This essay features two Roman marble statues that portray women, and no ordinary women at that, but a pagan goddess, Venus, and a famous Christian martyr, St. Cecilia. My inspiration is a pioneering study by Carolyn Collette on Chaucer’s only saint’s life, “The Second Nun’s Tale.” Collette was ahead of her time in showing that this short tale, which had been largely ignored by critics, was a genuine “work of art” and thematically coherent in contrasting bodily sight with spiritual Christian insight: “In Chaucer’s version of the life of Seinte Cecile we learn that the apparently real, that perceived by the senses, is only a shadow, while that perceived by the eye of the soul is truly real.” Collette supports her reading with St. Augustine’s distinction between things and signs in the second book of his *De Doctrina Christiana*: things are objects to be used or enjoyed for themselves, but signs are things that “represent another level of reality” (Collette, 342). As Augustine puts it: “a sign is a thing which of itself makes some other thing come to mind, beside the impression that it presents to the senses.” Collette points out that Cecilia makes a similar distinction in a long, final debate with the Roman prefect Almachius, who demands that she sacrifice to the city’s pagan gods. The saint contemptuously refuses, saying that the prefect is “blynd” because the image that he calls a god is nothing more than a “thyng,” for all can see it is only “stoon,” as the senses show: “lat thyn hand upon it falle / And taste it wel, and stoon thou shalt it fynde” (VIII. 498–
504). Chaucer’s Cecilia shows that it takes true spiritual insight, rather than fallible physical sight, to see beyond this world and know that “myghty God is in his hevenes hye” (508).⁵

In her rejection of apparent things for signs of the real, Chaucer’s Cecilia represents the “triumph of the spirit over the flesh” (Collette, 348), even if that flesh is Christian and dear to her. She does not lament the martyr’s deaths that come to her husband and his brother because in giving up earthly existence they will thus gain “the corone of lif that may not faille” (383–90). Nor does Cecilia care much about her own life. When Almachius threatens her with death, she scorns his power, saying that she is perfectly capable of enduring whatever violence he uses on her (480–86), and when he almost severs her head, she does not pray to God for a cure but only a respite of three days to preach, teach, and arrange for her house to become a church (542–46). As in the Latin lives of Cecilia that were his sources, Chaucer also says little about the saint’s body after death. In the tale’s final stanza we are told only that Pope Urban buried her secretly “among his othere seintes,” presumably in the catacombs where he was still hiding, and that the church she requested was duly consecrated, in which, to this day, “Men doon to Crist and to his seint servyse” (547–53). The tale thus concludes with no mention of the subsequent history of St. Cecilia’s remains, which, as we shall see, is as eventful as her life.

Collette’s reading persuasively demonstrates the careful art and spirituality of “The Second Nun’s Tale,” and the sharp opposition she finds in the tale between the material and the spiritual prompted me to think about things and signs in two other medieval English texts on Rome that I have been working on. One was written long before Chaucer and the other after and neither has any direct connection with his work. The earlier text is a Latin report of a visit to Rome by Master Gregorius, which demonstrates that physical things may be signs without necessarily being spiritual. Augustine himself recognized that some signs had secular meanings (a footprint suggests an animal and a trumpet that soldiers should advance or retreat), and Gregorius so interprets a statue of Venus. As a Christian, he does not treat it as a religious image, but his close inspection finds significances that are aesthetic and antiquarian rather than sacred. A second, later poem in Middle English, the Stacions of Rome, offers another medieval perspective on materiality that is more devotional than Gregorius’s but less dismissive than Chaucer’s Cecilia: this Middle English poem treats the relics of the ancient saints as both things and signs, matter and spirit: it asserts that the
bodies in their tombs are not inert but still inhabited by the saints’ active, holy presences. I conclude by returning to St. Cecilia and, in particular, to a Counter-Reformation statue of her by Stefano Maderno (1576–1636) that still survives in her church in Rome. Chaucer’s version of Cecilia’s story, which ends with her death, ignores the saint’s body in order to celebrate her heavenly transcendence. By contrast, Maderno’s statue complicates Chaucer’s antimaterialist stance by using a very material statute to celebrate the spiritual. Unlike Chaucer’s heroine, Maderno does not see an absolute divide between body and spirit. Instead, his statue of Cecilia asserts that her physical remains (here represented in marble and actually preserved in her tomb below) exert the full spiritual presence of the blessed saint. In presenting Cecilia this way, Maderno draws on other late medieval texts that locate the holy in ancient physical objects.

