“With the downfall of the Gothic kingdom, the Italy and Rome of antiquity begins to disintegrate.” Thus Gregorovius opens the third book of his *History of Rome in the Middle Ages* (first published 1859–1872), “From the Beginning of the Rule of the Exarchs to the Beginning of the Eighth Century.” According to Gregorovius, this was a period of cultural stagnation, as the city was neglected by its overlords, the emperors in Constantinople. He writes, “The ancient capital of the Roman Empire was already entirely abandoned. The Greek emperors, occupied by the migrations of the Slav tribes on the banks of the Danube and by the Persians in the East, and weakened by revolutions at home, left Italy to her fate.” With these words Gregorovius raises the question of Rome’s exceptionalism. Was this a city that, already from the late sixth century onward, was disconnected from the Mediterranean, was left to its own resources, and so developed its own independent identity? This question is pivotal both for understanding the trajectory of the late antique and medieval Mediterranean and for writing the history of Rome more generally. How far back in time can we trace today the sense of distance that separates Rome from Alexandria? Was Rome ever “a firm standpoint and lofty watchtower,” as Gregorovius would have it, “whence [the historian] can survey the movements of the medieval world”?  

Many scholars have challenged Gregorovius’s characterization of Rome in the period 554 to 751, between Justinian’s promulgation of the Pragmatic Sanction, which marked the official resumption of imperial authority in Rome after the Gothic Wars, and the fall of the exarchate of Ravenna, which marked an end to “Byzantine” rule in northern Italy. Yet whether the history of late-sixth- to mid-eighth-century Rome is part of Byzantine history and how “Byzantine” rule in Italy after Justinian differed from earlier centuries of “Roman” rule in Italy remains the subject of debate.

For example, in a recent study focusing on the late-seventh- and early-eighth-century “eastern” or “Greek” popes (a series of popes described by their biographers as Sicilian, Greek [Græcus], or Syrian “by nationality [natione]”), Thomas Noble concludes, “In the end, therefore, I do not think it is right to speak of a Byzantine period in Italian history. . . . In my

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view, a regime that cannot achieve allegiance even by coercion or persuasion cannot be said to rule.” His argument is twofold. He first demonstrates that the number of incidents on record in which “Byzantines” may be said to have exercised “effective power or authority in Italy” is minimal. He then convincingly shows that the Greek popes were neither “sympathetic to Byzantium,” nor regarded by contemporaries as so ethnically (or culturally) “Greek” as to fail to be Roman. These findings dovetail with recent work by Clemens Gantner, who has shown that in Roman papal sources the term “Greek” emerged as a pejorative label distinct from “Roman” only in the mid- to late eighth century. Prior to then, being a “Roman Greek” posed no contradiction (although it was also possible to be a non-Roman “Greek”).

Meanwhile, archeologists, especially Robert Coates-Stephens, have demonstrated that in this “dark age” there was on the ground significant building activity, including much that may be attributed to the “Byzantine” presence—much more than Richard Krautheimer’s authoritative assessment of the period had previously concluded. Given the paucity of literary sources that bespeak “Byzantine” construction, Coates-Stephens has cleverly turned to omissions, arguing that the absence from the Liber Pontificalis (a source usually so eager to maximize papal activity) of a foundation notice for a church is an indication that a non-papal donor (such as a member of the Byzantine administration or other elite) might have been responsible for establishing the church. He concludes that the “conceptual importance of Rome in the Byzantine mind” was in fact reflected in the city, particularly on the forum Romanum.

This article contributes to an understanding of what, if anything, was “Byzantine” about seventh/eighth-century Rome and what changed thereafter. At stake here is disentangling our perception of early medieval Rome from the later medieval (and modern) anachronistic historiography of Rome as the seat of a powerful papacy, culturally and dogmatically separated from the eastern Mediterranean. Unlike Noble or Coates-Stephens, I do not seek to do such disentangling through the lens of the papal or “Byzantine” administration. Rather, I examine a particular pair of “Greek” saints, Cyrus and John, whose repackaging in Rome, by Greek- and Latin-speaking elites, may be observed in texts and frescoes from the seventh–thirteenth centuries. Like Coates-Stephens, I argue that there was more “Byzantine” influence in seventh/eighth-century Rome than is immediately apparent; like Noble, I argue that this was not “Byzantine,” “Greek,” or “eastern” in the sense of being foreign to Rome. My contention is that seventh/eighth-century Rome was unique, but not exceptional: the city had its own particular history and its own distinctive physical fabric, but it remained a resolutely Mediterranean city. Its urban identity was flexible enough to include individuals, saints, and cultural practices from the Eastern Mediterranean. The later vicissitudes of Cyrus and John’s cult through the 13th century, however, point to a shift from a mobile, bilingual Mediterranean elite

5 Ibid., 80.
6 Ibid., 82.
10 This debate has also been lively with respect to the art-historical evidence and the Roman liturgy; for discussion of the latter, see most recently J. F. Romano, Liturgy and Society in Early Medieval Rome (Farnham, 2014); most discussion of early medieval Roman art has focused on S. Maria Antiqua, see esp. n. 73.
11 Much of the evidence was first collected by P. Sinthern, “Der römische Abborcus in Geschichte, Legende und Kunst,” RQ 22 (1908): 196–239.
to a resolutely Latin elite that viewed its “Byzantine,” “Greek” cultural heritage as foreign and in need of naturalization. What we see taking shape is the idea of Rome as a “watchtower,” a city isolated from the movements of the world around it. This image, even for early medieval Rome, remained difficult to dislodge.

The late antique cult of Sts. Cyrus and John was based at the sanctuary of Menouthis outside Alexandria. There, the saints acquired a web of therapeutic, universalizing, anti-pagan, and orthodox connotations, which, through the hagiographic dossier of Sophronius (d. ca. 638), would form the basis of their cult in Rome. The first section of this paper provides an overview of Sophronius’s profile of the saints, focusing on his presentation of Cyrus and John as saints for all of Christendom. This profile, I show, is a Mediterranean perspective that includes, as especially venerable, the city of Rome.

The second section describes how inhabitants of Rome participated in, but also modified, the cult of Cyrus and John from the late seventh century onward. Excerpts from Sophronius’s hagiographic dossier were translated from Greek into Latin—a translation project that testifies to a Roman elite comfortable with Cyrus and John’s Sophronian profile, but also desirous of greater Roman ecclesiastical oversight of the saints’ cult. Similarly, frescoes that were added to the church of S. Maria Antiqua on the forum Romanum indicate an elite in Rome who took part in Cyrus and John’s healing cult as it had developed at Menouthis, but with a Roman twist, namely, a preference for Cyrus over John. Moreover, there is evidence to suggest that, as in Menouthis, relics played a role in the saints’ Roman cult. The third and final section examines two projects that aimed to make the cult of Cyrus and John more intelligible and palatable to Latin audiences in a city increasingly disconnected from the Mediterranean world. The projects are Anastasius Bibliothecarius’s late-ninth-century compilation and translation of hagiographic texts related to the saints, including a much simplified passio, and, most dramatically, an anonymous imaginative translatio (which developed prior to the thirteenth century) that claimed the saints for Rome.

1. Sophronius and the Cult of Cyrus and John at Menouthis

In the early seventh century, Sophronius, who eventually became patriarch of Jerusalem (from 634 to his death in ca. 638), produced an extensive hagiographic dossier (a preface, encomium, and miracle collection) that furnished Cyrus and John with a web of therapeutic, theological, and ideological significations which would accompany the saints throughout the subsequent centuries as they established themselves in Rome.12 Significant, from the perspective of their later Roman reception, was the degree to which Sophronius’s profile of Cyrus and John presented the saints as relevant for Rome.

**Alexandrian Healing Saints**

The cult of Cyrus and John—a monk and an ex-soldier martyred under Diocletian—was based at a sanctuary in Menouthis, outside of Alexandria, a thriving Mediterranean port city, and an intellectual and theological powerhouse throughout late antiquity.13 Alexandria, as a wealthy administrative center with a forceful tradition of monasticism, was among the Byzantine Empire’s foremost, but also, especially from a Constantinopolitan perspective, problematic, ecclesiastical sees. At the turn of the seventh century this was a city—and a religious topography—contested between those who endorsed the Council of Chalcedon in 451, and the non-Chalcedonian Miaphysite (pejoratively termed “Monophysite”) majority, both of whom regarded themselves as the true heirs of Cyril, patriarch


of Alexandria (d. 444). These rival claims, which stemmed from differences between Cyril’s earlier and later formulations of Christ’s nature, proved stubbornly intractable.14

Sophronius’s presentation of the cult of Cyrus and John was shaped by Alexandria’s distinctive Christian history. According to the tradition endorsed by Sophronius it was Cyril of Alexandria who had first established the sanctuary of Cyrus and John in the early fifth century to provide, physically and spiritually, for his congregation.15 Surviving archaeological and textual evidence from the shrine itself is limited, and even the texts attributed to Cyril are preserved only in the Sophronian dossier, so that it is difficult to corroborate Sophronius’s portrait of the saints’ cult.16 However, as the Sophronian dossier would serve as the basis for the saints’ textual reception in Rome, we can confidently read his hagiographic dossier as reflecting the pedigree with which Cyrus and John came to Rome.

Sophronius was a teacher of rhetoric in Damascus who became a monk after visiting Egypt. In the last years of his life he became patriarch of Jerusalem and negotiated the surrender of Jerusalem to the Arabs in 638 shortly before his death.17 Before he settled in Jerusalem, Sophronius had traveled widely, visiting monastic centers and Christian holy sites in Egypt, Palestine, and Rome. As he records in the preface to his miracle collection, Sophronius, attracted by the saints’ healing reputation, visited the sanctuary of Cyrus and John on account of his eye problems. Once there, he was so impressed by the saints’ many miracles that he sought out further information about their cult but could find nothing except three short sermons by Cyril of Alexandria.18 Incensed that pagans should have composed books in honor of their demons while such athletes for God went unrecognized, Sophronius vowed to fill the textual gap by commemorating the saints. The result, written ca. 610–20, was a weighty text that included a description of the saints’ martyrdom, Cyril’s translation of their relics to Menouthis, and seventy of the saints’ miracles.

The stated aim and emphasis of these texts is to render due praise to the saints. Sophronius presents his project as following in the footsteps of Cyril of Alexandria, who, according to Sophronius, had promoted Cyrus and John as a means of eradicating a popular healing shrine in Menouthis dedicated to Isis. As Cyril had sought to suppress pagan practices, so too Sophronius presents his Christian dossier as countering the pagan textual heritage. Christian praise of the saints is to replace pagan praise of demons.

Additionally, however, Sophronius’s portrayal of Cyrus and John registered his own (evolving and gradually hardening) theological position in the ongoing Christological controversy, namely, a claim to adhere strictly to the Council of Chalcedon, which taught that Christ had two coexisting natures, divine and human.19 (This would eventually culminate in Sophronius’s insistence on rejecting Monotheletism and Monoenergism as deviations from the tenets of Chalcedon.) Theological explication rarely takes center stage in his texts regarding Cyrus and John, yet nonetheless his hagiographic dossier firmly situates them in the Chalcedonian camp.20

14 In a letter to John of Antioch in 433, Cyril accepted the formula that Christ was “of two natures,” but later he preferred to say that Christ was “out of two natures”; P. T. R. Gray, “The Legacy of Chalcedon,” in The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian, ed. M. Maas (Cambridge, 2005), 215–18 at 219.

