

**STRONG SISTERS IN ROMAN ANTIQUITY: SAINTS
PUDENTIANA AND PRAEXEDE, DAUGHTERS OF
SENATOR PUDENS**

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Abstract: *The contribution intends to present some figures of strong women in the time of the Antiquity Saints Pudentiana and Praexedes, daughters of Senator Pudente whom the tradition identifies among the first people converted in Rome by the apostle Paul. Pudente owned a villa whose remains are nine meters below the current basilica (for centuries it was believed that this was the oldest Christian church in Rome) in which the persecuted Christians hid, according to some sources even the apostle Peter. When Pudente suffered martyrdom, Praexedes and Pudentiana, with the consent of Pope Pius I, built in 142/145 c.a. a baptistery to baptize new Christians. Praexedes and Pudentiana also suffered martyrdom during the persecutions of Antonino Pio. When Pudentiana died, Praexedes used her family's patrimony to build a church "sub titulo Praexedes". She hid many persecuted Christians, when they were discovered and martyred, she collected her bodies to bury them in the cemetery of Priscilla on the Via Salaria, where she too was buried together with her sister and her father. In our opinion, the proximity of the Basilica of Santa Pudentiana and one of the Roman synagogues (Oratorio Castro) as a symbol of the coexistence of religions is important for our project of strong women in times of crisis, which we will try to demonstrate with our research.*

Keywords: women, Rome, Senator Pudente, persecution, symbol.

In the framework of the project CRISIS - *Women's Response to Crisis: Re-Examination of Roman Cultural Records and Historical Documents from Early Christianity to the Present Day* led by Kinga Araya on our PUST, we focused on two saints of the early Roman Church who have their basilicas, but after the reform of the Second Vatican Council disappeared from the general calendar of martyred saints¹ mainly because of the impossibility to provide credible evidence of their curriculum vitae. From this point of view, from the outset, our work seems unnecessary, indeed misleading. However, we will try to show that this is not the case, or at least that this view is very simplified. Our interest in these nuns started with a very simple walk along Via Cesare Balbo, where there is a special building that stretches halfway down the street and looks like an old church (Photo 1). Since I personally have been in Rome for a short time and did not know all its sights, I did not know that it was the back (and still unrenovated part) of one of the oldest Roman basilicas. On the

¹ Cf. *Martyrologium Romanum*, Eystadii, 2013, see, https://introibo.net/download/brevier/martyrologium_latein.pdf (downloaded 20-03-2021).

other hand, I was surprised by another building nearby, a functional synagogue with adequate accommodation (Photo 2). Such a peaceful symbiosis of the places of worship of the two great religions is, in our opinion, very rare. Especially when it comes to one of the oldest buildings in Rome, which with its history (which we will reveal a little in our work) is very close to a significant clash of civilisations at the beginning of the first millennium. After all, the establishment of a Catholic house of prayer (then the so-called Jewish sect) and a baptistery in the house of a Roman senator who received Jewish apostles helped to create a secret place for catechisation and initiation into the newly formed Church during the persecution of Christians, and the historically marked presence of the Jewish community in Rome, which only after conditions had eased at the beginning of the 20th century built its second classical Roman house of prayer near this basilica, indicating an extraordinarily strong link in the clash of these civilisations even after several millennia. For this reason, we would like to add some hypotheses in our project for a possible significant appreciation of Saints Pudentiana and Praxedes as strong women and this phenomenon, as well as the emigrant escapade and religious symbiosis in general for the future in the cooperation of religions on the way to lasting peace in the sense of the latest encyclicals of Pope Francis.

An attempt to take a historical look at two rare minor basilicas and their *title*

The website dedicated to the *Churches of Rome*² (which works closely with the Roman Catholic diocese and summarises the historical facts quite plausibly) says that in the case of the biographies of Saints Pudentiana and Praxedes it is an imaginary romantic legend from the 6th century, which may have retained the names of real people.³ This describes St. Pudens as a Roman senator, who hosted St. Peter (for the first time in 42)⁴ and St. Paul during his stay in Rome and corresponded

² Website Churches of Rome, *Saint Praxedes*, https://romanchurches.fandom.com/wiki/Santa_Prassede#The_saint (downloaded 20-03-2021).

³ The phrase romantic legend is also found in the number of experts showing the work MATTEO BRACONI, *Il Mosaico dell'abside della Basilica di S. Pudenziana e Roma. La Storia, i Restauri, le Interpretazioni*, Doctorate at the Università degli Studi Roma Tre. Department of Historical Studies, Archaeology and Conservation 2008.

⁴ PIERO FALLETTA, *Basilica Prassede and Rome*, see https://pierooffenews.blogspot.com/2015/03/basilica-di-santa-prassede-roma_3.html

with him.⁵ Presumably he had two virgin daughters who were martyred, St. Pudentiana and St. Praexedes. The former has a minor basilica consecrated to St. Pudentiana (Photo 3a, Photo 3b) and the latter a minor basilica St. Praexedes, in Via Santa Prassede 9/A (Photo 4a, Photo 4b). This one is located in the Esquiline district and is very important for the Slavic community of Rome, because in its nearby monastery of Greek monks, the Slavic herald saints St. Cyril and St. Methodius during their visits to Rome, as testified by a plaque on the monastery building (Photo 5).⁶

According to tradition, there was already a place of worship near the present church in the 5th century called *Titulus Praexedes*.⁷ The term is documented in an epitaph from the Catacombs of St. Hippolytus in 491 and in the signatures of the Synod of Rome in 499. This was found in the catacombs of St. Hippolytus near the Basilica of St. Lawrence Outside the Walls.⁸ But it was only a century later that another Roman synod signed in 595 to assume the founder of the church's saintly title *titulus sanctae Praexedes*.⁹

In contrast, the minor basilica of its sister St. Pudentiana, located on the Viminale with the address Via Urbana 160, is much older and has long been referred to as one of the oldest churches in Rome, which according to some sources stands on the foundations of Roman baths from the 2nd century, or according to other sources on the foundations

(downloaded 20-03-2021). Unlike other sources, Falletta writes that Senator Pudens was the uncle of our two sisters and that Priscilla was her mother.

⁵ For the presentation of a legend about the life of St. Praexede, see ELISABETH GRÜNBECK, *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, vol. 8, ³1999, p. 520; and EKKART SAUSER, *Biographisch-Bibliographisches Kirchenlexikon*, vol.7, 1994, p. 915, according to CORNELIA GILLINGER, *Paschalis I. (817-824) Das Bild eines frühmittelalterlichen Papstes im Spannungsfeld von Politik, Amt und Repräsentation*, University of Vienna, Feb. 2009, cfr . Paschalis I. (817-824) - E- Theses (univie.ac.at), p. 44, footnote 201.

⁶ Pope St. Pascal I placed Greek monks in the monastery near the Basilica of St. Praexedes, see MAURIZIO CAPERNA, *La basilica di Santa Prassede: il significato della vicenda architettonica*, Rome: Edizioni Quasar, 2013, p.14.

