Old Saint Peter’s, Rome

Saint Peter’s basilica in Rome is arguably the most important church in western Christendom, and is among the most significant buildings anywhere in the world. 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 and much new evidence has been uncovered in the past thirty years. This is the first full study of the older church, from its late antique construction to Renaissance destruction, in its historical context. An international team of historians, art historians, archaeologists and liturgists explores aspects of the basilica’s history, from its physical fabric to the activities that took place within its walls and its relationship with the city of Rome.

Rosamond McKitterick is Professor of Medieval History in the University of Cambridge and Fellow of Sidney Sussex College. She has published on literacy, manuscript transmission, perceptions of the past and political culture in the early Middle Ages. In addition to many articles, chapters in books, edited books and monographs, her most recent books include History and Memory in the Carolingian World (Cambridge, 2004), Charlemagne: the Formation of a European Identity (Cambridge, 2008) and Rome across Time and Space: Cultural Transmission and the Exchange of Ideas, c. 500–1400 (with C. Bolgia and J. Osborne, Cambridge, 2011).

John Osborne is Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at Carleton University in Ottawa. His publications cover topics as varied as the Roman catacombs, the fragmentary mural paintings from excavated churches such as San Clemente and Santa Maria Antiqua, the decorative programme of the church of San Marco in Venice, seventeenth-century antiquarian drawings of medieval monuments, cultural transmission between western Europe and Byzantium, and the medieval understanding and use of Rome’s heritage of ancient buildings and statuary.

Carol M. Richardson is Lecturer in the History of Art at the University of Edinburgh. Her book Reclaiming Rome: Cardinals in the Fifteenth Century (2009) was described as a ‘milestone in the history not only of artistic patronage but also of the papacy in fifteenth-century Rome [which] will become a standard work for scholars to return to again and again’ (Simon Ditchfield, Art History 34/1 (2011)). She has also edited a number of Open University text books which are widely used to teach history of art on both sides of the Atlantic.

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Old Saint Peter’s, Rome

Edited by ROSAMOND MCKITTERICK,
JOHN OSBORNE, CAROL M. RICHARDSON AND
JOANNA STORY
For Maria Pia Malvezzi
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Foreword

We all think we know Saint Peter’s basilica, the vision of Pope Julius II and great temple of Michelangelo Buonarroti, Donato Bramante, Carlo Maderno and Gian Lorenzo Bernini. What we forget is that this masterpiece of European architecture was not the building that for twelve hundred years, following the victory of the Christian Emperor Constantine, was recognized as the most important religious and pilgrimage site in Europe. The pilgrims who flocked to Rome in 1300 for Boniface VIII’s first great Holy Year gazed weary, footsore but jubilant, on a different basilica. Constantine’s Old Saint Peter’s was the centrifuge of Europe, where emperors were crowned – the last being Frederick III in 1452 – and from which, high above the tomb of Saint Peter, the first 216 of God’s Vicars on Earth derived their authority. It dominated a Rome before the Farnese, Borgia, Medici and Della Rovere parvenus, before the disastrous Sack of 1527, a still visible reminder of the early, pre-Schism Church when Rome and Constantinople were one, and Reform no more than a distant gleam in a Lollard’s eye.

The rediscovery of Old Saint Peter’s as it emerges from the historical and architectural shadow cast by its great successor is redolent of a detective story in the finest tradition of the genre. It is a tale of alternative endings, twists in the plot, archaeological red herrings and a cast of characters, heroes and some villains (including, it must be said, lurking off stage left, that great architect known to some contemporaries as ‘Bramante ruinante’), not all of whom are what they initially appear. It is also a story of the Roman palimpsest – architectural, liturgical, artistic and historical – on whose surface the tracings of nearly forgotten dynasties, forms of worship, ceremonies and ideas may still be discerned.

Through the collective and collaborative scholarship of this extraordinary volume, Old Saint Peter’s emerges once again in its late antique splendour and ramshackle high medieval glory. As we learn from these pages, this was no cold, empty shell, but a glittering repository of holy (and profane) function, a shrine, treasure-house, mausoleum, place of ecclesiastical encounter and pilgrims’ destiny, the site of worship, display, patronage and propaganda. And we learn how papacy and Rome developed together, in a
complex and uneven symbiosis of growth, triumph, decline and resurrection, the one nourished from the physical, spiritual and imperial legacy of the other. This is a Rome we can no longer touch, and barely discern, but it remains still an essential component of the city’s soul.

