

ST. PETER'S IN THE VATICAN



Wherein lies the significance of St. Peter's in the Vatican? – in its role as first church of Roman Catholicism? as preeminent symbol of an ancient city? as major monument of Western civilization? This book posits an answer to the question (while recognizing that it is only one among many): the significance of the edifice lies in its extraordinary and extraordinarily tormented history. Founded in the fourth century to honor the tomb of Saint Peter, the church gained enormous prestige in the Middle Ages as a repository of holy relics and objects, and as the site of epoch-making events. But with the return of the papacy from Avignon and the shift in papal residence from the Lateran to the Vatican, the building needed to be renovated. Beginning in the fifteenth century and over the course of the next three hundred years, Old St. Peter's was gradually torn down, and in its midst arose the new structure now in place. The transmutation was far from easy. It involved many changes in design and concept, and interwove the careers of some of the most brilliant – and contentious – architects and artists of the day, including Bramante, Michelangelo, and Bernini. This volume, focusing on selected and key moments in the history of the church from the late antique period to the twentieth century, offers an expertly researched and thoughtful overview of St. Peter's, full of new insights and appreciation.

William Tronzo is Professor of Art History at Tulane University, where he has also directed the Medieval Studies Program and the Program in Italian Studies. A scholar of medieval Italy, he is the author of *The Cultures of His Kingdom: Roger II and the Cappella Palatina in Palermo*.

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CONTENTS



	<i>List of Illustrations</i>	page vii
	<i>List of Contributors</i>	xv
1	INTRODUCTION <i>William Tronzo</i>	1
2	PETER AND CONSTANTINE <i>Glen W. Bowersock</i>	5
3	SPOLIA <i>Dale Kinney</i>	16
4	<i>EST HAEC SACRA PRINCIPIS AEDES: THE VATICAN BASILICA FROM INNOCENT III TO GREGORY IX (1198–1241)</i> <i>Antonio Iacobini</i>	48
5	RENAISSANCE ST. PETER'S <i>Christof Thoenes</i>	64
6	MICHELANGELO TO MARCHIONNI, 1546–1784 <i>Henry A. Millon</i>	93
7	BERNINI AT ST. PETER'S: <i>SINGULARIS IN SINGULIS, IN OMNIBUS UNICUS</i> <i>Irving Lavin</i>	III
8	THEATERS FOR THE CANONIZATION OF SAINTS <i>Alessandra Anselmi</i>	244
9	ST. PETER'S IN THE MODERN ERA: THE PARADOXICAL COLOSSUS <i>Richard A. Etlin</i>	270
	<i>Selected Bibliography</i>	305
	<i>Index</i>	315

ILLUSTRATIONS



1	Rome, Vatican Necropolis, second-century shrine (the <i>aedicula</i>). Drawing by G. U. S. Corbett	page 7	16	Twisted columns of the eighth-century donation (?), reused on the altar of St. Francis in the Cappella del SS. Sacramento	24
2	Capsella of Samagher (Pola casket) with image of St. Peter's	9	17	Bronze pinecone and peacocks from the atrium fountain, now in the Cortile della Pigna, Musei Vaticani	25
3	Giacomo Grimaldi, <i>Descrizione della basilica antica di S. Pietro in Vaticano</i>	10	18	The obelisk in Piazza S. Pietro	26
4	Rome, Vatican Necropolis, Tomb M, mosaic of Christ as Helios the Charioteer	11	19	Drawing of the obelisk by Antonio Dosio, ca. 1548–69	27
5	Ground plan of Old St. Peter's published by Tiberio Alfarano in 1590 (<i>Tiberii Alfarani De Basilicae . . . structura</i>)	17	20	Clean drawing of the shafts of the south nave colonnade with tops horizontally aligned, after Arch. 108 ^v , by the workshop of Antonio da Sangallo	27
6	Old St. Peter's, transverse section through the nave and aisles by Domenico Tasselli, before 1620	18	21	Distribution of materials in the nave shafts, analysis by Jürgen Christern	28
7	Facade of Old St. Peter's, drawing by Domenico Tasselli, before 1620	19	22	Drawing of five twisted columns by Étienne Dupérac, ca. 1575	31
8	Nave of Old St. Peter's and crossing piers of New St. Peter's in 1538, drawing in the style of Marten van Heemskerck	20	23	Drawing of the oratory of Pope John VII in the presentation copy of Grimaldi's <i>Descrizione</i>	31
9	View from the annex of the north transept with the <i>Colonna santa</i> in the middle ground at left, in the style of Marten van Heemskerck, 1538	20	24	Ornamental pilasters from the oratory of Pope John VII, now in the Vatican Grottoes	32
10	Shrine of St. Peter, reconstruction by Jocelyn Toynbee and John Ward Perkins	21	25	Drawing of the fountain of the <i>pigna</i> by an anonymous draftsman, after 1489	33
11	Ground plan of Old St. Peter's by H. A. van Dijk, Jr.	21	26	Porphyry column with bust of Trajan possibly from the fountain of the <i>pigna</i> , now in the Louvre	33
12	Reconstruction of Old St. Peter's in the fourth century by Kenneth John Conant and Turpin C. Bannister	22	27	Twisted columns from the eighth-century donation (?), reused on the altar of the Corpus Christi, drawing by Domenico Tasselli	36
13	Shafts of the south nave colonnade, sketch by Baldassare Peruzzi	23	28	Raphael's cartoon for The Healing of the Lame Man, showing the Portico of Solomon with twenty twisted columns	37
14	Twisted columns of the fourth-century donation, reused on the pier of St. Veronica	24	29	(<i>Upper left</i>) Composite capital in Old St. Peter's drawn by Bernardo della Volpaia	38
15	Twisted columns of the eighth-century donation, reused on the pier of St. Longinus	24	30	Composite capital in Old St. Peter's, drawing attributed to Giovanni Francesco da Sangallo	38