15 Regarding Sophronius and the cult of Cyrus and John, see especially P. Booth, Crisis of Empire: Doctrine and Dissent at the End of Late Antiquity, Transformation of the Classical Heritage 51 (Berkeley, 2011), 44–89.


20 An exception is miracle no. 39, which stresses how the saints cure only those who follow Chalcedonian Christology.
Sophronius’s encomium celebrates Cyrus and John in Chalcedonian-Christological terms as an unlikely “pair [ἐνυπόριδος]” whose union in life and death indicates the remarkable power of God to combine opposites.21 Cyrus had been a monk, whereas John had been a soldier. These, as Sophronius describes in depth, are antithetical lifestyles. A monk is a peace-loving desert-dweller who dedicates himself to the poor and extends his hands for supplication, whereas a soldier is a belligerent city-dweller who bears arms and steals goods that are not his own in the service of a tyrant.22 In short, as with Christ himself, so too with the pairing of Cyrus and John, God’s power had united the terrestrial and celestial.

Sophronius lavishes effusive praise on the saints but provides little concrete information about their lives.23 He describes how in the reign of the emperor Diocletian, Syrianus, the governor of Alexandria, seized a group of three young virgins and their mother in Canope (by Alexandria). Hearing of their fate, Cyrus and John went to encourage and support the women.24 The women and Cyrus and John underwent a lengthy trial and numerous tortures before they were martyred. Local Christians then hid the martyrs in the church of St. Mark, men and women separately.25

The saints remained there until an angel exhorted the bishop Cyril to translate Cyrus to Menouthis. However, when Cyril opened the tomb, he found both saints, their bodies indistinguishable, and decided to translate both, “reckoning wisely that the divine command had made known both by the name of one, on account of the unanimity and concord of both, and that it was not right to divide after death those whom neither their way of life, nor place, nor burial, nor time, nor suffering divided.”26 Through their life and death together, the saints had become indivisible.

Once brought to Menouthis, the saints immediately began to exercise their healing powers. The saints chased out the demons and undertook a “spoliation [σκύλευσις]” of their “possessions [τῶν ὑπαρχόντων],” that is, the men and women who had supplicated the demons.27 The saints began to cure physically and spiritually the crowds who had once prayed to Isis, thus eradicating pagan belief. Thereupon the pagan temple was destroyed and replaced by a church for the saints. Since then, Sophronius asserts, the saints have continued to perform miracles, curing those suffering from different ailments: the lame, the blind, those possessed by demons, but “most of all those suffering from mortification of the soul.”28 As Sophronius takes care to demonstrate in his miracle collection, patients were required to purify themselves (of misguided beliefs or moral failings) in order to have their bodily ailments cured.29 Thus, as Booth has argued, the saints offer a model of saintly intercession, salvation as achievable through “the adoption of ascetic virtue,” a model that reflects the monastic ideals Sophronius embraced.30

To summarize, Sophronius’s hagiographic dossier presents a multifaceted portrait of Cyrus and John. They are physician-saints for body and soul but also serve as guides for personal moral improvement. The saints willingly dispense cures for physical ailments, free of charge, to men and women, whatever their origins or social status, provided that their patients first cleanse themselves of any spiritual ills. At the same time the saints, in their life and death, act as witnesses to Chalcedonian orthodoxy. They are a pair of opposites who prove God’s ability to achieve the impossible.

John, a Pilgrim from Rome to Menouthis

Sophronius situates Sts. Cyrus and John firmly at their shrine in Menouthis. Yet his miracle collection is eager to demonstrate their universal Christian significance. To do so the collection includes seventy miracles, all of

21 Sophronius, Encomium, 10, ed. Bringel, 30–32.
23 As I discuss below (with reference to Anastasius Bibliothecarius’s translation project), a later Greek passio attributed to Sophronius (but certainly of later date) describes Cyrus and John as practicing physicians already during their life. Sophronius’s account provides no indication that he was familiar with this tradition.
24 Sophronius, Encomium, 18–19, ed. Bringel, 42–45.
26 Sophronius, Encomium, 27, ed. Bringel, 60: “καὶ σοφὰς λογισάμενος ὡς ἀμφότερος τὸ ἱελέκτον πρόσταγμα τῆς ἐνός προσηγορίας, διὰ τὴν ἀμφότερων ομοιοίαν τε καὶ ὁμοφροσύνην ἐμήνυσεν, καὶ ὡς οὐ δέον διελεῖν μετὰ θάνατον οὓς οὐ τρόπος, οὐ τόπος, οὐ τάφος, οὐ χρόνος, οὐ πάθος διέλυσεν.”
29 Gascou, Sophrone de Jérusalem (n. 12 above), 19, proposes that the miracles may be read as a “panorama des erreurs religieuses des temps.” These include monophysite sects, pagans, those hostile to the cult of martyrs, and many others.
30 Booth, “Saints and Soteriology,” 55.
which Sophronius assures his readers he saw himself or heard recounted by eyewitnesses. In particular, the selection and arrangement of miracles showcases Cyrus and John’s geographic reach. Their beneficence radiates out “to the very ends of the earth,” including Rome.  

As Sophronius explains in the preface, his miracle collection is structured according to the origins of the individuals cured by Cyrus and John. The first thirty-five miracles tell of Alexandrians, the subsequent fifteen miracles feature Egyptians and Libyans, while the last twenty miracles report on foreigners (ἐπὶ τοῖς ὑπερέχουσι, including pilgrims from Syria, Palestine, the Greek islands, Asia Minor, Constantinople, and one from Rome.  

In his prelude to this third part, Sophronius entreats foreigners not to feel insulted on account of their placement at the end of his text. He acknowledges the difficulty they must have had traveling to the shrine and the piety that this entailed, offering as justification for his arrangement that he did not want their miracles to overshadow the rest by recounting them first.  

Furthermore, Sophronius reminds his readers that the first will be last and the last will be first, thus establishing an inverse hierarchy of his text, humbly reinforced by the placement of his own cure as the final miracle of the collection.  

The protagonist of the penultimate miracle, a pilgrim from Rome named John, is the sole westerner included in Sophronius’s collection. Like many of Sophronius’s miracles, the story of the pilgrim John revolves around the inability of worldly doctors to accomplish a cure. John the Roman sought out medical help for his weak eyes. Though treatment by expensive physicians rendered him completely blind, he still sought their assistance. Finally, when he had spent the last of his money, the doctors, hitherto eager to treat him, informed him that his blindness was incurable.  

John was forced to seek free medical care. Since he had heard rumors of Cyrus and John’s miraculous abilities, the blind pilgrim traveled across the Mediterranean to their shrine outside of Alexandria. There, in an impressive act of ascetic renunciation, he vowed not to enter the saints’ sanctuary until cured. Accordingly, he spent the next eight years braving the elements outside the door of their shrine. At long last the saints appeared to him and through their touch cured his blindness. Although it was the middle of the night, John the Roman awoke and, before finally entering the church, took a piece of red ocher that was near at hand and wrote, with pride, on the wall next to the door: “I, John, from the great city of Rome, although blind for eight years, waited and recovered my sight here through the power of Cyrus and John.”  

This graffito, Sophronius tells us, remained as a testimony to John’s cure. Pilgrims frequently recorded their presence at the shrines they visited, as attested, for example, by the signatures of individuals that abound in the Roman catacombs, but their messages are more laconic, usually recording only an individual’s name, title, an expression of humility, or perhaps a brief invocation for assistance. John the Roman appears unusual in so extensively describing his origins and the circumstances surrounding his cure. Alternatively, we might attribute the loquaciousness of the graffito to Sophronius himself.  

John’s cure is remarkable on account of his multi-year wait and the many hardships he experienced in the process. For Sophronius, however, what makes the miracle impressive is John’s Roman identity. In introducing John, he underscores the pilgrim’s origins and the implications of his cure for Rome:  

He was a Roman—not being from a city subject to the Romans [i.e., the Roman/Byzantine Empire]—but rather having as his fatherland and city Rome herself, who first ruled over them. For Rome truly wished to add this too to

31 Sophronius, Encomium, 33, ed. Bringel, 70, lines 13–14: “… καὶ εἰς αὐτὴ τῆς οἰκουμένης τὰ πέρατα, τὰ περὶ τούτων ἀφίκετο ρήματα.”  
33 Sophronius, Miracles, 51, ed. Fernández Marcos (n. 12 above), 561–62: “Καὶ πρῶτοτυποὶ μὲν οἱ ἑσχατοὶ, ἑσχατοὶ δὲ πρῶτοτυποὶ γίγνονται…”  
34 Sophronius, Miracles, 51, ed. Fernández Marcos, 362: “Καὶ πρῶτοτυποὶ μὲν οἱ ἑσχατοὶ, ἑσχατοὶ δὲ πρῶτοτυποὶ γίγνονται…”  
35 Sophronius, Miracles, 69, ed. Fernández Marcos, 393: “Εγὼ Ιωάννης, πόλεως τῆς μεγίστης Ρώμης δραμόνεις, τοιούτω χρόνως γενόμενος, ἐνθάδε διὰ τῶν ἁγίων Κύρου καὶ Ιωάννου δυνάμεως προσκαρτερήσας ἀνέβλεπα.”
Rome is presented as an eager consumer of sanctity. Not content with its imperial past, the city now seeks to be foremost in heaven. To do so, it draws on the resources of eastern sanctity. By having one of its own cured by Cyrus and John, the city partakes in the heavenly glory of the saints, adding this to its former temporal glory.

The account of the pilgrim John is our earliest evidence for a desire to evince Roman interest in the cult of Cyrus and John. Its placement in Sophronius's miracle collection is an indication, from Sophronius's perspective, of Rome's status as a Mediterranean city within (but at the furthest extreme of) the saints' healing orbit. Cyrus and John's healing powers, Sophronius tells us, had spread to Rome by rumor (ἐκ φήμης), the subliterary pathways of information, conveyed by the traders and other travelers who disseminated so many saints' cults around the Mediterranean world. At the same time Sophronius singles out Rome as distinctive, a city historically unique and unsurpassed in its material splendor and of continued importance to Christianity.

**Sophronius in Rome**

Sophronius's subsequent life and writings reflect a similarly positive attitude to Rome. Sophronius does not tell us whether the pilgrim John returned to Rome after he was cured by Cyrus and John. According to an anonymous prologue in John Moschus's *Spiritual Meadow*, however, Sophronius himself, subsequent to his own miraculous cure in Alexandria, visited Rome. This prologue, a generally well-informed source, reports that John Moschus, while in Alexandria, heard of the fall of Jerusalem to the Persians (in 614) and "sailed off for the great city of the Romans with his truest disciple Sophronius." In Rome John Moschus attracted a small but devoted following and completed his *Spiritual Meadow* but died soon after. On his deathbed he gave Sophronius his completed work and entreated him to bring his body to Mount Sinai or, should that prove impossible, to the monastery of St. Theodosius by Bethlehem. Soon afterward, Sophronius set out from Rome with John Moschus's body and twelve disciples (imitating the journey of Joseph and his brothers, the preface tells us) and arrived at the monastery of St. Theodosius.

Nothing specific is known about Sophronius's stay in Rome, but we may imagine that an eagerness to see the great city and its martyrs and respect for the bishop of Rome provided the impetus for his visit.

