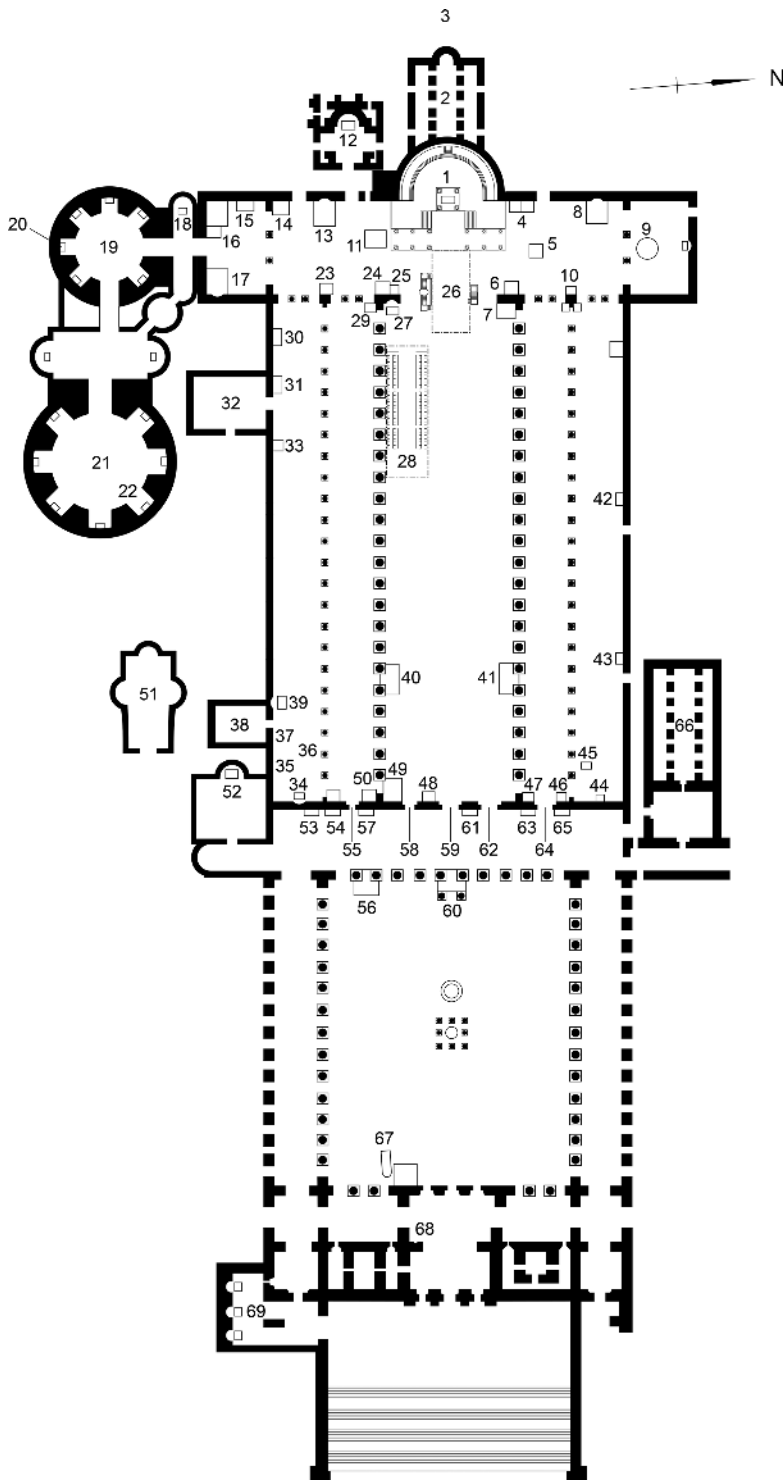


## PART I

### THE CANON AND THE BASILICA

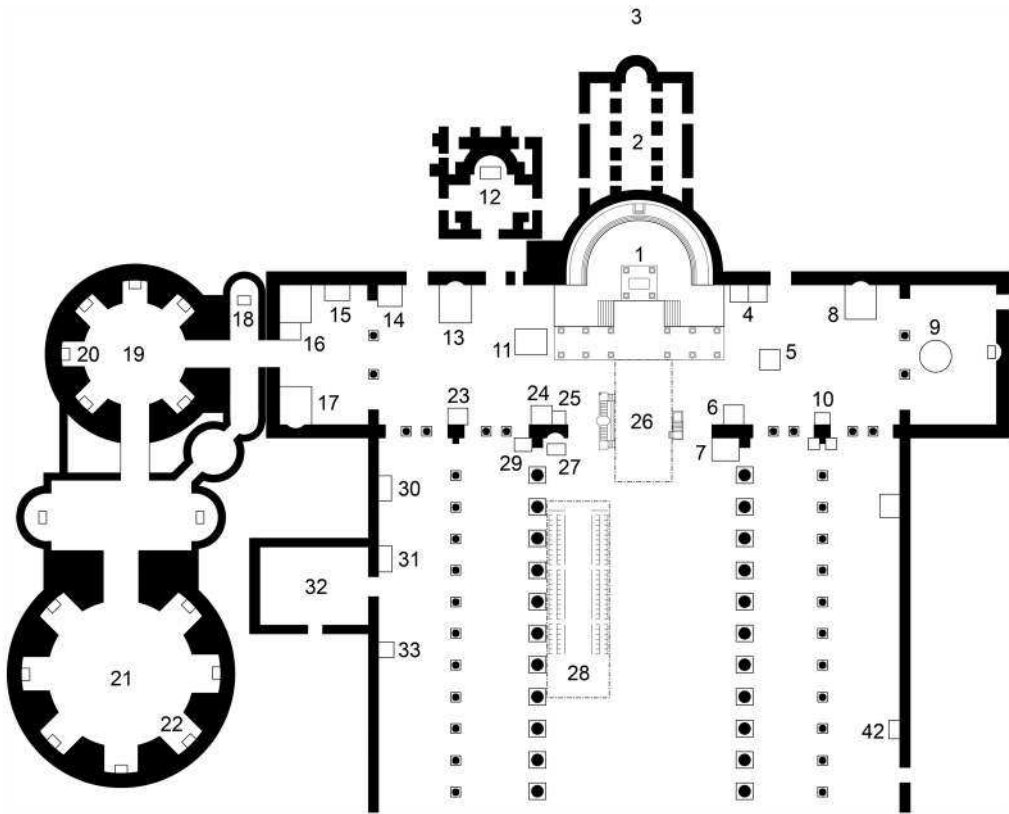
Part I approaches Vegio's text from three distinct lines of interpretation: the work's historical context; its literary structure and meaning; and Vegio's response to the visual evidence of Old St. Peter's. To