

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-04164-6 - Old Saint Peter's, Rome

Edited by Rosamond Mckitterick, John Osborne, Carol M. Richardson and Joanna Story

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## Introduction

ROSAMOND MCKITTERICK, JOHN OSBORNE,  
CAROL M. RICHARDSON AND JOANNA STORY

The Vatican basilica is arguably the most important church in western Christendom, and it is among the most significant buildings anywhere in the world (see Frontispiece a). However, the church that is visible today is a youthful upstart, only four hundred years old in comparison with the twelve hundred-year-old church whose site it occupies. A very small proportion of the original is now extant, entirely covered over by the new basilica, but enough survives to make reconstruction of the first Saint Peter's possible. Consolidation, conservation and ongoing exploration of the present basilica and its surroundings, particularly in the past thirty years, have made available new evidence about its predecessor which has both excited and perplexed historians, archaeologists and art historians alike.

Built over a protracted period in the fourth century, the first Saint Peter's was a huge edifice designed to enclose and enhance that part of the area of the Vatican hill where the apostle Peter was reputed to have been buried, just above the Circus of Nero where he had been executed: the huge obelisk that now stands in front of the new basilica was quite probably the last thing he saw, albeit, according to later legend, upside down. The basilica built later in his honour became the focus of western Christendom for more than a millennium. However, the history of that first building has been overshadowed by the story of its protracted demolition and replacement in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This has become primarily an architectural history, which has distorted and oversimplified a narrative of competing demands and furious passions. Old Saint Peter's is assumed to have been dispensable, a thing of the past that neither satisfied Renaissance aesthetic sensibilities nor offered suitable spaces for contemporary liturgy. As a result the importance of the original is often either ignored or taken for granted, and its history, form and function remain surprisingly unclear, unconsidered and indeed controversial. But, as this volume demonstrates, the new basilica was formed by the traditions established by the old, which were far more enduring than its brick walls and marble colonnades.

In March of 2010, a group of historians, art historians, archaeologists and liturgists gathered at the British School at Rome to explore aspects of the basilica's history, from its physical fabric to the activities that took place

within its walls. The discussion was greatly enriched by the multidisciplinary perspectives brought to bear on questions new and old, and this volume brings together many of the papers presented. The chapters in the volume reconsider existing evidence, present new material for the first time, and tackle the complex history and historiography of the site.

### *Tu es Petrus*

The history of the first basilica of Saint Peter is the history of the relationship of the papacy and the city of Rome. In the years after his victory at the Milvian Bridge in October 312, the Emperor Constantine and members of his family began to manifest an interest in the shrines of Christian saints and martyrs that were situated outside Rome's Aurelian walls. Constantine's mother, Helena, was buried in a mausoleum adjoining the large funerary basilica at the cemetery of Santi Pietro and Marcellino on the Via Labicana, and his daughter, Constantina, was similarly laid to rest in a basilica-mausoleum complex adjacent to the tomb of the martyr Agnes on the Via Nomentana. But the largest of these imperial building projects outside the urban periphery in the first half of the fourth century was the basilica constructed on the right bank of the Tiber, outside the walls of the city and adjacent to the abandoned Circus of Nero, to mark the spot in a cemetery on the slope of the Vatican hill where the body of the apostle Peter was venerated by the Christian faithful.<sup>1</sup> This was no small undertaking and, paradoxically, led eventually to the disappearance of any obvious physical sign of Saint Peter's original burial site. Before building could even begin it was first necessary to bury the southern portion of the existing necropolis, in order to create a sizeable platform on which to erect the new structure. Work at the site continued for many decades, although from the mid-320s onwards Eusebius and other writers record the throngs of pilgrims who crossed the river to visit Rome's most important shrine. Constantine's name in golden letters appeared prominently in the inscription placed on the triumphal arch that terminated the nave,<sup>2</sup> and it was not long before important Christians began to choose this site for their own burial, including the prefect of the city, Junius Bassus, in the year 359.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> P. Liverani and G. Spinola, with P. Zander, *The Vatican Necropolies* (Turnhout, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> P. Liverani, 'Saint Peter's, Leo the Great and the leprosy of Constantine', *PBSR* 76 (2008), 155–72, who disagrees with G. W. Bowersock, 'Peter and Constantine', in W. Tronzo (ed.), *Saint Peter's in the Vatican* (Cambridge, MA, 2005), 5–15. See also Gem, this volume, 35–64.

