Epilogue: A hybrid history: the antique basilica with a modern dome
Kempers, B.

Published in:
Old Saint Peter's, Rome

Citation for published version (APA):
20 | Epilogue: A hybrid history

The antique basilica with a modern dome

BRAM KEMPERS

Julius II decided in 1505 to tear down Constantine’s basilica and replace the heterogeneous edifice with a modern church for which the most excellent architects supplied a series of brilliant designs; this is a neat story driven by powerful characters. According to this view, cherished by scholarship, the individual genius of Bramante determined the sudden fate of the basilica’s longstanding tradition. In reality, Julius II (1503–13) ensured that a large part of the nave and atrium of Old Saint Peter’s was preserved, while work was begun to create a new western extension that was to be crowned by a monumental dome. Proposals for a completely new church were rejected, time and again, by successive popes, until Paul V (1605–21) took the highly controversial decision to demolish the atrium and remaining half of the basilica and to build a new nave and façade. Nevertheless, Julius II’s vision for Saint Peter’s has been interpreted as if it encompassed a completely new edifice.¹ However, no records survive to suggest that either the pope himself or any of his advisers spoke or wrote of any such coherent plan; it was only in the late 1530s that the idea seems to have gained momentum, becoming established by the middle of the century.²

Most scholars consider Bramante’s first concept to have been a harmonious Zentralbau.³ A minority have proposed that his original idea

² Giorgio Vasari in his Lives of the Artists, for example, stresses the ‘invenzione nuova’ represented by Bramante’s work, and Saint Peter’s is an example of this. See C. Thoenes, ‘Renaissance Saint Peter’s’, in W. Tronzo (ed.), Saint Peter’s in the Vatican (Cambridge, M.A., 2005), 81.
Epilogue: the antique basilica with a modern dome

comprised a nave, or Latin rather than Greek cross, only later followed by a reduction to a centralized church. In both interpretations, scholars see the complete destruction of the antique basilica as a strategy predetermined by Julius and Bramante, the magnificent patron and the innovative architect. Rejected proposals, drawings and later projects have served as the key sources to create this art historical narrative, which is, in fact, largely based on hindsight. This view has dominated almost all the scholarly literature on Saint Peter’s. In this chapter, however, I wish to stress the conscious continuity of the old basilica during the pontificate of Julius II, and argue that plans for a completely new structure were an interesting side-line, a notion that was repeatedly proposed and rejected until the seventeenth century.

When Julius II initiated his ambitious building campaign at Saint Peter’s, he continued an almost twelve-century-old tradition of small and large innovations and renovations, several still visible and many recorded in texts or drawings. Like his predecessors, Julius II treated the basilica and its surrounding structures as a living organism. Saint Peter’s continued to be a complicated and contradictory ensemble of human initiatives to preserve traditions and to renovate the building according to both antique and modern standards. Patrons continued to reuse old material for new purposes, they repaired roofs and walls and added chapels; mosaics, paintings and tombs were ordered, placed and relocated. Julius II ordered a section of the Constantinian basilica to be demolished, preserving the eastern part of the nave, the façade, the atrium, the stairs and the square in front of this heterogeneous ensemble, but masses were celebrated and processions organized in the old nave and at the high altar, even though, after 1507, it lacked a proper roof.

Yet Julius’s renovations were new in several respects. Firstly, the extent of the fabric of the old basilica that was demolished and the scale of additions

---

4 This revisionist view has been introduced by C. Thoenes, ‘Neue Beobachtungen an Bramante’s St.-Peter-Entwürfen’, Münchner Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte 45 (1994), 109–32. It is revisionist in the sense that in previous publications the Zentralbau thesis prevailed. Thoenes elaborated this view in many subsequent publications, as well as translations, such as ‘Renaissance Saint Peter’s’ (above, n. 2), 64–92. Bredekamp accepts Thoenes’s view on the Langhausbau or Langhausplan, see Bredekamp, H., Sankt Peter in Rom und das Prinzip der Produktiver Zerstörung. Bau und Abbau von Bramante bis Bernini (Berlin, 2000).

5 See Satzinger and Schütze (eds.), St. Peter in Rom 1506–2006 (above, n. 3).

planned were unprecedented. Secondly, Julius and his entourage initiated a tradition of architectural drawings and three-dimensional models associated with the project, taking care that the proposals were preserved even when they were rejected. Thirdly, Julius seems to have encouraged critical and historical reflection on his rebuilding projects. Both the designs and reactions to them – positive, neutral or negative – dictated the form of later renovations and their reception. It is the historical evidence resulting from this process of design and debate, I argue, that makes it tempting to assume Julius II’s plans for Saint Peter’s were coherent from the start. By considering first Julius II’s testimonies, then other literary sources, and then, finally, the visual evidence, I hope to demonstrate that 1506 was a point of departure, but not necessarily of the kind generally assumed by the majority of scholars to date. The main implication of my argument is that significant parts of the old basilica survived up to the seventeenth century, not because Julius II and Bramante were unsuccessful in seeing their ambitious plans executed, but because it was never their intention to replace the whole of the venerable edifice in the first place.