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37 Sophronius, *Miracles*, 69.2, ed. Fernández Marcos, 191–92: "Ῥωμαίος ὑπόστας ἐτύγχανεν, ὁ πόλεως ὑπόφορος Ῥωμαίος ὁ ἀγαθός ὁ ἡγεμόνις, ἀλλ’ Ῥώμην κατὰ τὴν πρώτην αὐτῶν βασιλεύσαν, πατρίδα καὶ πόλις μεταβάλλεται· καὶ Ῥώμη γὰρ ἀλήθως ἐπιθυμεῖ τὴν ἐκ καθεμιᾶς καὶ τοῦτο προσθέλει λαμπρότητι, τὸ Κόροι καὶ Ἰωάννου τοὺς δεκαμάνικους ὡς θυσίας τοῦ ἐγκαταστάθηκεν, πολὺ ταῦτα λαμπρότερα στεφάνων καὶ καταλιπὸν τὸν ἐν θείᾳ δυνάμει τικτόμενον, οὐρανίων τῆς δόξης ὀρέγεται." Sinopia (“σινοπίδιον”) is a red earth pigment that was used as a paint and dye.

38 I borrow the use, in this context, of “subliterary” from C. Rapp, "Hagiography and Monastic Literature between Greek East and Latin West in Late Antiquity," in *Cristianità d’Occidente e Cristianità d’Oriente (secoli VI–XI)*, 24–30 aprile 2003, Settimane di studio del Centro italiano di studi sull’alto medioevo 51 (Sipoleto, 2004), 1121–82, esp. 1251–66.


Sophronius expressed his great esteem for the Roman church in his Synodical Letter, written subsequent to his stay in Rome upon becoming patriarch of Jerusalem in 634. In the letter Sophronius describes Pope Leo (r. 440–461) as “the great and illustrious Leo of godly mind, of the most holy church of the Romans, or rather of the luminary of all under the sun.” Rome, in the synodical letter as in the miracle collection of Cyrus and John, is portrayed as the acme of Christianity.

2. Sts. Cyrus and John in Seventh- to Eighth-Century Rome

In the decades after Sophronius visited Rome, his theological position (opposing Monotheletism and Monoenergism) turned him into a hero of the Roman church. Sophronius’s theological position was endorsed in Rome by the Lateran Council of 649 and vindicated on the imperial stage when his Synodical Letter was read aloud at the Sixth Ecumenical Council (680–81). It is in this later context (roughly the late seventh or early eighth century) that we find the earliest evidence for the Roman reception of Sts. Cyrus and John. In Rome, excerpts of Sophronius’s hagiographic dossier of Cyrus and John were translated into Latin, and frescos of the saints were added to the church of S. Maria Antiqua on the forum Romanum. By the mid-eighth century there is also evidence for relics of and ecclesiastical dedications to the saints in and around Rome.

In Rome, Cyrus and John were promoted above all as healing saints—in accordance with the profile that Sophronius had crafted for them. Additionally, their Sophronian pedigree appears to have contributed to their appeal. Like Sophronius, members of the Roman elite who participated in the cult of Cyrus and John took for granted that these Alexandrian saints would be efficacious for all of Christendom, including inhabitants of Rome. Yet the evidence also suggests subtle shifts in the saints’ Roman profile, indications of the city’s own strongly ecclesiastical and predominantly Latin traditions of Christian sanctity.

Translating the Miracles of Cyrus and John in Rome

The seventh- or eighth-century Latin translation of Sophronius’s dossier does not survive and, on account of the complex later history of this text, only its outlines can be reconstructed, partially at best. As discussed below (§3), in the late ninth century Anastasius Bibliotecarius expanded, and perhaps reworked, this preexisting partial translation; his version is the most recent Latin edition of these texts remains that of Mai: Preface and Encomium (BHL 2079), ed. Mai, Spicilegium romanum 3:1–95 (PG 87:3179–3422); Miracles (BHL 2080), ed. Mai, Spicilegium romanum 397–669 (PG 87:3423–3675). The most extensive Latin Sophronian corpus survives in Rome, Vat. lat. 5410 and Rome, Vallicelliana H 8.2, seventeenth-century manuscripts which claim to be copies of a manuscript dated 1204 that was at the time in S. Maria in Via Lata. For descriptions see A. Poncelet, Catalogus codicum hagiographiorum latinorum: Bibliothecae Vaticanae (Brussels, 1910), 130–31; and idem, Catalogus codicum hagiographiorum latinorum bibliothecarum romanarum: Praeter quam vaticanae (Brussels, 1909), 423 (as well as 249–30 for Rome, Bibliotheca Casanatensis 1046 [Alias XX II.11], an early 17th-century copy of Vat. lat. 5410). These two manuscripts contain different versions of the saints’ passio (Vallicelliana H 8.2 contains BHL 2078, Peter of Naples’s Passio Cyri et Ioannis, mutilated at the end; Rome, Vat. lat. 5410 contains the older version of the passio by Anastasius, BHL 2077, mutilated at the beginning), but the other contents of the manuscripts are the same. Both contain the three sermons attributed to Cyril of Alexandria (BHL 2077b–d), included in the Greek corpus of Sophronius’s texts; Sophronius’s Preface and Encomium (BHL 2079); Sophronius’s Miracles (BHL 2080); and the later translatio Cyri et Ioannis (BHL 2080e), discussed further below. (Not included in either manuscript, however, is the preface by Anastasius Bibliotecarius to his translation of the Sophronian corpus that mentions the earlier translation by Theodore and Boniface.)

All of these Latin texts were edited by A. Mai. Together with their Greek counterparts they are printed in Mai, ed., Spicilegium romanum 3 and 4, and reprinted in the PG and PL. Specific editions will be cited below in discussions of individual texts. For an overview of the Latin texts see W. Berschin, “Bonifatius Consiliarius: Ein römischer Übersetzter in der byzantinischen Epoche des Papsttums,” in Lateinische Kultur im VIII. Jahrhundert: Traube-Gedenkschrift, ed. A. Lehner and W. Berschin (St. Ottilien, 1989): 25–40 at 36–37 (appendix 2).

42 For the text, English translation and detailed discussion of this letter see P. Allen, Sophronius of Jerusalem and Seventh-Century Heresy: The Synodical Letter and Other Documents (New York, 2009).
43 Sophronius, Synodical Letter, 2.5.3, ed. and trans. Allen, 132–33, “…τὸ μεγάλον καὶ λαμπρὸν καὶ θεόφρονον Λέοντα τοῦ τῆς Ῥωμαίων ἁγιωτάτης ἐκκλησίας, μᾶλλον δὲ τῆς ἐπ’ ἡλίῳ πάσης φωστῆρος . . . .”
44 See below; for the Latin translation, exp. n. 46; for the frescoes, nn. 75–76, 98.
45 See below; for the relic evidence, esp. nn. 94–95; for ecclesiastical dedications, nn. 87, 103–104.
only extant Latin translation. Indeed, the only evidence for the existence of the earlier Latin translation is Anastasius’s brief comment in the preface to his translation: 47 “Of these miracles [i.e., Sophronius’s collection] the consiliarius Boniface, at the request of the primicerius defensorum ecclesiae Romanae Theodore, once translated twelve chapters with the preface.” 48

On the basis of references to a consiliarius named Boniface in the late seventh century, scholars have tried to establish the precise date of this earlier translation, but the grounds for this identification are tenuous (see below). What Anastasius’s brief statement does do, however, is firmly situate the translation in the milieu of Rome’s ecclesiastical elite. This is a somewhat unexpected context for a text that, as Booth has demonstrated, not only emphasizes “ascetic virtue” as the means to salvation but also has an ambivalent attitude toward the “hierarchy and rituals of the Church.” 49 In redacting and translating the text, then, Boniface, at Theodore’s behest, was drawing on the writings of an influential and respected church father, and was also shifting the context of his writings—and exercising a certain level of ecclesiastical oversight over a cult that, as promoted by Sophronius, had endorsed a rather individualistic view of salvation.

Various forms of healing—from saintly intercession to doctors of older traditions of “magic”—were on offer in early medieval Rome. 50 Saints whose cults

47 Anastasius’s letter (commonly numbered 10) has been most recently edited by Berschin, “Bonifatius Consiliarius,” 39–40 (appendix 3). This supersedes the edition by E. Perels and G. Laehr in MGH Ep 7 (Epistolae Karolini Aevi 5): 426–27, which was based only on the then-damaged, now-destroyed, late 9th-century codex Chartres, Bibliothèque municipale 63 (115 1/G). Berschin’s edition also uses a complete version of the text found in Montpellier, Bibliothèque interuniversitaire, Faculté de Médecine H 360 (M), dating from ca. 1000. An English translation of the letter (based, however, on the MGH edition) is provided by B. Neil, “The Miracles of Saints Cyrus and John: The Greek Text and Its Transmission,” Journal of the Australian Early Medieval Association 2 (2006): 183–93 (appendix).

48 Anastasius Bibliothecarius, epist. 10, ed. Berschin, 39: “Quorum videlicet miraculorum: bonifacius consiliarius: ad petitem theodori primicerii defensorum ecclesie romane: duodecem cum prefacione capitula olim interpretatus est.” (For the punctuation used by Berschin’s edition and reproduced here see p. 38.)

49 Booth, “Saints and Soteriology” (n. 19 above), 65; idem, Crisis of Empire (n. 15 above), 80–87.

50 The use of talismans against demons by members of Rome’s eastern Christian communities is demonstrated by J. M. H. Smith, (such as Sts. Cosmas and Damian) or whose legends (such as St. George) were associated with miraculous healing were to be found as the patrons of a variety of ecclesiastical institutions: churches, monasteries, diaconiae, and xenodochia. There is too little evidence to draw any conclusions about if and how miraculous healing took place at these sites, but in the absence of any direct papal (or other) oversight, we may imagine that a range of healing practices coexisted, some under clerical supervision, some not. Theodore and Boniface, in making Sophronius’s text available to a Latin audience in Rome, affirmed the saints’ channels (through dreams and waking visions) of divine intercession, but also intimated that these saints would be most effective operating under clerical supervision.

Anastasius’s reference to Theodore and Boniface gives a sense of the ecclesiastical context which may have informed their interest in, and approach to, translating the text. As primicerius defensorum, Theodore was the head of the college of defensores, officials who assisted in church administration. 51 Although a primicerius typically would take no more than minor orders, he was highly influential within the church; during papal masses at stational churches the

“Cursing and Curing, or The Practice of Christianity in Eighth-Century Rome,” in Italy and Medieval Europe: Papers for Chris Wickham on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday, ed. R. Balzaretti, J. Barrow, and P. Skinner, Past and Present Supplement (Oxford, forthcoming). I am grateful to Julia Smith for sharing this article with me prior to publication.

