engages with the same questions, uses largely the same materials and generally the same methods as the 19th-century scholars before him. The innovation of his method is best characterized as a quantitative, not a qualitative, shift. Delehaye argues with a new level of meticulous precision, but his overarching aim remains the search for kernels of historical authenticity.

\(^{132}\) *Delehaye* 1906, pp. X-XI (trans. Crawford 1907, p. xi): “Exposer sommairement dans quel esprit il faut lire les textes hagiographiques, indiquer la méthode à suivre pour discerner les matériaux que l'historien peut en retirer et ce qu'il doit abandonner, comme leur bien propre, aux artistes et aux poètes, mettre en garde contre l'entraînement des formules et des systèmes préconçus, tel est le but de ce travail.”

\(^{133}\) *Delehaye* 1906, p. 75: “C'était la confusion perpétuelle entre l'histoire et la légende. L'histoire, au moyen âge, c'est ce qui se raconte, c'est ce qui se lit dans les livres.”

\(^{134}\) For detailed discussion see *Joassart* 2000.

\(^{135}\) Italian translation, 1906; German and English translations, 1907.
Delehaye’s commentary focuses on the vexed question of identifying the ‘original’ Quattro Coronati. He proposes that we should more accurately speak of two passiones: a Pannonian passio and a Roman passio. He identifies a textual break following the description of Nicodemus’s burial of the Pannonian martyrs: his edition correspondingly inserts a chapter break at this point in the text. Chs. 1-21 are the ‘Pannonian’ passio; Ch. 22, the ‘Roman’ passio. Delehaye argues that the text is corrupted at this ‘break.’ Subsequent to Nicodemus’s burial of the saints’ bodies, he asserts, we would expect to find some sort of description about the construction of a church for the saints after the end of the Christian persecutions, or a description of the translation of the saints’ relics from Pannonia to Rome.136

This reading is in harmony with Delehaye’s overarching conclusion regarding the relative value of the two texts. The “Pannonian acts,” which lack the problematic features that plague so many other hagiographic texts, are sincere; the “Roman acts” are a forgery.137 The Pannonian saints are the true Quattro Coronati; the Roman soldier-saints are a later, untrustworthy addition to the tradition.

Delehaye then seeks to reconstruct a plausible sequence of events that could have resulted in the textual corruption of the Pannonian passio and the fusing of the Roman and Pannonian passiones. Like previous scholars, he searches for a solution in the complicated tangle of late antique and medieval sources mentioning these or similarly named saints. He meticulously enumerates and discusses all the evidence. As an example of his careful attention to detail, I focus here on some of his arguments involving the Liber Pontificalis.

Delehaye envisions a scenario by which the bodies of the Pannonian saints, the ‘Quattro Coronati,’ were translated to Rome soon after their martyrdom. Eventually, however, popular opinion gave rise to the belief that the ‘Quattro Coronati’ must be a different set of saints than the five stonemasons, and so the legend of the Roman soldiers was created. If only five Pannonian saints were buried at the catacombs, however, how to explain Pope Leo IV’s supposed translation of nine saints’ bodies into the church of the SS. Quattro Coronati in the mid-9th century, as apparently attested by the Liber Pontificalis?

136 Delehaye 1910, pp. 751C-751E (§9).
Delehaye has a clever solution. Available to him was Louis Duchesne’s masterly edition of the Liber Pontificalis (vol. 1, 1886; vol. 2, 1892). In the main text Duchesne’s edition gave the reading that Leo had discovered the bodies of the four crowned martyrs and had translated their bodies “together with (cum) Claudius, Nicostratus, Simphronianus and Castorius and Simplicius.”\(^{138}\) Delehaye noticed an alternate reading in the critical apparatus: scilicet (“that is”) instead of cum.\(^{139}\) On the basis of this reading Delehaye argued that Pope Leo had only translated one set of saints from the catacombs to the church on the Caelian hill.\(^{140}\) These were the Quattro Coronati: Claudius, Nicostratus, Simphronianus, Castorius, and Simplicius, the Pannonian martyrs, whose bodies had, at some point after their martyrdom, been translated from Pannonia to Rome and buried on the via Labicana.

The text of the Liber Pontificalis was also key for Delehaye in reconstructing a crucial step in the ‘deformation’ of the legend: the names given to the Roman soldier-saints. As we have seen, De Rossi had demonstrated that these names (Severus, Severianus, Carpophorus, Victorinus) belonged to a set of martyrs from Albano. The Liber Pontificalis, however, also included these names (immediately after the names of Pannonian saints) among the relics that Pope Leo IV had translated into the church on the Caelian Hill.\(^{141}\) The belief that these were the names of the Roman soldier-saints, so Delehaye proposed, must have resulted from the misreading of this text.\(^{142}\)

All in all, Delehaye’s scenario for the development of the cult of the Quattro Coronati is quite similar to those which earlier scholars had proposed, but it rests on much more detailed and precise philological analysis and more explicitly spells out each of the steps he envisions in the cult’s gradual (de)formation. Furthermore, Delehaye’s edition and commentary offered up a wealth of materials for subsequent scholars to comb through themselves.

\(^{138}\) *LP* II, p. 115, lines 23-29: “Nam et corpora sanctorum martyrum IIII Coronatorum sollerti cura inquirens repperit; […] eorumque sacratissima corpora cum Claudio, Nicostrato, Simphroniano atque Castorio et Simplicio, necnon Severo, Severiano, Carpoftoro et Victorino…”

\(^{139}\) In fact, De Rossi had also spotted this alternate reading, but had dismissed it as an erroneous identification of the Quattro Coronati with the five Pannonian saints: *De Rossi* 1879, p. 82 n.1: “In molti codici la frase è diversa; ed in luogo di *cum Claudio* etc. dice *id est Claudii* etc.; identificando erroneamente i Quattro Coronati con i cinque della Pannonia.”

\(^{140}\) Delehaye 1910, p. 755E-F (§31).

\(^{141}\) See n. 138 above.

\(^{142}\) De Rossi’s theory is very similar, but De Rossi had thought there was a source earlier than the Liber Pontificalis attesting to these names, the so-called
Unresolved Enigmas: Duchesne’s Response

If anyone was capable of taking on Delehaye’s masterly discussion of the Quattro Coronati it was the renowned French philologist and historian Louis Duchesne (1843-1922). His edition of the Liber Pontificalis (to which, as we have seen, Delehaye referred in his commentary on the Quattro Coronati) synthesized archeological and topographical evidence with the results of careful philological scholarship. In 1910, when Delehaye’s edition appeared, Duchesne was working on his Histoire ancienne de l’Église, published 1906-1911 (which very briefly makes reference to the passio sanctorum quatuor coronatorum in a footnote). Like Delehaye, Duchesne faced criticism and censure by conservative factions of the Church for what was considered a too rationalist approach to early Christian history.

In 1911 Duchesne published a brief article on the Quattro Coronati responding to Delehaye. Duchesne agreed with Delehaye that the original Quattro Coronati were the Pannonian martyrs, although Duchesne expresses considerably more hesitation than Delehaye with respect to the authenticity of their passio and avoids passing firm judgment on the text. Duchesne largely restricts his own observations to the subject of the saints’ Roman cult. One of the questions that fascinates him is the meaning of the topographical (?) indication “in comitatum” given by the Depositio Martyrum with reference to the saints “Clemens, Sempronianus Claudius, Nicostratus” (whose names, similar but not identical to those of the Pannonian saints, continued to trouble scholars). Duchesne argues that the term “in comitatum” refers to an imperial residence, but since no residence with such a name existed in late antique/early medieval Rome, it must refer to an imperial

Parvum Romanum (a text, which Ado had claimed was a very ancient martyrology that he had used in composing his own martyrology). Delehaye, however, cites Quentin’s analysis (QUENTIN 1908, pp. 649-752) demonstrating that the Parvum Romanum was a forgery composed by Ado himself: DELEHAYE 1910, p. 757F (§40).