⁷ As Gillinger writes in his dissertation, the *Titulus* marked at the beginning of Christianity a space that was available in private homes for worship. Families of the name or title also remained linked to the area of worship for centuries, see *Die Basilika Santa Cecilia in Rom* (o. A.). Kirchenführer. Genoa 2007, according to GILLINGER, *op. cit.* p. 43, n. 196. For more information on this term and its meaning, see FALLETTA, *op. cit.*

⁸ Cf. Churches of Rome, *Saint Praexede*, *op. cit.*

⁹ Cfr. Hugo BRANDENBURG, *Die frühchristlichen Kirchen Roms vom 4. bis zum 7. Jahrhundert. Der Beginn der abendländischen Kirchenbaukunst*, Regensburg 2004, p. 197, according to GILLINGER, *op. cit.*

of the house of senator Pudens.¹⁰ At this address there was therefore a private house from the 1st century, the remains of which remain under the church.¹¹ The basilica was built at the end of the 4th century (Josi indicates the years 387-90 to 398)¹² on the remains of an ancient two-storey house and on the walls of a *nymphaeum* (fountain house).¹³ This building may have originated the name *titulus*, one of the first parish churches in Rome, although its foundation is obscured by legend and archaeologists have found no evidence of Christian culture, according to the Churches of Rome portal.¹⁴ However, a leading archaeologist De Rossi is also certain that there are monuments in the church that point to its existence at least as far back as the 4th century. On the tomb epitaph from 384, which bears the names of the consular couple Ricimere and Clearco, the *Leopardus lector de Pudentiana* is named: it is the oldest surviving ancient monument bearing this title.¹⁵

The teaching Christ is the dominant theme of the famous apsidal mosaic in the Basilica of St. Pudentiana, which, despite the disruptive intervention of restorers in the 19th century, draws the viewer into its

¹⁰ J. JOHN, & F. M. FREI, Rom, version 2000/2001. Munich, publishing house: Gräfe und Unzer, p. 134, according to HEIKO HUNGERIGE, *Kurze Geschichte der Familie Pudenz*, https://www.portraitarchiv.ch/img/documents/pdf_159320.pdf (downloaded 20-03-2021), and also AMATO PIETRO FRUTAZ, *Titolo di Pudente. Denominations, Successive, Clergy and Cardinal Holders*, *Rivista di Archeologia Cristiana*, Vatican City, Pontificio Istituto de Archeologia Cristiana (RivAC) 45 (1964) p. 53, citing ERNESTUS DIEHL, *Inscriptiones latinae christianae veteres*, 3 vol., Berlin 1925-31, n. 1772A-1772B.

¹¹ What is certain is that archaeological excavations and their past in-depth study have confirmed the presence of two Roman houses under the foundations of the basilica, one from the Republican period (2nd century before Ch.) and one from the Empire period (1st - 2nd century A.D.), which would therefore coincide with the *Titulus Pudentis* tradition, cf. <http://www.gaudiumspes.com/basilica-di-santa-pudenziana/> (downloaded 20-03-2021) and also cf. UMBERTO MARIA FASOLA, *Bibliotheca sanctorum*, Istituto Giovanni XXIII della Pontificia Università Lateranense (BibLISS), Mariapoli di Città Nuova publ. house, 1968, Vol. 10, p. 1240.

¹² ENRICO JOSI, *Enciclopedia Cattolica, Ente per l'Enciclopedia cattolica per il libro cattolico*, Vatican City, 1953, p. 295.

¹³ See *Pudenziana*, https://www.schwarzaufweiss.de/rom-reisefuehrer/santa_pudenziana.htm (downloaded 20-03-2021).

¹⁴ Website: CHURCHES OF ROME, *Santa Pudenziana*, https://romanchurches.fandom.com/wiki/Santa_Pudenziana (downloaded 20-03-2021).

¹⁵ Cf. MARIANO ARMELLINI, *La Chiesa di Roma dalla scuola IV all'Ottocento*, Tipografia Vaticana 1891, p. 193, see: http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/I/Gazetteer/Places/Europe/Italy/Lazio/Roma/Rome/churches/_Texts/Armellini/ARMCHI*/2/Monti/3.html (downloaded 20-03-2021).

charm. The mosaic, which is almost entirely based on the naturalism of late antiquity, shows the doctrinal conversation of Christ in the golden robe with the apostles from the left and right - Peter and Paul are depicted somewhat exalted (Photo 6).¹⁶ The two female figures symbolise Jewish Christians (Jews who converted to Christianity) and gentile Christians (gentiles who became Christians).¹⁷ The representative of the Jewish Christians crowns Peter, the gentile Christian crowns Paul, who is referred to in Christian tradition as 'the apostle to the gentiles'. A cross appears in the sky above the walls of Jerusalem, surrounded by winged beings, symbols of the evangelists: a man = Matthew, a lion = Mark, a bull = Luke, an eagle = John. As far as we know today, the symbols of the evangelists at St. Pudentiana are the oldest known representation of these symbols on a mosaic and, as the city chronicler Mauro Lucentini discovered, the group of people gathered around Christ is the oldest but most realistic representation of life-size human figures in a Roman church ever seen.¹⁸

¹⁶ The mosaic was, according to the latest research, carried out between the years 410-417. Surrounded by a halo, in a position of blessing and royal attire, Jesus is depicted here as Pantocrator, the Almighty Lord of the universe (others speak of a philosopher, a king). He is surrounded by the court of the apostles, dressed as Roman senators, to emphasise their mission, which each of them has fulfilled in the midst of this world, according to MARGHERITA DEL CASTILLO, *The New City of God in the Mosaic of St Pudentiana*, The website La Nuova Bussola quotidiana from, 7.11.2020: <https://lanuovabq.it/it/la-nuova-citta-di-dio-nel-mosaico-di-santa-pudenziana> (downloaded 20-03-2021). Another portal says that the mosaic represents the "City of God", which in the immediate vicinity (in 476) of the fall of the Roman Empire is the "city of man", which finds its new "emperor" in Christ and new "senators" in the Apostles, cf. <http://www.gaudiumspes.com/basilica-di-santa-pudenziana/> (downloaded 20-03-2021). According to BRACONI, *op. cit.* the mosaic is an important work and source of many contemporary scientific theories, p. 211.

¹⁷ However, Josi argues against this and, unlike De Rossi, Kirsch and Wilpert, states that these figures do not represent the Holy Sisters, but the two Churches, *ex gentibus and ex circumcissione*, according to v. Chiesa, III, col. 1468 cf. Josi, *op. cit.*, p. 296. The portal *Sotterranei della Chiesa di S. Pudentiana*, <https://www.sotterrainediroma.it/sites/sotterranei-della-chiesa-di-s-pudenziana>, also writes, that according to others they represent the "Church" and the "Synagogue", that is, the temples of the Christians and the Jews (downloaded 20-03-2021).

¹⁸ Cf. *St. Pudentiana*, https://www.schwarztaufweiss.de/rom-reisefuehrer/santa_pudenziana.htm (downloaded 20-03-2021) and MAURO LUCENTINI, *La grande guida di Roma*, Rome 1999, Newton Compton.