II.

Chaucer’s Cecilia cannot wait to depart Rome for the next world, but Master Gregorius and the poet of the Stacions of Rome respond to the city and its material objects more positively, finding them to be conduits for historical and religious meaning. Master Gregorius, who is otherwise unknown but who circumstantial evidence suggests was English, is named as author of the sole surviving manuscript of a distinctive Latin treatise of the late twelfth or early thirteenth century entitled the Narracio de Mirabilibus Urbis Romae (Narration of the Marvels of the City of Rome). The Narracio is a brief prose report of Gregorius’s first visit to Rome, where, like so many other visitors before and since, he was overwhelmed by the many wonders he saw. Gregorius declares that he is writing at the request of clerical companions engaged in the study of Holy Scripture, but his work largely ignores Christian Rome in favor of the pagan culture that Chaucer’s St. Cecilia holds in such contempt. No churches appear in the Narracio, which instead describes ancient topographical sites and structures, such as palaces, arches, temples, baths, and especially statues. Gregorius provides genuine information about the remains of classical Rome, although it is not clear how much of what he tells depends on fanciful legends or misunderstandings of the function of ancient buildings. He is proud of his literary learning, which he often displays, while being contemptuous of the pious credulity of ignorant pilgrims, such as those interested in the obelisk now in the center of St. Peter’s Square,
because they believe that crawling under it will cause them to be “cleansed of their sins” (29.549–52; trans. 35).

As his scorn suggests, Gregorius has no interest in the Christian use of such ancient monuments. He values classical remains for themselves, even as he laments how much has been lost. Early in the Narracio, he quotes the first lines of the famous medieval poetic lament by Archbishop Hildebert of Lavardin:

Par tibi, Roma, nichil, cum sis prope tota ruina:
Fracta docere potes, integra quanta fores.

[Nothing can equal you, Rome, although you are almost a total ruin,
Shattered you can teach, whole how much you would speak.]
(12.40–41; trans. 18)

Gregorius the antiquarian is as active as any pilgrim pursuing atonement in his attempts to learn what ancient Rome was like when it was still whole; if he crawls under no obelisk, he assiduously measures the diameter of the Pantheon (23.384–86; trans. 29) and dips his hand into the water of what he says was a bath, though he refuses to go further because of the stench (19.264–66; trans. 25). The Roman marvels to which Gregorius pays particular attention are freestanding statues, such as the bronze of a young boy picking a thorn from his foot known as the Spinario (he is one of the earliest medieval authorities to mention it) and the magnificent gilded bronze monument of a horse and its rider, which we now know depicts Marcus Aurelius, both of which can be found in the museums of the Capitoline. These works of art may have especially appealed to Gregorius because, unlike so many classical structures, they were still intact.

The statue that most fascinates Gregorius, for a number of reasons, is a particular marble Venus, one that appears to have resembled the famous Capitoline Venus (fig. 12.1). First of all, it allows him to show off his classical knowledge: he reports that the statue was inspired by the myth of the Judgment of Paris and supplies a poetic quotation on the goddess’s amatory power from Ovid’s Ars Amatoria (1.248). In a characteristic move, Gregorius goes from citations of classical texts to his own experience in Rome, as he makes explicit the overwhelming emotional effect the sight of the statue had on him:
Fig. 12.1. “Capitoline Venus,” Roman copy of the Venus pudica type, Capitoline Museum, Rome.
In Augustinian terms, Gregorius describes the statue of Venus as a thing that makes an impression on the senses, but also as a kind of sign that makes “some other thing come to the mind.” One of those things is the representational power of art. He stresses the aesthetic qualities of the statue: its high-quality marble, the skill of its sculpting, the red tinge of the face that suggests blushing. Sight, which is central to Collette’s reading of “The Second Nun’s Tale,” is also emphasized, but instead of Cecilia’s spiritual insight, Gregorius’s vision remains resolutely earthbound. Those who look closely at the statue, he insists, will discover not just a marble thing, like the pagan idols Chaucer’s Cecilia calls deaf and dumb (286), but an image whose illusion of flowing blood makes it seem more like a living woman (viva creatura) than a statue. Gregorius’s reference to the Judgment of Paris, his quotation from Ovid’s love poem, and his emphasis on the statue’s nakedness all suggest her sexuality, which may explain his apparently self-mocking reference to being drawn back three times, as if by some magic force.