<sup>3</sup> Life 46, *LP*, I, 232; E. S. Malbon, *The Iconography of the Sarcophagus of Junius Bassus* (Princeton, NJ, 1990), 3–4, 139–40.

The next century witnessed the dramatic withdrawal of the imperial court from Rome, with secular power shifting to Constantinople and, within Italy, to Milan and then Ravenna, as well as the shock occasioned by the attacks on Rome of first the Goths (in 410) and then the Vandals (in 455).<sup>4</sup> The vacuum created by the loss of imperial patronage was increasingly filled by the city's bishop, the pope; and while the papal residence and the city's official 'cathedral' were located at the Lateran, the importance of Peter as the 'rock' on which the Christian Church was to be constructed underpinned ambitious papal claims to broader spiritual authority. This meant that the physical location of his earthly remains grew in importance as a site of authority, as well as a major draw for pilgrims. Significantly, Pope Leo I (440–61), whose sermons developed the ideology of Peter and Paul replacing Romulus and Remus as Rome's special guardians, was the first pontiff to choose Saint Peter's as his own place of burial, a practice that has continued with only a few exceptions until the present day.<sup>5</sup> Leo I also established the first monastery at the site, since its growing importance created a need for resident clergy.

From the second half of the fifth century onwards, the shrine of Peter was embellished by a series of significant building projects, all sponsored by popes. One of Leo's successors, possibly Simplicius (468–83) or Symmachus (498–514), constructed a covered 'porticus', leading to the basilica from the bridgehead. Symmachus was also responsible for the addition of a baptistery, various chapels and fountains, and a series of rooms that the *Liber Pontificalis* refers to as *episcopia*.<sup>6</sup> Here Symmachus resided during the years of the Laurentian schism, when the Lateran was controlled by his rival Laurentius. Symmachus also rebuilt the atrium and its exterior staircase. The interior of the basilica underwent a major reorganization in the time of Gregory I (590–604), who introduced the semi-annular crypt passage.<sup>7</sup> This allowed pilgrims to venerate Peter's remains without causing interruption to services at the altar above, a model that subsequently was copied in a number of other shrine churches across western Europe. The biographies of Gregory's successors in the seventh, eighth and ninth centuries are filled with references to the donations of silk curtains and altar vestments, glittering mosaics, and liturgical objects of gold and silver.

<sup>4</sup> See B. Ward-Perkins, *The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilization* (Oxford, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> W. Ullmann, 'Leo I and the theme of papal primacy', *Journal of Theological Studies* n.s. 11 (1960), 25–51, reprinted in his *The Church and the Law in the Earlier Middle Ages* (Variorum Collected Studies Series 38) (London, 1975).

<sup>6</sup> Life 53, *LP*, I, 262; J. D. Alchermes, 'Petrine politics: Pope Symmachus and the rotunda of Saint Andrew at Old Saint Peter's', *Catholic Historical Review* 81 (1995), 1–40.

<sup>7</sup> *CBCR*, V, 51–191; Blaauw, *CD*, 530–4, 632–3.

Many pontiffs also established subsidiary chapels within the church, replete with the relics of other saints, and intended to function as the sites of papal tombs.<sup>8</sup> One of the best documented of these is the chapel dedicated to Mary, constructed against the counter-façade of the basilica at its northern end by Pope John VII (705–7), and intended as his own funerary chapel. But, as William Tronzo put it, albeit from the perspective of the inevitability of the new basilica, ‘medieval Christianity shattered the delicate metaphor of the fourth century by filling Saint Peter’s with the burgeoning material apparatus of the religion, the holy objects and bodies that were the focus of devotion and cult . . . At the same time, it diffused its singular focus on the altar in the apse and the tomb of Saint Peter.’<sup>9</sup> Another way to interpret these accretions, however, was not as confusion or compromise of the original, but as the continual organic enrichment of a covered cemetery where the rare possibility of burial *ad sanctos* was feasible for only a very fortunate few.<sup>10</sup>