In any case, it is one of the oldest buildings in Rome and has never been a ruin.¹⁹ The church is located in the valley between Viminale and Monti, and in ancient times Via Urbana was called *Vicus Patricius*. According to tradition, the first church or chapel was built on the site of the garden of the house during the pontificate of Pius I (140-155). A later legend, as written in the portal Churches of Rome, describes St. Pudens as a Roman senator from the family of Acilia Glabriones, who hosted St. Peter and was martyred in a Christian programme commissioned by Emperor Nero. Several sources, however, still refer to only one of the credible biblical quotations from the letters of St. Paul (2 Tim 4: 19- 22) during his second imprisonment in Rome, which mentions Pudens: "*Greet Prisca and Aquila and the family of Onesiphorus. Erastus remained in Corinth, while I left Trophimus sick at Miletus. Try to get here before winter. Eubulus, Pudens, Linus, Claudia, and all the brothers send greetings. The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with all of you!*"²⁰

Hungerige adds to this some legendary facts that the term "Aquila" means Aquila Pudens (Pudentius), a Roman senator who died in Rome; under name "Prisca" means his wife Priscilla, who also died in Rome. "Claudia" was the wife of Rufus Pudente, Aquila's son, "Linus" his brother. "Onesiphorus" is mentioned by Holzner as a citizen of Ephesus.²¹ Aquila and Priscilla had five children: Novatus, Praexedes, Pudentiana, Timotheus and (to whom Paul addressed his letter) Rufus Pudente. Since Priscilla was also the mother of the Apostle Paul (born in Tarsus, died in Rome around 68 A.D.; father unknown), Rufus Pudente and Paulus were half-brothers.²²

¹⁹ Website: Churches of Rome, *Santa Pudenziana*, *op. cit.* At that time seated in the Petrine ministry, Innocent I, who led the Church through the historic, shameful 'Sack of Rome' committed by Alaric's Visigoths in the year 410, who, when the city devastated and destroyed numerous Constantinian basilicas, saved Santa Pudentiana. The Pope decided to commission a mosaic work - which then became the object of a major reconstruction during the nineteenth century - to strengthen the faith of the Roman people: in the hands of Christ there is in fact a book written "*Dominus Conservator Ecclesiae Pudentianae*", according to DEL CASTILLO, *op. cit.*

²⁰ Cf. New American Bible, https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0839/___P119.HTM (downloaded 20-03-2021), see HEIKO HUNGERIGE, *op. cit.*

²¹ GEORG OTT, *Ersten Christen ober und unter der Erde oder Zeugnisse für den Glauben, die Hoffnung und Liebe unserer heiligen Mutter, der Kirche. Ein Buch des Trostes und der Ermütigung für die Katholiken und der Belehrung für ihre Gegner*, Regensburg, New York and Cincinnati: Friedrich Pustet 1880, cf. <http://immaculata.ch/archiv/erstenchristen1.htm> (downloaded 20-03-2021).

²² Cf. JOSEF HOLZNER, *Paulus. Sein Leben und seine Briefe*, Freiburg: Herder 1959 and OTT, *op. cit.*, according to HUNERIGE, *op. cit.*

The reason why the original church is mentioned in the garden is, according to tradition, that the house was demolished in 139 (before Pope Pius I) to create space for a small public bath known to the sources as *Thermae Novae*. Legend describes the foundation of the bath complex as two sons Pudens named Novatus and Timotheus.²³ Therefore, the baths are also known in literature as *Thermae Novatianae* or *Timothianae*. A recent revisionist analysis of the site has raised doubts about the identification of the building with the thermal pool *Thermae Novae*, as the complex is devoid of apparent ancient water supply systems and reservoirs. It could instead be a tannery, but according to the portal of the Churches of Rome the debate continues.

The first part of the complex known to have been used for worship, was the atrium, which was probably a chapel used by the Novatian heretics after 250.²⁴ It made history when, according to *Liber Pontificalis*, Pope Siricius (384 - 99) consecrated this oratory to St. Peter.²⁵ The spiritual administrators of the oratory were therefore Maximus, Leopardus and Ilcius, as stated in the epigraph located in the present basilica.

Legendary hagiographies of Senator Pudens's daughters SS. Pudentiana and Praexede

As the ecumenical lexicon of saints reminds us, Pudens, the husband (or son) of Priscilla, who named the Catacombs of Priscilla, was

²³ Cf. HIPPOLYTE DELEHAYE, *Contribution récentes a l'hagiographie de Rome et d'Afrique*, Analecta Bollandiana, Tomus LIV-Fasc. III and IV, Brussels-Paris 1936, p. 273. The author supports the theory of the church built on the site of the former baths and notes that it is certain that this site is historically associated with the name of St. Pudentiana, but that Petignani demonstrated in his precise work that this could not be associated with a virgin called Pudentiana, nor that the church of Pudentiana was anything other than the church of Pudens.

²⁴ According to some sources, Novatus was not the builder of the baths, but the leader of a schismatic group present in Rome in the 3rd century, the so-called Novatians, who were defeated by Pope Siricius, who later consecrated the oratory in the name of St Peter. In the baths built on the house of Pudente, *titulus Pudentis*, the Novatians settled as a heretical community, against which the official Church, cf. ANNA ZELLI, *Basilica di Santa Pudenziana Via Urbana Rione Monti (Rome)*, <http://www.annazelli.com/basilica-santa-pudenziana-via-urbana-roma.htm> (downloaded 20-03-2021).

²⁵ Cf. LOUIS DUCHESNE, *Le Liber Pontificalis. Text, introduction and commentary*. Volume 1. Paris: ed. E. de Boccard, 1955. Reprinted from the 1955 issue. Paris, 1981, p. CI (34-35); p. 216-217.

a senator in Rome.²⁶ Together with his daughters Pudentiana and Praexede, he is said to have hosted the Apostle Peter in Rome and also founded a church, which was later consecrated to Pudentiana.²⁷ Since, according to recent studies, there is currently no evidence for a bath theory, it is more likely that the basilica is located above her former home.²⁸ Georg Ott writes in his legendary biography of our saints:²⁹ „*The first to receive him [the apostle Peter] into his house was the senator Pudente, a Roman nobleman who had vast possessions at the foot of Mount Esquiline. This sublime citizen was so moved ... by the words of the apostle that he abandoned idolatry with his mother [correctly: wife] Priscilla, his sons Timothy and Novatus, and his daughters Pudentiana and Praexede, and they were baptised. He also built an oratory in his palace to celebrate the sacred mysteries. Pudens's house became a model for every Christian home; the family became the family of saints, wealth was shared with the poor, the doors of the house were opened to poor strangers, in the rooms of the house where there was holy peace, only praise was heard. This house and its small oratory formed the first cathedral church in Rome, where St. Peter consecrated the bishops and sent them as messengers of the faith. Here these first, zealous Christian saints gathered around the first head of the Church, around St. Peter, who taught, baptised,*

²⁶ Cf. JOACHIM SCHÄFER: *Article Pudens*, from the Ökumenischen Heiligenlexikon - <https://www.heiligenlexikon.de/BiographienP/Pudens.htm> (downloaded 20-03-2021).

²⁷ Pudente, who lived in the house together with her two daughters Pudentiana and Praexede was turned towards the Christian Apostle Peter, who was living in the house of his friends seven years, see *Sotterranei della Chiesa di S. Pudenziana*, <https://www.sotterraneidiroma.it/sites/sotterranei-della-chiesa-di-s-pudenziana> (downloaded 20-03-2021).