143 DUCHESNE 1910-1911, II, p. 49 n. 2. The footnote discusses the chronology of the Bishop Cyril of Antioch, using the passio as evidence to supplement Eusebius. As far as I have been able to ascertain, Duchesne does not specifically discuss the Quattro Coronati anywhere in his history.


145 DUCHESNE 1911.

146 DUCHESNE 1911, p. 237 (with regard to Pannonian legend): “Peut-être lui [Delehaye] et les autres lui ont-ils attribué une trop grande valeur historique et une date un peu trop ancienne. Ceci importe peu à mon sujet.”

147 Delehaye discussed earlier hypotheses in his commentary: DELEHAYE 1910, p. 753E (§19).
residence outside Rome: most logically, given that these were Pannonian saints, in Sirmium, in Pannonia.\textsuperscript{148}

This conclusion again provokes the question that had plagued earlier scholars: “Why were these saints from abroad venerated in Rome?”\textsuperscript{149} Duchesne does not claim to provide a definitive solution, but suspects the involvement of members of the Constantinian imperial household.\textsuperscript{150} Yet, at the same time, he also agrees that the most natural solution is that proposed by De Rossi (and also endorsed by Delehaye): the translation of the saints’ bodies from Pannonia to Rome.\textsuperscript{151} According to Duchesne, however, such a translation must have occurred only after the initial veneration of the saints in Rome and should be placed in the 5\textsuperscript{th}/6\textsuperscript{th} century in the context of the invasions of Pannonia (not, as Delehaye had suggested, in the 4\textsuperscript{th} century).\textsuperscript{152}

Duchesne also disagrees with Delehaye’s proposed emendation of the \textit{Liber Pontificalis}. He prefers to keep the reading \textit{cum} rather than opting for \textit{scilicet} (as Delehaye had suggested). The manuscript evidence, he asserts, speaks for \textit{cum}, nor does this present a problem with the evidence. As he notes in a footnote:

That the list (in the \textit{LP}) of the relics given by Leo IV to the Caelian church distinguishes the Quattro Coronati from the five Pannonians does not seem to me in doubt; whether, in fact, nine – rather than four or five – saints’ bodies were discovered on the via Labicana is a different matter. We are not in the position to appreciate the exactitude of such stories, which were surely greatly influenced by contemporary opinions in the domain of hagiography. Had the narrator scrupulously reproduced the lists or inventories drawn up by those in charge of the exhumation, one would still be entitled to ask if these persons had proceeded with all possible care.\textsuperscript{153}

\textsuperscript{148} Duchesne 1911, pp. 233-234.
\textsuperscript{149} Duchesne 1911, p. 241: “Pourquoi ce culte rendu à Rome à des martyrs si lointains?”
\textsuperscript{150} Duchesne 1911, p. 244.
\textsuperscript{151} Duchesne 1911, p. 242: “La solution la plus naturelle serait celle d’une translation.”
\textsuperscript{152} Duchesne 1911, p. 242: “La translation s’expliquerait, comme celles de Quirinus et de divers autres saints, par l’émigration de la population romaine devant les invasions; et, comme elles ont été fréquentes sur les bords du Danube, depuis le V\textsuperscript{e} siècle surtout, on n’aurait que le choix entre bien des dates possibles jusqu’à la fin du VI\textsuperscript{e} siècle.”
\textsuperscript{153} Duchesne 1911, p. 240 n. 3: “Que le catalogue (celui du \textit{L.P.}) des reliques données par Léon IV à l’église du Célius distingué avait les Quatre Couronnés des cinq Pannoniens, cela ne me paraît pas douteux; qu’on ait, en réalité, découvert sur la voie Labicane, neuf corps saints et non quatre ou cinq, c’est une autre affaire. Nous ne sommes pas en état d’apprécier l’exactitude de telles narrations, sur lesquelles les opinions alors courantes, en matière d’hagiographie, ont
Confusion of relics, so Duchesne reasons, was only to be expected back in the age before ‘modern’ archaeology. Although much more elegantly than Meyer had done, Duchesne again dismisses the 9th-century relic translation as a piece of evidence that the modern historian need not take seriously.

“Una mostruosa leggenda”: Franchi De’ Cavalieri

“A monstrous legend”: such was the more disparaging opinion of the *passio sanctorum quatuor coronatorum* expressed by Pio Pietro Franchi De’ Cavalieri (1869-1960) in an article published in 1912. Franchi De’ Cavalieri was a *scrittore* at the Vatican Library and a member of the Pontifical Academy of Archeology. Like the Bollandists (with whom he collaborated closely and by whom he was highly respected), Franchi De’ Cavalieri took a rigorous approach to analyzing hagiography, although he was especially careful to cast doubt on hagiographical texts, not the saints themselves.

Franchi De’ Cavalieri argues that the *passio* is “a monstrous legend, which, moreover, unbeknownst to the hagiographer, contained, if my hypothesis is right, one truth: and that truth was that the names of four stonemasons, Claudius, Nicostratus, Sempronianus and Castorius, were applied to the four nameless ones.”

Franchi De’ Cavalieri argues that it is inconceivable that, had there originally been five saints, “the people” would have stripped one of them from his companions and referred to the group as the “Four Crowned Ones,” rather than the “Five Crowned Ones.” This leads him to conclude (agreeing with Duchesne) that there were originally only four Pannonian saints and that the *passio*, as it survives, is a later redaction that added a fifth saint, Simplicius. Like Duchesne, he expresses his reservations about the antiquity and historical worth of the Pannonian *passio* (although, as

**pu avoir beaucoup d’influence. Le narrateur eût-il reproduit scrupuleusement les listes ou inventaires qui ont pu être dressées par les personnes chargées de l’exhumation, que l’on serait encore en droit de se demander si ces personnes ont procédé avec tout le soin possible.”**

---

154 FRANCHI DE’ CAVALIERI 1912.

155 FRANCHI DE’ CAVALIERI 1912, p. 66: “Mostruosa leggenda, che peraltro, a insaputa dell’agiografo, contiene, giusta la mia ipotesi, una verità: e la verità è che a quattro anonimi furono applicati i nomi dei quattro lapicidi Claudio, Nicostrato, Semproniano e Castorio.”

156 FRANCHI DE’ CAVALIERI 1912, p. 58: “Non è perciò concepibile che il popolo l’abbia divelto dai suoi compagni e gettato in disparte, chiamando il gruppo dei ‘Quattro Coronati’ invece che dei ‘Cinque’.”
he carefully emphasizes, not the authenticity of the saints themselves.\textsuperscript{157}

More complex, in Franchi De' Cavalieri's opinion, is the question as to why these Pannonian saints were venerated in 4\textsuperscript{th}-century Rome and why their veneration continued in the subsequent centuries. This is the basis for his fundamental disagreements with Duchesne's and Delehaye's theories. He argues, contra Duchesne, that it is inconceivable that an urban basilica in 4\textsuperscript{th}-century Rome would have been dedicated to foreign martyrs: “a time when almost no Roman martyr, even the most famous, had his own church inside the city."\textsuperscript{158} At the same time, contra Delehaye, he is also reluctant to believe that foreign martyrs would have been deposited in a Roman cemetery: other examples of such translations of non-Roman martyrs to Rome, are, as far as he is aware, otherwise unknown in this early period.\textsuperscript{159} Moreover, as Franchi De' Cavalieri proceeds to argue, the theory of a translation of the stonemasons from Pannonia to Rome (at any point in time) causes more problems than it solves.\textsuperscript{160}

Franchi De' Cavalieri's solution is that “although foreign, and although buried elsewhere,” these Pannonian martyrs were venerated in 4\textsuperscript{th}-century Rome at the catacombs, just like the North African martyrs, Cyprian, Perpetua and Felicity, also recorded in the *Depositio Martyrum*.\textsuperscript{161} But why did these saints continue to be venerated in Rome? Franchi De' Cavalieri proposes that the Pannonian saints were identified with four anonymous Romans who also

\textsuperscript{157} Franchi De' Cavalieri 1912, p. 59: “Chi in età posteriore redasse a Sirmio, o nelle sue vicinanze, la passio (sul cui valore storico e sulla cui antichità stimo assai giustificate le riserve del Duchesne), pose in relazione con i quattro un quinto martire locale, senza dubbio autentico come gli altri e sepolto loro dappresso, ma più oscuro”.