31	Corinthian order in Old St. Peter's, drawing by Alberto Alberti	39	59	Donato Bramante, Project for St. Peter's. Uffizi, Florence	66
32	The topography to the north of the Vatican basilica at the beginning of the thirteenth century	49	60	Uff. 20 A O (Thoenes 1994)	67
33	Vatican palaces, hall of the <i>marescalcia</i>	49	61	Uff. 20 A I (Thoenes 1994)	67
34	The destroyed apsidal mosaic of St. Peter's in a watercolor of ca. 1590	50	62	Uff. 20 A verso, detail (Geymüller 1875/80)	68
35	Head of Innocent III. Museo di Roma, Rome	51	63	Donato Bramante, Project for St. Peter's. Uffizi, Florence	68
36	Phoenix. Museo di Roma, Rome	51	64	Cristoforo Foppa Caradosso, foundation medal of St. Peter's	69
37	<i>Ecclesia Romana</i> . Museo Barracco, Rome	52	65	Uff. 1 A and Uff. 20 A I (Thoenes 1994)	69
38	Baron G. Barracco's bedroom: hanging (<i>above right</i>) is the mosaic fragment of the <i>Ecclesia Romana</i>	52	66	Donato Bramante, Projects for St. Peter's. Uffizi, Florence	71
39	Arrangement of St. Peter's choir in an engraving from 1581	53	67	Donato Bramante, Projects for St. Peter's. Uffizi, Florence	71
40	The <i>Cathedra Petri</i> . St. Peter's, Rome	53	68	Giuliano da Sangallo, Project for St. Peter's. Uffizi, Florence	72
41	T. Alfarano, portion of the plan of Old St. Peter's	55	69	Donato Bramante, Project for St. Peter's. Uffizi, Florence	73
42	Vatican Grottoes, St. Peter's basilica, fragments of the basilica's medieval ambo	55	70	Raphael's first project for St. Peter's	74
43	Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, <i>Archivio del Capitolo di S. Pietro</i> , Exultet B 78, fol. 15 ^v	55	71	Bernardo della Volpaia, Plan of St. Peter's	75
44	The pallium niche, St. Peter's, Rome	56	72	Donato Bramante (attrib.), capital for St. Peter's	76
45	St. Peter's, sectional diagram and plan for the high altar after 1123 (frontal of the pallium niche at no. 4)	56	73	Pieter Coecke van Aelst (attrib.), St. Peter's under construction	77
46	A reconstruction of the metal frontal of the pallium niche, St. Peter's	56	74	St. Peter's, Choir of Pope Julius II, plan	78
47	Statuettes from the frontal of the pallium niche. Museo Sacro Vaticano	57	75	St. Peter's, Choir of Pope Julius II, section	78
48	The frontal door to the pallium niche, front and back. Museo Nazionale di Palazzo Venezia, Rome	57	76	St. Peter's, Choir of Pope Julius II, elevation	78
49	The frontal door to the pallium niche, front and back. Museo Nazionale di Palazzo Venezia, Rome	57	77	Bramante's project for the dome of St. Peter's, plan	79
50	The facade of old St. Peter's	58	78	Bramante's project for the dome of St. Peter's, section and elevation	79
51	Head of Gregory IX. Museo di Roma, Rome	59	79	St. Peter's, interior looking west	80
52	Head of the Virgin. Pushkin Museum, Moscow	59	80	Antonio da Sangallo the Younger, Project for St. Peter's	81
53	Head of St. Luke. Pinacoteca Vaticana	59	81	Antonio da Sangallo the Younger, projects for the elevation of the southern tribuna of St. Peter's	82
54	Head of St. Luke before its removal from Palazzo Altemps	59	82	Domenico Aymo da Varignana, elevation and section of Raphael's second project for St. Peter's	82
55	The facade of St. Peter's before its remaking by Gregory IX	60	83	Baldassare Peruzzi's first project for St. Peter's	83
56	Gregory IX, from the mosaic of the facade of St. Peter's, drawing by Ciacconio	60	84	Maerten van Heemskerck, St. Peter's, exterior from the north	84
57	St. Peter's, Project of Pope Nicholas V	65	85	Giorgio Vasari, <i>Pope Paul III orders the continuation of the construction of St. Peter's</i>	84
58	Maerten van Heemskerck, St. Peter's Square. Albertina, Vienna	65	86	Baldassare Peruzzi, Project for St. Peter's	85
			87	Antonio da Sangallo the Younger, Project for St. Peter's	85
			88	Antonio da Sangallo the Younger, Project for St. Peter's	86