help readers visualize the sites mentioned we have provided a set of five figures – identified as Figures A, B, C, D, and E – identifying the places mentioned by Vegio in and around St. Peter's. We will refer to these figures throughout the book.



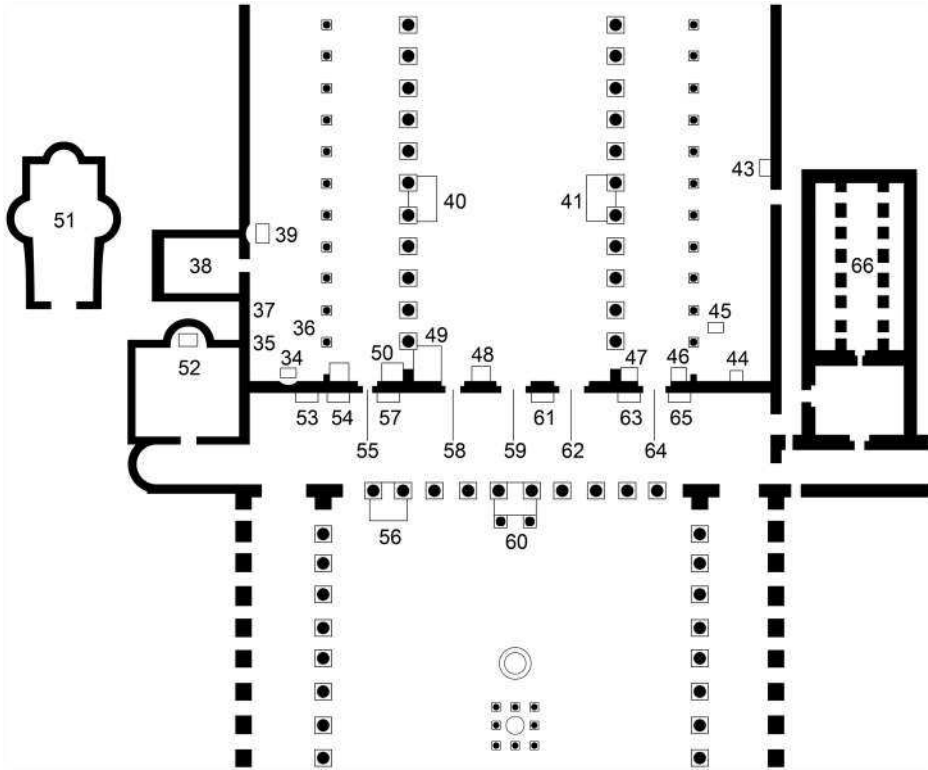
A. Places in St. Peter's mentioned in the text.