\textsuperscript{158} Franchi De' Cavalieri 1912, p. 59: “Giacché per indurmi ad ammettere una basilica urbana dedicata a martiri stranieri sulla fine del sec. IV, quando cioè quasi nessun martire romano, neppure dei più celebri, aveva una propria chiesa dentro città, non può bastare un solo passo del Martirologio Geronimiano...”

\textsuperscript{159} Franchi De' Cavalieri 1912, p. 60: “Ma anche senza di ciò bisognerebbe andare molto adagio prima d'ammettere la deposizione di cinque martiri stranieri in un cimitero di Roma nei primi tempi della pace. Traslazioni a Roma di corpi di martiri non romani in età così remota (per quanto io sappia) non si conoscono, nè ci è dato immaginare per quali motivi esse si sarebbero dovute effettuare.”

\textsuperscript{160} Franchi De' Cavalieri 1912, p. 64: “In conclusione io temo che l'ipotesi della traslazione a Roma delle ossa dei cinque scultori pannonici, anzi che servire a scogliere il difficile problema, lo complichi...”

\textsuperscript{161} Franchi De' Cavalieri 1912, p. 64: “In Roma nel IV secolo erano venerati (benché stranieri e benché sepolti altrove) i martiri pannonici Claudio, Niscostra-to, Semproniano, Castorio, come vi si celebrava la memoria dei celeberrimi santi africani Cipriano, Perpetua e Felicita...”
Delehaye’s Response

Duchesne and Franchi De’ Cavalieri had raised numerous objections to Delehaye’s theories about the Quattro Coronati, with respect to both the authenticity of their Pannonian passio and the development of their Roman cult. In 1913 Delehaye responded in an article that reiterates and slightly modifies his original position, while pointing to weaknesses in the theories proposed by Duchesne and Franchi De’ Cavalieri.163

Delehaye is eager to respond to the accusation that he has shown “excessive indulgence” for Porphyrius, the author of the Pannonian passio, and “exaggerated the antiquity and historical value of his [Porphyrius’s] account.”164 Delehaye argues that such skepticism is unfounded: the Pannonian passio has an air of authenticity that distinguishes it from the mass of artificial stories so typical of hagiographical literature.165 Delehaye rehearses the earlier 19th-century arguments in favor of the passio’s authenticity: its precise localization in the Pannonian stone-quarries, its mild depiction of Diocletian and the appearance of the historically verifiable Cyril of Antioch.

Most indicative of its authenticity, according to him, is the willingness of the Pannonian stonemasons to sculpt so many pagan art-works, balking only at the statue of Asclepius. No later hagiographer would have invented saints so accommodating of pagan art. Delehaye clarifies that these are not ‘acts,’ in the sense of formal court proceedings, and yet, he wishes to identify the passio as an example of popular literature written not by a “professional writer

162 Franchi De’ Cavalieri 1912, p. 65: “Questa applicazione dei quattro nomi stranieri ai quattro anonimi martiri romani feci sì che il culto dei primi, invece di cessare, come accadde ad altri santi stranieri (p. es. a s. Perpetua e a s. Felicita) proseguisse, anzi riprendesse vigore.”

163 Delehaye 1913.

164 Delehaye 1913, p. 67: “On semble craindre que nous n’éprouvions pour le bon Porphyrius, censualis a gleba, une indulgence excessive, et que l’antiquité comme aussi la valeur historique de son récit n’ait été exagérée.”

165 Delehaye 1913, p. 67: “Tout le monde accordera que la Passion des Quatre Couronnés se distingue avantageusement d’une foule des récits artificiels, faits de lieux communs et de réminiscences, dont la littérature hagiographique est encombrée.”
(écrivain)” but by a middling employee, whose native language was probably not Latin. This explains why the language of his text does not correspond to that of 4th-century literary texts.

From Delehaye’s perspective, the Pannonian passio (including all five saints) is the authentic core. The problem is to explain how and why these Pannonian saints were venerated in Rome. Again, Delehaye argues that the bodies of these saints must have been translated from Pannonia to Rome very soon after the peace of the Church. He admits that he has no definitive proof of such a translation, but continues: “The principal reason that would make me incline towards this solution is that it would explain the cult rendered in the capital to these obscure martyrs, whom nothing, not even the fame of their place of martyrdom, would seem to single out for attention.” As to what could have prompted such a translation, he hazards the guess that perhaps the Pannonian stonemasons were Romans by birth (whence their Roman names).

Furthermore, Delehaye argues that the theories of Franchi De’ Cavalieri and Duchesne do not account for the Roman passio’s many internal textual references to the Pannonian passio. The Roman passio, Delehaye concludes, must have been written by someone familiar with the Pannonian passio. And why was it written? Again, Delehaye maintains his earlier thesis that the Roman passio was written to provide medieval audiences with an explanation of the puzzling question: how did a group of five saints merit the name ‘Quattro Coronati’? For the medieval mind the only way to explain this discrepancy was to imagine the existence of another group of four saints.

Although they disputed the details of how the cult of the Quattro Coronati had developed, Delehaye, Franchi De’ Cavalieri and

---

166 DELEHAYE 1913, p. 69: “Mais on aurait tort de traiter Porphyrius comme un écrivain, et de voir dans son écrit autre chose qu’un spécimen de la littérature populaire... il ne me paraît pas démontré qu’un petit employé du cadastre, dont le latin n’était peut-être pas la langue maternelle, ne pouvait pas, au IVe siècle, écrire comme Porphyrius.”

167 DELEHAYE 1913, p. 66: “La raison principale qui nous ferait pencher vers cette solution, c’est qu’elle expliquerait le culte rendu dans la capitale à des martyrs obscurs, que rien, pas même la notoriété du lieu de leur martyre, ne semblait désigner à l’attention.”

168 DELEHAYE 1913, p. 66: “Est-on bien sûr que les sculpteurs de Pannonie étaient des indigènes, et des noms comme Sempronianus, Claudius ne sont-ils pas bien romains?”

169 DELEHAYE 1913, p. 70: “Nous croyons qu’elle [the Roman passio] a été écrite uniquement pour répondre à cette question: Comment un groupe de cinq martyrs peut-il se désigner sous le titre de Quattuor Coronati? La seule réponse possible à cette époque était celle qu’on a trouvée: ‘Ce ne peut être le même groupe; il y a d’une part celui des cinq, de l’autre celui des quatre’.”
Duchesne all agreed that it had begun with the Pannonian saints. The difficulty was explaining how and why these saints had found a foothold in Rome and how the double legend had formed. With Delehaye’s response, the debate had circled back yet again to focus on the authenticity of the Pannonian passio: for if this was a historical document then the later cult in Rome must have developed around it; but if it was a later legend, or a heavily revised redaction of an earlier text, then it could not be adduced as solid evidence for the early development of the saints’ cult.

Excavating the Quattro Coronati

Meanwhile in Rome, archeological work was underway at the church of the Quattro Coronati. In 1914 Antonio Muñoz (1884-1960), who had just a few years earlier begun to work for the Superintendency of Monuments in Rome (Soprintendenza ai monumenti di Roma), published the results of his excavations.170 These were conducted (1912-1913) in conjunction with a restoration of the church, which aimed, not without controversy, to restore it to its ‘original’ early Christian appearance. Muñoz’s excavations confirmed the presence of the 9th-century crypt with its marble sarcophagi.171 Although Muñoz did not weigh in on the Quattro Coronati debate, his findings and documentation provided an impetus for renewed attention to the church as evidence for the cult of the Quattro Coronati.