²⁸ Cf. FEDERICO GUIDOBALDI, *Osservazioni sugli edifici Romani in cui si insediò l'Ecclesia Pudentiana, in Ecclesiae Urbis. Atti del Congresso Internazionale di studi sulle Chiese di Roma (IV-X secolo)*, Rome 4-10 September 2000, edited by FEDERICO GUIDOBALDI and ALESSANDRA GUIGLIA GUIDOBALDI, Vatican City 2002, pp. 1033-1071. The scholar proposes, among other things, to identify the Roman building as a complex of dwellings, contrary to the common opinion that considers it to be a thermal building. Finally, for some hints on the Christianization of the Esquiline and the creation of tituli on this hill, see VICTOR SAXER, *Sainte-Marie Majeure. Une basilique de Rome dans l'histoire de la ville et de son Eglise*, Roma, 2001 (Collection de l'Ecole Française de Rome, 283), p. 10-24, according to ALESSIA TRIVELLONE, *Il cosiddetto oratorio mariano della chiesa di S. Pudenziana e i suoi affreschi: nuove considerazioni*, in: *Roma e la Riforma gregoriana Tradizioni e innovazioni artistiche (XI-XII secolo)* edited by SERENA ROMANO and JULIE ENCKELL JULLIARD, publ. house Viella, Rome 2007, p. 307-330, here 306, footnote 1.

²⁹ Cf. OTT, *op. cit.*, according to ANDRÉ SIELAND, *Kurze Geschichte des römischen Zweigs der Familie Pudenz - Legende und Wirklichkeit*, cf. <http://www.sieland-online.de/gene.html> (downloaded 20-03-2021).

celebrated and conferred sacred mysteries.³⁰ Later, St. Paul also lived here with St. Peter. In this place holy daughters of the House of Saints Pudentiana and Praexede gathered and brought 3,000 bodies of martyrs, whom they and their helpers visited during the bloody persecution at the places of executions, and whose blood they collected with sponges and brought here. Here in this house the followers of St Peter, the first holy Popes, performed their sacred office. Here Pius I (142 A.D.) celebrated the holy mysteries, here he baptised many, and it was this house of the Pudente family, that the same pope at the request of St. Praexede after the death of his father and brothers, ceremoniously opened a formal church, in which he installed his brother St. Pastor as priest, from which this church took the name (title) Pastor, until the name of St. Pudentiana remained permanently. The old oratory was demolished in 1803 and a magnificent chapel was built in its place. On this occasion, five holy bodies were found with a sponge reddened with blood. To the left of the high altar there is a chapel and an altar, according to tradition on the spot where St. Peter offered the holy sacrifice ... A part of the table that served as an altar to the apostle is enclosed in it, Pope Sylvester transferred the other part to the Lateran Church”.

Another notation presented by Falletta states: (Senator Pudens) Had a mother Priscilla and two children Pudente and Sabinella, who are written about in the "Acts of the Apostles". He gave birth first to two boys, Timotheus and Nevatus, then two girls, Pudentiana and Praexede, and these grandchildren, seventy years after welcoming St. Peter to his grandfather's house, host Justin, also a Palestinian, who became a martyr in Rome for his defence of the superiority of the new doctrine. Many of his disciples were killed with him, and apparently also Timothy and Nevatus. We have more precise information about these two girls: the two sisters, with the help of the priest Pastor and the consent of Pope Pius I, built a baptismal font in a church founded by their father, converting many gentiles. During the persecution of the Christians, accused by Nero of burning the city, they suffered the martyrdom of Pudens, Sabinella, Pudentiana and the said Timotheus and Nevatus. Later Praexede asked and obtained permission from the Pope to build a new church dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Pudentiana, in the house built by her father, and another church, the present Basilica of Santa

³⁰ At this point, we would like to draw attention to the incredible story of St. Peter's throne, which recalls the story of the so-called "Turin cloth" and about which both De Rossi and other historians wrote in detail, cf. NICOLETTA DE MATTHAEIS, *Where is the Chair of St. Peter?* From 29 January 2013, <https://reliquiosamente.com/2013/01/29/dove-la-cattedra-di-san-pietro/#more-267> (downloaded 20-03-2021). Falletta even writes that it was in the senator's house on 22 February 42 where Peter founded the Roman Church, see, FALLETTA, *Basilica of Santa Prassede in Rome*, *op. cit.*

Prassedè, dedicated to the saint of the same name. In the case of the second building, Praexede requested the '*Titulus Praexedes*', a very important political step that allowed his community to manage the site without the intervention of others.³¹

Seventh-century records of the tombs of Roman martyrs mention two martyrs called Potentiana (Pudentiana) and Praexedes (Praexede) in the catacombs of Priscilla. These itineraries show that they were venerated by pilgrims at the Priscilla Cemetery on the Via Salaria.³² They were located in adjacent tombs in these catacombs.³³ Of the various manuscripts of the '*Martyrologium Hieronymianum*', only the *Codex Aureus of Echternach (Cod. Eptern.)*³⁴ gives the name of St. Praexede on 21 July, but this entry seems to be a later addition, and not as if it came from the *Roman martyrology of the 4th century*.³⁵ A sixth-century legend assigned her as the sister of St. Pudentiana.³⁶ Other authors also write of our sisters as nieces of the senator Pudente.³⁷

As Borrelli notes, one of the oldest depictions of the two sister saints is a 9th century fresco, found in 1891 in the church of St. Pudentiana, which shows them together with St. Peter (photo 7). The other, where they are depicted together with Our Lady, is on the mural at

³¹ See FALLETTA, *Basilica of Santa Prassedè in Rome*, *op. cit.*

³² Cf. ANTONIO BORRELLI, *Santa Prassedè di Roma, Vergine e martire*, <http://www.santiebeati.it/dettaglio/63850> (downloaded 20-03-2021).

³³ Cf. GIOVANNI BATTISTA DE ROSSI, *La Roma Sotterranea Cristiana*, Nabu Press 2014, 1, p. 176-7.

³⁴ ENRICO JOSI, *Enciclopedia Cattolica, Ente per l'Enciclopedia cattolica per il libro cattolico*, Vatican City, 1953, writes about Codex of Munich, Tamblacht (Tallaght) and Richenove where S. Pudentiana is mentioned and also *Capitulare evangeliorum* of Würzburg, p. 295. Vanmale adds, however, that only the mention in the *Hieronymian Martyrology* seems certain that the cult of our two saints is sufficiently ancient, cf. BASILIO VANMALE, *Potenziana (Pudenziana) e Prassedè, vergini, sante, martiri di Roma*, Bibliotheca sanctorum, Istituto Giovanni XXIII della Pontificia Università Lateranense (BibLSS), Mariapoli di Città Nuova editrice 1968, Volume 10, pp. 1062-72, here p. 1069.

³⁵ Cf. MICHAEL C. TINKLER, *Praexedes and Pudentia*, <https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12344b.htm> (downloaded 20-03-2021), according to *Martyrologium Hieronymianum*, ed. De Rossi-Duchesne, in: *Acta Sanctorum LXXXII* November, Part II (1894), p. 94, cf. JOHANN PETER KIRSCH, *Praexedes and Pudentia*, *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 12. New York: Robert Appleton Company 1911, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12344b.htm> (downloaded 20-03-2021).