The statue of Venus is also a sign that brings something more abstract to Gregorius’s mind: it stands for the achievements of classical Rome that so fascinated him. Venus is not so much an example of the religion of the ancient city as of the wider culture of Rome’s influential myths, literature, and other arts. Unfortunately, because of the limitations of the physical, temporal world, Gregorius is unable to experience, despite his best efforts,
the two things that the statue seems to promise. Her sexuality, which stands in such contrast to St. Cecilia’s purity, cannot be enjoyed by Gregorius, as it was by another classical sculptor most famously described in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. Whether or not it was a magic charm that drew Gregorius back to the statue, no supernatural transformation occurs as it did for Pygmalion. Venus does not step down from her pedestal and go off with her admirer, but remains stone. And if classical statues do not come alive in Gregorius’s world, neither is the Englishman able to find himself back in the time when the statue of Venus was first created and ancient Rome and its pagan culture were whole. However much he might wish it, Gregorius cannot return to that lost city; he is left to puzzle over its ruins and surviving fragments, his antiquarian appetite stimulated but unsatisfied. Gregorius values the material world that St. Cecilia despises and rejects in “The Second Nun’s Tale,” but he is barred from complete knowledge of it.

III.

Like Gregorius’s meditation on the statue of Venus, the popular late medieval poem known as the *Stacions of Rome* sees the potential of the physical world to act as a conduit to the spiritual. Yet unlike Gregorius’s unfulfilled antiquarian yearnings (and disdain for pilgrimage), it declares that certain ancient Roman bodies, distinguished by their Christian piety rather than their classical beauty, do indeed have extraordinary power, the power to absolve from sin those who seek them. These bodies are not works of art but the mortal remains of Rome’s early martyrs, enshrined in the city’s many churches. Cecilia is one such martyr mentioned in the *Stacions*, but her presentation is very different from that in “The Second Nun’s Tale.” Chaucer’s Cecilia rejects all earthly material things, including her own survival, for the spiritual joys of heaven, whereas the *Stacions* proclaims that it is precisely by means of Roman bodies such as hers that salvation may be achieved—for all and not just the elect.

Rome had long been famous for its saints and especially for its early martyrs, whose heroic faith had helped to convert the city from a pagan to a Christian capitol. In the early Middle Ages, pilgrims came to Roman shrines to worship, pray, and even live out the rest of their lives in proximity to sanctity, but by the late Middle Ages, these holy places promised tangible rewards as well. Indulgence from the penalties of sin was extended from cru-
saders and other special classes to pilgrims in general. Because of the quality and quantity of its shrines, Rome was believed (and announced itself) to be pre-eminent in the amount of pardon it could supply. The churches of Rome, the sacred relics they contained, and the pardon they offered were recorded in medieval Latin texts known as the *Indulgentiae ecclesiarum urbis Romae*, which became popular in the fourteenth century and quickly spread throughout Europe, including England. The *Stacions of Rome*, which appeared in various but generally similar forms in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, is a version of the *Indulgentiae* in Middle English verse. Although without literary distinction, the *Stacions* was relatively popular in late medieval England: six long versions and two fragments survive, with two of the former in major religious miscellanies.

The *Stacions* differs from “The Second Nun’s Tale” in its focus on holy bodies after death. Many of these bodies, like that of Cecilia herself, were said to have been moved from the catacombs and brought into the city’s central churches, such as the “vij þousende holy bones” Pope Simplicius gathered and placed in a single church (Vernon, 415–19). As the phrase “holy bones,” which appears often in the *Stacions*, suggests, the poem insists on the relics’ materiality, often by emphasizing their great number or even their appeal to the senses. One version of the *Stacions* says that a pilgrim kneeling by an opening in the double tomb of Sts. Lawrence and Stephen will enjoy “a swete smelle of bodyes þat þer be” (Cotton, 530).

