



recent of these can be found in the lower part of the gallery and still have the original mortar seal (Fig.6). Some have simple graffiti inscribed into the plaster depicting crosses, monograms of Christ and short texts; others are embellished with frescoes (Fig.7).

devotion to the burial place of Saint Christine. In fact, the first gallery to the left (nearest to the Saint's tomb) is the tallest, longest and most densely occupied.

It must be stressed that the catacombs were solely used as a cemetery for the Christian community and were never used as a refuge or hiding place during the period of persecution. In fact, the catacombs were known to everyone and were protected by Roman legislation. At burial, the body was wrapped in a linen sheet, placed in a niche in the wall or lair in the ground and then covered with quicklime. The oldest burials are those on the highest level and then, as needs demanded, the shaft was deepened. It is during this period that we find “arco solium” (arched recess) tombs. Many of the most



Only one epitaph, on the left of the main corridor, can be read in its entirety (Fig. 8). This is in memory of Cestroniae Castoriae, who lived 56 years, 37



years, 5 months of which were spent with her consort. She was buried in September when the Consuls were Arcadius, in his fifth term of office, and P. Anicius Probus. The deceased was, therefore, married when she was 19 and died in 406 when Arcadius was Emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire and Anicius Probus of the West.

Other burial niches have marble plaques with the beautiful memorial acclamation:

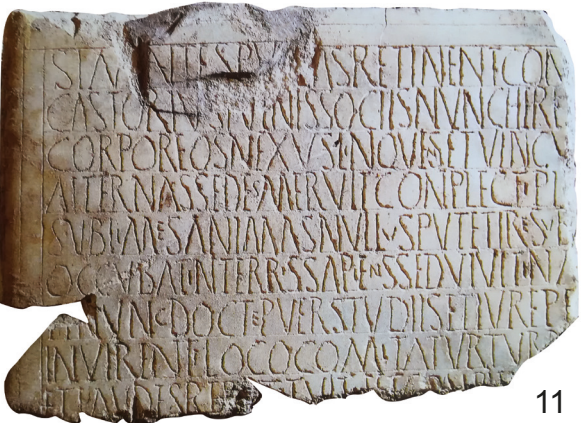
PAX TIBI CUM SANCTIS – *Peace to Thee together with the Saints*, a salutation of peace for the deceased and also the other baptized Christians buried in the catacomb. Next to many of the burial niches, we often find shelves and small recesses, which were used for placing oil lamps and vessels containing balsam. Some of these marble plaques and oil lamps are displayed in the artefacts collection in the so-called “Longobard Chamber” (Fig.9).

The “Longobard Burial Chamber”

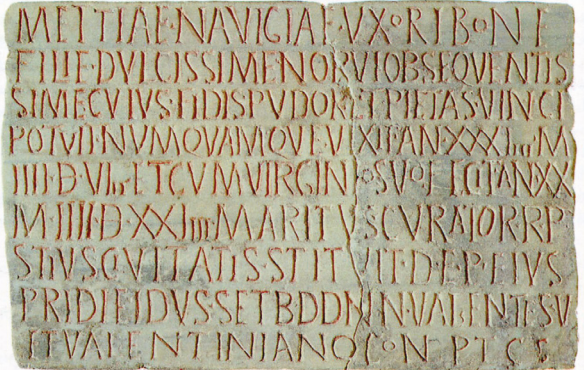
Returning to the upper level, on the left-hand side of the balustrade, we find the erroneously named “Longobard Burial Chamber”, a misnomer stemming back to the last century. What we really have in front of us is a little section of the catacomb, the height of which has remained intact, but whose unusually large dimensions are due to the dismantlement of the original tufo, dividing walls of the gallery (Fig. 10). In this area, we find many “arco solium” (arched cell)



burials, together with niches and more recent floor tombs. In the area containing the archaeological artefacts, there are many epitaphs, some of which are of great importance. Of these the epitaph of the young boy, Alexander, who died soon after celebrating his Confirmation, and that of Maccius Plautus, mayor of the town, are particularly interesting. Among the various epitaphs, some stand out for their touching elegiac prose, expressing tender familial sentiments as well as a deep Christian faith (Figs. 11-12).



If the realms of Heaven welcome the souls of the just, at this hour young Castorius is among those who preceded him. Leaving behind the fetters of the flesh and the chains of this world, he has gained an eternal place among the Blessed. No one believes that the glorious souls end their days in darkness: the enlightened man dies on earth but continues to live in Paradise. And now learned youth, skilled as you were even in legal matters, a Host of the Blessed will lead you to a verdant abode.



Mettiae Navigiae, good wife, sweet daughter and respectful daughter-in-law: her faithfulness, modesty and devotion can never be surpassed. She lived 34 years, 4 months and 8 days; she spent 20 years, 4 months and 8 days with her husband. Placed here by her husband, heritage trustee of this town. She was buried on the 12 September when the Consuls (Emperors) were Valentis, for the fifth term, and Valentinianus. (376 ad). PTCS (Peace to Thee together with the Saints).