The British School at Rome has for more than a hundred years led the way in the application of academic rigour and new perspectives to the Roman mosaic. Its dedication to the eternal study of the *fmen et opes strepitumque Romae*, of how the tesserae of the city’s history have been re-laid and re-assembled by its successive masters, continues to illuminate and reveal the historical, artistic and cultural realities of the Eternal City, even in the obscurest or most forgotten (conveniently or otherwise) corners of its past. As Her Majesty’s Ambassador to the Holy See, I am delighted to be supporting this further, multidisciplinary contribution to that academic detective story. All Roman journeys require collaboration. This volume is the fruitful result of the British School’s partnership with Cambridge University Press, brought together with the vital support of the Vatican authorities, particularly the Fabbrica di San Pietro in Vaticano, that essential reference point for all scholars wishing to explore the history of Saint Peter’s basilica, Old or New.

Turning these pages reveals a different, unexpected Rome to the one that confronts us most obviously today. Its (re)discovery requires us to adjust our sights and reappraise what we know. In presenting the fruits of their scholarly labours, all who have collaborated on this volume have done us a great service. We shall no longer be able to look on Saint Peter’s through the same historical lens.

Nigel Baker

*Her Majesty’s Ambassador to the Holy See*
Acknowledgements

This volume is the result of a successful and happy collaboration between scholars representing a range of disciplines, from countries across the world, and with a wide variety of backgrounds and experience. The editors are particularly grateful to the staff of the British School at Rome (Gill Clark, Alessandra Giovenco, Maria Pia Malvezzi, Sue Russell, Valerie Scott, Christopher Smith and Geraldine Wellington).

We have dedicated the book to Maria Pia Malvezzi, Secretary of the British School at Rome from 1979 to 2012. Her help in accessing some of the most important – yet inaccessible – sites in Rome, and in smoothing the way for conversations and collaborations, lies behind the work of so many scholars. We are eternally grateful to her for her kindness, patience and perseverance.

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Abbreviations

AASS  
Alfarano, DBVS  

Andrieu, OR  

Arch. Cap. S. Pietro  
Archivio Capitolare di San Pietro (BAV)

Baronio, AE  
Cesare Baronio (Caesar Baronius), Annales Ecclesiastici, 12 vols. (Rome, 1588–1607; Antwerp, 1597–1609; Mainz, 1601–8)

BAV  
Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana

BHL  
Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina Antiquae et Mediae Aetatis (Brussels, 1898–1901); Novum Supplementum (1986)

Blaauw, CD  
S. de Blaauw, Cultus et Decor: liturgia e architetttutura nella Roma tardaantico e medievale, 2 vols. (Vatican City, 1994)

BSPV  

CBB  
Collectio Bullarum Brevium Aliorumque Diplomatatum Sacrassancte Basilicae Vaticanae, 3 vols. (Rome, 1747–52)

CBCR  

CCSL  
Corpus Christianorum Series Latina

CIL  
Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum, ed. Deutsches Akademie der Wisseuschafren zu Berlin, 17 vols. (Berlin, 1862)

CSCO  
Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium

CSEL  
Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DBV–M</td>
<td>DBV, redaction by Mallius (c. 1154)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DBV–R</td>
<td>DBV, redaction by Romanus (1192–8)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ferrua</td>
<td>A. Ferrua, <em>Epigrammata Damasiana</em> (Vatican City, 1942)</td>
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<tr>
<td>ILCV</td>
<td>E. Diehl (ed.), <em>Inscriptiones Latinae Christianae Veteres</em> (Berlin, 1925)</td>
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>MAH</td>
<td>Mélanges d’Archeologie et d’Histoire de l’École Française de Rome</td>
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<tr>
<td>MGH</td>
<td>Monumenta Germaniae Historica</td>
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<td>MGH, AA</td>
<td>MGH, Auctores Antiquissimi</td>
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<tr>
<td>PBSR</td>
<td>Papers of the British School at Rome</td>
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<tr>
<td>RB</td>
<td>Revue Bénédictine</td>
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<tr>
<td>RFSP</td>
<td>Reverenda Fabbrica di San Pietro in Vaticano</td>
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<tr>
<td>RIS</td>
<td>Rerum Italicarum Scriptores</td>
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<tr>
<td>RJBH</td>
<td>Römisches Jahrbuch der Bibliotheca Hertziana</td>
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<tr>
<td>SPL</td>
<td>San Pietro Legendary</td>
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