Chaucer’s St. Cecilia represents one extreme of medieval spirituality in her eagerness to shed her body and go to heaven; in contrast, the medieval veneration of the relics of the saints, as in the *Stacions*, celebrates the holy bodies left on earth. In his ground-breaking *Cult of the Saints*, Peter Brown argues that one of the elements that distinguished Christianity was seeing in the saint a direct connection between the divine and the mundane: for “the saint in Heaven was believed to be ‘present’ at his tomb on earth” and capable of mighty deeds. Or as Patrick Geary puts it, most people thought “relics were the saints, continuing to live among men.” In the late Middle Ages, and nowhere more so than in Rome, the cult of the saints developed further as their bodies came to be regarded not only as objects of veneration and imitation but also as the practical source of relief for humans burdened by sins.

Church doctrine insisted that while the guilt (*culpa*) of sin was forgiven by a genuine confession, its punishment (*pena*) still needed to be satisfied by penance and good works, and as a result most humans died greatly in arrears. This huge debt necessitated additional punishment in purgatory before heaven could be achieved. The bountiful indulgences offered in
Rome’s numerous churches, supposedly drawn from the Catholic Church’s inexhaustible Treasury of Merit accumulated by the virtues of Christ and the saints, were a sure way for the sinner to significantly reduce what he or she owed.\textsuperscript{17} An introductory section in an early version of the \textit{Stacions} speaks directly to readers whose souls are “in synne bounde,” telling them that a place exists where they can “medicyn fynde” to avoid “þe fuir of helle” (Vernon Prologue, 9–14).\textsuperscript{18} That place is “Grete Rome,” for “Þer is þe medicyn, crop and rote, / Þat men clepeþ pardoun” (Vernon Prologue, 17–19). Like many of the Latin \textit{Indulgentiae}, the \textit{Stacions} cites Pope Boniface’s assertion that if men only knew the amount of “þe pardoun þat is at grete Rome,” they would feel no need to go “ouer þe see” to Jerusalem or to St. Katherine’s shrine (Vernon, 285–93). Although the penitent must be contrite, boundless pardon is freely available at Roman churches made holy by the relics of martyrs and others.

The church of S. Cecilia is treated more briefly than many other Roman churches in the \textit{Stacions}, and yet, in a single couplet, its benefit because of the saint is made explicit: “At Sesyle [S. Cecilia], the holy marter, / Thowe myght have a C yere” (Cotton, 832–33).\textsuperscript{19} The century of indulgence mentioned in the second line is a relatively modest amount, for other Roman churches in the \textit{Stacions} offered many thousands of years, full remission of sins, or even the immediate release of a friend from Purgatory.\textsuperscript{20}

While Chaucer’s “Second Nun’s Tale” envisions an ascetic life of denial and mortification as the way to salvation, the \textit{Stacions of Rome} promises mercy and grace to all. Chaucer’s tale describes “a greet bataille” against devilish forces by stalwart martyrs to achieve the “corone of lif” that they have richly “deserved” (383–90), whereas readers of the \textit{Stacions} need only appear at the churches of Rome to collect the spiritual riches earned for them by the saints. As in the late medieval genre known as the \textit{Miracles of the Virgin}, where the simple, heartfelt prayer of the most hardened sinner may win Mary’s mercy, the \textit{Stacions} insists that boundless pardon is available to all those who visit Roman churches made holy by the relics of martyrs and other saintly figures.

\textbf{IV.}

I conclude this essay on Roman statues, souls and bodies by returning to the church of S. Cecilia in Rome. Although dedicated to the heroine of “The Second Nun’s Tale,” the church contains a Renaissance statue of the saint
that suggests the less austere values of the two medieval English texts about ancient Rome discussed above: the *Narracio* of Master Gregorius and the *Stacions of Rome*. S. Cecilia in Trastevere was standing in Chaucer’s time and still stands today, though it has been much altered over the centuries. The present church was built in 821 by Pope Paschal I (817–24) specifically to house the remains of the saint, whose incorrupt corpse he claimed to have discovered in the catacombs at the very spot she had revealed to him in a dream.21

A modern visitor to the church, after passing by the tomb of the English Cardinal Adam Easton, a contemporary of Chaucer, sees a gleaming white object at the other end of the nave below and in front of the central high altar.22 This is a marble sculpture of St. Cecilia lying on her side at the point of death or just after, placed in a contrasting niche of black marble, itself surrounded by further decoration, giving the statue of the saint even more prominence. Cecilia appears as a young woman, barefooted and clad in a simple robe, with her knees slightly drawn up before her, her arms stretched along her sides, and her turbaned head turned away so that her face remains hidden, though we see her neck with its wounds from which drops of blood ooze.23