Turning the Tables: Kirsch

Among those interested in Muñoz’s findings was Johann Peter Kirsch (1861-1941), a professor of patristics and Christian archeology at the University of Fribourg, Switzerland. Kirsch had studied in Rome, and his work shows the influence of De Rossi’s and Duchesne’s approach to Christian archeology and topography in Rome, as well as his familiarity with Delehaye’s critical approach to hagiography. Kirsch’s interest in the Quattro Coronati stemmed from his work on Rome’s titular churches. In an article published in 1917 (the First World War notwithstanding) in the Historisches Jahrbuch, a forum for Catholic history, Kirsch proposed a radical

170 Muñoz 1914. These results were summarized at the conference on Christian archeology presided over by Duchesne in December 1913, on which occasion Duchesne also pointed to the discovery, by Delehaye, of a breviarium which Duchesne argued further supported his own case for the antiquity of the cult of the Quattro Coronati on the Caelian Hill: Marucchi 1914, pp. 79-80. Muñoz also published an article on the excavations underway in 1913: Muñoz 1913.

171 Muñoz 1914, pp. 123-133. These pieces remain on view in the crypt of the church today.
revaluation of the evidence. Kirsch summarized his key arguments in his *Die römischen Titelkirchen im Altertum* (1918).

Kirsch proudly presents his proposal as a solution that, if correct, eliminates all difficulties earlier scholars had faced in explaining the development of the cult of the Quattro Coronati. More precisely, Kirsch is most concerned with the two issues that had by now become the crux of the debate: why were these Pannonian saints venerated in Rome? and how could five saints be known as the ‘Quattro Coronati’? Kirsch’s solution turns around the theories of Delehaye, Duchesne and Franchi De’ Cavalieri: he proposes that the original set of four martyrs were Roman, not Pannonian, and that the whole *passio* – both the Pannonian and Roman part – was invented in Rome.

In support of his theory, Kirsch points to the fact that all the earliest evidence (liturgical and archeological) for these saints comes from Rome. However, Kirsch also needed to demolish the Pannonian *passio* as an authentic text. The tack he takes is twofold: “Firstly, it [the *passio*] does not deserve to be valued as a true historical source, and secondly, it could have just as well developed in Rome as in Pannonia and, as such, can be categorized among the Roman legends.” In arguing against the authenticity of the Pannonian *passio*, Kirsch makes thorough use of Delehaye’s critical methodology. Kirsch details the many “naïve episodes characteristic of legendary martyr acts” that render the *passio sanctorum quatuor coronatorum* unbelievable as a historical document. To explain the more realistic parts, he proposes that it was written by a Pannonian in Rome, likely a 5th/6th-century refugee from Pannonia, motivated by “local patriotism.” As a result of his

---

172 Kirsch 1917.
174 Kirsch 1917, p. 73: “Eine endgültige Lösung ist somit nicht gefunden worden. Dies möge die hier gebotene Untersuchung recht fertigen, die einen neuen Lösungsvorschlag bringt, der, wenn er als richtig erwiesen werden kann, alle Schwierigkeiten beseitigt.”
175 Kirsch 1918, p. 92: “Denn 1. verdient sie nicht als echte geschichtliche Quelle gewertet zu werden, und 2. kann sie ebensogut in Rom als in Pannonien entstanden sein und somit in die Reihe der römischen Legenden hineingestellt werden.”
176 Kirsch cites Delehaye’s characterization of Roman martyr legends as “religious dramas” in which, without respect for correct place or time, additional persons and incidents are incorporated for the overall effect: Kirsch 1918, p. 87.
177 Kirsch 1918, p. 92: “Aber im übrigen bietet sie nicht mehr als die legendarischen Martyrakten im allgemeinen enthalten und ist auch von naiven Episoden dieser Legenden nicht frei.”
178 Kirsch 1918, p. 96: “es ist eine Art Lokalpatriotismus, der darin zum Ausdruck gelangt.”
Pannonian background, this hagiographer was able to give local flavor to the legend; he also had Rufinus’s *Church History* available to him, from which he extracted the name of Bishop Cyril of Antioch and inserted it into the legend.

At the same time, Kirsch agrees with previous assessments of the ‘Roman’ part of the *passio* as inauthentic, both because of its confused chronology and its absurdity, especially the idea that the names of Roman Christian officials would have been forgotten and then commemorated under the names of foreign saints. Kirsch argues that the medieval hagiographer added this final twist to the legend to justify why Pannonian saints were venerated in Rome. In sum, Kirsch asserts: “The whole text is the work of the same hagiographer; both accounts [the Pannonian and the Roman] are pure invention – with the exception naturally of the four authentic historical martyrs on the via Labicana.” These four ‘authentic’ martyrs are the four Roman saints, Claudius, Nicostratus, Sempronianus and Castor(ius), attested by the *Depositio Martyrum*, but about whom little more can be said with certainty.

**Locating the Pannonian Saints**

Given the circumstances, it is unsurprising that Delehaye could not immediately respond to Kirsch. More puzzling is that Kirsch’s theory is not mentioned by Jacques Zeiller (1884-1962), who like Kirsch was a professor at the University of Fribourg. In 1918 Zeiller, a historian of early Christianity who had previously worked on early Christianity in Dalmatia, published his *Les origines chrétiennes dans les provinces dannubiennes de l’Empire romain*, a work dedicated to Duchesne.

Part I, on the spread of Christianity to the region, briefly addresses the Quattro Coronati. Zeiller’s discussion is based on the scholarship of Delehaye, Duchesne and Franchi De’ Cavalieri. As regards the Pannonian part of the text, Zeiller’s conclusions align most closely with Delehaye; Zeiller regards the Panno-
nian *passio* as an authentic core that provides a historically reliable source for the Christianization of Pannonia. He builds on Delehaye’s theory in two respects.

Firstly, Zeiller attempts more precisely to correlate the *passio*’s topographical indications with his first-hand observations in the Fruška Gora. Zeiller notes that in all his travels he was unable to find the green porphyry that Karajan had claimed was present in these hills. Nevertheless, he localizes the *passio* in Kipovno, suggesting that the reddish limestone of this hill led to the belief, shared by the *passio*’s author, that porphyry was quarried in the region. This red stone also explains the hill’s ancient name, *mons igneus*, for in the setting sun the mountain appears ablaze.

Secondly, in terms of explaining the veneration of these Pannonian saints in Rome, Zeiller follows Duchesne’s suggestion that members of the imperial household must have been involved. He further imagines that the Pannonian stonemasons may well have accompanied the marble they quarried to Rome and brought with them the cult (and *passio*) of the saints. Imperial patronage then prompted the veneration of the saints within the walls. What clinches the argument, for Zeiller, is that the Quattro Coronati were buried on the via Labicana, near the mausoleum of Helena: further proof that members of the Constantinian dynasty, who themselves had Pannonian origins, must have been involved in the cult. Pannonia, so Zeiller argues, was, from a 4th-century Roman perspective, less distant and inconsequential than previous scholars had imagined.

**A Delayed Response**

During the war, Delehaye had been unable to respond. When Belgium had been invaded by the Germans, Delehaye had been

---

183 Zeiller 1918, pp. 95-96.

184 Zeiller 1918, p. 96: “Le calcaire rougeâtre de Kipovno, dont la teinte expliquerait aussi l’expression de *metallo porphyretico*, car il n’y a pas de porphyre proprement dit dans la région, aurait fort bien mérité à ce piton, qui s’embrase curieusement au soleil couchant, le nom d’*igneus*.” Zeiller also discusses possible remains of a pagan temple in the area.

185 Zeiller 1918, p. 99: “Peut-être aussi aurait-on à tenir compte du rôle joué par des artisans de même profession qu’eux carriers et tailleurs de pierre au service de l’État, dont les déplacements n’étaient pas rares et dont quelques-uns accompagnèrent vraisemblablement jusqu’à Rome des matériaux extraits des carrières pannoniennes et destinés à des monuments romains.”