51 P. Llewellyn, Rome in the Dark Ages (New York, 1971), 114–16; S. O. Keller, Die sieben römischen Pfalzrichter im byzantinischen Zeitalter (Amsterdam, 1966), 112–13; T. S. Brown, Gentlemen and Officers: Imperial Administration and Aristocratic Power in Byzantine Italy, A.D. 554–800 ([London], 1984), 185–86; B. Fischer, “Die Entwicklung des Instituts der Defensoren in der Koemischen Kirche,” Ephemerides Liturgicae 48 (= n.s. 8) (1914): 443–54. A primicerius defensorum Theodore is not known from any other sources: L. Halphen, Études sur l’administration de Rome au Moyen Âge (751–1252), Bibliothèque de l’école des hautes études, Sciences historiques et philologiques 166 (Paris, 1907), includes lists of all known primicerii. See also L. Santifaller, “Saggio di un elenco dei funzionari, impiegati e scrittori della Cancelleria Pontificia dal’inizio all’anno 1099,” Bulletino dell’Istituto storico per il Medio Evo e Archivio Muratoriano 56 (1940): 1–865. There is evidence for a Theodorus who was primicerius sanctae romanae ecclesiae, that is, head of the notaries, in the early 9th century (ibid., 42–43). However, given that the name Theodore was very common in the Byzantine Empire, it is unlikely that this is the same individual. There are 208 entries for “Theodorus” in PLRE 3 (covering A.D. 527–641), many of whom were in Italy.
primicerius defensorum and primicerius notariorum (the head of the college of notaries) accompanied the pope on his right and left as he received lay offerings.\textsuperscript{52} His many tasks included administering papal patrimo-
nies, negotiating church contracts, resolving disputes among churchmen, carrying out charitable bequests, and dispensing alms. Given the charitable connotations of Cyrus and John’s cult, we might speculate that Theodore considered the saints a useful bulwark in the ecclesiastical administration’s attempts to encourage virtuous behavior among the Roman elite. He might also have had an economic motive.\textsuperscript{53}

Meanwhile, as 

\textit{consiliarius}, Boniface could have been involved in a wide range of activities. Walter Berschin has argued on the basis of four other references to individuals named Boniface in late-seventh-century Rome (all of whom he equates to our Boniface), that we can precisely identify the Boniface responsible for Sophronius’s translation.\textsuperscript{54} However, given that three popes of the seventh century had the name Boniface and that we do not know how widespread the rank of 

\textit{consiliarius} was, this interpretation seems overly optimistic.\textsuperscript{55} Nevertheless, the references collected by Berschin provide a helpful overview of the range of responsibilities and activities which might engage a 

\textit{consiliarius}.

The 

\textit{Liber Pontificalis}’s biography of Pope Sergius I (r. 687–701) tells of a Boniface 

\textit{consiliarius} in Rome whom the emperor had arrested and brought to Constantinople as a means of exerting pressure on the pope.\textsuperscript{56} Meanwhile, according to the \textit{vita} of St. Wilfrid (d. 709), a certain Boniface, “an archdeacon, one of the wisest of the consiliiarii,” is described as a friend and teacher of Wilfrid during his first visit to Rome in 654.\textsuperscript{57} Another Boniface (with no specification as to his rank) is mentioned a second time in the same vita. This Boniface is an acquaintance of Wilfrid from the time of Pope Agatho (r. 678–681). According to the vita, Boniface testified, in Rome, on Wilfrid’s behalf as Wilfrid petitioned to be restored to his see under Pope John VI (r. 701–5).\textsuperscript{58} Furthermore, the Acts of the Seventh Ecumenical Council of 787 (Nicæa II) record how in the time of Pope Benedict II (r. 684–85), when Macarius, the patriarch of Antioch, was sent as an exile to Rome, a 

\textit{consiliarius} named Boniface visited him daily, trying unsuccessfully to convert him from the Monothelete heresy.\textsuperscript{59}

Unsurprisingly, given his title, the profile that emerges of a 

\textit{consiliarius} is that of a learned individual. Late-seventh-century 

\textit{consiliarii} met with both Constantinopolitan officials and visitors from more distant locations, such as the Anglo-Saxon Wilfrid or the Antiochene patriarch Macarius. Excellent knowledge of Greek was likely a must. 

\textit{Consiliarii} were also well versed in ecclesiastical procedures; we are told that the 

\textit{consiliarius} Boniface instructed Wilfrid in the four gospels and the art of calculating the date of Easter. The task of converting the patriarch Macarius also suggests a grasp of theology that accords well with the task of translating Sophronius. Furthermore, a 

\textit{consiliarius}’s role in

\textsuperscript{52} Ordo 1.69; M. Andrieu, \textit{Les ordines romani du Haut Moyen Âge}, 5 vols., Spicilegium sacrum Lovaniense, Études et documents 11, 23, 24, 28, 29 (Louvain, 1931–1961), 2:91. For discussion of this \textit{ordo} see Romano, \textit{Liturgy and Society} (n. 10 above).

\textsuperscript{53} In Menouthis, although Cyrus and John were famed for providing their services free of charge, the stewards of their shrine seem to have benefited financially from involvement with the cult. This is suggested, for example, by a miracle (no. 2.4) in which a wealthy woman, Juliana, arriving at the shrine at the same time as a poor woman, also named Juliana, receives the coveted location closer to the saints’ relics; discussed in Montserrat, “Pilgrimage” (n. 16 above), 169–70.

\textsuperscript{54} Berschin, “Bonifatius Consiliarius.”

\textsuperscript{55} Boniface III (r. 607); Boniface IV (r. 608–615); Boniface V (r. 619–625).

\textsuperscript{56} \textit{Liber pontificalis} 86.7, ed. Duchesne, 1:373: “Qui imperator Sergium magistrianum in spretum praenominati pontificis Romam mittens, Ioannem Deo amabilem Portuensem episcopum vel Sergium magistrianum in spretum praenominati pontificis Romam mittens, Iohannem Deo amabilem Portuensem episcopum


\textsuperscript{58} \textit{Vita S. Wilfridi}, 53, ed. Levison, 2:48: “Tunc Bonifatius et Siszentzius et alii nonnulli, qui eum in diebus beatae memoriae Agathonis agnoscentes viderunt, dicebant, istum esse praesentem Deo amabilem Wilfridum episcopum, quem beatus Agatho purificatum de accusationibus...”

\textsuperscript{59} Cited in Berschin, “Bonifatius Consiliarius,” 28–29, n. 15: “... etenim Romae in exsilio erat Macarius haereticus a sexto sy nodo...”
mediating between different cultural contexts could well have alerted him to the theological and spiritual benefits of introducing the cult of Cyrus and John to a Latin-speaking elite and rendered him well equipped to adapt Sophronius’s text for such an audience.

**Boniface’s Latin Portrait of Cyrus and John**

Although Boniface’s translation does not survive, Anastasius’s description, that Boniface’s translation consisted of “twelve chapters and the preface (duodecim cum pref. acione capitula),” allows us to reconstruct its outlines. Boniface did not attempt to reproduce Sophronius’s extensive Greek dossier in Latin, but rather provided an overview of the saints’ cult that rendered it more suitable for the Roman elite. Emphasized in Boniface’s translation project are the saints’ Sophrian pedigree and their healing abilities, as well as, more subtly, the importance of liturgical rituals in effecting miracles.

The “preface” translated by Boniface seems (as Walter Berschin has argued based on careful textual analysis) to refer only to Sophronius’s briefer preface (προθεωρία) and not the longer encomium (ἐγκώμιον) that follows. Sophronius’s προθεωρία provides a summary of his reasons for composing the text: the lack of an adequate account of the saints, the saints’ miraculous cure of his eyes, and his vow to compose a work in their honor. Sophronius incorporates biblical citations to stress the importance of rendering God his due, no matter the difficulties, and describes how the saints came to his assistance as he struggled to complete his work, encouraging and reprimanding him until he succeeded. Sophronius’s preface also provides a brief overview of the contents of the work (namely that it will describe the saints’ martyrdom, their translation by Cyril, and some of their miracles). Furthermore, he explains the rationale for the inclusion of seventy miracles and justifies the style he has adopted for the purpose. Although he admits that a relaxed and free style is best suited for saints’ miracles, Sophronius affirms that he chose to use an intense (σύντονον/extensum) style to reflect the saints’ eagerness (τὸ σύντονον) to cure the sick.61

To a certain extent, then, this preface may be read as an introduction to Cyrus and John. Yet as such, it is a rather unsatisfying text. Few details of any sort are given about the saints’ lives, deaths, or posthumous cult. Instead, in accordance with Sophronius’s emphasis on himself throughout the text, the prologue highlights the Sophrian pedigree of the saints’ cults. At the same time, by not translating the encomium, Boniface omitted both Sophronius’s more detailed Christological interpretation of the saints, as well as his detailed description of the saints’ healing sanctuary in Menouthis, information which may have seemed unnecessarily complex or of lesser interest to a Roman audience.

Anastasius also tells us that in addition to translating the preface, Boniface translated twelve chapters (duodecim capitula), that is, twelve miracles. Sophronius’s extensive miracle collection, a monument to the geographical scope of Cyrus and John’s healing powers outward from Alexandria, was thereby shrunk into a short set of examples.

Strong circumstantial evidence (based on the inclusion of material from the first twelve miracles in a different saint’s life, the Acta S. Barbatiani) suggests that Boniface’s translation included the first twelve miracles (of Alexandrians) in Sophronius’s

60 Berschin compares the passages of Sophronius’s dossier included in Anastasius’s translation of the Greek Acts of the Council of Constantinople held in 869–70 (also referred to as the 8th Ecumenical Council) to Anastasius’s translation of Sophronius’s dossier. He concludes that Anastasius’s translation of a section of Sophronius’s encomium in the conciliar acts is much closer to the Greek than is the translation of this same section found in Anastasius’s full corpus; Berschin concludes that the translation in Anastasius’s hagiographic dossier is unlikely to be by Boniface, since Boniface is unlikely to have been freer in his translation than Anastasius. Although the conciliar acts also contain an excerpt from one of the miracles (no. 36), in that case Berschin concludes that both translations are at times closer to the Greek, meaning that we cannot be sure whether this was a miracle already translated by Boniface: Berschin, “Bonifatius Consiliarius,” 30–31. (As I shall discuss, however, there is other evidence to suggest that Boniface translated the first 12 miracles.) Berschin’s conclusions do, of course, assume (1) that Anastasius retained Boniface’s translation in the hagiographic dossier and that he did not retranslate the text or significantly edit Boniface’s translation and (2) that Boniface would not have been freer than Anastasius in his translation style.

dossier. 62 Furthermore, if the dependence of the Acta S. Barbatiani on Boniface’s translation is accepted, a comparison of these texts to each other indicates that Boniface translated at least half of these twelve miracles in their entirety (rather than abridging them). 63 In many ways these first twelve miracles are representative of the work as a whole. A diverse set of individuals is included: men, women, and children from different social strata. Particularly prominent, however, are members of the elite. Sophronius explains in the first miracle of the collection, “Therefore, let Ammonius begin the miracles for us, since he was among the leading men of the city, distinguished for his wealth and distinguished on account of his good father.” 64 The second miracle describes the cure (speedily accomplished) of a certain Theodore, a coincidence that cannot have displeased the primicerius defensorum ecclesiae Romanae Theodore, who had commissioned the translation. 65

The first twelve miracles, like the rest of Sophronius’s miracles, portray the saints as assisting in the cure of a wide range of physical ailments. In general, the narratives begin with the inability of worldly doctors to find a cure, followed by the saints’ intervention. Emphasized throughout is the essential role of an individual’s faith in bringing about this cure. For example, Ammonius is first cured of an “inflammation of the soul [τῆς ψυχῆς τῆν φλεγμονήν],” before receiving a bodily cure. 66 On account of the “simplicity [ἀπλότης]” of his faith, Theodore is cured quickly, and a man named “Good [Καλὸς],” whose character matches his name, receives his cure on account of his “unwavering faith.” 67 Noteworthy among the first twelve miracles, however, are also the occurrence of two themes that may have particularly appealed to Boniface and Theodore, namely the importance of liturgical ritual in effecting a cure and the universal applicability of the saints’ healing powers.