Cardinal Paolo Emilio Sfondrato (1560–1618), who had been assigned S. Cecilia in Trastevere as his titular church, was responsible for ordering and displaying the statue of the saint. According to a detailed historical account Sfondrato commissioned from the renowned archaeologist Antonio Bosio, while the church was being renovated, the cardinal unearthed three sarcophagi beneath the altar, the smallest of which was found to contain the body of Cecilia, still as incorrupt as it had been when placed there almost eight hundred years earlier by Pope Paschal.24 The discovery on October 20, 1599, caused a sensation in Rome, with citizens, clergy, and even the pope eager for a sight of the famous martyr, though her body was only occasionally displayed publicly before being reburied under the altar on her feast day, November 22, 1599. Soon after Cecilia’s reburial, her statue was made at Sfondrato’s request by the young sculptor Stefano Maderno, who portrayed her, as a subsequent plaque nearby states, “in the position in which she was found.”

Maderno’s marble image of St. Cecilia (fig. 12.2) has long been recognized, in the words of John Pope-Hennessy, as “one of the most celebrated statues of its time.”25 Although it is unclear how much credit belongs to Maderno himself (none of his subsequent work matches it) and how much
to his sophisticated patron, Cardinal Sfondrato, a leader of the Counter-Reformation at Rome, the success of the sculpture is undeniable. The “truly moving simplicity” of the saint’s wounded body creates an understated emotional effect, very different from the flamboyant extremes of the Roman baroque sculpture that followed soon after Maderno. In his travel journal, the novelist Stendahl wrote that the sculpture pleased him very much and that, as with Gregorius and the statue of Venus, one “cannot avoid going back, to look at it over and over again”; the Marquis de Sade also echoes Gregorius in noting the delicate naturalism and sense of life in the statue, saying that it resembled a “flower picked almost at the moment of birth . . . like a body just thrown there, soft and willowy, breathing.”

The lovely and moving figure created by Maderno conflicts with some of the key themes of “The Second Nun’s Tale.” The body that the saint mortified and willingly relinquished for the spiritual joys of heaven has been made into an object to delight the senses of even such as de Sade, though, as a piece of marble, it is a “stoon” like the pagan idols to which Cecilia refused to sacrifice. Maderno’s statue, like Chaucer’s tale, honors Cecilia’s heroic self-sacrifice, but it also incorporates other, less severe medieval attitudes.
toward the body, such as those seen in Gregorius’s Roman treatise and in the *Stacions of Rome*.

The delicate elegance of Maderno’s statue, for example, calls to mind the “wonderful and intricate skill” of the Venus praised by Gregorius, though instead of the latter’s sexual response to the statue of the goddess, the Italian sculptor sought to evoke compassion for his young, modest, and innocent victim. What Claudio Strinati calls a “masterpiece of introspection and silence” is especially appropriate because Cecilia’s story is unusual in medieval virgin martyr tales in containing no element of sexual threat. If Maderno’s artistry reminds us of Gregorius’s aestheticism, he also shares something of the writer’s antiquarianism, but, once again, his purposes are more devotional than secular. Maderno was trained to copy ancient art, perhaps one of the reasons Sfondrato commissioned him for the Cecilia statue, and his approach is noticeably classical, most explicitly in his realization of the saint’s turned away face, which derives from a Hellenistic statue of a dead Persian. An obvious reason for using such an antiquarian style is to pay tribute to the purity of the early Roman Church and thus to associate the present with that heroic past. Although the accompanying plaque proclaims that the statue portrays Cecilia’s body exactly as it appeared when her tomb was opened in 1600, blood is still dripping from her wound, thus conflating the moment of her death with her rediscovery well over a millennium later.