89	Antonio da Sangallo the Younger, Project for St. Peter's	86	112	Plan of Florence Cathedral	116
90	Antonio Salamanca, <i>Plan of Antonio da Sangallo's wooden model for St. Peter's</i>	87	113	Baccio Bandinelli, choir of Florence Cathedral, reconstruction	117
91	Antonio Salamanca, <i>Section of Antonio da Sangallo's wooden model for St. Peter's</i> , engraving, 1546	88	114	Federico Zuccari and Giorgio Vasari, cupola of Florence Cathedral, detail	117
92	Antonio da Sangallo and Antonio Labacco, wooden model for St. Peter's	88	115	Mosaic of cupola, St. Peter's, Rome	117
93	Collaborator of Maerten van Heemskerck (Anonymous A), St. Peter's from the north	89	116	View of Baldacchino and choir, St. Peter's, Rome	118
94	Leonardo Bufalini, <i>Map of Rome</i> , woodcut, detail, 1551	90	117	View of choir, St. Peter's, Rome	119
95	Étienne Dupérac, <i>Plan for St. Peter's</i> , engraving, 1569	95	118	Borromini, ciborium for the choir of St. Peter's, drawing	120
96	Unknown draftsman, <i>Elevation of a hemicycle for St. Peter's</i> , engraving published by Vincenzo Luchino, 1564	96	119	Temporary baldachin in St. Peter's under Paul V, 1617	120
97	St. Peter's, interior view of crossing and south transept	97	120	Cappella Sistina, S. Maria Maggiore, Rome	121
98	St. Peter's, attic of the north and west transept apses	98	121	Altar of the Sacrament, S. Giovanni in Laterano, Rome	122
99	Étienne Dupérac, <i>Elevation of St. Peter's from the south</i> , engraving, 1569–70	99	122	View of Baldacchino and Cathedra Petri, St. Peter's, Rome	123
100	Michelangelo, Giacomo Della Porta, and Luigi Vanvitelli, <i>Model of the interior of one half of the drum and dome of St. Peter's</i> , limewood, tempera paint	100	123	Crown of the Baldacchino, St. Peter's, Rome	124
101	Michelangelo, Giacomo Della Porta, and Luigi Vanvitelli, <i>Model of the exterior of one half of the drum and dome of St. Peter's</i> , limewood, tempera paint	100	124	View of the Baldacchino and dome, St. Peter's, Rome	125
102	St. Peter's, drum and dome, completed 1590	102	125	Bernini, first project for the Baldacchino, 1626	126
103	St. Peter's, plan. From P. Letarouilly and A. Simil, <i>Le Vatican et la Basilique de Saint-Pierre de Rome</i> (Paris 1882)	105	126	Giulio Romano, <i>Donation of Constantine</i> , detail showing suspended baldachin and reconstruction of the Constantinian presbytery. Sala di Costantino, Vatican Palace, Rome	126
104	Carlo Maderno, St. Peter's, facade, 1607–21	106	127	Modern reconstruction of the Constantinian Shrine at St. Peter's	127
105	St. Peter's, interior of the nave from the east	107	128	Bernini, sketches for the crown of the Baldacchino	128
106	Carlo Marchionni, St. Peter's, exterior of the Sacristy, 1776–84	108	129	Bernini, sketch for the crown of the Baldacchino	128
107	Carlo Marchionni, St. Peter's, plan of the Sacristy, 1776–84	109	130	Francesco Borromini, perspective view of the Baldacchino in relation to its setting, drawing	129
108	Bernini, view of the Cathedra Petri seen through the Baldacchino, drawing, ca. 1657	113	131a,b	Post-classical columns copied from those at St. Peter's. S. Carlo, Cave	130
109	View of St. Peter's including Ponte and Castel Sant' Angelo	114	132a,b	Ancient columns with medieval capitals and bases, now destroyed. S. Chiara, Naples	130
110	Interior of St. Peter's	115	133	Giovanni V. Melone, Reverse of medal of Cardinal Granvelle showing installation of Don Juan of Austria, 1571. Museo di Capodimonte, Naples	131
111	Antoine Cheron, honorific medal of Bernini, with allegories of Sculpture, Architecture, Painting, and Mathematics, 1674	116	134	Guglielmo della Porta, Tomb of Paul III. St. Peter's, Rome	132
			135	Michelangelo, Tombs of Giuliano and Lorenzo de' Medici, Medici Chapel. San Lorenzo, Florence	132
			136	Bernini, Tomb of Urban VIII. St. Peter's, Rome	133