By the seventh century, pilgrimage to the tombs of the saints had become a major business, and it is probably no coincidence that the first surviving guidebook for Christian visitors to Rome, the *De Locis Sanctis Martyrum*, appears at almost exactly the same moment that Jerusalem fell to the Arabs, thus rendering pilgrimage to the Holy Land somewhat more difficult.<sup>11</sup> It may also have been about this time that the Egyptian obelisk standing adjacent to the south flank of the basilica, on the site of Nero’s circus, came to be interpreted as the tomb of Julius Caesar, possibly to act as a foil to the tomb of Peter.<sup>12</sup> The obelisk was one of three pre-Christian monuments believed to have been tombs of prominent Romans that medieval pilgrims passed en

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, J. Story, J. Bunbury, A. C. Felici, *et al.*, ‘Charlemagne’s black marble: the origin of the epitaph of Pope Hadrian I’, *PBSR* 73 (2005), 157–90.

<sup>9</sup> W. Tronzo, ‘Introduction’, in Tronzo (ed.), *Saint Peter’s in the Vatican* (above, n. 2), 2.

<sup>10</sup> Y. Duval, *Auprès des saints, corps et âme: l’inhumation ‘ad sanctos’ dans la chrétienté d’Orient et d’Occident du IIIe au VIIe siècle* (Paris, 1988); I. Herklotz, ‘Sepulcra’ e ‘monumenta’ del medioevo. *Studi sull’arte sepolcrale in Italia* (Naples, 2001; first published 1985), 48–56.

<sup>11</sup> R. Geyer, O. Cuntz, R. Franceschini, R. Weber, L. Bieler, J. Fraipont and F. Glorie (eds.), *Itineraria et Alia Geographica. Itineraria Hierosolymitana. Itineraria Romana. Geographica* (CCSL 175) (Turnhout, 1965); Valentini–Zucchetti, I and II for the Sylloges; M. d’Onofrio, *Romei e giubilei. Il pellegrinaggio medievale a S. Pietro (350–1350)* (Milan, 1999); V. Ortenberg, ‘Archbishop Sigeric’s journey to Rome in 990’, *Anglo-Saxon England* 19 (1990), 197–246; R. B. C. Huygens (ed.), *Magister Gregorius: Narracio de Mirabilibus Urbis Romae* (Leiden, 1970); J. Osborne, *The Marvels of Rome (Master Gregorius)* (Toronto, 1987); C. Nardello, *Il fascino di Roma nel medioevo. Le meraviglie di Roma di Maestro Gregorio* (Rome, 1997; second edition 2007); D. Birch, *Pilgrimage to Rome in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, 1998); C. Dietz, *Wandering Monks, Virgins, Pilgrims: Ascetic Travel in the Mediterranean World AD 300–800* (University Park, PA, 2005); G. Walser, *Die Einsiedler Inschriftensammlung und der Pilgerführer durch Rom (Codex Einsidlensis 326)* (Stuttgart, 1987); R. McKitterick, *Perceptions of the Past in the Early Middle Ages* (Notre Dame, IN, 2006), 35–62.

<sup>12</sup> See Osborne, this volume, 274–86.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-04164-6 - Old Saint Peter's, Rome

Edited by Rosamond Mckitterick, John Osborne, Carol M. Richardson and Joanna Story

Excerpt

[More information](#)

route from the Tiber crossing to the basilica. These monuments prefigured a fourth, greater, tomb, that of Saint Peter himself, and encouraged pilgrims to contemplate the wider 'memorial landscape' of the shrine.

The pilgrims' path to the obelisk continued into the basilican complex via the imperial mausolea that lay on its southern flank. As Joanna Story shows, this route was used in the eighth century and, she argues, formed a *via sacra* for the cult of Peter itself. She shows how oratories en route, as described in a late eighth-century Carolingian manuscript, were patronized by popes and by the kings of the Franks, especially Charlemagne. The Carolingian relationship with the basilica was particularly significant and enduring. In return for their promise to protect the papal territories, Stephen II (752–7) had declared Saint Petronilla, the purported daughter of Peter himself, patroness of the Franks. The westernmost of the two round mausolea attached to the southern flank of the basilica was rededicated to Petronilla and embellished with a fresco cycle of the life of Constantine, commissioned by Stephen II's brother, Paul I (757–67): it was subsequently known as the Chapel of the Kings of France. Charlemagne himself attended mass in the rotunda in 773 and his son, Carloman, was baptized there and given a new name, Pippin, in 781. The chapel of Saint Petronilla later contained the tombs of Agnes of Aquitaine, wife of the Emperor Henry III (1017–56), who was crowned with her husband in Saint Peter's on Christmas Day 1046.