Maderno’s Cecilia contains elements that suggest Gregorius’s secular response to Venus, but it is finally, like Chaucer’s “Second Nun’s Tale,” a Christian work of art, though one whose respect for holy bodies is more like that of the *Stacions of Rome*. The statue of Cecilia suggests that matter need not be the “fetter of the spirit” (Collette, 338), as it is in Chaucer’s tale, but can be a powerful religious sign. The most obvious Christian signification of Maderno’s Cecilia, evident even to casual visitors, is its strategic location in the church. The horizontal statue is slightly raised above the nave floor and parallel to the main altar one level above, both image and altar framed by the famous thirteenth-century ciborium of Arnolfo di Cambio. In Sfondrato’s renovation of the church, as Kämpf explains, “two new clear-cut horizons were established—one for the veneration of the relic and the other for the liturgical celebration of the mass.” For worshipers in the nave, the statue reinforces the most important act performed in any Christian church: the transubstantiation of the Host. The body and blood of Christ in the consecrated bread and wine of the Eucharist are echoed in the bloody body of the saint just below, whose physical intactness also looks forward to “Christ’s
Second Coming and the bodily resurrection of the faithful." Whatever the aesthetic beauty and historical interest of the statue of Cecilia, it functions in the church as a marble sign of Christ’s great sacrifice and his promise of eternal life.

The statue of the dying Cecilia is also a sign of the uncorrupt body of the saint herself, who was believed to be still an active presence in her nearby tomb, like the holy relics detailed in the Stacions of Rome. Maderno made the link between statue and holy body explicit by shaping the marble Cecilia so that its head looks in the direction of her remains in the crypt directly beneath the main altar, where she rests with her husband and his brother. The contemporary archaeologist and historian Bosio describes the statue as “‘turning her face towards the confessio,’ thus indicating the burial place of the saintly bodies beneath.” The body of the saint in her shrine is not immediately accessible to visitors, but her statue is, especially on Cecilia’s feast day when it is available to be touched and kissed by the devout.

Such veneration of an inanimate statue may look like the idol worship condemned by Chaucer’s heroine; it would certainly be so judged by Christian iconoclasts, among them England’s Lollards, who were suspicious of all religious representation, which they believed broke the commandment against graven images and misappropriated the worship due to God. The orthodox medieval theology behind the Stacions of Rome, which was written when suspicion of the Lollards was high and perhaps in deliberate opposition to them, would have valued a statue like Maderno’s Cecilia not because of its beauty and evocation of past history or even as an object of veneration, but because it was a sign of Cecilia’s holy body, a sacred relic.

Chaucer’s “Second Nun’s Tale” expresses little regard for the preservation of Cecilia’s body, either before or after death, but, as we have seen, the Stacions of Rome, Pope Paschal, Cardinal Sfondrato, Maderno, and pilgrims to this day exhibit the greatest care and reverence for her corpse, regarding it not as worthless matter but as the vessel of the saint’s real presence. Gregorius hoped in vain to bridge the gap between medieval and classical Rome through the statue of Venus, but the body of Cecilia creates just such a link between present and past. Her statue and holy remains unite the viewer (whether in 1600 or the twenty-first century) with the still vital saint at the moment of her martyrdom and acceptance into heaven. Gregorius is granted only the illusion of life as he looks intently at Venus, and he cannot return in any meaningful way to the time of her creation, but Cecilia comes from the ancient past (and heaven) to meet those who come to visit her shrine,
helping them to achieve their own salvation, as she did the people of Rome during her earthly existence.footnote{16}

Instead of the rejection of the physical for the spiritual that underlies “The Second Nun’s Tale,” as Carolyn Collette has demonstrated, a marble statue and especially the dead body it represents, though material, inspires the hope of spiritual regeneration. The austere theology of “The Second Nun’s Tale” is not the only lesson taken from ancient Roman Christianity. There is also the more undemanding message of the Stacions of Rome, which does not reject but uses the objects of this world to promise joy in the next. In the Middle Ages, the church of S. Cecilia in Trastevere continued the preaching and teaching of its saintly patron, as indicated in Chaucer’s tale, but Maderno’s statue of St. Cecilia reinforced a more immediate and less intellectual message: the church of S. Cecilia was a place where pilgrims could find healing for their sins as the result of the heavenly power that resided in the body of the young martyr beneath its altar.

Notes

1. I am grateful for this opportunity to join in honoring another remarkable woman, Carolyn Collette. Although Carolyn has not yet, to my knowledge, been officially recognized either as a saint or goddess, her learning, insight, generosity, and good humor have been a blessing to countless students and colleagues, as I know from my own experience. In this essay, I shall generally use the form St. Cecilia for the name of the saint (even though Chaucer’s spelling is different) and S. Cecilia for the name of her church in the Trastevere section of Rome. I am further grateful to Carolyn for the occasion to discuss one of my very favorite Roman churches.