- | | | | | | |
|-----|--|-----|-----|---|-----|
| 137 | Bernini, Tomb of Urban VIII, Allegory of Justice, detail. St. Peter's, Rome | 134 | 164 | Bernini, Chapel of St. Teresa, view of altar with "converging" perspectives. S. Maria della Vittoria, Rome | 153 |
| 138 | Bernini, Tomb of Urban VIII, Allegory of Death. St. Peter's, Rome | 135 | 165 | Colosseum, Rome | 154 |
| 139 | Bernini, Tomb of Urban VIII, escutcheon. St. Peter's Rome | 136 | 166 | Jean Grandjean, Annular vault of the Colosseum, 1781, watercolor | 155 |
| 140 | Giulio Romano, <i>St. Peter</i> . Sala di Costantino, Vatican Palace, Rome | 137 | 167 | Giovanni Battista Bonacina, plan of Piazza S. Pietro with facade and cross section of portico arms, engraving, detail | 156 |
| 141 | Tomb of Érarard de la Marck, engraving. Formerly in Liège Cathedral | 138 | 168 | Reconstruction of ancient Capitol | 157 |
| 142 | <i>Malediction</i> , Tomb of Archilochus, engraving. Alciati 1621, Emblema LI | 138 | 169 | Bernini, St. Peter's with the colonnades as embracing arms, drawing | 157 |
| 143 | <i>Principis Clementia</i> . Alciati 1567, Emblema IX | 139 | 170 | Decennial medal showing Alexander VII kneeling as in the Corpus Domini procession of 1655, 1664 | 159 |
| 144 | Francesco Mochi, St. Veronica. St. Peter's, Rome | 140 | 171 | Bernini, Cathedra Petri, St. Peter's, Rome | 160 |
| 145 | Francesco Duquesnoy, St. Andrew. St. Peter's, Rome | 140 | 172 | Bernini, Cathedra Petri, detail. St. Peter's, Rome | 161 |
| 146 | Bernini, St. Longinus. St. Peter's, Rome | 140 | 173 | Bernini, Cathedra Petri, Saints Ambrose and Athanasius. St. Peter's, Rome | 162 |
| 147 | Andrea Bolgi, St. Helen. St. Peter's, Rome | 140 | 174 | Foundation medal Piazza S. Pietro, 1657 | 162 |
| 148 | Tabernacle reliquary of the Volto Santo, Old St. Peter's, drawing | 141 | 175 | Commemorative medal of the Cathedra Petri, 1662 | 162 |
| 149 | Bernini Presenting His Design for the Reliquary Niches to Urban VIII. Grotto Chapel of St. Veronica, St. Peter's, Rome | 143 | 176 | Bernini, <i>Constantine the Great</i> . St. Peter's, Rome | 164 |
| 150 | Bernini, Portrait of Luigi Bernini, drawing | 143 | 177 | Bernini, <i>Constantine the Great</i> . St. Peter's, Rome | 165 |