Particularly important in Carolingian Saint Peter's was the oratory of Saint Peter the Shepherd, which celebrated the apostle's pastoral commission to preach the Gospel and to guard Christ's flock. This oratory was thus a key part of the papacy's claim to authority over the temporal Church, and complemented the power asserted through its control of the relics of the apostle. Gifts to the oratory of the Shepherd show that the Carolingian dynasty understood its doctrinal significance and was able to manipulate the liturgical topography of the basilica to ensure the eternal presence of the Carolingian family at the shrine of the apostle.

Saint Peter's itself, of course, was embellished by successive popes and the area around the basilica soon became filled with related buildings, not only monasteries to house the clergy who performed services and provided pastoral care to the many visitors, but also hospices and hospitals for the faithful, so many of whom came from the north that the district soon became known popularly as the 'burgh' or 'borgo'.<sup>13</sup> In the ninth century, following the shock of the Saracen sack of Saint Peter's in 846, Pope Leo

<sup>13</sup> L. Gigli, *Rione XIV Borgo* (Guide rionale di Roma) (Rome, 1990–4), 15–20; C. J. Goodson, *The Rome of Paschal I: Papal Power, Urban Renovation, Church Rebuilding and Relic Translation, 817–824* (Cambridge, 2010); F. A. Bauer, *Das Bild der Stadt Rom im Frühmittelalter*:

IV (847–55) enclosed the entire area in a defensive wall that finally brought the basilica inside the ring of the city walls.<sup>14</sup> His ‘Leonine city’ was the only significant alteration to Rome’s defensive perimeter after the rim of Aurelian in the late third century. The shrine of Peter had become almost synonymous with the Christian Church of the Latin rite, and was much too important to be allowed to remain unprotected.

But the basilica’s continued vulnerability to attack – victim of its significance – is made clear by Katharina Christa Schüppel, who reconstructs the context for a monumental silver cross, one of the many precious objects presented to the basilica by popes, emperors and kings. The silver cross almost certainly replaced a golden one given to Saint Peter’s by Leo III (795–816) but stolen by supporters of the antipope Anacletus II (1130–8) in 1130. This turbulent period in papal history was the result of tensions between the pope and Holy Roman Emperor as to which of them had the greater temporal power. The iconography of the cross marks it as a papal gift and an assertion of papal primacy, a deliberate gesture as it was displayed in an area of the basilica associated with the coronation of emperors.

Innocent III (1198–1216) sought to settle the question of papal primacy once and for all by asserting that the pope was ‘set midway between God and man, below God but above man’.<sup>15</sup> He understood the symbolic power of Saint Peter’s basilica for his campaign: he had been a canon of the basilica and, on his election, took the risk of delaying his coronation by almost two months until 22 February, the feast of Saint Peter’s Chair, when he was enthroned on the wooden *Cathedra Petri* believed to have been used by Peter himself, though in fact a mid-ninth-century artefact, given by the Frankish king Charles the Bald to Pope John VIII.<sup>16</sup> Together, Innocent III and his cousin, Gregory IX (1227–41), updated the most prestigious and visible parts of the basilica, the apse and the façade. Innocent III’s portrait appeared alongside the figure of *Ecclesia* in the lower portion of the apse mosaic, declaring in visual form what he preached in his third sermon *In*

*Papststiftungen im Spiegel des Liber Pontificalis von Gregor dem Dritten bis zu Leo dem Dritten* (Wiesbaden, 2004).

<sup>14</sup> S. Gibson and B. Ward-Perkins, ‘The surviving remains of the Leonine wall’, *PBSR* 47 (1979), 30–57, and ‘The surviving remains of the Leonine wall, part II: the passetto’, *PBSR* 51 (1983), 222–39; J.-C. Picard, ‘Étude sur l’emplacement des tombes des papes du IIIe au Xe siècle’, *MAH* 81 (1969), 725–82; R. Ivaldi, *Le mura di Roma: alla ricerca dell’itinerario completo di un monumento unico al mondo le cui vicende hanno accompagnato la storia millenaria della Città eterna* (Rome, 2005), 511–39.