186 Zeiller 1918, p. 100: “L’emplacement est à remarquer, parce qu’il pourrait bien être en connexion avec le fait que le culte des martyrs de la Fruška-Gora se serait implanté à Rome sous l’influence des princes de la famille flavienne, originaire d’Illyrie et accoutumée à la résidence à Sirmium.”
arrested and sentenced to hard labor for his support of the Belgian resistance movement. In the preface to his *Les passions des martyrs et les genres littéraires*, published in 1921, Delehaye refers to the exceptional circumstances that had prevented the work from appearing as he had originally intended in 1917.187

*Les passions des martyrs* offers its readers an introduction to the world of hagiographical texts. Delehaye includes a brief discussion of the Quattro Coronati in his chapter on “mixed genres”: hagiographical texts that evade easy classification.188 Delehaye cites Kirsch’s 1917 article as the most recent work to have appeared on the subject, but he does not engage with Kirsch’s arguments.189 In general Delehaye’s discussion of the Quattro Coronati recapitulates his earlier views, but framed as an aid to the novice wishing to learn how to analyze hagiographical texts.

Delehaye describes the many ingenious solutions that previous scholars have proposed to make sense of the *passio*, many of which entailed “violent methods” for resolving its contradictions, such as replacing the emperor Diocletian with a different emperor or somehow eliminating Cyril of Antioch from the story.190 Delehaye contrasts these heavy handed textual interventions with his simple solution of separating the Pannonian and the Roman parts of the *passio* and eliminating the latter, “which appears like a foreign body introduced into an organism and paralyzing all its movements.”191 Once the Roman part is excised, the Pannonian text can be appreciated as a valuable historical document, not on par with the acts of Polycarp, to be sure, or other texts properly deserving the designation “acts,” but a “detailed history” written by a sincere contemporary.192

A few years thereafter Delehaye offered a brief summary and response to Kirsch’s article in the 1924 *Analecta Bollandiana*’s presentation of recent hagiographical publications.193 Delehaye reminds

---

187 Delehaye 1921.
188 Delehaye 1921, pp. 328-344.
189 Delehaye 1921, p. 329 n. 2.
190 Delehaye 1921, p. 335: “D’autres hypothèses inégalement ingénieuses sont possibles, et on en a imaginé un grand nombre qui toutes pèchent par quelque endroit”; p. 336: “Si au moins on parvenait, par ces moyens violents à lever les contradictions. Mais il en reste dans toutes les hypothèses, et on conçoit, après cela, les hésitations...”
191 Delehaye 1921, p. 337: “Mais si l’on vient à faire abstraction de la passion romaine, les contradictions s’évanouissent. Elle apparaît donc comme un corps étranger introduit dans un organisme et paralysant tous ses mouvements.”
192 Delehaye 1921, p. 343: “On aura constaté que nous n’avons pas ici des actes proprement dits, mais l’histoire détaillée de cinq artisans chrétiens.”
193 Delehaye 1924.
his readers how, in order to solve the intricate difficulties of the 
passio, he had distinguished between the Pannonian and Roman 
passiones and had argued that the Roman part was a later invention. 
Delehaye emphasizes that he has not changed his earlier opinion 
on the matter and that his work on other hagiographical legends 
likewise supports his theory that “such violent interventions were 
not repugnant to hagiographers.”194 Nonetheless, he agrees with 
Kirsch that the cult of the Quattro Coronati still presents enigmas. 

Delehaye then summarizes Kirsch’s solution, namely that 
the Pannonian saints never existed and that a fantastical legend 
inventing them was composed in Rome.195 For Delehaye, whether 
or not such a hypothesis solves all the problems is irrelevant. 
Delehaye’s underlying objection is that such a theory does not 
take into account the incontestable historical core contained in 
the Pannonian legend, which even later more literary re-workings 
cannot obscure.196 Furthermore, such a theory fails to make sense 
of the Roman passio. The author of the Pannonian text does not 
write in a polished style, but his narrative is coherent and clear. 
If, as Kirsch argued, this same hagiographer had written the entire 
text, he would have been free to imagine any sort of scenario he 
wished to explain why the Pannonian martyrs were venerated in 
Rome, without having recourse to such an “incoherent fiction full 
of implausibilities.”197 Thus, concludes Delehaye, it is inconceiv-
able that the Roman passio was written by the same author who 
wrote the Pannonian part.

That same year Kirsch published a careful study of the Depos-
sitio Martyrum and Jerome’s Martyrology.198 His comparison of 
these two sources leads him to conclude that a group of four saints

194 Delehaye 1924, p. 175: “Nous n’avons pas changé d’avis sur ce point, et ce que nous avons constaté en étudiant les manuscrits des Passions de S. Félix (Anal. Boll., XXXIX, 241-76) et de S. Marcel (Anal. Boll., XLI, 257-87) montre une fois de plus que les procédés violents ne répugnent pas aux hagiographes.”

195 Delehaye 1924, p. 175: “Cela ne veut pas dire qu’il ne reste plus aucune obscurité. Mgr Kirsch a pensé qu’il subsiste plus d’une, et en cela il est de notre avis. La solution qu’il propose est beaucoup plus radicale que la nôtre.”

196 Delehaye 1924, p. 176: “Je ne veux pas rechercher ici si pareille hypothèse dissipe définitivement toutes les difficultés. Il est certain qu’elle ne tient aucun compte de la donnée fondamentale de la pièce, ni de l’élément historique qu’elle renferme incontestablement et que les développements d’un caractère plutôt littéraire ne sauraient obscurcir.”

197 Delehaye 1924, p. 176: “Il [Porphyrius] était assez habile, ayant d’ailleurs toute liberté d’imaginer des épisodes, pour faire revenir de Pannonie, où il les avait menés, les quatre martyrs, et placer à Rome le dernier acte du drame, sans recourir à une fiction incohérente et pleine d’in vraisemblances. La Passion Romaine n’est donc pas de lui.”

198 Kirsch 1924, pp. 34-38.
were originally venerated in the catacombs “in comitatum” (on the via Labicana) on November 9th; then, he argues, in the beginning of the 5th century a feast for these saints was instituted in the titular church on the Caelian hill on November 8th (although pilgrims also continued to visit the catacombs). For the later development of the cult of these Roman saints Kirsch references, in a footnote, the problem of the ‘Quattro Coronati’ and his own article on the subject, suggesting that he had not modified his earlier opinion of the passio as a fanciful legend that provided no solid historical evidence for the saints buried on the via Labicana and venerated on the Caelian Hill.

In 1931, in his commentary on the new edition of Jerome’s Martyrology, Delehaye briefly mentions the problem of the Quattro Coronati. He references his own edition and the scholarship by Franchi De’ Cavalieri, Duchesne, as well as Kirsch, but remarks, “I believe that it is impossible to clear the thick clouds that obscure this whole matter… Let someone else come forth who can dispel these shadows.”

Topographical Considerations

In 1932 an earlier theory (first proposed by Schneider in 1883) resurfaced, namely that the passio did not take place in Pannonia, but rather in the porphyry quarries in Egypt. Its new proponent was the classical archeologist Richard Delbrück (1875-1957) in his detailed study of ancient porphyry. Delbrück argues that the passio is “the most important source for conditions at the porphyry quarries during the Diocletianic period.” According to him, since the only quarry where porphyry was mined was the one located in Egypt, the passio must take place there. Furthermore, the name Mons igneus corresponds well to this site in Egypt, still referred to, in Arabic, as “Djebel Duchan,” “smoking mountain.” This theory also makes sense of Cyril of Antioch’s presence at the quarries.

Based on this conclusion, Delbrück mines the passio as a historical source for porphyry quarrying during the Diocletianic period. From its account he infers that the imperial administration

199 Delehaye 1931, p. 591: “De Passione SS. Simproniani Claudii, Nicostrati, Castorii et Simplicii de eorum veneratione Romae, in monte Caelio, id est in titulo Quattuor Coronatorum et via Labicana, […] qua densas quibus tota res obvolvitur nebulas dissipatas nequaquam confidimus… Exoriatur aliquis qui has tenebras tandem dispellat.”