A. (*cont.*) Key to the Plan. (This also applies to Figures B, C, and D.)

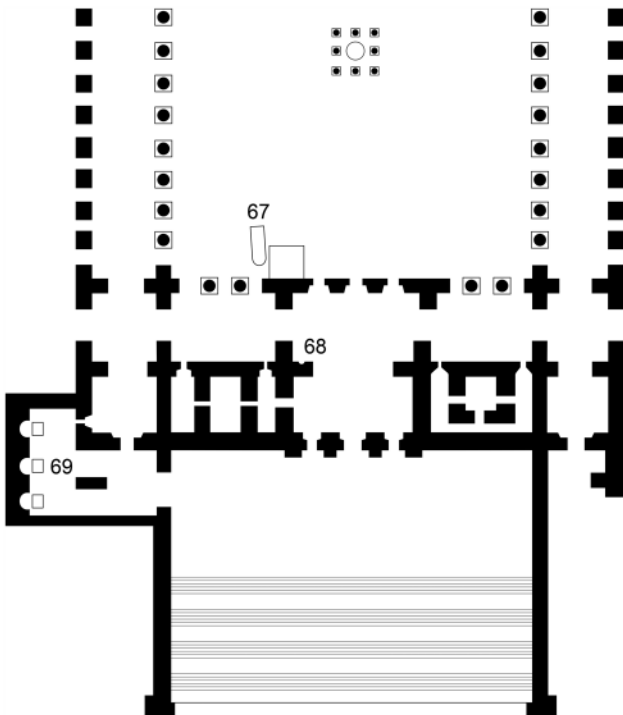
1. Main altar and Tomb of Peter; 2. Temple (oratory) of Probus (destroyed); 3. Oratory (ruined) and ancient Christian cemetery; 4. Two small chapels without names; 5. Altar of Peter and Paul (*De Ossibus apostolorum*); 6. Chapel of St. Bartholomew; 7. Chapel of the Holy Shepherd; 8. Oratory of the Holy Cross (destroyed); 9. Baptistery; 10. Oratory of St. Lucy; 11. Oratory and tomb of St. Sixtus II; 12. Monastery and oratory of St. Martin (destroyed); 13. Oratory of St. Leo I and tombs of Leo I, II, III, and IV; 14. Oratory St. Hadrian I, replaced by *Cattedra Petri*; 15. Tomb of Urban II (not extant); 16. Oratory of Sta. Maria in Oratorio and tomb of Paul I with (perhaps) tomb of John XV, not extant; 17. Oratory of Processus and Martinianus and tomb of Pascal I; 18. Altar of St. Michael; 19. St. Petronilla; 20. Chapel of St. Petronilla and Tomb of Agnes of Poitou; 21. Sant'Andrea; 22. Altar of Sta. Maria a Febribus; 23. Altar of St. Mauritius; 24. Altar of St. Sylvester and tomb of Pope Vigilius; 25. Tomb of Hadrian IV; 26. Schola cantorum, Gospel ambo, paschal candlestick; 27. Oratory of Sta. Maria in Cancellis; 28. Canons' choir; 29. Altar of St. Martialis; 30. Tomb of Eugene IV; 31. Tombs of Gregory III, Eugenius III, and Hadrian III; 32. Canons' Sacristy; 33. Tomb of Nicholas V and altar of St. Nicholas; 34. Oratory and tomb of Gregory I with altar or altars of Sebastian, Gorgonius, and Tiburtius; 35. Tomb of Pelagius I; 36. Tomb of Boniface III; 37. Tomb of Gregory V; 38. New Sacristy (Sacristy of St. Peter) and Tomb of Benedict I; 39. Tomb of John III; 40. Altar of Simon and Jude; 41. Altar of Philip and James; 42. Oratory of St. Ambrose, abandoned; 43. Altar of St. Abundius; 44. Oratory of John VII and his tomb; 45. Altar of the Sudarium; 46. Altar of St. Brigid of Sweden (formerly St. Antoninus of Piacenza, later St. Erasmus); 47. Altar of St. Tridentius, abandoned (later St. Anthony of Padua); 48. Altar of the Dead (All Souls?) and tomb of Leo IX; 49. Altar of St. Boniface and tomb of Boniface VIII; 50. Tomb of Boniface IV; 51. St. Sebastian; 52. Oratory of St. Gregory (old sacristy); 53. Tomb of John X (actually John XIV); 54. Tomb of John VIII; 55. Door of Judgment; 56. Tomb of Caedwalla, King of Wessex; 57. Tomb of Nicholas I; 58. Ravennan Door; 59. Silver door (Filarete bronze doors); 60. Tomb of the Venerable Bede; 61. Tomb of Benedict III and John XIX; 62. Roman Door; 63. Tomb of Sergius I; 64. Guidonean Door; 65. Tomb of John IX; 66. Chapel of St. Vincent, closed; 67. Tomb of Otto II; 68. Sta. Maria in Turribus; 69. Sant'Apollinare ad Palmas. (Ruo Jia and Luo Xuan)