<sup>15</sup> See the essays in J. M. Powell (ed.), *Innocent III: Vicar of Christ or Lord of the World?* (Washington, DC, 1994).

<sup>16</sup> L. Nees, *A Tainted Mantle: Hercules and the Classical Tradition at the Carolingian Court* (Philadelphia, PA, 1991), 147 and 169 (n. 5).

*Consecratione Pontificis* – that the pope is the Vicar of Christ, not just the Vicar of Peter. No longer merely a donor figure, he was depicted literally between God in the upper part of the mosaic and man in the basilica itself.<sup>17</sup> Gregory IX's mosaic on the façade replaced the apocalyptic scheme of Leo the Great (440–61) with one that again stressed the papacy's direct commission by Christ. In this case the donor-pope was represented kneeling at Christ's right.<sup>18</sup> The *titulus* added to the façade mosaic declared that Saint Peter's, the *Ecclesia Romana*, shone like the sun, radiating the authority of the Church:

As when the heavenly orb of the sun burns, and shines on everything, and gleams like gold above every other metal, thus, this haven of peace built of stone is filled with fervor by doctrine and by faith and expands its power everywhere.<sup>19</sup>

For a period of roughly twelve hundred years, 'Old' Saint Peter's was the most significant religious site in western Europe, and in terms of architecture it was the continent's most influential building.<sup>20</sup> Restoration and embellishment of the already venerable building kept Old Saint Peter's 'alive and up-to-date, but always recognizable, ancient and modern at the same time.'<sup>21</sup> It was also an important site for the development of Christian liturgy.

As well as a major draw for pilgrims, Saint Peter's was also a stage on which many of the most important political dramas of the Middle Ages were enacted. One of the most ideologically resonant was the coronation of Charlemagne as emperor on Christmas Day 800.<sup>22</sup> At Old Saint Peter's this culminated with the coronation of Frederick III in 1452.<sup>23</sup> When, in 1530,

<sup>17</sup> A. Iacobini, 'Est haec sacra principis aedes: the Vatican basilica from Innocent III to Gregory IX (1198–1241)', in Tronzo, *Saint Peter's in the Vatican*, 50–1 (above, n. 2).

<sup>18</sup> Iacobini, 'Est haec sacra principis aedes' (above, n. 17), 60.

<sup>19</sup> Grimaldi, 163: 'Ceus sol fervescit sidus super omne nitescit/Et velut est aurum rutillans super omne metallum/Doctrina atque fide calet et sic pollet ubique/Ista domus petram supra fabricata quietam'; translated in Iacobini, 'Est haec sacra principis aedes' (above, n. 17), 61.

<sup>20</sup> J. Emerick, 'Building *more romano* in Francia during the third quarter of the eighth century: the abbey church of Saint-Denis and its model', in C. Bolgia, R. McKitterick and J. Osborne (eds.), *Rome across Time and Space, c. 500–1400: Cultural Transmission and the Exchange of Ideas* (Cambridge, 2011), 127–50; R. Krautheimer, 'The Carolingian revival of Early Christian architecture', *The Art Bulletin* 24 (1942), 1–38, reprinted with a postscript in R. Krautheimer, *Studies in Early Christian, Medieval and Renaissance Art* (New York, 1969), 203–56; R. Krautheimer, *Rome: Profile of a City, 312–1308* (Princeton, 1980); McKitterick, *Perceptions of the Past* (above, n. 11), 106 n. 31.

<sup>21</sup> Iacobini, 'Est haec sacra principis aedes' (above, n. 17), 48.

<sup>22</sup> See especially the section 'Renovatio imperii' in C. Stiegemann and M. Wemhoff (eds.), 799: *Kunst und Kultur der Karolingerzeit. Karl der Große und Papst Leo III. in Paderborn* (Mainz, 1999), 35–123.

<sup>23</sup> See Fletcher and Glass, this volume, 371–85 and 348–70.