Although Sophronius’s miracles usually do not accord much space to ecclesiastical personnel or liturgical ritual in bringing about a cure, miracle 12,

62 F. Lanzoni, “Gli ‘Acta S. Barbatiani presbyteri et confessoriis’,” Rivista di scienze storiche 4 (1909): 635–58, 712–14 at 712–14 demonstrated that the Latin Acta S. Barbatiani borrowed from Sophronius’s miracle collection of Cyrus and John (transforming the miracles to relate to St. Barbanarius). Given that the Latin of the two texts (Anastasius’s translation of The Miracles and the Acta S. Barbatiani) is quite similar (although the Acta S. Barbatiani is significantly freer in its Latin), Lanzoni argued that the two texts cannot be independent translations from the Greek. The question then arises: which translation was using the other’s text? Given that it would have been almost impossible for someone to reconstruct Cyrus and John’s miracles based on the mutilated and rearranged text of the Acta S. Barbatiani, Lanzoni concludes that the anonymous author of the Acta S. Barbatiani must have been working with a preexisting Latin translation of the miracles of Cyrus and John. But since the Acta S. Barbatiani make use only of material from the first twelve chapters of Cyrus and John’s miracles, Lanzoni reasonably concludes that the anonymous author of the Acta S. Barbatiani had available to him Boniface’s translation (and not the longer translation by Anastasius). The Acta S. Barbatiani are edited by Lanzoni (618–57) side-by-side with Anastasius’s translation (as edited by Mai). Lanzoni dates the Acta S. Barbatiani to 850–ca. 1000; it must have been composed prior to the 11th century (when it was used by Peter Damian), but later than the mid-9th century (based on its use of Agnellus’s Liber Pontificalis ecclesiae Ravennatis). For discussion of the text see E. M. Schoolman, Rediscovering Sainthood in Italy: Hagiography and the Late Antique Past in Medieval Ravenna (New York, 2016). I am grateful to Edward Schoolman for drawing my attention to this text.

63 Miracles 2–7 are included, with only minor omissions (especially the geographical origins of the individuals) in the Acta S. Barbatiani. It is possible that Boniface’s translation of Sophronius’s preface (προθεωρία) might have been a précis (rather than a full translation).


66 Sophronius, Miracles, 1.6, ed. Fernández Marcos, 2.44: “Επεὶ γὰρ τὸν νεανίαν κόρων ὑπέρφορην, καὶ τῷ τοῦ πλούτου φυσήματι πρὸς ἀλεξίναι αἱρομένον, οὐ πρότερον τὸ σωματικὸ τένοντος τὰς οἰδής κατέπαυσαν, εἰ μὴ τῆς ψυχῆς τὴν φλεγμονὴν ἐθεράπευσαν· πλείω γάρ τῆς τῶν σωμάτων ἰάσεως τῆς τῶν ψυχῶν ἀπαθείας φροντίζουσιν”; ed. Mai, Spicilegium romanum 3:102, “Etenim videntes eundem adolescentem supercilii elevati, et opulentiae fastu ad elevacionem exolli, non prius corporalis cervicis tumores sedaventur, quam animae iactantiam curavissent. Plus enim salute corporis animarum integritatem desiderant.”


68 Noteworthy among the first twelve miracles, however, are also the occurrence of two themes that may have particularly appealed to Boniface and Theodore, namely the importance of liturgical ritual in effecting a cure and the universal applicability of the saints’ healing powers.
concerning the heretic Julian, is a notable exception. After engaging in long disputations with Julian, Cyrus and John finally succeed in convincing him that he should embrace communion with the church. But since Julian is reluctant to have his conversion made public, the saints deceptively advise him that he should attend mass only until the reading of the gospel, leave and then secretly re-enter the church later to take communion alone. Julian follows the saints' advice, but, as the saints had in fact intended, Julian is detected and his conversion is publicized. Thus, Boniface's translation, as suited its ecclesiastical context, concluded with an account which portrayed the saints as eagerly cooperating with the ecclesiastical hierarchy. We may also identify a message more specifically relevant to a Roman audience in the inclusion of miracle 8, of a certain Christodoros, the steward of the saints' shrine. This is an elaborate story that includes numerous miracles, but what is unusual for Sophronius here is that the first of the miracles takes place away from the saints' shrine. While traveling, Christodoros is caught in a terrible storm and prays to the saints, who indeed come to his rescue. Thereupon Sophronius takes the opportunity to emphasize the saints' universality: “For no place is an obstacle to their aid and evil-averting arrival, whether on land or on the marsh, or even on the sea, whether it be nearby or separated by a very large distance. But rather in whatever place someone calls upon them for aid, they attend to him quickly.” Boniface's Roman audience was thus assured that their distant location in Rome was no obstacle to the saints' healing powers.

Lastly, before we turn to the visual evidence for Cyrus and John's cult in Rome, it is worth noting that one of the miracles included in Boniface's Latin translation helpfully explained how to recognize Cyrus: “It was Cyrus who appeared seated; for he was a monk, and he is always obligated to appear in the habit [κρηματι] of physicians too might be kept.” As presented in Boniface's Latin dossier, then, Cyrus and John were saints readily recognizable and accessible in Rome, an available resource to Romans who, granted that they approached the saints with faith, could hope to be cured in body and in soul—a cheerful prospect of salvation.

**Greek Speakers in S. Maria Antiqua**

Parallel to this textual evidence for the cult of Cyrus and John in Rome we also have visual evidence for the saints' veneration. This comes in the form of frescoes from the church of S. Maria Antiqua on the forum Romanum. In total there are four images of Cyrus and two images of John in the church, ranging in date from the early eighth to the mid-/late tenth century. Given the uncertain dating of both the textual and the fresco evidence it is impossible to correlate them precisely—and we should not forget that much more evidence for their cult has likely disappeared. Nonetheless, in the proliferation of representations of Cyrus and John throughout the church of S. Maria Antiqua, we can continue to examine how the cult of Cyrus and John was repackaged for audiences in Rome. Again, what stands out in the visual evidence is Cyrus and John's appeal, first and foremost, as healing saints. Noticeable,

68 Sophronius, Miracles, 12, ed. Fernández Marcos, 264–269; ed. Mai, Spicilegium romanum 3:169–86. Booth, Crisis of Empire, 79, points out that “mention of the eucharist within the Miracles of Cyrus and John occurs only in those cases where the supplicant is a heretic or a pagan (Miracles 12, 31, 32, 36–39).”


70 Sophronius, Miracles, 8, ed. Fernández Marcos, 254: “ἐφέτει γὰρ αὐτῶν τὴν ἁρωγήν καὶ τὴν ανεξίκακην ἀφίξιν τόπος ὀδύνης, οὐ χρησιμος, οὐ λιγυματα, οὐδὲ πάλιν θαλάσσις, οὐ πλησίον συγκείμενος, οὐ καταστασιμάτως ἀφέλεται, ἀλλ’ εἰς ὅπου πρὸς τοὺς συμμαχίαν καλέσειεν εὐθέως ἐφίστανται.” ed. Mai, Spicilegium romanum 3:131, “nullus quisque locus adventum corum et salutare praeidium prohibet, non terra, non stagnum, neque mare, non in propinquuo positus locus, non longe distantus spatius, sed ubicumque eos quisquam ad auxilium invocaverit, confessum adissent. . . .”


72 The so-called Chapel of the Physicians, which dates to around the time of Pope John VII (r. 705–7), includes representations of both Cyrus and John on the north wall; there is a second image of Cyrus in a niche on the south wall. The east wall of the atrium includes a niche with Cyrus that dates from around the time of Pope Paul I (r. 757–67). The same wall also contains a fresco of Christ flanked by Cyrus and John, which likely dates to the second half of the tenth century. These are all discussed in depth below.
however, is also an implicit (and imprecise) characterization of the saints as “eastern” healing saints, as well as a preference for the more heavenly Cyrus.

The church of S. Maria Antiqua has a complex history that remains a subject of much debate. It is not certain who was responsible for the church in its earliest phases. Suffice it to say here that the Liber Pontificalis reports the church’s redecoration under Pope John VII (r. 705–7). Given that the decorative program attributed to him involved Greek inscriptions in the apse, we may also conclude that at this time Greek-speaking clergy affiliated with the papacy were involved in determining the iconographic program of the church. Based on stylistic and paleographical considerations, scholars have also tended to date the earliest frescoes of Cyrus and John to around the time of Pope John VII. These frescoes, however, are situated not in the nave of the church but in the Chapel of the Physicians, a small room to the right of the apse (A on fig. 1).

The chapel is so named, by modern scholars, for the numerous healing saints, including Cyrus and John, who adorn its walls. As David Knipp has argued, this unusual space likely served as a site of incubation, imitating, in Rome, the healing practices found in eastern Mediterranean healing sanctuaries, like that for Cyrus and John in Egypt. Rather than attempt to create an exact replica of such a sanctuary, however, the Chapel of the Physicians drew on a range of eastern saints, offering its audience a collective vision of “eastern” saintly healing.

We do not know who was specifically responsible for the Chapel of the Physicians, but we may imagine a situation analogous to the later, mid-eighth-century Theodotus Chapel, whose frescoes were commissioned by Theodotus, a Roman notable who served in both the Byzantine and the papal administration in Rome (B on fig. 1). The Greek inscriptions, the choice of saints, and eastern Mediterranean precedents for the Chapel of the Physicians bespeak individuals who were steeped in the cultural heritage of the Byzantine Mediterranean, but who were also amenable to adjusting these traditions to the city of Rome.

Two of the chapel’s walls preserve frescoes depicting saints standing in a row (six on each wall), their names once carefully written beside them in Greek (figs. 2–3). Some of the frescoes are too eroded to allow

Byzantine Rome,” presented at the Patristics Conference in Oxford in 2011; these ideas were also presented in a paper entitled “S. Maria Antiqua, the Cult of Cyrus and John in Rome and Sophronius of Jerusalem,” presented at “Santa Maria Antiqua,” British School in Rome, December 2013 (see above).


The saints are located on the west and north walls of the chapel (that is, on the walls facing to the right and behind when entering the chapel from the side aisle). Nordhagen hypothesized that the east wall may have contained a frieze of female saints: Nordhagen, The Frescoes of John VII, 61.
secure attributions, but the saints who can be identified are St. Dometius, St. Pantaleon (Panteleemon) of Nicomedia, St. John (presumably St. Cyrus’s companion), St. Celsus, St. Cyrus, and Sts. Cosmas and Damian.\(^79\) As many scholars have noted, almost all of these are Byzantine physician saints, that is, saints originating from the eastern Mediterranean and renowned for their healing powers.\(^80\) Some of the saints even hold surgeon’s boxes, reinforcing the message of their curative abilities.

In addition to these wall frescoes, the room also contains a frescoed niche, very near the ground, depicting St. Cosmas, St. Cyrus, St. Stephen, St. Procopius, and St. Damian (fig. 4). Based on the curative powers of some of these saints, but in particular on account of the unusual location of this “icon,” near the ground, David Knipp has argued that this chapel functioned as a site of incubation.\(^81\) As in the shrine of Cyrus and John in Menouthis, the sick could have spent the night on the floor, entreat and lighting candles to the saints, who would then have appeared to prescribe a cure for them. Although no other late antique incubation shrines are known from Rome, or even Italy, there were also Constantinopolitan precedents for such a space, most famously the Kosmidion (Κοσμίδιον), where Sts. Cosmas and Damian attended to the sick.\(^82\)

Yet, I argue, it is significant that in marked contrast with the Kosmidion, dedicated to Cosmas and Damian, or to the Egyptian sanctuary for Cyrus and

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\(^79\) This is the order of the saints proceeding from the left end of the west wall to the right end of the north wall.

\(^80\) Most problematic for this interpretation remains Celsus, although it is not clear which St. Celsus is depicted. Rushforth, “Church,” 78, suggests that this is not Celsus of Milan, the companion of St. Nazarius (who was well known in Italy), but rather Celsus of Antioch, the companion of Julian. Neither of these saints seems to have been particularly well known for healing abilities.