b. Detail of Figure A, up to the *muro divisorio*.

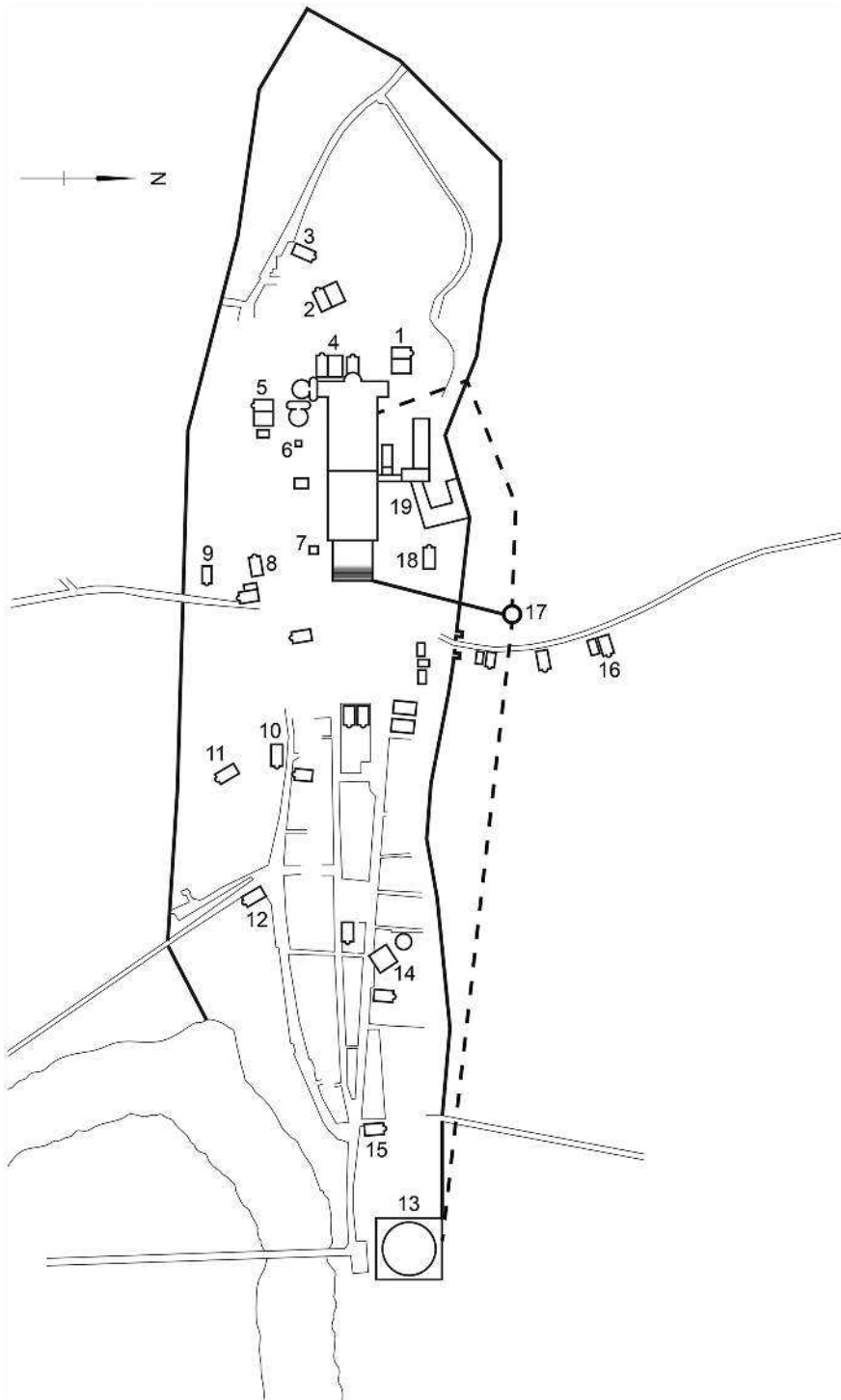


c. Detail of Figure A, eastern portion of the nave and narthex.



d. Detail of Figure A, atrium and steps.

Cambridge University Press  
 978-1-108-49685-8 — Eyewitness to Old St Peter's  
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E. Places outside St. Peter's mentioned in the text.  
 Key to the Plan.

1. Monastery of Sts. John and Paul; 2. Monastery of St. Stephan Major; 3. San Giorgio Martire (San Giorgio in Monte Aureo); 4. Monastery of San Martino; 5. Monastery of St. Stephan Minor; 6. Obelisk; 7. San Sebastiano (hospice for women); 8. San Zenone; 9. San Salvatore in Torrione; 10. San Michele e Magno; 11. Sta. Maria in Palazzolo; 12. Sto. Spirito in Sassia (Sta. Maria); 13. Castel Sant'Angelo; 14. Meta Romuli; 15. Sta. Maria in Transpontina; 16. San Pellegrino; 17. Tower and Fortification of Nicolas II (proposed but not built); 18. San Giustino; 19. Vatican Palace (Ruo Jia and Luo Xuan)

## INTRODUCTION

The present of past things is the memory; the present of present things is direct perception; and the present of future things is expectation.

– St. Augustine, *Confessions*, XI.20

We present “Remembering St. Peter’s” to our readers in its first English translation as an exceptionally – even uniquely – significant and consequential contribution to the history of St. Peter’s Basilica. By the descriptor “St. Peter’s Basilica,” we intend not only the material fabric and contents of that Early Christian church known to scholars as Old St. Peter’s but, more broadly, the basilica as an institution represented by the Chapter of St. Peter’s, of which Vegio was a member. The text, while no heated polemic and constituting no sustained argument for any side, is nonetheless an extended response to the transfer of pope and Curia from the cathedral of Rome, St. John Lateran, to residence at the Vatican in 1447. It sheds a great deal of new light on the Chapter of St. Peter’s, an institution that has not been much studied despite its centrality to the life of the basilica. In addition, it offers the sole eyewitness evidence for the state of the basilica just prior to its demolition (Figure 1). These contexts, which are immediately related to St. Peter’s, do not exhaust the importance of our text. Indeed, the text is an exemplar of that new Humanist historiography that, addressing both the recuperation of ancient Roman history, topography, and archeology and the lives of the saints, aimed to establish truth as its criterion as much through new uses of primary sources



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1. Reconstruction of Old St. Peter's in 1458.



as through the use of new primary sources. Its instrument was a Latin prose at once correct and stylish, narrative in its ordering, thematic and ideational in its content, and rendering both dry chronicles and fantastical inventions, such as were Vegio's own main sources, obsolete. While our translation is accurate to Vegio's Latin, we retain the flavor of his literary style in an effort to preserve these qualities in our English text.