| 151 | Bernini, "Feed my Sheep" portico, St. Peter's, Rome | 144 | 178 | Bernini, <i>Constantine the Great</i> and the Scala Regia. St. Peter's, Rome | 166 |
| 152 | Bernini, Tomb of Countess Matilda of Tuscany. St. Peter's, Rome | 144 | 179 | Bernini, Constantine's vision and the view beyond. St. Peter's, Rome | 167 |
| 153 | Stefano Speranza, <i>Capitulation of Henry IV before Gregory VII</i> . St. Peter's, Rome | 145 | 180 | Giulio Romano, <i>Vision of Constantine</i> . Sala di Costantino, Vatican Palace, Rome | 168 |
| 154 | Bernini, nave decorations, St. Peter's, Rome | 147 | 181 | <i>Vision of Constantine</i> . Galleria delle Carte Geografiche, Vatican Palace, Rome | 168 |
| 155 | Bernini, nave spandrels, Niccolò Menghini, allegories of Virginity and Obedience. St. Peter's, Rome | 147 | 182 | <i>Vision of Constantine</i> , MS Barberini Gr. 372, fol. 75 ^r . Biblioteca Vaticana, Rome | 169 |
| 156 | Bernini, Piazza S. Pietro. St. Peter's, Rome | 148 | 183 | <i>Vision of St. Procopius</i> , MS Barberini Gr. 372, fol. 85 ^v . Biblioteca Vaticana, Rome | 169 |
| 157 | Bernini, Colonnade, north arm. St. Peter's, Rome | 148 | 184 | "Triumph of Constantine," Barberini plaque, ivory. Musée du Louvre, Paris | 169 |
| 158 | Bernini, Colonnade, north arm. St. Peter's, Rome | 149 | 185 | Bernini, study for the first version of the <i>Vision of Constantine</i> , drawing. Academia de San Fernando, Madrid | 170 |
| 159 | Bernini, Colonnade, north arm. St. Peter's, Rome | 149 | 186 | Conversion of St. Paul, medal of Julius II | 170 |
| 160 | Anonymous, Corpus Domini procession, ca. 1640. Museo di Palazzo Venezia, Rome | 150 | 187 | Raphael, <i>Conversion of St. Paul</i> , tapestry. Musei Vaticani, Rome | 170 |
| 161 | Determination of the <i>Piazze Retta</i> and <i>Obliqua</i> | 151 | 188 | Poussin, <i>Destruction of Jerusalem</i> , 1638–9. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna | 171 |
| 162 | Francesco Borromini, plan of Palazzo di Propaganda Fide showing Bernini's chapel of the Re Magi, drawing, detail | 152 | 189 | Poussin, <i>Destruction of Jerusalem</i> , 1625–6. The Jewish Museum, Jerusalem | 171 |
| 163 | Bernini, Chapel of St. Teresa, lateral walls, members of the Cornaro family. S. Maria della Vittoria, Rome | 152 | 190 | Pietro Tacca, equestrian monument of Philip V, 1636–40. Plaza de Oriente, Madrid | 172 |