Charles V, the last Holy Roman Emperor to be anointed by the pope, was crowned in Bologna, a plan of Saint Peter's had been sent, along with four canons to provide continuity by proxy, to aid preparations and ensure the same positions were used by the main protagonists.<sup>24</sup>

The story of the rebuilding of Saint Peter's is often traced back to the poor state into which the old basilica had fallen by the beginning of the fifteenth century, thanks to the exile of the papacy in Avignon which lasted from 1304 to 1374. But the Vatican basilica and its attached palace were in a better condition than many of the other basilicas and churches of Rome, including the Lateran and San Paolo fuori le mura.<sup>25</sup> Earthquakes and civil strife had all but destroyed other sites while Saint Peter's survived relatively well. Despite the absence of the pope throughout most of the fourteenth century, there were resident clergy at the basilica. The visits and donations of pilgrims and other devotees continued apace, and cardinals, canons and bishops continued to be buried at Saint Peter's. Even the lack of a pope in Rome could not distract from the pull of the Vatican basilica and the shrine of the apostle. A particularly important patron was Jacopo Caetani Stefaneschi (c. 1260–1341), first of all as a canon of Saint Peter's and then as a cardinal, who commissioned the huge double-sided altarpiece and the fresco of the *navicella* from Giotto, had the tribune redecorated, and much else besides, spending the huge sum of 2,200 florins.<sup>26</sup> Even though he died in Avignon in 1341, Stefaneschi's remains were returned to Rome so that he could be buried in Saint Peter's.<sup>27</sup> The local population also continued to look after Saint Peter's, and may have taken advantage of the pope's absence to develop a greater presence there. Roman clans, among them the Stefaneschi, the Tebaldeschi, and, most importantly, the Orsini, appear to have thought of Saint Peter's as their own in the same way that the Colonna held sway at the Lateran. And, as has been suggested for other urban centres in the Italian peninsula, the Black Death of 1348 did not deprive affected

<sup>24</sup> See Appendix, this volume, section 5, 410–13.

<sup>25</sup> P. Silvan, 'S. Pietro senza papa: testimonianze del periodo avignonese', in A. Tomei (ed.), *Roma, Napoli, Avignone: arte di curia, arte di corte 1300–1377* (Turin, 1996), 229–30.

<sup>26</sup> J. Gardner, 'The Stefaneschi altarpiece: a reconsideration', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 37 (1974), 57–103; B. Kempers and S. de Blaauw, 'Jacopo Stefaneschi, patron and liturgist: a new hypothesis regarding the date, iconography, authorship and function of his altarpiece for Old Saint Peter's', *Mededelingen van het Nederlands Instituut te Rome* n.s. 12–47 (1987), 83–113; M. Lisner, 'Giotto und die Aufträge des Kardinals Jacopo Stefaneschi für Alt-St. Peter: 1. das Mosaik der Navicella in der Kopie des Francesco Beretta', *RJBH* 29 (1994), 45–95; M. Lisner, 'Giotto und die Aufträge des Kardinals Jacopo Stefaneschi für Alt-St. Peter: 2. der Stefaneschi-Altar; Giotto und seine Werkstatt in Rom; das Altarwerk und der verlorene Christuszyklus in der Petersapsis', *RJBH* 30 (1995), 59–133.

<sup>27</sup> Silvan, 'S. Pietro senza papa' (above, n. 25), 229–30.



areas of patrons but rather increased the amount of money available to be spent on pious works.<sup>28</sup> Even the popes in Avignon continued to pay for the basilica's upkeep, especially the roof and campanile, which were damaged by storms and earthquakes. Then in 1378, with the start of the papal schism, Saint Peter's became a particularly valuable propaganda tool: Urban VI was buried there in a sarcophagus bearing a representation of his receipt of the keys from Saint Peter himself, a powerful rebuff to his competitor pope in Avignon (see Fig. 17.2). Indeed, if Saint Peter's was neglected during the fourteenth century because the pope resided in Avignon, the pattern merely mirrored the habits of the previous century, for the papal court had been largely itinerant since the twelfth century.<sup>29</sup>

With the return of the papacy to Rome under Martin V in 1420, the Vatican also became the primary papal residence, making Saint Peter's the papal chapel *par excellence* that it remains today. It was this fact and its increased symbolic importance that made the resumption of papal patronage inevitable, some of it involving single altars, some of it substantial parts of the architecture. Every one of Martin V's successors was buried in the basilica, reviving a tradition that had fallen out of favour in the ninth century.<sup>30</sup>

