Many visitors to Rome have become acquainted with the basilica of SS Nereus and Achilleus, the cemeterial church at the catacomb of Santa Domitilla, and have been intrigued by the story of its virtual disappearance in the early Middle Ages and its rediscovery by G.B. De Rossi in the 1870s. Some of them may also have found their way to the charming little church with the same dedication, which is situated in the so-called Passeggiata Archeologica, near the baths of Caracalla. There they will have been shown a marble pontifical throne upon which are carved the words: S. Gregorius hic habuit homiliam vicesimam octavam, followed by the beginning and ending of the Homily itself. It probably occurs to few of them to doubt the truth of this inscription or to speculate whether there is any connection between these two churches with the same dedication.

Let us first consider the pontifical throne and its inscription. The church by the baths of Caracalla which, as we shall see shortly, is of at least fourth-century origin, fell into a ruinous condition between 1475, when it was restored by Sixtus IV in preparation for the Holy Year, and 1594, when Caesar Baronius, at his own request, became its titular cardinal. He restored the church in a scholarly manner to the form of an early Christian Roman basilica, and it is still very much as he left it, in accordance with his wish, expressed in an inscription at the church, that his successors should hand it on untouched: ... quisquis fuerit, rogo te per gloriam Dei et per merita horum martyrum, nihil demito, nihil minuito nec mutato ... The pontifical throne was created from a number of fragments at the time of the restoration and it was Baronius himself who caused the inscription about the Homily and the quotation from it to be carved there.1

It seems from his own writings\textsuperscript{2} that Baronius was convinced that this was the church where Gregory preached, but even though the cemeterial basilica was lost to view in his day, there was literary evidence available which might have led him to be cautious. In the first place there is a sentence in the Homily itself, which Gregory delivered on 12 May, the feast-day of SS Nereus and Achilleus: Sancti isti, ad quorum tumbam consistimus.\textsuperscript{3} When Baronius first took in hand the restoration of the church, the bodies of these saints lay in Sant' Adriano,\textsuperscript{4} to which they appear to have been transferred in the thirteenth century by Gregory IX. There is no evidence that they ever lay in SS Nereus and Achilleus by the baths of Caracalla before they were brought there by Baronius at the completion of the restoration in 1597.\textsuperscript{5} Secondly, the heading of the manuscripts of the Homily might have led him to hesitate. The majority, followed by Migne, read habita ad populum in basilica sanctorum Nerei et Achillei, but one of the best of them (Cod. reg. Sueciae) supplies the even more explicit habita ... in coemeterio. This last phrase must have been known to Baronius from the Liber Pontificalis, where it is stated that Pope John I (523–6) refecit cymeterium beatorum Nerei et Achillei, via Ardeatina, since he refers to the relevant passage in a comment in his edition of the Martirologium Romanum.\textsuperscript{6}

Apart from the foregoing evidence, the church by the baths of Caracalla does not appear under the name of SS Nereus and Achilleus until the synod lists of 595, when each of its priests is described as presbiter tituli sanctorum Nerei et Achillei,\textsuperscript{7} whereas internal evidence suggests 591 as the date of the sermon. It is certainly not later than 593.\textsuperscript{8} It seems that prior

\textsuperscript{2} Ep. 63, ed. R. Albericius, Venerabilis Caesaris Baronii epistolae et opuscula (Rome 1770) 79.

\textsuperscript{3} PL 76, 1212C.

\textsuperscript{4} The greater part of the remains of SS Nereus and Achilleus were transferred to the church of Sant' Adriano in 1228 by Gregory IX, as a contemporary inscription on a stone at the church testified. When the church was secularized and restored to its former condition as the Senate House in the Forum, the stone was transferred to the Frate Mercedari in the Via Regina, where Dott. Guerrieri saw it.

\textsuperscript{5} Cod. Vall. G99, cited by A. Guerrieri, La Chiesa dei SS Nereo ed Achilleo (Vatican City 1951) 63. See also the letter of Baronius cited in note 2 above.

\textsuperscript{6} See PL 76,1210; LP I, p. 276. Martirologium Romanum (Venice 1604) 270.


\textsuperscript{8} The Homiliae in Evangelia are to be assigned to the first three years of Gregory the Great's pontificate, 590–3. The twenty-eighth Homily, since it was delivered on 12 May, cannot belong to the first year, because Gregory did not become Pope until 3 September. In view of PL 76,1212D, Ubique mors, ubique luctus, ubique desolatio, etc., it seems appropriate to 591, the year of floods, plagues, and other disasters.