\(^81\) Knipp, “Chapel of Physicians,” esp. 11–13. Throughout S. Maria Antiqua, frescoes located in recessed niches seem to have been the focus of particular veneration: Belting, “Eine Privatkapelle,” 58.

Fig. 2. S. Maria Antiqua, Chapel of the Physicians, fresco on west wall (by permission of the Ministero dei beni e delle attività culturali e del turismo—Soprintendenza Speciale per il Colosseo, il Museo Nazionale Romano e l’Area archeologica di Roma)

Fig. 3. S. Maria Antiqua, Chapel of the Physicians, fresco on north wall (by permission of the Ministero dei beni e delle attività culturali e del turismo—Soprintendenza Speciale per il Colosseo, il Museo Nazionale Romano e l’Area archeologica di Roma)
Fig. 4. S. Maria Antiqua, Chapel of the Physicians, fresco on south wall (by permission of the Ministero dei beni e delle attività culturali e del turismo—Soprintendenza Speciale per il Colosseo, il Museo Nazionale Romano e l’Area archeologica di Roma)
John, the Chapel of the Physicians directs its viewers’ attention not to one saint or a pair of saints, but rather to a whole assembled panoply of sanctity, including saints not particularly known for their healing abilities (such as St. Stephen and St. Procopius). It is unclear which saint a patient is to call upon. Or rather, in more positive terms, the space emphasizes the collective nature of Christian sanctity in performing miracles, rather than (as emphasized in Sophronius’s hagiographic dossier) the specific agency of individual saints. Standing together in a row, the saints, all of uniform height, surround the viewer with their presence. Although distinguished by their dress and, as those familiar with the saints would have known, originating from a range of locations throughout the eastern Mediterranean (Cappadocia, Nicomedia, Cilicia, Egypt, Syria, and Palestine), the saints appear together to assist the supplicant.

Such an interpretation does not, of course, explain the significance of the specific saints assembled. The small size of the chapel and its location, immediately adjacent to the presbytery, suggest that it was an intimate space, commissioned and intended for a select Greek-speaking audience (again in contrast to the Constantinopolitan Kosmidion, whose miracles record that it was frequented by crowds of residents and pilgrims). A range of irretrievable considerations, then, were likely involved in the specific choice of saints, from the personal devotion of those who commissioned the chapel, to the ideological connotations of certain saints.83 The Sophronian pedigree of Cyrus and John may have helped motivate their inclusion.84 Yet whether or not a unified program guided the choice of the saints, by assembling them together the chapel affiliated them with each other, presenting them as a group of related saints, in some sense similar to each other and, especially as indicated by their Greek inscriptions, different from other saints found in Rome.

Conspicuous also in the Chapel of the Physicians is the repeated inclusion of St. Cyrus, once on the upper walls together with St. John, and once without him in the frescoed niche. This icon, as suited the chapel’s placement within a church, gives pride of place, the center, to an ecclesiastical saint, the protomartyr Stephen, a deacon. To Stephen’s left is Procopius; to the other side of Stephen is the monk Cyrus.85 Here (as in the depiction of him on the north wall of the chapel and elsewhere in Rome) he is called ABBAKYPOC, “Father Cyrus,” emphasizing his spiritual vocation and eastern profile.86 This portrayal of the monk Cyrus without his soldier-saint companion, St. John, contrasts sharply to Sophronius’s emphasis on the pair as indivisible, suggesting a partiality for the more “heavenly” of the two saints.

Theodore, Theodatus, and Other Notables in S. Maria Antiqua

From the mid-eighth century onward there is increasing evidence for the cult of Cyrus (and John) in Rome, most often in association with charitable institutions. The Liber Pontificalis reports, during the reign of Pope Zacharias (r. 741–52), the construction of an oratory dedicated to St. Abbacyrus, right outside Rome on the via Tiburtina.87 As described by the Liber Pontificalis, the oratory was built on a piece of land donated by a certain Theodore, the “older son of Megistus Cataxanthus.” The estate (which had a preexisting oratory for St. Cecilia) was enlarged and transformed by Pope Zacharias into a domuscula, a new type of rural estate run by the papacy that was often used to

83 Brenk, “Kultgeschichte versus Stilgeschichte,” 1018, has argued that many of the icons throughout S. Maria Antiqua would have been based on specific icons brought by eastern immigrants to Rome.
84 Rubery, “What Can,” suggests Cyrus and John would have stood out as orthodox, anti-monorhelete saints and would even have reminded educated viewers of Sophronius, the champion of orthodoxy.
86 The term abba (Aramaic for father) was used in Greek as: “1. title of respect accorded to monks in gen., esp. to prominent ascetics and monks, and abbots of monasteries. . . . 2. the abbot, as official designation. . . . 3. title of respect given to priests and bishops as spiritual fathers” (A Patristic Lexicon, ed. G. W. H. Lampe [Oxford, 1961]); the term recurs throughout John Moschus’s Spiritual Meadow.
87 Liber pontificalis 93.25, ed. Duchesne, 1:434: “Huius temporiibus defunctus Theodorus maior filius Megisti cata Xanthi, ob veniam suorum delictorum, praedium quod ex hereditate fruebatur paterna, situm quinto ab hac Romana urbe miliario, via Tiburtina, in quo et oratorium sanctae Ceciliae esse dinostravit, beato Petro de reliqui. Quod ipse beatissimus papa magne constructionis fabricis atque picturis decoravit; ampliavitque in eo praeda... praedium quod ex hereditate fruebatur paterna, situm quinto ab hac Romana urbe miliario, via Tiburtina, in quo et oratorium sanctae Ceciliae esse dinostravit, beato Petro de reliqui. Quod ipse beatissimus papa magne constructionis fabricis atque picturis decoravit; ampliavitque in eo praeda... praedium quod ex hereditate fruebatur paterna, situm quinto ab hac Romana urbe miliario, via Tiburtina, in quo et oratorium sanctae Ceciliae esse dinostravit, beato Petro de reliqui.
The Liber Pontificalis does not explain what motivated the dedication to Cyrus, but we might surmise that Cyrus was among the saints favored by the Greek-speaking Roman elite to which the donor Theodore (to judge from his father’s name) likely belonged, and that, in light of the domusculta’s charitable purpose, a dedication to a physician-saint was regarded as suitable.  

Another member of Rome’s eighth-century elite, Theodotus (whose chapel in S. Maria Antiqua was mentioned above), was also familiar with the cult of Cyrus and John. In addition to commissioning the family chapel in S. Maria Antiqua, Theodotus, who served both as dux, the foremost Byzantine administrator in Rome, and primicerius sanctae sedis apostolicae, a close advisor to the pope, was also responsible for the foundation of a diaconia, S. Angelo in Pescheria, in 755. Among the sixty-three names of saints with whose relics the diaconia was dedicated, both Cyrus—“s(an)c(t)i Abbaquiri”—and John are included, as well as the group of female martyrs Athanasia, Theoctiste, and Eudoxia, who (according to Sophronius’s account) were martyred along with Cyrus and John.  

Moreover, Theodotus’s dedicatory inscription includes all the saints depicted with Cyrus and John in the Chapel of the Physicians. Theodotus was certainly familiar with the Chapel of the Physicians, given its close proximity to the chapel he commissioned. Accordingly, his choice of saints may be interpreted as a self-conscious desire to patronize this repertoire of eastern healing saints who had demonstrated their efficacy at the diaconia of S. Maria Antiqua. Yet Theodotus’s inscription also exhibits a shift indicative of the changing audience for these saints in Rome: their names are given in Latin, not Greek.  

Theodotus’s dedicatory inscription in S. Angelo in Pescheria is the earliest surviving evidence attesting to the circulation of the saints’ relics in Rome. There is, however, tantalizing evidence suggesting that relics of St. Cyrus were available in Rome at an even earlier date. Two authentices, from the monastic relic collections of Saint-Maurice d’Agaune and Chelles, indicate relics of St. Cyrus. The former, written in a hand dating to the second half of the seventh century, is labeled “relics of St. Abbacyrus [+Reliquias de s(an)c(t)o abaceryo],” and the latter, whose script is dated to the second half of the eighth century, reads: “from the garment of the martyr, St. Abbacyrus [De vestimento s(an)c(t)i / abba Churu marten].” We may imagine that like so many other transalpine relics, these relics were acquired, by gift, purchase, or theft, in Rome.  

In Menouthis, proximity to the saints’ relics was a step in soliciting the saints’ attention. The relic authentic indicates that, at least for some Latin audiences—in Rome and north of the Alps—relics remained a desideratum. The authentic also attest to the same preference for “St. Abbacyrus” that I have suggested is apparent in Rome. Furthermore, it is intriguing that the Chelles authentic refers to the clothing of St. Cyrus since, as we have seen above, one of the miracles probably included authentic refers to the clothing of St. Cyrus since, as we have seen above, one of the miracles probably included


89 Although onomastics are rarely a secure indicator of an individual’s identity or native language, the name of Theodore’s father, Megistus Cataxanthus, does suggest a family that had ties to a Greek-speaking milieu.  

90 For a transcription of the dedicatory inscription see F. De Rubeis, “Epigrafi a Roma dall’està classica all’alto medioevo,” in Roma dall’Antichità al Medioevo: Archeologia e storia, ed. M. S. Arena et al. (Milan, 2001), 104–21 at 118–19, no. 10.  

91 Theodotus’s inscription, line 25.  

92 Theodotus’s inscription, line 11: “s(an)c(t)i Stephani”; line 12: “s(an)c(t)i Celsi”; line 18: “s(an)c(t)i Abbaquiri, s(an)c(t)i Iohanni, s(an)c(t)i Dometti”; line 19: “s(an)c(t)i Procopii, s(an)c(t)i Pantaleoni”; line 20: “s(an)c(t)i Cosmae, s(an)c(t)i Damiani”; Rushforth, “Church” (n. 71 above), 80.  

93 I am grateful to Julia Smith for drawing my attention to this evidence and supplying me with the relevant editions and citations.  


in Boniface’s Latin translation notes Cyrus’s monastic garb as part of his characteristic appearance. 97

Meanwhile, at about the same time as Theodotus founded his diaconia, a new image of St. Cyrus (without John), was added to S. Maria Antiqua in a niche on the far end of the east wall of the atrium (fig. 5; C on fig. 1). 98 As with the frescoed niche in the Chapel of the Physicians, the recessed placement of this fresco

97 See above, n. 71.

suggests that it was intended for particular veneration. Underneath the image a small cavity in the niche may once have held relics of the saint.\(^9^9\) In the fresco, Cyrus, with a long beard and a wrinkled brow, is holding a box of medical instruments and a scalpel; the saint is labeled, on either side, in Greek, “St. Abbas Cyrus (Ο ΑΠΙΟΣ ΑΒΒΑΚΥΠΟΣ).”\(^1^0^0\) His age and medical instruments emphasize his wisdom and skill, presenting Cyrus as a trustworthy doctor and spiritual father.

The new image of Cyrus was labeled, as in the Chapel of the Physicians, in Greek, but by its new placement, Cyrus became available to a wider audience. The atrium was the primary means of entry to S. Maria Antiqua from the forum Romanum and was decorated with various frescoed niches.\(^1^0^1\) Given that by the mid eighth-century S. Maria Antiqua was serving as a diaconia, we may wonder whether the image was added for the benefit of the church’s welfare recipients.\(^1^0^2\) Together with other saints, Cyrus greeted visitors, offering them the hope of bodily and spiritual salvation.