191	Entrance portal at Ecouen with equestrian statue of Anne de Montmorency, engraving by Jacques Androuet Ducerceau, 1579	172	215	Bernini, Angel with the Superscription. Sant'Andrea delle Fratte, Rome	186
192	Andrea Rivalta, equestrian monument of Vittorio Amadeo I of Savoy. Palazzo Reale, Turin	172	216	Vision of Gregory the Great. Trinità dei Monti, Rome	187
193	Arnolfo di Cambio, equestrian saint, ciborium of high altar, detail. S. Cecilia, Rome	173	217	Giulio Romano, <i>Battle of the Milvian Bridge</i> . Sala di Costantino, Vatican Palace, Rome	188
194	Roman hunting sarcophagus, detail. Palazzo Mattei, Rome	173	218	Pons Aelius, medal of Hadrian, reverse	188
195	Giacinto Gimignani, <i>The Vision of Constantine</i> . Baptistery, S. Giovanni in Laterano, Rome	174	219	Raphael, <i>St. Michael Liberating St. Peter from the Mamertine Prison</i> , ca. 1514. Stanza d'Eliodoro, Vatican Palace, Rome	189
196	Bernini, Monument to Suor Maria Raggi. S. Maria sopra Minerva, Rome	174	220	Attributed to Benvenuto Cellini, <i>St. Michael Liberating St. Peter from the Mamertine Prison</i> , 1527, medal of Clement VII	189
197	Bernini, <i>S. Francesca Romana</i> . S. Francesca Romana, Rome	175	221	Baccio Bandinelli, <i>St. Michael Defeating the Seven Deadly Sins</i> , drawing. Musée du Louvre, Paris	190
198	Bernini, Chapel of St. Teresa. S. Maria della Vittoria, Rome	175	222	Domenico Beccafumi, <i>St. Michael Defeating the Rebellious Angels</i> . Pinacoteca, Siena	191
199	Sacrament tabernacle. S. Paolo Maggiore, Bologna	175	223	Lorenzo Lotti and Paolo Romano, Sts. Peter and Paul. Ponte Sant'Angelo, Rome	192
200	Bernini, Tomb of Alexander VII. St. Peter's, Rome	176	224	View of Ponte Sant'Angelo, drawing, ca. 1580	193
201	Bernini, Tomb of Alexander VII, Allegory of Truth. St. Peter's, Rome	177	225	Ambrogio Brambilla, View of Ponte and Castel Sant'Angelo, detail showing the "Luogo di Giustizia" with gallows and severed heads	194
202	Bernini, Tomb of Alexander VII, escutcheon. St. Peter's, Rome	177	226	Procession of Sixtus V showing severed heads of criminals displayed on stakes along the parapets of Ponte Sant'Angelo	195
203	Justice and Peace, inaugural medal of Alexander VII, 1655	178	227	Raffaello da Montelupo, <i>St. Michael</i> . Castel Sant'Angelo, Rome	195
204	Bernini, tomb of Beatrix and Roderigo Lopez de Silva. S. Isidoro, Rome	178	228	Spinello Aretino, <i>Vision of St. Gregory</i> . Guasconi Chapel, S. Francesco, Arezzo	196
205	Bernini, <i>Truth</i> , 1646–52. Galleria Borghese, Rome	179	229	Spinello Aretino, <i>Last Judgment</i> . Guasconi Chapel, S. Francesco, Arezzo	196
206	Roman sarcophagus, detail. Museo Archeologico, Florence	180	230	Religion Protects the People, medal of Alexander VII	197
207	Hermes leading deceased from Hades, Roman sarcophagus, detail. Museo Civico, Velletri	180	231	St. Peter Expelling the Plague, medal of Alexander VII	197
208	Bernini, Sala Ducale, 1656–7. Vatican Palace, Rome	181	232	Alexander VII as Androcles, medal of Alexander VII	197
209	Ponte Sant'Angelo and Castel Sant'Angelo, Rome	182	233	Israël Silvestre, <i>View of Pont-Rouge from the North</i> (Paris), detail, engraving, before 1655	198
210	Girolamo Lucenti, Angel with the Nails, detail. Ponte Sant'Angelo, Rome	183	234	Israël Silvestre, <i>View of Pont-Rouge from the South</i> (Paris), detail, engraving, ca. 1657	198
211	Antonio Raggi, Angel with the Column. Ponte Sant'Angelo, Rome	183	235	Giovanni Battista Falda, <i>View of Ponte and Castel Sant'Angelo</i>	201
212	Bernini, Angel with the Crown of Thorns. Ponte Sant'Angelo, Rome	184	236	<i>The Last Judgment with the Seven Acts of Mercy</i>	201
213	Bernini, Angel with the Superscription. Ponte Sant'Angelo, Rome	185	237	<i>Ferre patienter iniurias</i> (Suffer injuries patiently), Fifth Act of Spiritual Mercy, surrounded by six episodes of the Via Crucis and four Old Testament scenes	201
214	Bernini, Angel with the Crown of Thorns. Sant'Andrea delle Fratte, Rome	186			