³⁶ Cfr. EKKART SAUSER, *Praexedis von Rom, Jungfrau und Märtyrerin der Frühzeit, Fest 21. Juli*, <https://www.bbkl.de/index.php/frontend/lexicon/P/Pr/praxedisvonrom-66802> (downloaded 20-03-2021).

³⁷ Cf. PIERO FALLETTA, *Basilica di Santa Pudenziana e Roma*, comp. https://pierooffenews.blogspot.com/2015/08/basilica-di-santa-pudenziana-roma_83.html (downloaded 20-03-2021) and also *Basilica di Santa Prassedè e Roma*, *op. cit.*

the bottom of the crypt of the Church of St. Praexedes, as well as on the grandiose mosaic in the apse of the same church, donated by Pope Pascal I (Photo 8). In any case, these two churches are a concentration of works of art to which artists of all times have dedicated themselves in order to pay homage to the two Roman sister saints, witnesses of the heroism of the first-century Christians.³⁸ De Waal also notes that the depiction of our holy sisters in the Basilica of St. Prassede is even younger, while it is found on the famous apse of the Basilica of St. Pudenziana they show them much more mature.³⁹

On the contrary, the existence of the martyred daughters has been historically extremely problematic and the word 'Pudentiana' probably derives from the corruption of the name of the original title, this church as *Titulus Pudentianus* or "the 'Title of Pudens'". Pudens himself was deleted from the revised Roman martyrology during the Reformation.⁴⁰ Sieland adds that during the reign of Emperor Tiberius Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus (41-54), the family of senator Pudens was expelled from Rome to Corinth. It is not clear whether Pudens returned. Unlike his daughters, the actual existence of Pudens is *considered historically certain*. Apparently he died in 96 as a martyr, his wife a year later. It is very difficult to separate truth and legend in the person of Pudens. His existence is certain, but many points that were considered certain today are uncertain.⁴¹ However, the portal Churches of Rome points out that according to "the latest scientific consensus" on who St. Praexede actually was, it is concluded that she was probably a lady who donated property to found the original church, or money for that purpose.⁴²

On the contrary, according to legend, it was St. Praexede, a Roman girl and sister of St. Pudentiana, who, when the Emperor Marcus Antonius persecuted Christians, tried to help them with money, care,

³⁸ Cf. BORRELLI, *op. cit.*

³⁹ Cf. ANTON DE WAAL, *Der titulus Praxedis, Römische Quartalschrift für Christliche Altertumskunde und Kirchengeschichte* (RQ) 19 (1905) pp.168-180, here p. 172, n. 2.

⁴⁰ In 1969 Pudentiana and Praexede were 'suppressed' by Pope Paul VI, in the sense that they were deleted from the general calendar of saints and declared to be invented: "Most saints are removed from the general calendar of saints, because historical surveys show, that they never existed, but existed only in the imagination of the people". For example, Pope Paul VI removed forty saints' days from the ecclesiastical calendar in 1968. In this form, in addition to Pudentiana and Praexede "suppressed" St. Barbara, St. Christopher, St. Eustace, St. Expedius, St. Margaret and St. Philomena, cf. CHARLES PANATI, *Lexikon religiöser Bräuche und Gegenstände*. Munich/Zurich: Piper 1999, p. 306.

⁴¹ Cf. SIELAND, *op. cit.*

⁴² Cf. Churches of Rome, *saint Praexede, op. cit.*

comfort and every possible charity.⁴³ After the death of their father, the sisters took the name *titulus* from him, had a baptistery built in the house (on which today stands the Basilica of St Pudentiana) and took care of prisoners and tortured Christians.⁴⁴ After Pudentiana untimely death her sister Praexede took over the family properties.⁴⁵ She hid some Christians in her house, encouraged others to remain steadfast in their faith and buried others; and helped those in prison or tortured in slavery to keep them to a minimum. In the end, when she could no longer bear the atrocities perpetrated on Christians, she prayed to God that, if she should die, she might be delivered from seeing so much suffering. And so on 21 July she was called to heaven as a reward for her goodness. Gaul writes that Praexede died after constantly asking God for the opportunity to follow the Christian martyrs in the example they gave her.⁴⁶ Her body was laid by the priest Pastor in the tomb of her father

⁴³ According to the book of Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend* was Praexede the sister of St. Pudentiana; their brothers were St. Donatus and St. Timotheus. In one of the periods of persecution holy sisters buried the bodies of Christians and distributed food to the poor. In a brief report by De Voragine they are said to have died in 165, "during the reign of Emperor Marco Antonio II", cf. JACOBUS DE VORAGINE, WILLIAM GRANGER RYAN (eds.), *The Golden Legend* Vol. 1. Princeton UP 1995. ISBN 978-0-691-00153-1, p. 374. Sabine Baring-Gould states in her post on St. Novatus that the "holy virgin" Praexedes was the daughter of St. Pudentius, sister of St. Pudentiana, and that her brothers were Saints Novatus and Timotheus. Novatus reportedly died in the year 151, cf. SABINE BARING-GOULD, *The Lives of the Saints*. BiblioBazaar 2009. ISBN 978-1-113-80661-1, p. 269-70, by author and publisher - Catholic Online, see https://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint_id=772 (downloaded 20-03-2021).

⁴⁴ During Nero's persecution of the Christians, after the burning of Rome in 64, of which the Christians were accused, the persecution began and the martyrs Pudens, his wife Savinella and their daughters Praexede and Pudentiana also died. Pudentiana took a vow of purity and devoted herself fervently to helping other Christians in need. She also made sure that they were properly buried, collecting their blood in ampullae like her sister Praexede, then pouring it into a well (cistern), which can be seen in some of the old areas of the house below the church, cf. ANNA ZELLI, *op.cit.*

⁴⁵ GILLINGER, *op. cit.*, p. 44. However, the famous archaeologist De Rossi objects to many historical inconsistencies and also to the young age of St. Pudentiana's death. According to him, Senator Pudens is also a clear contemporary of the apostles Saints Peter and Paul and the apsidal mosaic in the church of St. Pudentiana (dated by him 390-398) clearly mentions the daughters Saints Pudentiana and Praexede, cf. GIOVANNI BATTISTA DE ROSSI, *I monumenti del secolo quarto spettanti alla chiesa di s. Pudentiana*, in: *Bullettino di Archeologia Christiana*, V, Rome July and August 1867, no. 4, pp. 49-60, here p. 50 and 59.

⁴⁶ Cf. PAOLA GALLIO, *La Basilica di Santa Prassede*, Genova, Ed. d'Arte Marconi, 2000, p. 2.