Further dedications in Rome likewise continue to point to Cyrus’s close association with charitable endeavors. By 807, at the latest, the diaconia of S. Angelo in Pescheria had an altar dedicated to “sancti abba Cyri.”\(^1^0^3\) In Leo III’s catalogue of 807, an oratory dedicated to Cyrus in the “xenodochium called a Valeris” is attested.\(^1^0^4\) Yet again, conspicuous in both dedications, as well as in the mid-8th-century fresco in S. Maria Antiqua, is their preference for Cyrus. The monk is favored over his military companion, the more divine over the more earthly.

\(^9^9\) Alternatively, Tea, Basilica, 112, suggested that the cavity could have held medical tools, as such objects were found in the excavations.
\(^1^0^0\) Rushforth, “Church,” 98: the words are inscribed perpendicular to the image.
\(^1^0^1\) Osborne, “Atrium,” 191.
\(^1^0^2\) The inscription in the so-called Theodoreus Chapel, which names Theodoreus as the dispensator of the church, indicates that it had already assumed that function by 752, when this chapel was completed; the Liber Pontificalis’s life of Pope Leo III (r. 795—816) explicitly calls S. Maria Antiqua a diaconia.
\(^1^0^3\) Liber pontificalis 98.108, ed. Duchesne, 2:32.

3. Sts. Cyrus and John in Medieval Rome

In the previous section we have seen inhabitants of Rome in the late seventh and eighth centuries interpreting the cult of Cyrus and John as their own. Cyrus and John were regarded as eastern saints in the sense that their cult was based in the Greek-speaking eastern Mediterranean, but there is no indication of a perceived need to justify the presence of these Greek saints—or their relics—in Rome. In the late ninth century a more self-conscious program of appropriating Cyrus and John for the Latin West becomes apparent with Anastasius Bibliothecarius’s comprehensive translation program of Cyrus and John’s hagiographic dossier. The cultural distance implied in his project culminated in the development of a translation legend, according to which Rome had rescued, by theft, the relics of Cyrus and John from Alexandria.

Anastasius Bibliothecarius, a Roman Aristocrat between Two Empires

In the late ninth century Anastasius Bibliothecarius (d. ca. 877), a dexterous interlocutor between Byzantium and the Carolingian world, undertook a massive translation project that provided Latin-speaking audiences with both the complexity of Sophronios’s original project in Latin, and a neatly simplified Latin passio of the saints. His project put Cyrus and John, who had previously lacked a Latin passio, on firm ground in the Latin-speaking West. It also made further recourse to Greek texts about Cyrus and John unnecessary for Latin-speaking audiences, thus uncoupling the eastern and western traditions.

Without a doubt Anastasius Bibliothecarius was one of ninth-century Rome’s most ambitious and versatile figures. Born to an aristocratic family, Anastasius had a varied career, including a brief spell as pope in 855 before Benedict III (r. 855–858) gained control.\(^1^0^5\) Thereafter Anastasius nonetheless managed to become abbot of Sta. Maria in Trastevere, secretary to Pope Nicholas I (r. 858–867), and bibliothecarius for

Hadrian II (r. 867–872) and John VIII (r. 872–882), posts which allowed him to exercise control over papal correspondence and the papal library. Anastasius put to good use his knowledge of Greek, positioning himself as a cultural broker between the Byzantine and Carolingian Empires.106

Throughout his life Anastasius undertook an extensive array of translation projects for a range of patrons, including Roman popes, bishops from throughout Italy, and the Frankish king and emperor Charles the Bald (d. 877).107 Anastasius’s translations included hagiographic texts (often of individuals who had faced political opposition in Constantinople or had some connection to Rome), as well as conciliar acts, homilies, and historiographic texts. While each of these works must be situated in its particular context, in general we may identify a trend in Anastasius’s work to delineate and strategically deploy Rome’s “Greek” heritage for the benefit of Latin-speaking audiences in Rome and north of the Alps.

This motive is especially apparent in Anastasius’s decision, toward the end of his life, to translate the hagiographic dossier of Cyrus and John.108 As Anastasius describes in the preface (dated 875), he undertook the task at the request of an unnamed priest whose church (location unknown) was dedicated to Cyrus and John.109 This priest had already translated one version of Cyrus and John’s passio but wished to supplement it with the translation of the version attributed to Sophronius.110 Anastasius carried out the priest’s request and did much more. He translated all the texts relevant to Cyrus and John and assembled them in a hagiographic dossier. This included the preface, the encomium, and all seventy miracles, as well as a later Greek passio attributed to Sophronius and the Greek sermons regarding the saints attributed to Cyril, patriarch of Alexandria.111

The Sophronian pedigree of the saints was clearly important to Anastasius.112 In the preface, he stresses the importance of the patriarch of Jerusalem, whose “celebrated mention is found in many collected writings of our predecessors, [but] also in the sixth holy and universal council, especially since he published

106 I appropriate Clifford Geertz’s term “cultural broker” from Helmut Reimitz, who uses it to describe certain figures throughout the early Middle Ages who operated comfortably between different cultural contexts: Reimitz, “Cultural Brokers of a Common Past: History, Identity and Ethnicity in the Merovingian Kingdoms,” in Pohl and Heydemann, Strategies of Identification, 207–101.


109 Anastasius, Preface, edited in Berschin, “Bonifatius Consiliarius,” 39–40, here 39, lines 3–5, 11–15. “. . . pusillitatem meam cogere volueris · passionem sanctorum kyri atque iohannis · ex greco in romanum vertendi sermonem · presertim cum ecclesia in qua divinis penes urbem cultibus et obsequiis incumbit · horum victoriosissimorum martirium memoria immo miraculis fulget · et eorum annuę celebratis · en dies festus imminet.” The usual interpretation, following Sinthern, “Der römische Abbacyclus,” has been to understand this church as S. Passera. However, there is no firm evidence for this assumption. Multiple dedications to Cyrus existed in Rome, and, as I discuss below, the evidence for S. Passera’s dedication to Cyrus and John is complicated.

110 Anastasius, Preface, ed. Berschin, 39: “Sane passionis horum · duas editiones repperisse me memini · Quaram alteram olim cum interpretatus fuisses · qua quis huius conscriptor fuerit non est inventus · ad alteram id est ad istam interpretandam · me progre/di religiosisitas tua voluit · et hortata est · Huius autem scriaptor · sanctus sophronius · etc.” As Berschin discusses (40), it is unclear which other passio had previously been translated. There survive other Greek versions of Cyrus and John’s passio, but the only other known Latin version is that by the subdeacon Peter of Naples in the tenth century: BHL 2078, ed. Mai, Spicilegium romanum 4:168–80.


112 Anastasius had previously translated excerpts from Sophronius’s dossier on Cyrus and John contained in the acts of the Council of Constantinople (8th Ecumenical Council): Anastasius Bibliothecarius, Interpretatio Synodi VII (PL 119:519–512, here 100); included were a brief excerpt from Sophronius’s encomium (on the different ways in which saints are praised) and from the miracle collection, regarding a miraculous image of Christ, the Virgin Mary, and John the Baptist. Anastasius had also encountered the saints in his translation of Leontius of Neapolis’s Life of John the Almsgiver, where the author reports that he heard of John (the Almsgiver) after coming from Alexandria, where he had visited the shrine of Cyrus and John: Neil, Seventh-Century Popes and Martyrs, 54.
several small works for the instruction of many, and clearly preached the teachings of the orthodox faith." 113 A hagiographic dossier by such an illustrious author belonged to Rome’s heritage and thus deserved to be available in Latin. 114

Anastasius’s extensive undertaking made available in Latin a wealth of material, at times contradictory, regarding Cyrus and John’s cult. By translating the saints’ passio ascribed to Sophronius, however, Anastasius also presented a synopsis of the saint that was slightly different from and much simpler than Sophronius’s complex portrait of them. 115 In part, the alterations (such as the passio’s more extensive elaboration of the saints’ tortures) correspond to the genre of passiones. Yet the passio also shifts the identity of the saints, rendering Cyrus much more explicitly a physician. Cyrus is described as an Alexandrian citizen, initially a layman, who, after he was forced to flee, took on the monastic habit. The passio says of Cyrus that “with his habitation he also changed his habit [cum habitacione etiam habiti
tum commutavit].” 116 Already during his lifetime Cyrus was a doctor (medicus), attending to both the spiritual and the physical well-being of his patients. 117 His workshop, so the passio affirms, was converted into a church for the three young men of the Old Testament saved by God from the fiery furnace (Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego). Meanwhile, John is presented as an Edessan “who was acknowledged as a faithful citizen of heaven, although he exercised a military dignity.” 118 The soldier John is thereby presented on an equal footing with the monk Cyrus in a passio whose portrayal of the saints corresponds, much more literally, to the saints’ posthumous profile as miracle workers.

In addition to emphasizing Cyrus’s profile as a physician, the passio also draws increased attention to Cyrus and John as eastern saints. For the most part the passio summarizes and rearranges Sophronius’s information about the saints’ martyrdom. But after their martyrdom, a tangential miracle story about the emperor Theodosius, not found in Sophronius’s text, is included. 119 Theodosius, so the passio narrates, was faced with the invasion of barbarian peoples into the western Empire. In his piety the emperor asks Theophilus, bishop of Alexandria, to consult a holy man in Egypt, Senuphius. Wearing a cloak (pallium) and holding a staff, Senuphius turns to the east and entreats God, then sends these accoutrements to the emperor. Theodosius, wearing Senuphius’s cloak and holding his rod, confronts the barbarian army, whereupon the barbarians immediately turn to flight. The passio justifies the inclusion of this curious story, which, in terms of its content, has very little to do with the saints, by explaining that it was this very bishop Theophilus who constructed the church in Canope to which the relics of Cyrus and John would eventually be translated. 120 The effect of this incident, however, is to construct a portrait of Egypt as a source of miraculous power in the east that helped sustain the Empire. This


115 BH 1077: ed. Mai, Spicilegium romanum 4:253–61 (PL 119:705–12) + AB 8 (1889): 95–96, BHG 469 (PG 87:2677–2680). The earliest manuscripts of this passio are the late-ninth-century Chartres, Bibliothèque municipale 63 (115 1/G) and the tenth-century Montpellier, Bibliothèque interuniversitaire, Faculté de Médecine H 360 (M). There are lacunae, due to damage, in the beginning of the text as it is edited by Mai from the Chartres manuscript.

116 Passio 6, ed. Mai, Spicilegium romanum 4:255: “Sanctus ergo ex soper medicus, quem paulo ante praediximus, saeculairi civid habitum, sed non animo, medicinas peragebat; non enim cor cum esset medicus, quem paulo ante praediximus, saeculari qui exercit armis.”

117 Passio, AB 8 (1889): 96, lines 10–12, 15–18: “Kyros itaque memoriales et admirabilis martyris, magnae quidem urbis erat Alexandriac civis . . . arte medicus, cujus ergasterium usque nunc omnibus evi-
dens extat templum constructum sanctorum trium puerorum percomendum gratiam martyrum sanitatem effundens.”

118 Passion 8, ed. Mai, Spicilegium romanum 4:256: “. . . haec beatissimus Iohannes cognoscens, qui edessenus quidem genere secundum cæna, sed caeli civis ut sibi fidelis agnoscerebat, cum militarium politer dignitate.”


introduces an emphasis on Cyrus and John’s “foreign” origins hitherto essentially absent in their Roman cult.

_Medieval Afterlife: Acquiring Cyrus and John for Rome_ Subsequent to Anastasius Bibliothecarius’s translation project all evidence for the cult of Cyrus and John in Rome is in Latin. Cyrus and John’s eastern origins are not forgotten—indeed, quite the contrary—but are framed in resolutely Latin, Roman, terms.