From the middle of the fifteenth century the history of Saint Peter's is dominated by the inevitability of the 'slow (though logical) process of growth from west to east, from the choir of Nicholas V and Bramante's crossing, to Maderno's nave and Bernini's colonnade'.<sup>31</sup> Important work by Christof Thoenes and Christoph Frommel has established what can be known for certain about Nicholas V's project, described in fulsome terms by the Florentine humanist Gianozzo Manetti, who captured the pope's (suspiciously coherent) deathbed oration.<sup>32</sup> Accounts for the years 1452–4 show that work on a new tribune or choir – for which a number of the original structures in the area of the apse and transept were demolished – was at least started and foundations laid. These were captured in Bramante's plan (Uffizi 20A, see Fig. 20.1), which laid down his own proposals for a new domed crossing, firmly establishing the precedent for the subsequent

<sup>28</sup> M. Meiss, *Painting in Florence and Siena after the Black Death* (Princeton, NJ, 1979); but see also H. B. J. Maginnis, *Painting in the Age of Giotto: a Historical Re-evaluation* (University Park, PA, 1997).

<sup>29</sup> B. Bolton, 'A new Rome in a small place? Imitation and re-creation in the patrimony of Saint Peter', in Bolgia *et al.*, *Rome across Time and Space* (above, n. 20), 305–22.

<sup>30</sup> See Richardson, this volume, 324–47.

<sup>31</sup> C. Thoenes, 'Renaissance Saint Peter's', in Tronzo (ed.), *Saint Peter's in the Vatican* (above, n. 2), 89. See also the review of this book in *The Art Bulletin* 89/1 (2007), 162–4, by L. Bosman.

<sup>32</sup> Thoenes, 'Renaissance Saint Peter's' (above, n. 31), 65–71.

rebuilding.<sup>33</sup> A substantial part of the old basilica was demolished to make way for the massive piers required to support the dome. But none of this area had been carefully documented. When Tiberio Alfarano, *Clerico Benefitiato* of Saint Peter's from 1567, brought together what was remembered of the old structure in plans (1571, 1576 and 1582) and notes that led to the important publication in 1582 on which so many of the chapters in this volume rely, his challenge was enormous.<sup>34</sup> There had been no careful inventory of the kind supervised by Giacomo Grimaldi (1568–1623) in the first decade of the seventeenth century when the remaining sections of the old building were torn down.<sup>35</sup> This, in large part, explains why details of even the most important sites in the old basilica, such as the baptistery, are uncertain.

From the moment of Bramante's intervention, Saint Peter's became an enormous, multidimensional jigsaw puzzle. Its reconstruction in the sixteenth century is dominated by the story of great Renaissance architects devising great architectural schemes. The view that the old basilica was not worth keeping was reinforced by influential authors such as Giorgio Vasari (1511–74), writing in the middle of the sixteenth century, who had been born after the demise of the original crossing. He suggests that only the classical remains had any value, that 'the temple of the Prince of the Apostles in the Vatican was not rich except for the columns, bases, capitals, architraves, cornices, doors, and other revetments and ornaments, which had all been taken from... buildings erected earlier with great magnificence'.<sup>36</sup>

This neat story has been questioned in recent years.<sup>37</sup> It occupies the domain of architectural history at the expense of all else. Even the canons of Saint Peter's who wrote to Paul V in 1605 (in a letter published at the end of this volume), bemoaning the demolition of what was left of the old nave, warned that over-emphasis on the architecture had resulted in the loss of some of the basilica's most important monuments and altars: Julius II and his associates had 'demonstrated that they had more regard for the exterior

<sup>33</sup> See Kempers, this volume, 386–403.

<sup>34</sup> Alfarano, *DBVS*, xi–xlii.

<sup>35</sup> R. Niggel, 'Giacomo Grimaldi (1568–1623): Leben und Werk des Römischen Archäologen und Historikers' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Munich, 1971).

<sup>36</sup> Vasari, *Lives of the Artists*, discussed in D. Kinney, 'Spolia', in Tronzo (ed.), *Saint Peter's in the Vatican* (above, n. 2), 16–47.

<sup>37</sup> B. Kempers, 'Diverging perspectives – new Saint Peter's: artistic ambitions, liturgical requirements, financial limitations and historical interpretations', *Mededelingen van het Nederlands Instituut te Rome* 55 (1996), 213–51; L. Rice, 'La coesistenza delle due basiliche', in G. Spagnesi (ed.), *L'architettura della basilica di San Pietro: storia e costruzione* (Rome, 1997), 255–60.