Pudente and her sister Pudentiana, which was in the cemetery of Priscilla on the Via Salaria. Other sources state that she must have been buried in the catacombs of Priscilla, near St Pudentiana. However, it is not necessary to believe that she was the sister of this saint, or that any of them were the daughter (as later legends say) of the Roman senator Pudente, converted by St. Peter. At first she was venerated as a martyr in connection with the *Ecclesia Pudentiana*, but then a separate church was built in her honour, on the supposed site of her house, to which her relics were transferred when pope St Paschal I converted it into a shrine (now St. Praexede).⁴⁷ Opening the crypt built by Pope St. Pascal I in the 18th century revealed a large number of saints' bones and two sarcophagi. According to the inscription, there lay the remains of two sisters, Praexede and Pudentiana. To this day, these lie under the altar in a chapel made out of a relic chamber (Photo 9).⁴⁸ It is not entirely clear whether Praexede actually suffered martyrdom thereafter, or whether she was worshipped as a confessor, which Gillinger said would be more likely.⁴⁹

According to Borrelli's interpretation, the lives of the holy sisters are recounted in the Roman "*Legendaries*" or "*Passionaries*", composed around the 5th-6th centuries so that clergy and religious would receive prayers for liturgical services, both for instruction and divine reading; '*Passionary*' stories of the life and suffering of the holy martyrs spread in religious circles in the early and late Middle Ages.⁵⁰ One of the most extensive studies was conducted by the Premonstratensian Vanmale, who evaluated very critically the historicity of the lives of our holy sisters. Vanmale found that out of 151 testimonies, 12 of which are later (from the second millennium), it follows that it is a later legend. Also traces of the cult of St Peter in connection with St Pudentiana are according to him from the 9th century.⁵¹ In particular, according to him, this is the case in the so-called *Itinerarie* of the seventh century, where it is written that both nuns were worshipped by pilgrims in the catacombs of St. Priscilla on the Via Salaria. As for the *Acta Legendaries* and *Passionaries*,

⁴⁷ Author and publisher - Catholic Online, *op. cit.*

⁴⁸ GILLINGER, *op. cit.*, p. 46, according to GALLIO, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

⁴⁹ GILLINGER, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

⁵⁰ Cf. BORRELLI, *op. cit.* In our view, Borrelli relies mainly on the work of B. Vanmale.

⁵¹ Vanmale also relies on authors such as P. Delehay, M. Dufourcq and mons. Lanzoni, cf. G. PHILIPPART, Review : Basil Vanmale, *L'église Pudentienne de Rome (Santa Pudenziana). Contribution à l'histoire de ce monument insigne de Rome chrétienne ancienne du II^e au XX^e siècle*, Analecta Bollandiana (AnBoll), Brussels, 86, Fasc. 3-4 (1968), p. 413.

according to Vanmale they are all apocryphal and no longer deserve attention, as do the *Gesti*.⁵²

The historian Borrelli continues that the “*Acti*” of the two holy martyrs say that the Roman priest Pastor wrote to Timothy, a disciple of St Paul, that Pudens “a friend of the apostles”, after the death of his parents and his wife Savinella, transformed his house into a church with the help of the pastor himself. Then Pudente died, leaving four children, two boys Timotheus and Novatus, and two girls Pudentiana and Praexede. These two women, with the consent of the priest Pastor and Pope Pius I (140-155), built a baptismal font in the church founded by their father, converting and administering baptism to many servants and gentiles, the pope often attended the church and the believers (*titulus*), serving Mass to their intentions. Pudentiana (Potentiana) died at the age of sixteen, possibly a martyr, and was buried with her father Pudente in the cemetery of Priscilla on the Via Salaria. Her brother Novatus soon fell ill and before his death he donated his property to Praexede, Pastor and Pope Pius I. The story continues in a letter sent by the three to the other brother Timotheus, asking him to approve the gift received. Timotheus, who was clearly distant, replied in the affirmative, leaving them free to use the family property. Praexede then asked Pope Pius I to build a church in the baths of Novato (which he apparently owned) “*in vico Patricius*”, the pope agreed, naming it after the Blessed Virgin Pudenziana (Potentiana), and also to build another church “*in vico Lateranus*”, naming it after the Blessed Virgin Praexedes, probably a saint of the same name. Two years later, another persecution broke out and Praexede hid many Christians in his church (*titulus*). Emperor Antonius Pius (138-161) heard about this and imprisoned and condemned to death many of them, including the priest Semetrius. Praexede organised their funerals during the night at the cemetery of Priscilla, but very sad about these events she also died a martyr a few days later. The pastor priest also buried her together with Father Pudentius and Sister Pudentiana.

Borrelli adds that the story of the “*Acts*” of the two saints is fanciful and is undoubtedly the work of a monk or pious priest from the fifth to the sixth century. However, *their existence is certain*, because they are mentioned in many ancient codices. On 20 January 817 Pope Pascal I had the bodies of 2,300 martyrs from catacombs or cemeteries transferred to the city to protect them from the destruction and sacrilege

⁵² Vanmale on the basis of *Notitia Ecclesiarum Urbis Romae* (Itinerarium Salisburgensis) and *De loci*, cf. VANMALE, *Potenziana (Pudenziana) e Prassede, vergini, Sante, Martiri di Rome*, *op. cit.*, p. 1066.

that had already occurred during the Lombard invasions; the relics were distributed to various Roman churches.⁵³ Relics of St. Pudentiana in the church of St. Pudens, her father and these of Praexede in the church of St. Praexedes, which according to some scientists were not the same person.⁵⁴ However, on the apsidal mosaic of the basilica of St. Praexede two sister saints with martyr's crowns are depicted, one in the embrace of St Peter the Apostle (St. Pudentiana) and the second St Paul (St. Praexede) (Photo 9). According to Demès this is the second similar process of the martyr's recommendations as was the case in the Basilica of Saints Cosmos and Damian. Transferring the relics of two martyrs to the Basilica of St. Praexede is Pascal I in continuity with Pope Pius I (140-154), who became the protector of Praexede and Pudentiana.⁵⁵ The chapel of St. Zeno, which is located in this basilica and was created for the remains of St. Pascal I is also decorated with an interesting mosaic. In the lower register there are four portraits of busts of women, from left to right Theodora, Praexede, Virgin Mary and Pudentiana (Photo 10). The mother of Christ is thus framed by a tortured couple and Theodora becomes the opposite of Mary. The daughter and kinship system are emphasised by the two supposed sisters, as well as by the Mother of Jesus and the Pope, who are integrated into this group.⁵⁶ The body of St. Pudentiana (Potentiana) was moved in 1586 or 1710, when the church, which had been consecrated to her, was later restored under the high altar; from the 4th century to the end of the 6th century the church bore the name of the founder of Pudens (*Ecclesiae Pudentiana*); from the 7th century the church first changed its name to "*Ecclesiae S. Potentianae*" and then from 1600 to the present day exclusively as the Church of St. Pudentiana, thus transferring the title from the father's name to the daughter's name. As for the relics of St. Praexede, they too rest in the church that bears her name, together with some of her sister

⁵³ See BORRELLI, *op. cit.* However, for the first mention, see *Praxedis v. Roma*, saec. II - Iul. 21, in *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina. Antiquae et Mediae Aetatis*, (BHL) ed. Socii Bollandiani, Brussels, 1898-1901, p. 1007 and *Pudentiana v. Romana*, saec. II - 19 May, in: *op. cit.*, con. 1017 as well as *Acta SS. Pudentianae et Praxedis*, Acta Sanctorum, coll Joannes Bollandus, Joanne Gardandet (ed.), ed. Taurini: Marietti, 1863-1940, maii, Tomus 4, Voll. 17, p. 295-300 (Act. SS) and *Patrologia Graeca*, (PG) ed. JP Migne, 161, vol. II., Paris, 1857-1866, p. 1019-24.