2. Carolyn P. Collette, “A Closer Look at Seinte Cecile’s Special Vision,” Chaucer Review 10 (1976): 337–49. Further citations to this essay will be by page number in my text and notes. Other works by Chaucer, such as “The Man of Law’s Tale” and “The Prioress’s Tale,” not to mention The Legend of Good Women, contain hagiographical elements, but Cecilia is the only Chaucerian protagonist who is actually a Christian saint.

4. References to Chaucer’s works, including “The Second Nun’s Tale,” are from the *Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987). Subsequent citations to this tale in my text are parenthetical by line number.

5. See Collette, 346–47. In contrast to Almachius’s blindness, Cecilia’s spiritual insight is emphasized in some of the etymologies of her name in the Prologue to “The Second Nun’s Tale”: “Cecilie is to seye ‘the wey to blynde’” (VIII.92) or “‘Wantynge of blyndnesse,’ for hir grete light / Of sapience” (VIII.100–101). The saint also brings true sight to others: after following her instructions, her husband gains the faith to enable him to see the holy angel that was previously invisible to him, he “now sees what before was hidden” (Collette, 344); and he in turn opens the eyes of his brother when he “in one sweeping statement . . . affirms the greater reality of the word beyond sight, scorning the pale shadows of the material world” (Collette, 345):

“In dremes,” quod Valerian, “han we be
Unto this tyme, brother myn, ywis.
But now at erst in trouthe oure dwellyng is.”

(262–64)

6. My quotations of Gregorius’s *Narracio* are from the Latin edition of R. B. C. Huygens, *Magister Gregorius: Narracio de Mirabilibus Urbis Rome* (Leiden: Brill, 1970), and from an English translation, which I have slightly modified, by John Osborne, *Master Gregorius: The Marvels of Rome* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1987). All further citations will be included in the text and will refer first to the page and line number of the Latin original and then to the page number of Osborne’s translation.

7. Osborne, *Marvels of Rome*, 58, casts doubt on the existence of a working bath in Rome at the time and notes that Gregorius’s account is based on a version of the *Seven Wonders of the World*, suggesting that Gregorius’s attempts to recreate Rome depended on texts as well as direct experience.

8. Given the details he mentions, especially the blushing of the goddess, the statue Gregorius saw probably did not depict the Judgment of Paris but rather was an example of a famous representation of Venus emerging naked from her bath, known as the *Aphrodite Pudica*. Gordon Rushforth, “Magister Gregorius De Mirabilibus Urbis Rome: A New Description of Rome in the Twelfth Century,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 9 (1919): 25, identified Gregorius’s Venus as the so-called Capitoline Venus now in the Capitoline Museum, and this was accepted by Osborne, *Master Gregorius*, 59, but Dale Kinney, “Mirabilia Urbis Romae,” in *The Classics in the Middle Ages*, ed. Aldo S. Bernardo and Saul Levin (Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1990), 214, calls this identification “neither likely . . . nor necessary.” The Capitoline Venus seems to have been rediscovered too late to be the one Gregorius saw, though he may have seen a similar work.
9. In the *Narracio*, Gregorius frequently refers to bronze statues as signs (*signum*) among other terms (13.50, 51, 56, 15.128, 16.164), though he calls the marble Venus an image (*imago*) twice and statue (*statua*) once, as seen in the quotation above.

10. Gregorius also insists that other ancient statues give the illusion of life, including speech: a bronze bull on Castel Sant’Angelo was so skillfully made, he says, that it appears to viewers as if it were about to “bellow and move” (*mugituro et moturo*) (13.54; trans. 19), and to one looking intently (*attencius insperxit*), the bronze head of the Colossus at the Lateran appears to be “moving and speaking” (*moturo et locuturo*) (18.205; trans. 23).

11. For the most comprehensive account of medieval Continental and English manuscripts of the *Indulgentiae* in Europe, see Nine Robijntje Miedema, *Die römischen Kirchen im Spätmittelalter nach den “Indulgentiae ecclesiarum urbis Romae”* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2001), and her *Die “Mirabilia Romae”* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1996).


13. Most of the bodies of the saints were enclosed in their shrines, but other non-human but very material relics associated with Christ, Mary, and the apostles were available for inspection, as the *Stacions* repeatedly insists. These include “þe Table þer men may se” used by Christ at the Last Supper (Vernon, 305) at the Lateran, or, in the church named for them (S. Pietro in Vincoli), “þe cheynes þere men may see” that once restrained Peter (Vernon 583).