200 Delbrück 1932, pp. XVIII-XIX (citing the relevant passages), XXVII (citing bibliography), 2, 10, 24, 172-173.

201 Delbrück 1932, p. 2: “Die wichtigste Quelle für die Verhältnisse am Porphyryberg ist die in diocletianischer Zeit abgefaßte Passio quattuor coronatorum.”
sent artists directly to the quarries (in this case from the imperial court in Pannonia). He also includes the basins (concae and lacus) mentioned in the passio among his detailed catalogue of ancient porphyry pieces.\textsuperscript{202}

At the same time, in Rome, archeologists had been searching for evidence of the Quattro Coronati in the catacombs. Based on the passio and the early medieval itineraries of Rome, archeologists reasoned that these saints must have been buried on the via Labicana at the cemetery ad duas Lauros, also known as the catacomb of SS. Pietro e Marcellino.\textsuperscript{203} The most probable candidate seemed to be a cubicule off a long hall reached by its own staircase that showed evidence of Christian veneration. In his 1933 \textit{Die römischen Katakomben}, the archeologist Paul Styger (1887-1939) indicated the cubicule in question, but emphasized that: “Their story alone, as it has come to us through late acts, seems a tangle of confusions and misunderstandings. Before this hagiographical nut is cracked, one cannot, on the basis of the legend, set about identifying monuments.”\textsuperscript{204} Nevertheless, based on the relative stratigraphy of the catacombs and the style of frescoes, Styger argued that this hallway was unlikely to date from earlier than the second half of the 4th century. Thus, Styger concluded, the relics of the Quattro Coronati had probably been translated here at a later point in time (rather than buried in the catacombs immediately after their martyrdom).\textsuperscript{205}

The same year, Kirsch published an article regarding the same section of the catacombs but disagreeing with Styger’s interpretation.\textsuperscript{206} Kirsch distinguishes between two questions (which Styger had conflated): firstly, whether there is evidence for the veneration of Christian martyrs in these rooms; secondly, the identity of the martyrs buried here. As for the first question, Kirsch is confident that the room demonstrates all the necessary criteria to prove the presence of tombs of Christian martyrs venerated here. As for the second, he emphasizes that there is not sufficient evidence to answer it conclusively. Nonetheless, Kirsch holds that it is highly

\textsuperscript{202} Delbrück 1932, pp. 172-173.
\textsuperscript{203} For example, De Rossi 1864-1877, I, pp. 178-179.
\textsuperscript{204} Styger 1933, pp 201-202, here p. 201: “Mann nimmt an, daß hier die berühmten Quattuor Coronati ruhten, welche in der diokletianischen Verfolgung ihren Christenglauben mit dem Blute besiegelten. Allein ihre Geschichte, wie sie durch späte Akten auf uns gekommen ist, scheint ein Wirrwarr von Verwechslungen und Mißverständnissen zu sein. Bevor diese hagiographische Nuß geknackt ist, geht es nicht an, auf Grund der Legende Monumente zu bestimmen.”
\textsuperscript{206} Kirsch 1933, pp. 278-285.
unlikely that had the relics of the Quattro Coronati been brought to Rome at some point in the 4th century they would have been deposited in a crypt in the cemeteries (instead of under the altar of their church on the Caelian hill). The “most natural conclusion” is that martyrs of one of the last persecutions, most probably that of Diocletian, were buried in this catacomb immediately after their martyrdom.207

In a brief article published in 1934, Nikola Vulić (1872-1945), a historian at the University of Belgrade, trained in Munich, cast doubt on the specific localization of the passio in the Fruška Gora.208 Vulić begins by emphasizing that many scholars have made recourse to the topography of the passio sanctorum quatuor coronatorum in claiming its authenticity.209 He specifically cites Zeiller on this point, although he refers to, but does not name, the many “Yugoslav historians” who have written on the question.210

Based on his own first-hand observations, however, Vulić concludes that there is very little evidence to support such a thesis.211 There is no evidence for Roman quarrying on the hill of Kipovno (Zeiller’s proposed location). There are no Roman ruins in the area. The wall that was considered to be part of a sanctuary in honor of the Quattro Coronati does not date from the Roman period (nor is there even a popular tradition of such in the area).212 The ruins on the hill of Gradac said to belong to the temple of the Sun erected by Diocletian are more plausibly the remains of a medieval fortress. Furthermore, the writer of the passio has only a vague notion of Pannonia at best.213

207 KIRSCH 1933, p. 281: “La conclusione naturalissima che secondo i criteri fondamentali degli studi topografici e cronologici delle catacombe romane s’imponne come risultato di queste considerazioni è, che nelle cripte in fondo alla lunga galleria furono deposti i resti mortali di martiri di una delle ultime persecuzioni, molto probabilmente della persecuzione di Diocleziano. Questa deposizione fu fatta subito dopo la loro morte gloriosa, non essendovi nessun motivo di assegnarla a un’epoca posteriore.”

208 VULIĆ 1934.

209 VULIĆ 1934, p. 156: “Pour l’authenticité de la Passio SS. IV Coronatorum on a recours à la topographie.”

210 VULIĆ 1934, p. 156 n. 1: “Nous n’avons pas besoin de nommer ici les historiens jougoslaves qui on écrit sur cette question. On trouvera un excellent resumé dans le superbe volume de M. I. ZEILLER....”

211 VULIĆ 1934, p. 156: “Nous avons visité les lieux en question et nous sommes arrivé à la conclusion qu’on y trouve fort peu de ce qui pourrait soutenir la thèse que les lapicides de la Passio moururent en ces parages.”

212 VULIĆ 1934, p. 157: “Pour l’opinion publique, il faut savoir qu’il ne s’agit pas d’une véritable tradition, de ce que dit la population rurale, mais ce sont les gens instruits qui parlent d’un sanctuaire des sculpteurs martyrs.”

213 VULIĆ 1934, p. 157: “Un auteur qui écrit comme cela ne connaissait probablement pas bien les lieux dont il parle.”
In the second half of his article, Vulić switches gears to argue that Simplicius was a later interpolation to the passio. His article concludes with the disclaimer that the problems he has addressed do not cast doubt on the authenticity of the passio itself.214

In 1935 Styger published his Römische Märtyrergräfte.215 Unlike his earlier Die römischen Katakomben, his new publication includes a separate section entitled “Quatuor Coronati.” For Styger proudly proclaims that he has evidence for the veneration of the Quattro Coronati at the catacombs of SS. Pietro e Marcellino.216 He points to a piece of graffiti, “SCE CLE [with an overline]”; this he correlates with the “Clemens” included in the Depositio Martyrum as one of the four saints “in comitatum.” Styger remains convinced that the section of the catacomb in question must date to after the Christian persecutions. According to his scenario, then, the relics of the Pannonian saints were translated to this crypt and venerated here (as attested by the Depositio and the itineraries of Rome): hagiographers are responsible for the rest of the story.217

**Delehaye Weighs in Once More**

Although a few years earlier Delehaye had called on others to propose a new solution to the vexed problem of the Quattro Coronati, he could not refrain from returning to the question once more in 1936, in his Étude sur le légendier romain: les saints de novembre et de décembre.218 More specifically, his discussion is aimed at responding to, and disproving, Kirsch’s theory of a Roman origin for the passio. He does not address Delbrück’s or Vulić’s arguments against the topographical placement of the passio in the Fruska Gora, although he does cite Vulić in support of the theory that Simplicius was a later addition to the passio.219

There is good reason, so Delehaye begins, to omit the saints commonly referred to as the Quattro Coronati from the present volume whose subject is Roman saints commemorated in Novem-