⁵⁴ Cf. SAUSER, *op.cit.*

⁵⁵ Cf. RAPHAËL DEMÈS, *Espace et art de formule visuelle à Rome sous le pontificat de Pascal I^{er} (817-824) : l'exemple de la basilique Saint-Praxède*, Bulletin du Centre d'Etudes Médiévales d'Auxerre (BUCEMA), 18.1.2014, p.7-9, <https://doi.org/10.4000/cem.13363>, cf. <https://journals.openedition.org/cem/13363> (downloaded 20-03-2021).

⁵⁶ Cf. DEMÈS, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

and other martyrs, collected in four ancient sarcophagi in the crypt. The liturgical celebration has remained divided: St. Praexede on 21 July and St Pudentiana on 19 May.

Oratory of Castro, historically the third synagogue built in Rome

As mentioned at the beginning, at Via Cesare Balbo 33 we find close to the back of the Basilica of St. Pudentiana the third synagogue (some sources say the second, but the oratory on Lungotevere Sanzio should also be added here)⁵⁷ built in Rome after the “relaxation” of conditions and the establishment of Unity of Italy.⁵⁸ Of course, we find the head of the Roman synagogue Tempio Maggiore (Photo 11) in the vicinity of the *Church of San Gregorio della Divina Pietà* in Piazza di Monte Savello 6, but that became famous a very different meaning in the history of Rome in the "obligatory" preaching to the Jews (Photo 12).⁵⁹ It is for

⁵⁷ Cf. SARA CAVA AND SERGIO AMEDEO TERRACINA, Chap. 2 L'Oratorio Di Castro. Storia e Architettura di una sinagoga (1914-2014), in CLAUDIO PROCACCIA (ed.), *L'Oratorio Di Castro, Cento anni di ebraismo a Roma (1914-2014)*, publ. House Gangemi, 2014, ISBN 978-88-492-2900-5, p. 30. The authors describe the state of the neighbourhood at the beginning of the twentieth century, writing that the street was previously named after St. Pudentiana "church complex" (p. 31). Other authors insist that it was the second synagogue after the Rome's Tempio Maggiore, which was built in Rome after the unification of Italy, and the first to be built in Via Cesare Balbo outside the historical boundaries of the ancient ghetto, see https://www.beniculturalionline.it/location-2968_Oratorio-di-Castro.php (downloaded 20-03-2021) and well LAURETTA COLONNELLI, *Ha Cento anni l'Altra Sinagoga romana: l'Oratorio di Castro, La città ospita ben diciassette Templi. La maggior parte sorti dal 2000 ad oggi*, Corriere della Sera, 7 September 2014, cf. https://roma.corriere.it/notizie/cultura_e_spettacoli/14_settembre_06/ha-cento-anni-l-altra-sinagoga-romana-l-oratorio-castro-9950c16e-35e8-11e4-bdcf-fc2cde10119c.shtml (downloaded 20-03-2021).

⁵⁸ Cfr. SILVIA HAIA ANTONUCCI, Cap.4 Le vicende dell'edificio di via Balbo nelle parole di coloro che l'hanno vissuto, in CLAUDIO PROCACCIA (ed.), *op.cit.*, p. 83.

⁵⁹ The portal Roma segreta, cf. <https://www.romasegreta.it/s-angelo/piazza-di-monte-savello.html> (downloaded 20-03-2021) writes that the church stands in the immediate vicinity of the ghetto and for this reason in the space in front the obligatory sermons imposed on the Jews were held (as before at St. Angelo in Pescheria and in the Tempietto del Carmelo) to try to convert them. An explicit confirmation of the religious intolerance that this place symbolised in antiquity is an inscription that still exists on the façade of the church, between the portal and the painting "Crucifixion", deliberately placed here during the reconstruction of 1729, initially only painted, then replaced by a coeval marble plaque during the restoration of 1858 at the express wish of Pope Pius IX. The double inscription in Hebrew (on the left) and Latin (on the right) refers to a passage from the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 65: 2 - 3) and reads as follows:

this reason that the proximity of the two buildings on the Via Balbo is indeed cause for deeper reflection, although the reason described below seems very pragmatic. Antonucci writes that this synagogue is not far from the "classic" place of the Jews - the area of the former ghetto - in order to accommodate those who deviated from the rules and physically from the places where members of the community usually lived.⁶⁰ Gianni Ascarelli adds that in 1909 Salvatore Di Castro's (1822-1899) widow Grazia Pontecorvo (1836-1909)⁶¹ left her property to the Jewish community of Rome (the Israelite University) with the commitment that a new synagogue would be built in the Esquiline district, where many Jewish families had settled after the abolition of the ghetto.⁶² The land was bought by the owner of the Manzoni Theatre, a Milanese Giuseppe Fiorentino Belluni.⁶³ The new building was constructed to serve the Sephardic, Ashkenazi and Italian communities (three prayer houses) and housed a school.⁶⁴ Although the project was entrusted to the same architects and decorators of the Tempio Maggiore in Rome, Oswald Armanni and Vincenzo Costa came up with a completely different

"EXPANDI MANUS MEAS TOTA DIE AD POPULUM INCREDULUM QUI GRADITUR VIA NON BONA POST COGITATIONES SUAS POPULUS HERE AT IRACUNDIAM PROVOCAT ME ANTE FACIEM MEAM SEMPER. CONGREGATIO DIVINA PIETATIS POSUIT" or "I have stretched out my hands all the day to a rebellious people, who walk in evil paths and follow their own thoughts, People who provoke me continually, to my face, offering sacrifices in the groves and burning incense on bricks.", *New American Bible*, cf. https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0839/___PPC.HTM (downloaded 20-03-2021). And this exhortation to his former fellow believers was the zealous work of a Jewish convert who had this epitaph made with the inscription, cf. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church_of_San_Gregorio_della_Divina_Piet%C3%A0, footnote 2, (downloaded 20-03-2021).

⁶⁰ Cf. ANTONUCCI, *op.cit.*, p. 83.

⁶¹ Cf. CLAUDIO PROCACCI, Chap.1 Il "Tempio di Via Balbo" in *La comunità Ebraica di Roma (1914-2014). Linee di sintesi e punti di riferimento*, in: CLAUDIO PROCACCIA (ed.), *op.cit.*, p. 15.

⁶² Cf. GIANNI ASCARELLI, *Introduzione*, in: CLAUDIO PROCACCIA (ed.), *op.cit.*, p. 11.

⁶³ Cf. SARA CAVA AND SERGIO AMEDEO TERRACINA, *op.cit.*, p. 34-37. The authors write that in front of the plot was the courtyard of the Evangelical Church, p. 37, footnote 17.