It was essential to this view of things that the saint should be considered to inhabit the place where his relics were preserved.


17. See, especially, Shaffern, “Medieval Theology of Indulgences.”


19. These lines are from the Lambeth continuation to Cotton published by Furnivall. Other versions mention another relic at S. Cecilia, the foot of Mary Magdalen (see Vernon, 664).

20. In the murky theology of indulgences, a sinner could never know for certain how much pardon was required to offset the debt he owed. There was (and is) also confusion about what the years of an indulgence meant. J. R. Hulbert, “Some Medieval Advertisements of Rome,” *Modern Philology* 20 (1923), 420, explains: “By a hundred days or a hundred years of indulgence is meant not release from that many days or years in purgatory [as often assumed], but as much shortening of punishment as a hundred days or a hundred years of penance performed on earth would accomplish.”


22. All cardinals are given title to a church in Rome and S. Cecilia’s was Easton’s; it has even been suggested he might have been the inspiration for “The Second Nun’s Tale”: see John C. Hirsh, “Did Chaucer Visit Rome?” *ELN* 37 (2000): 1–8.


24. These claims have always raised questions. Although Cecilia was named as
a martyr in the early centuries of Christian Rome, most scholars now believe that her story was a later invention. Pope Paschal obviously thought she was genuine and that he had found her preserved body, as did Cardinal Sfondrato (whose name is also given as Paolo Camillo Sfondrato). During the last century, a consensus developed that what was found by the cardinal in 1599 were only some clothes. The discovery of drawings in a contemporary document, however, seems to offer eyewitness testimony that an intact body of woman was found in the church, though not lying in the same position as the statue and as stated in the written report that accompanied the drawings. For a thorough account of the purported discovery of Cecilia by Cardinal Sfondrato and the new document, see Tomaso Montanari, “Una Nuova Fonte per l’Invenzione del Corpo di Santa Cecilia: Testimoni Oculari, Immagini e Dubbi,” *Marburger Jahrbuch für Kunstwissenschaft* 32 (2005): 149–65. See also Tobias Kämpf, “Framing Cecilia’s Sacred Body: Paolo Camillo Sfondrato and the Language of Revelation,” *Sculpture Journal* 6 (2001): 10–20, and Emma Stirrup, “Time Concertinaed at the Altar of St. Cecilia in Trastevere,” in *Rome: Continuing Encounters between Past and Present*, ed. Dorigen Caldwell and Lesley Caldwell (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2011), 57–78. This section of my essay is indebted to these articles.


29. Pope-Hennessy, *Italian High Renaissance and Baroque Sculpture*, 3.288, identifies the Hellenistic source of the face. For Maderno’s classical training, see Lo Bianco, *Cecilia*, 27. For Sfondrato’s Christian antiquarianism, see Stirrup, “Time Concertinaed,” 57: “Sfondrato was acting in response to the example set by several of his counter-Reformation contemporaries, in their zealous regeneration of the Catholic Church, and specifically their sensitive and archaeologically aware restoration of early Christian churches. The principal concept governing these restoration projects was to demonstrate and reaffirm an unbroken chain of tradition in Rome between the Apostolic early Christian community and the newly reformed church of the late sixteenth century.”

30. As noted by Montanari, whereas Maderno’s statue shows the saint lying on her side, a contemporary drawing of her rediscovery in her church shows her lying
flat in a coffin. This may not indicate conscious deception by Maderno or even that he altered Cecilia’s position so that her body would be better seen in the church, but rather that he wished to present different moments of the saint’s life in a single sculpture.

34. Stirrup, “Time Concertinaed,” 57.
35. See Caroline Walker Bynum, Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe (New York: Zone Books, 2011), esp. 45: “the Western discourse about images never completely lost an awareness that their physicality is a problem, that manifesting the divine in the material is at best a paradox, at worst an invitation to idolatry.” For the complexity of iconoclasm, in our day and in the past, see James Simpson, Under the Hammer: Iconoclasm in the Anglo-American Tradition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).
36. Stirrup, “Time Concertinaed,” 74, argues that the “ beholder [of the Cecilia statue] is invited to observe the continuation from the Rome of the Apostles to the present, from a divine perspective, all of these present in one scene.”

Works Cited