---

214 Vulić 1934, p. 159: “Pour terminer, nous soulignons que nous n’avons pas l’intention de parler dans notre présent mémoire de l’authenticité de la Passio. Cette question n’a aucun rapport avec les problèmes que nous avons voulu traiter ici.”
216 Styger 1935, p. 218: “Nun werden die Tatsachen in der Katakombe auch ein Wort mitzusprechen haben.”
217 Styger 1935, p. 218: “Die Kalendargabe ist gerettet; man braucht die Feier nicht nach Sirmium zu verlegen; Graffito und Itinerarien sind auch in Ordnung, und das übrige geht auf Rechnung der Legendisten.”
218 Delehaye 1936, pp. 64-73.
219 Delehaye 1936, p. 66 n. 2.
number and December. The heroes of the text in question are not Roman, they were not martyred in Rome and the legend was not written in Rome: "But astonishingly, all of this has been recently contested [referring to Kirsch] nearly against the evidence, and it is true that an attempt was made, in ancient times, to give this history a Roman coloring."\textsuperscript{220} Delehaye takes this opportunity to return to the enigma.\textsuperscript{221}

Delehaye's new solution slightly modifies that which he proposed in 1910. Delehaye is keen to preserve the distinction between the Pannonian and Roman passiones: the former a trustworthy source, the latter a terrible disgrace. He now agrees with Duchesne that the Quattro Coronati were initially venerated in Rome on the Caelian Hill, probably on account of imperial support for the cult. Initially the church likely had some sort of secondary relics of the four, original, Pannonian saints (excluding Simplicius); then, at a later point, the whole bodies were brought to Rome and buried on the via Labicana. Finally, at yet another later point in time, the redacted Pannonian passio (with Simplicius added) was rediscovered and the Roman part added to its authentic core in an attempt to make sense of the contradiction between the name of the passio and the number of saints it described.

In 1938, the tenth volume of the \textit{Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche} appeared. Kirsch was responsible for a brief entry regarding the Quattro Coronati ("Vier Gekrönte").\textsuperscript{222} As in his previous publications, Kirsch stresses the authenticity of the four Roman saints recorded in the \textit{Depositio Martyrum}, buried in Rome, "in comitatum," and later also venerated at the titular church on the Caelian Hill. Kirsch, however, also seems to have somewhat softened his critical opinion of the passio, or at any rate the assessment of it that he considered should be offered to the general public. He writes:

> According to a legend, the Quattro Coronati worked as stonemasons in the imperial stone quarries of Pannonia... If this is historical, then not only did their cult come early to Rome, but their bodily remains too were, in the 4th or 5th century, translated to there and buried "ad duas lauros." An addition affixed to the Pannonian passio

\textsuperscript{220} Delehaye 1936, p. 64: "Mais chose étonnante, tout cela a été contesté récemment, presque contre l’évidence, et il est vrai que, dans les temps antiques, une tentative a été faite pour donner à cette histoire une couleur romaine."

\textsuperscript{221} Delehaye 1936, pp. 64-65: "Nous saisissons volontiers cette occasion de revenir sur la question du culte des Quatre Couronnées à Rome et d’indiquer une solution préférable à celle que nous avions d’abord prônée."

\textsuperscript{222} Kirsch 1938.
in Rome awkwardly attempts to make the Quattro Coronati Romans and move their martyrdom to Rome.\textsuperscript{223}

He also comments, “If they who suffered in the Pannonian mines were Romans, then their early veneration and relic translation to Rome would be easily explicable.”\textsuperscript{224} These suggestions are much closer to the theories Delehaye and Duchesne had proposed than the theory Kirsch had initially advocated. Nevertheless, among the entry’s bibliography, he still refers the reader to his earlier publications on the Quattro Coronati.\textsuperscript{225}

**Postwar Scholarship**

When the Second World War broke out in 1939, scholarship on the Quattro Coronati largely ceased. Discussion resumed after the war, especially from the 1960s onwards, in particular with the interventions of eastern European scholars who proposed new or more precise topographical settings for the *passio*.\textsuperscript{226} From a different perspective, literary analysis demonstrated how biblical models and language were put to use in constructing the *passio*; for example the trial scene of the Pannonian martyrs modeled on Christ’s trial under Pontius Pilate, or specific textual borrowings, such as the *mons pinguis* or Nicodemus.\textsuperscript{227} As one of the most novel approaches to the text, we may note in 1961 Karl Demeter’s (1889-1976) proposal that the real ‘Quattro Coronati’ were the Pannonian stonemasons, who were, however, not Christians, but members of a Mithras cult: Christian tradition later borrowed these heroes and made them their own.\textsuperscript{228} Meanwhile, the


\textsuperscript{224} Kirsch 1938, p. 602: “Wenn sie Römer waren, die in Pannoniens Bergwerken litten, dann liebe sich ihre frühe Verehrung u. Reliquienübertragung nach Rom leicht erklären.”

\textsuperscript{225} In turn, A. Amore’s entry for the saints in the 2\textsuperscript{nd} edition of the tenth volume of the *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, summarizes the different theories and concludes that: “Die v. Kirsch vertretene Meinung ist wohl die wahrscheinlichste u. zutreffendste”: Amore 1965b, c. 782. For Amore’s theory, which follows Kirsch 1917, but gives even less credit to the *passio*, see n. 232 below.

\textsuperscript{226} For example, Dezső Simonyi proposed a localization near Pécs (present day Hungary): Simonyi 1960; Pavle Mijović (1914-1996) advocated for Sirmium: Mijović 1966.

\textsuperscript{227} For the trial scene: BERSCHIN 1986, I, pp. 70-71.

\textsuperscript{228} Demeter 1961.
Catholic Church’s 1969 revision of the General Roman Calendar left the feast day of the Quattro Coronati to the discretion of local calendars; the commentary explains that “from a historical standpoint many difficulties are found regarding these martyrs.”

In general, post-war scholarship tends to date the passio, as it survives, to somewhere between the 5th and 7th centuries, although most theories involve earlier traditions of some sort, whether written or oral. The question of where and how the composite legend developed remains disputed. Scholars have continued to reanalyze the evidence, their solutions usually growing in complexity, some concluding that the entire passio was redacted in Rome, others that a Pannonian core was brought to Rome and embellished there, or that the original narrative took place in the porphyry stone quarries in Egypt but that a later Roman intervention moved the scene to Pannonia. Most often scholars choose not to discuss the passio in depth.

**Conclusion**

Where does this historiographical trajectory leave us? As regards the passio sanctorum quatuor coronatorum, we may note certain features of the text that have continued to attract scholarly attention through the centuries: the passio’s localization of the saints in Pannonia; its description of stonemasons laboring away in a quarry; the discrepancy between the number of saints involved and their title ‘Quattro Coronati’; the composite narrative with two sets of saints that moves from Pannonia to Rome; and the explanation that the passio provides for linking these two texts. These particularities explain, in part, the scholarly interest in the

---

229 CALENDARIUM ROMANUM 1969, p. 144: “Memoria Ss. Quattuor Coronatorum, quamvis antiqua, Calendaris particularibus relinquitur; multae difficulitates inventuntur sub respectu historico de istis martyrribus in quorum honorem celeberrima exstat basilica in Coelio.”

230 Cécile Lanéry (1977-) presents as the most plausible hypothesis that a Pannonian passio was redacted in Rome (where the saints were already venerated prior to the arrival of the text): LANÉRY 2010, pp. 290-291 (no. 3).

231 One of the most elaborate scenarios is that proposed in the exhaustive study by Jean Guyon (1945-): GUYON 1975.

232 This theory is developed most thoroughly, to my knowledge by Agostino Amore (1916-1982): AMORE 1965a.

233 Levente Nagy (1975-): NAGY 2010. I am grateful to Levente Nagy for sharing with me an unpublished German translation of this article: “Topographische Probleme der passio IV sanctorum coronatorum.” See also NAGY 2012, with an English summary of his conclusions on pp. 222-225.

text over the past two centuries. From historical evidence in the passio, scholars have hoped to extrapolate answers to a number of larger historical problems: marble quarrying in the late Roman world, Christian attitudes to pagan art, the Christianization of Pannonia, the development of the Roman tituli, and the Roman cult of saints more generally.