⁶⁴ Among other things, the temple fits perfectly into the theme (in 2014) of the Day called "Woman Sapiens" dedicated to the theme of the female figure in Judaism. In fact, it was a woman who allowed it to be built. However, she left all her savings to the community with the intention of building a new place of worship in the area between Via Cavour and Via Nazionale, where the new Jewish bourgeoisie had settled in recent years, cf. COLONNELLI, *op.cit.*

building the exterior is simple and echoes the design of the surrounding residential buildings. The monumental interior is a far cry from the exotic Assyro-Babylonian forms of the Tempio Maggiore, to follow the then way of the Liberty. The inauguration took place on 16 September 1914. Since then, the Di Castro Oratory has become an important landmark for Roman Jews. On 24 September 2014, the entire Jewish community of Rome gathered in a temple on Via Balbo to participate in a party to celebrate the centenary of its construction.⁶⁵ So it goes without saying that, in addition to our two strong women, there is a third, Grazia Pontecorvo. We note again that Rachel Silvera, according to Professor Francesca Sofia's lecture, calls this synagogue, the synagogue of emancipation.⁶⁶

Summary

And as we can see from the documented opinions, one part of the specialists tells our strong women of ancient times that they are historical persons, while the other part talks about pseudo-historical (romantic) and legendary narratives.⁶⁷ So, on the one hand, we have historical figures and, according to recent research, the historical building of Senator Pudens⁶⁸ and on the other hand a great deal of 'endless' speculation due to the lack of documented resources.⁶⁹ However, in the absence of any information, we must also be aware of the importance of

⁶⁵ Also see: Oratorio Di Castro, https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oratorio_Di_Castro (downloaded 20-03-2021).

⁶⁶ RACHELE SILVERA, *Qui Roma - Oratorio di Cento Anni Di Castro*, News , 15.09.2014, cf. <https://moked.it/blog/2014/09/15/qui-roma-i-cento-anni-delloratorio-di-castro/> (downloaded 20-03-2021).

⁶⁷ However, the *Gesta Potentiana et Praxedis* would like to refer the *titulus* to a much older origin. However, their value must be considered pseudo-historical and legendary, being invalidated by strong chronological inconsistencies. Moreover, the tales themselves could only have been composed in the middle of the fifth century. See on this subject DE WAAL, *op. cit.*, p. 174 and JOHANN PETER KIRSCH, *Die Römischen Titularkirchen im Altertum*, Paderborn, 1918, pp. 127-137, cf. CAPERNA, *op. cit.*, p. 25. In addition, it is fascinating to follow Dassmann's controversy in 1970 with that of de Waal and Wilpert in 1905 and 1908 about the authenticity of the figures of the sisters Pudentiana and Praexede on the famous apse fresco in the church of St. Pudentiana, cf. Dassmann, *op. cit.*, p. 73 and also De Waal, *op. cit.* P. 171, n. 1 (both use Wilpert for their arguments).

⁶⁸ Cf. HUGO BRANDENBURG, *Prime chiese di Roma: IV-VII secolo: l'inizio dell'architettura ecclesiastica occidentale*/fotografie di by Arnaldo Vescovo, Milan: Jaca Book, 2005, pp. 136-142.

⁶⁹ "La storia Infinita" is called by BRACONI, *op.cit.*, p. 211,

another topic, which is almost the only one mentioned by Catherine-Giovanna Coda:

Reconstructing the history of the cult of the martyrs at Santa Praexede, however, is not easy. Most of the ancient, medieval documentation is also from the modern era, with the exception of the parchments published by P. Fedele at the beginning of the century, and unfortunately lost at the time of the suppression of religious orders in the Napoleonic era.⁷⁰

The historicity of our personalities cannot be confirmed or refuted in this way. At this point we ask ourselves, what would archaeologists today find in our places of prayer and dwelling during the time of totalitarianism? They would probably not find any traces of our former activities at all. Of course, there are many other questions:

- for example, why not evaluate the so-called bathing issue, as a form of initiation into Christianity that could have been practised in this building by the established Christian sect of the Novatians?⁷¹
- why was Senator Pudens's house turned into an oratory, sparing the destruction of Rome's churches during the Sack of Rome in 410?
- why not allow greater popularity of the so-called dissident sites of early Christianity persecuted in Rome in order to preserve the memory of the great deeds of these precisely following the example of Saints Pudentiana and Praexede?

After all, the legend of this place is so fascinating: the arrival of a young Judeo-Christian community in Rome, its beginnings, teachings, baptisms and the consecration of priests and bishops are worth expanding this place, or of show its original form modelled as Federico Guidobaldi (photo 15) and thus helping to think about the spiritual roots of this religion.⁷² In his description of the famous apsidal mosaic in the

⁷⁰ Cf. ROMUALDO NICOLA VASATURO, *Vallombrosa, L'abbazia e la congregazione. Note storiche*, edited by G. MONZIO COMPAGNONI, Vallombrosa, Ed. Vallombrosa 1994, pp. 182-184, in CATERINA-GIOVANNA CODA, *Duecento corpi di martiri. La relazione di Benigno Aloisi (1729) e il ritrovamento delle Reliquie nella Basilica di Santa Prassede a Roma*, Roma, Presso la società alla Biblioteca Vallicelliana 2004, p. 10.

⁷¹ See also the image of the baptism of the children of Pudens by the apostle Paul in the "kelchartigen Becher" (in a cup similar to a chalice), cf. JOSEPH WILPERT: *Eine mittelalterliche Tradition über die Bekehrung des Pudens durch Paulus. Römische Quartalschrift (RQ) 22 (1908)*, pp. 172-181, here. p. 175 (Photo 14).

⁷² FEDERICO GUIDOBALDI, *Un estesissimo intervento urbanistico nella Roma dell'inizio del XII secolo e la parziale perdita della «memoria topografica» della città antica*, in *Codicologie et*

church of St. Pudentiana Braconi finally adds importance to the whole construction in this part of Rome as follows:

The lamb, like the cross, like Christ on the throne, like the dove of the Holy Spirit, like the four living ones, are the today and tomorrow of the Christians of the district who, between the 4th and 5th centuries, were headed by the titular church of St. Pudentiana, preserved and not saved by the sack, cared for and not protected by disaster, raised up and not spared by the *rabies barbarica*, erected like a tower in a lively district, in ferment, the scene of a Christianity in movement, of a figurative civilisation which, by acquiring the apocalyptic alphabet - so dense, yet so full of hope - would launch a new art, a strong figurative manifesto so powerful that it would soon be echoed in St. Maria Maggiore, St. Sabina, in the Hebrew Gospels, in the precious arts, in liturgical vestments, enveloping Christian culture in an excited hope, a confident expectation, projected towards the near future, towards the second coming, towards the ultimate condition of the Parousia.⁷³

This mosaic, representing the symbiosis of Church and Synagogue, was somehow filled in practice 1500 years later by the somewhat mystical and mysterious symbiosis of the two buildings of these religions in Via Cesare Balbo.

langage de la norme dans les statuts de la Méditerranée occidentale à la fin du Moyen Âge (XIIIe-XVe siècles) = Codicologia e linguaggio normativo negli statuti del Mediterraneo occidentale alla fine del Medioevo (XII-XV sec.) - Varia - Regards croisés, p. 126 -2, 2014, cf. <https://journals.openedition.org/mefrm/2223> (downloaded 20-03-2021).

⁷³ See BRACONI, *op. cit.*