- | | | | | | |
|-----|---|-----|-----|---|-----|
| 238 | Roberto Oderisi, <i>Imago Pietatis with Arma Christi</i> | 202 | 267 | Bernini, bust of the Savior, S. Sebastiano fuori le mura, Rome | 223 |
| 239 | Nave fresco. S. Prisca, Rome | 202 | 268 | Bernini, <i>Sangue di Cristo</i> , engraving by François Spierre | 224 |
| 240 | Nave fresco. S. Prisca, Rome | 203 | 269 | Michelangelo, <i>God Creating the Firmament</i> . Sistine Chapel, Vatican Palace, Rome | 225 |
| 241 | Nave fresco. S. Prassede, Rome | 203 | 270 | <i>The Death of Moriens and the Intercession with the Trinity of Christ and the Virgin</i> , stained-glass votive window, Wettingen, Switzerland | 226 |
| 242 | Nave fresco. S. Prassede, Rome | 204 | 271 | Sandro Botticelli, <i>Triumph of the Faith</i> , woodcut | 226 |
| 243 | Crispijn de Passe, <i>Ecce Homo</i> , engraving | 204 | 272 | Detail of Fig. 268, Virgin receiving Water and Blood in Her Hands | 226 |
| 244 | Crispijn de Passe, Jr., <i>Angel with Instruments of the Passion</i> , engraving | 204 | 273 | Madonna avvocata ("Madonna di S. Sisto"). S. Maria del Rosario, Rome | 226 |
| 245 | Crispijn de Passe, <i>Angel vexillifer</i> , engraving | 205 | 274 | Crucifixion, showing the Virgin as advocate and Ecclesia with the Chalice receiving the Water and Blood of the Sacrament, reliquary plaque, Musée de Cluny, Paris | 227 |
| 246 | Johan Sadeler, <i>Pietà with Angels Bearing Instruments of the Passion</i> , engraving | 205 | 275 | Christ Crucified by the Virtues, Ecclesia with the Chalice receiving Water and Blood, Musée Municipal, Besançon | 227 |
| 247 | Distribution of Angels on Ponte Sant'Angelo, with accompanying inscriptions | 206 | 276 | <i>Mary as Priest Offering the Chalice of the Sacrament to the Trinity</i> , engraving | 227 |
| 248 | Bernini, study for the angel with the Crown of Thorns. Hermitage, Saint Petersburg | 209 | 277 | Caravaggio, <i>Madonna del Rosario</i> . Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna | 228 |
| 249 | Bernini, Altar of the Holy Sacrament. St. Peter's, Rome | 210 | 278 | Antonio Tempesta, <i>The Canonization of S. Francesca Romana</i> , engraving, 1608. Biblioteca Angelica, Rome | 245 |
| 250 | Bernini, Altar of the Holy Sacrament. St. Peter's, Rome | 211 | 279 | Antonio Tempesta, detail of <i>The Canonization of S. Francesca Romana</i> , engraving, 1608 | 246 |
| 251 | Bernini, Altar of the Holy Sacrament, with Pietro da Cortona's <i>Trinity</i> . St. Peter's, Rome | 212 | 280 | Antonio Tempesta, detail of <i>The Canonization of S. Francesca Romana</i> , engraving, 1608 | 246 |
| 252 | Bernini, Altar of the Holy Sacrament, angel. St. Peter's, Rome | 213 | 281 | Antonio Tempesta, detail of <i>The Canonization of S. Francesca Romana</i> , engraving, 1608 | 247 |
| 253 | Bernini, Altar of the Holy Sacrament, angel. St. Peter's, Rome | 213 | 282 | Antonio Tempesta, detail of <i>The Canonization of S. Francesca Romana</i> , engraving, 1608 | 247 |
| 254 | Bernini, Altar of the Holy Sacrament, Risen Christ. St. Peter's, Rome | 213 | 283 | Antonio Tempesta, detail of <i>The Canonization of S. Francesca Romana</i> , engraving, 1608 | 248 |
| 255 | Bernini, study for the Sacrament altar, drawing | 214 | 284 | Antonio Tempesta, detail of <i>The Canonization of S. Francesca Romana</i> , engraving, 1608 | 248 |
| 256 | Bernini, study for the Sacrament altar, drawing. Hermitage, St. Petersburg | 215 | 285 | Antonio Tempesta, detail of <i>The Canonization of S. Francesca Romana</i> , engraving, 1608 | 249 |
| 257 | Bernini, Altar of the Holy Sacrament; Pietro da Cortona, <i>Trinity</i> , engraving | 216 | 286 | Cesare Nebbia and Giovanni Guerra, <i>The Canonization of Diego of Alcalá</i> , fresco, 1588–9. Gallery of Sixtus V, Vatican Library | 249 |
| 258 | Bernini, <i>Blessed and Damned Souls</i> . Spanish Embassy to the Holy See, Rome | 217 | | | |
| 259 | Bernini, study for a kneeling angel, drawing. | 218 | | | |
| 260 | Bernini, study for a kneeling angel, terra-cotta | 218 | | | |
| 261 | Attributed to Jacopo Sansovino, Altar of the Sacrament. S. Croce in Gerusalemme, Rome | 219 | | | |
| 262 | Bernini, Altar of the Sacrament (St. Peter's), plan | 219 | | | |
| 263 | Bernini, S. Andrea al Quirinale, Rome | 219 | | | |
| 264 | Bramante, Tempietto. S. Pietro in Montorio, Rome | 220 | | | |
| 265 | Michelangelo, <i>Last Judgment</i> , detail. Sistine Chapel, Vatican Palace, Rome | 223 | | | |
| 266 | Cesare d'Arpino, <i>God Creating the Stars</i> . Lantern of the cupola, St. Peter's, Rome | 223 | | | |