Parish of Saint George and Saint Christine
BOLSENA, Italy

The Catacombs of Saint Christine

Pontifical Commission for Sacred Archeology
Diocese of Orvieto and Todi

Entrance to the Catacombs

Continuing past the New Chapel of the Miracle, a wrought iron gate leads into the most ancient and sacred area of this monumental site. On the right, protected by a Renaissance, columned structure, are the remains of the original altar, upon which the Eucharistic Miracle took place in 1263. According to tradition, this event motivated Pope Urban IV to initiate the celebration of the feast of Corpus Christi throughout the Christian world.

Passing through the gate, we find ourselves in the area leading to the early Christian cemetery of Bolsena, which was in use from the end of the III century until the beginning of the V century. In the forefront of the catacomb area, there is a white travertine balustrade surrounding a double staircase (Fig. 1), which leads down to the lower level of the catacombs. The balustrade was constructed in the late XIX century to enshrine the area surrounding the



tomb of Saint Christine. The discovery of the tomb dates back to 1880 and is the result of the successful archeological dig led by Giovanni Battista de Rossi and Enrico Stevenson. Saint Christine was a 12 year-old martyr, whose demise was a consequence of Diocletian's policy of Christian persecution in



the IV century. Her remains were relocated and buried in this catacomb so that she could repose with her brothers and sisters in Christ. Immediately after her interment, a small commemorative monument was constructed on her tomb. In the X century, a larger structure was built in the form of an underground basilica known as the Grotta of Saint Christine. The frescoes that adorn the barreled vaults are probably from the XVI century; the "Saint Peter" in the apsidal conch dates from the XV century. The exquisite terracotta statue, depicting Saint Christine in eternal repose was sculpted by Benedetto Buglioni between 1493 and 1497 (Fig. 2).

Sarcophagus Area

The double staircase leads down to the modern crypt, which was constructed after the discovery of Saint Christine's tomb. Here we find a large sarcophagus made from local stone with an acroterion cover dating from the late imperial period (Fig.3). On the rear side, there is a large hole, proof of early violations. Inside this aperture, a white marble funeral urn, from the Roman period, can be seen,



on which there is the abbreviated inscription: † I·RQES/CP·BAT·X·M († **HIC REQUIESCIT CORPUS BEATAE XRISTINAE MARTYRIS**): Here Reposes the Body of the Blessed Martyr Christine (Fig. 4).

At the time of the XIX century excavations, the urn was found to contain most of the small human

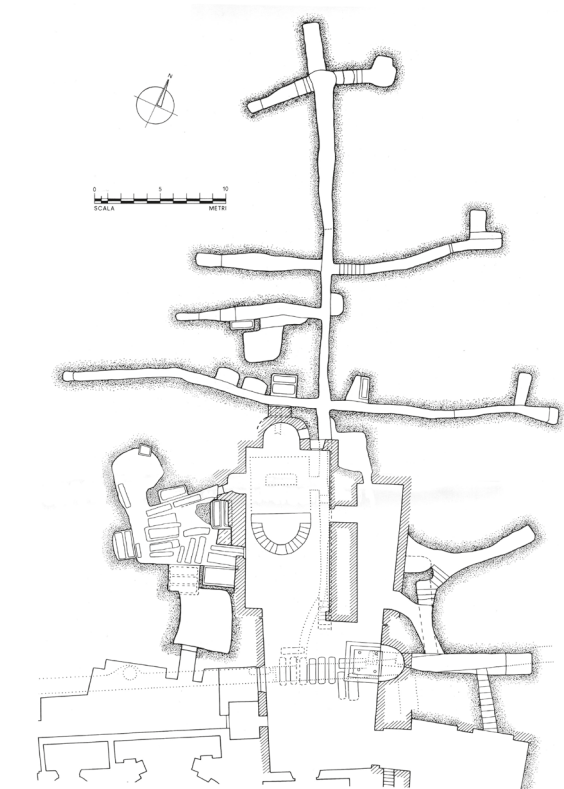


bones of an adolescent less than 14 years old, and a silver coin depicting King Berengar, dating from the first half of the X century. The irregular shape of the hole, the relics and the coin lend credence to the ancient tradition of the churches of Bolsena, Sepino and Palermo concerning the theft of part of the Saint's remains by two pilgrims

in the X century. Following this incident, Christine also became the Patron Saint of Sepino and Palermo and her relics reached places as far afield as Canterbury and Santiago de Compostela. At present, the remains discovered in 1880 are safeguarded in a precious silver and enamel urn, which can be found in the new chapel dedicated to Saint Christine in the left nave of the Basilica.

Catacomb Area

The small door to the right of the modern crypt gives access to the central area of the great catacomb, unearthed in the XIX century (Fig.5). This subterranean cemetery follows the charac-



Opening Hours

April – October
10.00 – 12.00/15.30 – 18.00
November – March
10.00 – 12.00/15.30 – 17.30

(pre-bookings, outside of these hours, can be made for groups- minimum 10 people)

Tickets
Adults €5.00
Children (7 – 16) €3.00
(Children under the age of 7 gratis)
For groups pre-booking is advised.

Booking information
www.basilicasantacristina.it
prenotazioni@basilica-bolsena.net

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teristic "Christmas Tree" layout, whereby the lateral branches, stemming from the main gallery, become shorter as they move away from the entrance. What immediately strikes the eye is the remarkable vertical structure of these corridors. This demonstrates not only its constant use over the centuries, but also the Congregation's fervent