

Gaetano Curzi

The two *triclinia* of Pope Leo III as “icons of power”

Pope Leo III (795-816) built two monumental representative rooms for banquets, court hearings and ceremonies in the Lateran Palace in Rome. These, called *triclinia*, were inspired by ancient and byzantine models, rich in imperial symbolism. The choice of this architectural types confirms Krautheimer's theory that we can interpret with iconographic and iconological method also the medieval architecture.

The interiors of these buildings were decorated with marbles, paintings and, above all, mosaics in the main apses. In the first was celebrated the role of the pope as successor of Peter, vicar of Christ and medium for the transmission of the secular power from Constantine to Charlemagne. In the latter, the pope usually was taking part in a banquet with eleven diners in the central apse where Christ, Peter and Paul were depicted, so that the pope became part of the group of the apostles, whose stories were represented on the walls.

These magnificent buildings are unfortunately destroyed, so in this paper, reviewing the literary and figurative evidences and taking into account new elements, I try to propose an original interpretation of these monuments. It reveals that the choice of architectural models - adopted in the same years also in the Carolingian palaces - and iconographic programs was designed to build an iconic image of the papacy which emphasized the legacy of the ancient world, its role of intermediary with Christ and its leadership over temporal power.