Vegio's ideas about St. Peter's developed from a discovery in regard to method that led to his understanding (he would have said "recognition") of its historical, spiritual, and intellectual content. Simply put, he realized that the evidence of written records and of eyewitness experience matched. This is not to say that they merely complemented, supplemented, or completed each other as historical testimony (which his contemporaries Flavio Biondo and Poggio Bracciolini had shown in secular contexts), but rather that their content was identical: They confirmed each other. This is what Vegio means by his first sentence: "I acquired a fundamental change in my thinking as I was *looking* at the abundant remains of antiquity in St. Peter's basilica in Rome or *reading* what was written about them by others" (emphasis added). What he found written by earlier authors could actually be seen and experienced now – that is, in 1458. The "abundant remains of antiquity" that Vegio looked at and read about, however, were not only – and perhaps not even primarily – built, painted, sculpted, or incised; they were the actions of men, especially liturgical and paraliturgical activities, but also the "correct" sequence of movement through the basilica by a visitor. St. Peter's was the "place where" certain historically significant human activities had, since earliest (or at least early) times taken place and – this is key to his realization – continued to be enacted in his sight. What Vegio read about as history, he lived as experience. He had in mind such ceremonies as the coronation of emperors, blessing of the pallia, installation of popes, canonization of saints, annual visits of bishops, and, above all, the daily Mass said at the altar over Peter's tomb, in all of which he himself participated in the 1450s.

Vegio knew St. Peter's first from experience and only later from facts, having come to live there in the 1440s with a knowledge of it no greater than, or different from, that of any tourist. At first, he probably did not distinguish in importance between the large number of spurious and genuine relics; miracle-working icons; the more than 100 altars with their dedications, endowments, devotions, and associated burials that littered the old basilica; and the much fewer objects he later selected as important in his text. In fact, Renaissance St. Peter's defied comprehension by its overwhelming complexity and, just for that reason, evoked wonder. Wonder – a condition that precedes understanding, judgment, and interpretation – is uncritical and unselective: It is about marvel rather than thought.

At some point, Vegio began reading the documents and records in the canons' archive and library. He learned from documents the legal grounds for why certain

activities took place at St. Peter's; here his earlier legal training served him well. He discovered why immense riches had been lavished on the basilica, intuited the material and cultural continuity between pagan antiquity and the Christian present embodied at that site, and concluded, in the end, that it was all about Peter's tomb. The tomb, yes, but also the consequences of the tomb reified in the building: the living presence of Peter's spirit in the basilica; the rights and privileges accruing to those serving Peter's cult; the ramifications for papal ideology; the implications for not just Western Christianity but the universal Church; and, finally, the place of the basilica in God's providential plan for salvation.

But wasn't that obvious to everyone? No, perhaps because in the entire basilica the least visible site, and that less often mentioned by fifteenth-century pilgrims, was the underground chamber where Peter's body had lain since the fourth century. No one, not even Vegio, had ever actually seen it. Of course, the location was marked by the high altar over it, the grated niche of the confessio facing the nave (Figures 2 and 3), and by a small altar in the annular crypt that approached the tomb from the rear. But there was really very little to see – no body parts, no elaborate tomb shrine – nothing that could compare in experience to touching the column from Solomon's Temple, against which Jesus leaned (it also exorcised demons) or to marveling at the blood that had flowed from Mary's cheek when a soldier's stone struck her image, indelibly marking the pavement beneath. These and other, similar, sights in the church drew the crowds.

Instead of entering the basilica through its western doors and walking straight down the nave to Peter's tomb at the east end, pilgrims zig-zagged across the nave and ducked in and out of the side aisles, searching out miraculous bits and pieces, the touted sights, and those experiences that they hoped would help them personally, whether that experience was a cure, an easier pregnancy, or reduced time in purgatory. Changed expectations about the purpose of the experience had obscured the hierarchy of spaces inherent in the original plan (Figure A). Elsewhere in Rome in the Imperial fora, as has been shown, after the late fourth century patterns of movement and even the routes through the Imperial fora changed as residential, commercial, and agricultural functions invaded the area. As a result of these changes of use and movement patterns, "knowledge of its earlier purpose and layout was lost."<sup>1</sup> Something analogous had happened at St. Peter's. Memory of the basilica's original meaning, diminished and distorted, had been dissipated through the aggregation of so many sites of devotional attraction. Only one group of users preserved the memory of the tomb's centrality: the canons, whose entire reason for existence was the perpetuation of Peter's cult through the Divine Office said if not at, then still near, Peter's body. But even the canons had been distracted from their singular focus by obligations at many of the minor altars, duties essential to their income. Yet the building itself, which had changed remarkably little in more than 1,000 years, and its particular