In the mid-ninth century the church of S. Maria Antiqua (likely damaged by an earthquake) was replaced by S. Maria Nova. According to an inscription of Pope Leo IV in the middle or second half of the tenth century, a fresco of another Alexandrian saint was added: St. Cyrus in the space, albeit with significant changes. This fresco attests to the continued veneration of St. Cyrus in the space, albeit with significant changes. The placement of the fresco, immediately above the earlier frescoed niche of St. Cyrus, suggests that the older icon of Abbacyrus continued to be venerated; perhaps the later fresco was commissioned as an expression of gratitude for a successful cure accomplished by this early icon. In contrast to the older fresco, however, the new fresco is inscribed in Latin, not in Greek, and although, as in the earlier S. Maria Antiqua frescoes, Cyrus is represented with a long white beard, he is now accompanied by a young, beardless St. John wearing a costly cloak.

This same iconography, Christ flanked by Cyrus and John, is found in a ca. eleventh-century fresco from the apse of the small church of S. Passera, located outside the city walls, along the via Portuense (figs. 7, 8). This unusual church, built into a preexisting Roman mausoleum, was probably first dedicated as a church in the mid-ninth century, and ninth-century frescoes depict prominent eastern church fathers. Its dedication to Cyrus and John, however, is first attested by the eleventh-century fresco and eleventh-century documents. On account of the uncertain etymology of its name, its initial dedication is unclear. Nonetheless, at least by the thirteenth century, S. Passera had become the hub for the cult of Cyrus and John in Rome.

121 The Liber Pontificalis reports the construction of a new “S. Maria Antiqua” by Pope Leo IV (Liber pontificalis 107-37, ed. Duchesne, 2:118); since a severe earthquake is recorded as occurring during the pontificate of Leo IV (Liber pontificalis 105-12, ed. Duchesne, 2:108), Rushforth suggested that this was the cause of the abandonment of the church’s interior: Rushforth, “Church” (n. 73 above), 9.

122 Osborne, “Atrium,” 220.

123 Ibid., 200–206. On the western wall, perhaps from the eleventh century, a fresco of another Alexandrian saint was added: St. Mary the Egyptian, a reformed prostitute who became an ascetic in the desert. The figure next to her is disputed, but Osborne convincingly argues that it is Zosimus, who visited Mary in the desert: ibid., 215–16.

124 Osborne suggests that the mural “may be plausibly assigned to the middle or second half of the tenth century”: ibid., 209–9, fig. 1f and plates XXII, XXIIIa/b. Previous scholarship dated the fresco to anywhere from the tenth to the twelfth century. See also Rushforth, “Church,” 98–99; Tca, Basilica (n. 73 above), 258.

125 Although it was previously thought that by the tenth century the ground level had risen to cover the earlier fresco of Abbacyrus, John Osborne has demonstrated that this was not the case: Osborne, “Atrium,” 219. A fragmentary dedicatory inscription survives below the saint, but does not include the donor’s name (ibid.): “[ABBAC] VRVS ET IOHS / [PING]ERE ROG(A) VIT.”


127 Manacorda, “La chiesa,” 38–39; Andaloro, _La pittura medievale, 110–14_.

128 In 1059, a vineyard “vocabulum sancti Abbacyri,” outside the Porta Portuensis, is mentioned in a property donation from the archives of S. Maria in Via Lata (to which the church eventually belonged): Sinthern, “Der römische Abbacyrus,” 215, n. 1. The church is not attested in any itineraries, papal biographies, or other written sources from the eighth/ninth centuries. A church dedicated to the saints, described as “non longe a flumine Tiberis,” is mentioned in the life of Gregory the Great, composed in the late ninth century, but there is no reason to identify this as S. Passera: Manacorda, “La chiesa,” 54, n. 2. Although earlier scholarship suggested that the name of S. Passera was a corruption of Abbacyrus, Manacorda, “La chiesa,” 57, adduces documentary evidence to show that the name of the church derived from the name of the region. See also L. Cavazzi, _La diaconia di S. Maria in Via Lata e il monastero di S. Ciriaco: Memorie storiche_ (Rome, 1908), 18, 308–307.

129 In addition to S. Passera, twelfth-century Rome also housed the church of S. Abbacyri de militiis on the Quirinal: Hülsen, _Le chiese di Roma, A1_. There may also have been a church dedicated to the saints in Trastevere: Hülsen, _Le chiese di Roma, A2_.

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A thirteenth-century inscription above the doorway of S. Passera proudly proclaims, “Here are preserved the bodies of Sts. Cyrus and John, which great Alexandria once gave to Rome” (fig. 9). This is a reference to a translation narrative, first attested in the thirteenth century, of how the saints had been rescued from Muslim Alexandria and brought to Christian Rome. The fragmentation of the Mediterranean and

130 “+ Corpora (an)c(ri) Ciri re(nit)e(n)t hic atq(u)e Ioh(ann)is / que quonda(m) Rome dedit Alexandria magna.”

131 The earliest known manuscript containing the translatio (BHL 2080e) was the now-lost 1204 manuscript from Sta. Maria in Via Lata, discussed above (n. 46), recopied in Rome, Vat. lat. 5410 and Rome, Vallicelliana H 8.2. The translatio was printed in Aringhus, Roma subterranea (Rome, 1631), i:167–69; (Paris, 1659), i:221–22 and edited by G. Prevete, Raccolta di atti, di scritti e di memorie storiche intorno ai martiri alessandrini San Ciro medico e San Giovanni.
the ideological divide between Islam and Christianity had given rise to a medieval legend that shamelessly repositioned Rome as the Alexandrian saints’ legitimate home. Cyrus and John had become eastern saints who needed to be rescued by Rome.

As we have seen above, relics of Cyrus likely reached Rome as early as the seventh century. From a seventh-/eighth-century Roman perspective the circulation of these relics through Rome was not particularly astonishing. From a twelfth-/thirteenth-century perspective, however, the presence of these Alexandrian relics in Rome was more remarkable, affording a greater opportunity for imaginative elaboration. The composer(s) of the translatio made use of this liberty to construct a narrative that would reframe Rome’s past to showcase the city’s claims to have always been the guardians of the Christian oikoumene.

soldato (Naples, 1916), 12.4–8. For discussion, see Sinthern, “Der römische Abbacyrus,” 225–30. A fresco (dated to the late twelfth century) from the lower level of S. Passera depicting a group of five people has been interpreted as depicting this translation, although there is not sufficient evidence to be certain: Manacorda, “La chiesa,” 40–41, plate I and fig. 12.
Fig. 8. Fresco of Sts. Cyrus and John with Christ, S. Passera, apse, eleventh century (photo by author)

Fig. 9. Inscription, S. Passera (photo by author)
Similar to many other medieval translation narratives, the translatio of Sts. Cyrus and John frames the narrative as a pious theft approved by the saints. Unlike the more famous translation of St. Mark to Venice, which likewise appropriated an Alexandrian saint through theft, the translatio of Sts. Cyrus and John places these events in a more distant, hazier, late antique past. The translatio of St. Mark (in circulation by the tenth century) situates the theft of Mark from Venice in the reign of the Byzantine emperor Leo V (r. 813–20) and the doge Justinianus (d. 829). In contrast, according to the translatio of Sts. Cyrus and John, which teems with anachronisms, Rome had acquired the Alexandrian saints centuries earlier.

The translatio reports how, in the time of the emperors Honorius (r. 395–423) and Arcadius (r. 395–408) and Pope Innocent (r. 401–417), Alexandria was overrun by “Saracens.” (Alexandria fell to the Arabs in 642.) The saints Cyrus and John appeared in a vision to two monks in Alexandria, Grimald and Arnulph, commanding them to steal their bodies and bring them to Rome. At first the monks hesitated, but after the saints repeatedly entreated them, they took the saints’ bodies and sailed, first to Constantinople, where the relics performed many miracles, and then on to Rome.

In Rome a pious widowed noblewoman in Trastevere named Theodora offered them hospitality until finally the relics were ceremoniously translated by Pope Innocent and the monks to the church of “S. Praxedis” on the via Portuensis (another name for S. Passera). The saints’ relics (except for the head of St. Cyrus) were then hidden in the church, so thoroughly that “it is impossible for them to be moved by anyone by any means until the end of the world.” Meanwhile the head of St. Cyrus was placed on the altar, where it cured the sick. Thus Rome, rescuing these saints from the Saracen threat, had acquired the distinguished physicians, Cyrus and John.

In one fell swoop the thirteenth-century translation neatly simplified the early medieval Roman reception of the cult of Cyrus and John. With its succession of disparate individuals who participate in the translation (the monks Grimald and Arnulph, the pious noblewoman Theodora, and Pope Innocent), the imaginative narrative does, in a certain way, circuitously remember the complexity of the saints’ reception in Rome. Yet by repositioning the origins of the Roman cult for Cyrus and John back in the early fifth century, the legend compresses centuries of Roman engagement with the cult, proffering instead an image of a confident late antique Christian city, a Rome sure of itself and its place in the world, eagerly coming to the rescue of endangered saints in Egypt.

In tracing the cult of Sts. Cyrus and John in Rome through the centuries, we have observed how the saints were progressively adapted and naturalized to suit their Roman surroundings. Rome was not Alexandria. Beginning in the late seventh/eighth century,
ecclesiastical officials took charge of the saints’ cult, the heavenly St. Cyrus was privileged over his more earthly companion, new images and mobile relics offered Romans access to the saints, and Menouthis lost prominence as the locus of the saints’ healing power. From the ninth century onward, “St. Abbacyrus” became more explicitly a physician, but incubation no longer was the preferred method of soliciting his assistance.

More subtle, but more significant, was the shifting perception of what translating Sts. Cyrus and John to Rome entailed. The Mediterranean world of the Roman Empire was never a culturally homogenous unit. Nevertheless, as Peter Brown so evocatively described it in the *World of Late Antiquity,* “the Roman empire, that had sprawled so dangerously far from the Mediterranean by 200, was held together by the illusion that it was still a very small world.”

By the time of Sophronius in the early seventh century this world had started to unravel and yet, at least in the case of the cult of Cyrus and John, a Mediterranean elite clung tenaciously to the illusion. Saints from Alexandria, so Roman elites could claim, would be equally at home and efficacious in Rome. This conviction, as we have seen, rested not only on the shared twin legacies of the Roman Empire and Christianity, but also on a continued sense of belonging to the same world, a united Christendom.

In the ensuing centuries the geographic trajectory of the saints remained the same. In the thirteenth century Cyrus and John were still Alexandrian saints who had come to Rome. What changed was how that same geographic trajectory was perceived. What had once been regarded as movement within a world had become movement between worlds. The horizons of the Roman elite had changed. As Alexandrians, “Greeks,” and “easterners” Cyrus and John had become foreigners in Rome.

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I would especially like to thank Michael Maas for his advice as I developed this article. The comments of Julia Smith and the anonymous reviewers greatly improved it. Patrick Geary, Teofilo Ruiz, Diane Favro, and Claudia Rapp provided valuable suggestions. Maria Daniela Donninelli and Bruno Angeli facilitated the acquisition of images and permissions. Joel Kalvesmaki, Kathy Sparkes, and Priyanka Menon provided expert copyediting and design. The research for this article was supported by a Phyllis G. Gordan Pre-Doctoral Rome Prize at the American Academy in Rome (2013–14) and a Mellon/ACLS Dissertation Completion Fellowship (2014–15).