287	Egidio della Riviera, The Canonization of Diego of Alcalá, marble relief, detail of the Monument of Sixtus V, 1599. Sistine Chapel, S. Maria Maggiore, Rome	250	309	Giuseppe Valeriano, interior view of Gesù Nuovo, Naples, designed 1584	272
288	Étienne Dupérac and Lorenzo Vaccari, the Cappella Sistina, 1578	250	310	Pietro da Cortona, plan of S. Luca e Martina, Rome, 1635–69	272
289	Giovanni Antonio Valsoldo, Jr., The Canonization of Raimondo of Peñafort, detail of the Monument of Clement VIII, Sistine Chapel, S. Maria Maggiore, Rome	251	311	Comparison of St. Peter's (Rome) and St. Paul's (London)	273
290	Carlo Marchionni, sketch for the <i>suggestum</i> , 1767	252	312	Christopher Wren, unexecuted project for St. Paul's Cathedral, London	274
291	Giovanni Antonio Valsoldo, Jr., The Canonization of S. Francesca Romana or Carlo Borromeo, detail of the Monument of Paul V, Pauline Chapel, S. Maria Maggiore, Rome	253	313	Jules-Hardouin Mansart, Hôtel des Invalides, Paris, with unexecuted curved forecourt, begun 1671	275
292	Giovan Battista Ricci, <i>The Canonization of S. Francesca Romana</i> , fresco. Gallery of Paul V, Vatican Library	254	314	Jacques-Germain Soufflot, view of Sainte-Geneviève, Paris, 1757–77	276
293	Giovan Battista Ricci, <i>The Canonization of Carlo Borromeo</i> , fresco. Gallery of Paul V, Vatican Library	254	315	Julien-David Leroy, "Plans [and sections] of the most noteworthy churches built between AD 320–1764"	277
294	Theater for the canonization of Carlo Borromeo, engraving, 1610	255	316	Louis Combes, "Cathedral for a Capital like Paris," Grand Prix of 1781, section and elevation	278
295	Theater for the canonization of the Five Saints, engraving, 1622	255	317	Louis Combes, "Cathedral for a Capital like Paris," plan	279
296	Luca Ciamerlano, The Beatification of Isidore of Madrid, engraving, 1619	256	318	Louis Combes, "Cathedral for a Capital like Paris," site plan	279
297	Theater for the canonization of Elisabetta of Portugal, 1625	257	319	Étienne-Louis Boullée, view of "Metropolitan Church" project ca. 1781–2	280
298	Giovanni Paolo Schor, The Decoration of St. Peter's Nave for the Canonization of Tommaso di Villanova, 1658	258	320	Étienne-Louis Boullée, "Metropolitan Church" project, interior	280
299	Decoration of the nave for the canonizations of 1726, engraving	258	321	Étienne-Louis Boullée, plan for "Metropolitan Church" project	281
300	Theater for the canonization of Francis of Sales, 1665	259	322	Gesù Nuovo, Naples, organ, ca. 1769	281
301	Theater for the canonization of the Five Saints, 1690	260	323	Étienne-Louis Boullée, "Metropolitan Church" project, section	282
302	Theater for the canonization of saints	260	324	Giovanni Battista Piranesi, architectural fantasy entitled "Vestibule of an Ancient Temple"	282
303	Theater for the canonization of 1712, engraving	261	325	Andrei Voronikhin, view of Cathedral of the Kazan Mother of God, St. Petersburg, 1801–11	283
304	Theater for the canonization of 1726, engraving	261	326	Vasili Stasov, plan of Cathedral of the Trinity, St. Petersburg, 1828–35	284
305	Theater for the canonization of Pietro d'Alcantara and Maria Maddalena de' Pazzi, 1669	262	327	Auguste-Ricard de Montferrand, view of Cathedral of St. Isaac of Dalmatia, St. Petersburg, 1818–58	284
306	Theater for the canonization of 1746, engraving	262	328	De Montferrand, detail of the dome of the Cathedral of St. Isaac of Dalmatia, St. Petersburg, 1818–58	284
307	Theater for the canonization of 1767, engraving	263	329	Leopoldo Laperuta and Antonio de Simone, then Pietro Bianchi, S. Francesco di Paola (1817–44) and Piazza del Plebiscito (begun 1808), Naples, view	285
308	Galeazzo Alessi, plan of S. Maria di Carignano, Genoa, begun 1552	271	330	Giuseppe Mengoni, Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II, Milan, view, 1865–7	286
			331	Giuseppe Mengoni, Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II, site plan: (<i>top</i>) Piazza del Duomo before 1850; (<i>bottom</i>) Galleria	

	Vittorio Emanuele II connecting Piazza del Duomo with Piazza La Scala	287		Industry of All Nations, London, 1862, interior view	291
332	George Carstensen and Charles Gildemeister, Crystal Palace, New York, view, 1853	290	336	Thomas U. Walter, dome of the Capitol, Washington, D.C., view, designed ca. 1854–5	293
333	Sir John Benson, Irish Industrial Exhibition of 1853, view	290	337	Marcello Piacentini and Attilio Spaccarelli, Via della Conciliazione, Rome, 1936–50	296
334	Captain Francis Fowke, R.E., Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations, London, 1862, view	291	338	Albert Speer, after Adolf Hitler, central axis with Gross Halle, project, Berlin, ca. 1937–41	297
335	Captain Fowke, Exhibition of the Works of				

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