The intensity of interest in the text, however, derived not from what can be extrapolated from the text itself, I argue, but from what the passio does not explain. Some of the scholars most familiar with hagiographical legends and the text itself, Wattenbach, De Rossi, and most of all, Delehaye, continued to insist that the passio was different from other hagiographical texts – even as their own methods were applied to the text. Despite the development of ever more precise historical methods, any interpretation of the passio is, by the nature of the limited evidence, conditioned by a subjective feel for the text and the historical imagination of its scholars. Baronio imagines sculptors who see in the absurdity of worshiping the product of their own hands a reason for the rise of Christianity and the decline of Roman art. Tillemont cannot fathom that Christians would have been unable to research the names of recent Roman martyrs soon after their death. Wattenbach believes only a contemporary could have been interested in a text describing the production of marble capitals at the stone quarries (at least until the advent of modern scholarship). Meyer considers it a fact that the medieval mind was unable to distinguish between probability and fact. Franchi De’ Cavalieri finds it inconceivable that 4th-century Romans would have venerated foreign saints inside the walls. For Delehaye it is unimaginable that a Christian hagiographer would invent saints willing to craft a statue of the sun-god. And almost all modern scholars are troubled by how a set of nine saints, five from Pannonia, four from Rome, could have ended up in a single text with the title “Quattro Coronati.”

What we consider to be the realm of plausibility shifts the parameters of the debate. If we imagine a credulous but deeply pious medieval world copying hagiographical texts and carefully documenting relic transfers, or if we imagine conniving medieval hagiographers penning deceptive narratives and inventing relics, the way we frame our questions about the past and the realm of plausible scenarios we entertain will differ significantly. The passio sanctorum quatuor coronatorum is a text that lends itself to creative interpretations; this is precisely the underlying tension of hagiography as history. Imagination is not a precise historical method, and yet no historical reconstruction is complete without it.

Maya Maskarinec
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Amore 1965a = A. Amore, I santi Quattro Coronati, in Antonianum, 40 (1965), pp. 177-243.


Baronio 1586 = C. Baronio (ed.), Martyrologium romanum ad novam Kalendarii rationem et ecclesiasticae historiae veritatem restitutum, Gregorii XIII... iussu editum. Accesserunt notationes atque Tractatio de Martyrologium romano; auctore Caesare Baronio..., Roma 1586.

Baronio 1590 = C. Baronio, Annales ecclesiastici, II, Roma 1590.


Bollandists 1889-1893 = Catalogus codicum hagiographicorum latinorum antiquiorum saeculo XVI qui asservantur in bibliotheca nationali parisiensi, ediderunt hagiographi Bollandiani, Bruxellis 1889-1893.

Bosio 1634 = A. Bosio, Roma sotteranea. Opera postuma, Roma 1634.

Budinger 1858 = M. Budinger, Österreichische Geschichte bis zum Ausgange des dreizehnten Jahrhunderts, Leipzig 1858.

Budinger 1870 = M. Budinger, Chronologische Bemerkungen, in Untersuchungen zur römischen Kaisergeschichte, III (1870), pp. 357-379.


Cohausen, Worner 1876 = A. von Cohausen, E. Worner, Römische Steinbrüche auf dem Felsberg an der Bergstraße in historischer und technischer Beziehung, Darmstadt 1876.

De Rossi 1864-1877 = G. B. De Rossi, La Roma sotterranea cristiana, 3 vols., Roma 1864-1877.

De Rossi 1879 = G. B. De Rossi, I santi Quattro Coronati e la loro chiesa sul Celio, in BACr. Serie Terza, 4.2 (1879), pp. 45-90.


Hunziker 1870 = O. Hunziker, Beiträge zu neueren Arbeiten über Diokletianus, in Untersuchungen zur römischen Kaiser geschichte, III (1870), pp. 3-16.

Ilg 1872 = A. Ilg, Die passio sanctorum quatuor coronatorum, in Mitteilungen der K.K. Central-Commission, 17 (1872), pp. XLVII-LI.


Keim 1865 = T. Keim, Eine christliche Quelle über die erste Regierungszzeit Diocletians, in Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Englisch-Theologische Forschung und Kritik, 2.1 (1865), pp. 3-11.


Kirsch 1918 = J. P. Kirsch, Die römischen Titelkirchen im Altertum, Paderborn 1918.


Marucchi 1914 = O. Marucchi, Resoconto delle adunanze tenute dalla Società per le conferenze d’archeologia cristiana, in NBACr, 20.2 (1914), pp. 79-97.

Memmolo 1757 = D. Memmolo, Della vita, chiesa e reliquie de’ Santi Quattro Coronati, Roma 1757.


Muñoz 1913 = A. Muñoz, La cripta e la tribuna della chiesa dei SS. IIII Coronati. La teca argentea del capo di S. Sebastiano, in StRom, 1 (1913), pp. 197-206.

Muñoz 1914 = A. Muñoz, Il restauro della chiesa e del chiostro dei SS. Quattro Coronati, Roma 1914.


Petrus de Natalibus 1493 = Petrus de Natalibus, Catalogus sanctorum et gestorum eorum, Vicenza 1493.


Schneider 1883 = O. Schneider, Naturwissenschaftliche Beiträge zur Geographie und Kulturgeschichte, Dresden 1883.


MOSANDER 1581 = J. MOSANDER, Tomvs VII. De probatis sanctorum historiis, ... nunc primum opera atque studio F. Iacobi Mosandri Carthusiani collectae & in lucem editae. Quibus subiunctum deinde est valde desideratum hactenus revertiss. D. Adonis Archiepiscopi Treuierensis Martyrologium, nunc primum integre editum, Köln 1581.


VALERI 1900 = A. Valeri, Cenni biografici di Antonio Bosio. Con documenti inediti, Roma 1900.

VULIĆ 1934 = N. VULIĆ, Quelques observations sur la ‘Passio Sanctorum Quattuor Coronatorum,’ in RACr, 11 (1934), pp. 156-159.


WATTENBACH 1858 = W. WATTENBACH, Deutschlands Geschichtsquellen im Mittelalter bis zur Mitte des dreizehnten Jahrhunderts, Berlin 1858.


WATTENBACH 1870 = W. WATTENBACH, Passio Sanctorum Quattuor Coronatorum, in Untersuchungen zur römischen Kaisergeschichte, III (1870), pp. 323-338.


WATTENBACH, BENNDORF, BUDINGER 1870 = W. WATTENBACH, O. BENNDORF, M. BUDINGER, Passio SS. Quattuor Coronatorum mit archäologischen und chronologischen
Bemerkungen, in Untersuchungen zur römischen Kaisergeschichte, III (1870), pp. 323-379.


Riassunto

L’enigmatica passio sanctorum quatuor coronatorum racconta il martirio di cinque scalpellini in Pannonia e, nella parte finale del testo, di quattro cornicullari a Roma. Questo articolo segue la storia degli studi sulla passio, con particolare riguardo per l’interesse che essa suscitò dopo la “scoperta” del testo da parte di Wilhelm Wattenbach nel 1853. Si sottolinea che le difficoltà incontrate dagli studiosi nella valutazione della passio rivelano le tensioni presenti nell’uso di testi agiografici nell’impresa moderna di ricostruire la storia, e la misura in cui l’immaginazione degli studiosi ha formato le loro interpretazioni.

Abstract

The enigmatic passio sanctorum quatuor coronatorum relates the martyrdom of five stonemasons in Pannonia and, in a final section of the text, four military adjutants in Rome. This article traces the reception history of the passio, focusing on the particular interest it elicited following Wilhelm Wattenbach’s ‘discovery’ of the text in 1853. It argues that the difficulties faced by scholars in evaluating the passio demonstrate the tensions inherent in using hagiographical texts for the modern enterprise of writing history, and the degree to which scholars’ imagination has shaped their interpretations.