**Official papal documents**

Julius II expressed his ambitions regarding Saint Peter’s in a variety of documents focusing, in particular, on the addition of a new cupola and a chapel. These official texts are backed up by the reports from Julius’s courtiers, which will be considered below. Before the ceremony of 18 April 1506, in which the foundation stone for the new crossing was laid, the pope publicized his desire to repair the basilica. In three documents of November 1505, Julius announced the provision of funds to be spent on the repair and embellishment (reparare et exornare) of Saint Peter’s (basilica beati Petri apostolorum principis).\(^7\) Between 1505 and 1512 basilica meant Constantine’s edifice, not a virtual project for a new building, although the pope’s ambitions seem to have increased as the years passed. In 1506, for example, Julius II used the verbs rehedificare, exornare and instaurare several times. He explained the reason for this: the basilica was old and nearly collapsing. Whenever Julius used the verbs construire or edificare,

\(^7\) C. L. Frommel, ‘Die Peterskirche unter Papst Julius II. im Licht neuer Dokumente’, Römische Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte 16 (1976), 92–3. The written sources – largely from the ‘Liber Mandatorum’ in the archives of the Chapter of Saint Peters (now BAV), the archive of the Fabbrica and the Camera Apostolica (ASV) – are very usefully brought together in this important article, pp. 57–136. See Thoenes, ‘Renaissance Saint Peter’s’ (above, n. 2), 79 and 91 n. 69.
Epilogue: the antique basilica with a modern dome

these specified sections of the building, such as the tribuna and construction of the side of the high altar. In February 1507, in a bull in which the pope admitted that he had wanted to develop the basilica ever since he became a cardinal, Julius chose slightly different concepts that suggest ‘reform’ and enlargement.8 This emphasis on enlargement reoccurred on 12 April, when *reparatio* was linked to *ampliatio*. These combinations of words set the subsequent tone. In 1508 Julius repeated that he started to rebuild with a great and wonderful *aedificatio*, attached to the basilica, the basic concept remaining repair, not replacement by a completely new structure.9 In his bulls, briefs and letters, therefore, Julius stressed the enlargement, restoration and embellishment of the existing basilica, not its replacement.

Like the narrative and historical texts, payments of the *fabbrica* or *opera* refer to the old building to which new sections were attached: the apse, dome and, later, chapel. In 1510 the work comprised the arches of ‘the said basilica’. From 1511, the enlargement included a chapel that became the focus of Julius’s attention. While his courtiers paid little attention to this section of the renovation, the pope himself and some donors described the chapel at length. It was to be ‘at the head of the basilica’.10

Julius’s additions to the basilica were driven by his desire, firstly, to embellish the space around the tomb of the apostle and, secondly, to create a chapel for his own tomb. These projects involved additional structures, mainly piers to buttress the existing crossing and help stabilize the old nave. The construction that Julius II decided upon was a simple one, albeit unusually large in scale. He preserved the main entrance from the atrium and the city and therefore the east–west axis, rejecting Bramante’s proposal for monumental entries from the sides and the creation of an axis from south to north, which would have necessitated the realignment of the apostle’s tomb and the high altar into a more central position. These reductions resulted in the elimination of three semi-domes and four towers proposed on Bramante’s ‘parchment plan’ and medals, discussed in more detail below.

---

8 Frommel, ‘Die Peterskirche unter Papst Julius II.’ (above, n. 7), 97–8; Frommel, ‘Saint Peter’s: the early history’ (above, n. 1), 401: from Bologna Julius issued a long bull, referring to Sixtus IV and his newly built chapel within the basilica as his inspiration. See also B. Kempers, “‘Capella Iulia’ and ‘Capella Sixtina’: two tombs, one patron and two churches”, in F. Benzi (ed.), *Sisto IV: le arti a Roma nel primo Rinascimento* (Rome, 2000), 33–59.
10 Frommel, ‘Die Peterskirche unter Papst Julius II.’ (above, n. 7), 125, a notarial document of 1 January, referring to the chapel built by Julius II, ‘in capite et caput basilica principis apostolorum ed urb’. It is the chapel and tribuna that is built, not the basilica as a whole. On this chapel and Michelangelo’s tomb designs, see Kempers, “‘Capella Iulia’ and ‘Capella Sixtina’” (above, n. 8), 40–5.
(see Figs. 20.2 and 20.5). Instead, a simplified but monumental apse-chapel was adopted, attached to the westernmost crossing piers, which could be built on earlier foundations put in place during the pontificate of Nicholas V. Ambulatories in the south, west and north were proposed but apparently rejected as Julius II did not pay for any building activity in those areas. In 1511 the four arches to support the dome were completed, by which time the interventions totalled some 80,000 ducats, raised largely through the sale of indulgences. Nevertheless, significant sections of the antique nave and the entire atrium lay well outside the scope of these changes.

The narrative of additions by the courtiers of Julius II

Many of the designs, proposals and commentaries that comprise the evidence for the ‘new’ basilica were made by artists and writers associated with the papal court: they were men who were keen to engage and impress the pope. In the history of ‘rebuilding’ Saint Peter’s, it is important to note that, rather that representing adopted or executed plans, drawings and medals often depict proposals that were rejected: they were designed to persuade and impress a potential patron, not commemorate an actual building. Indeed, the extraordinary number of designs for the redevelopment of Saint Peter’s can be explained only by the number of proposals that were put forward but never implemented. The expansion of both the area of architectural design and the market for architectural treatises and prints also accounts for the number of designs submitted that were then printed and distributed widely.

In June 1509, for example, Francesco Albertini finished a book on the monuments of new and old Rome, the Opusculum de Mirabilibus Novae et Veteris Urbis Romae. Eight months later his text appeared in print, and new editions soon followed. Albertini dedicated his treatise to Julius II, praising the pope’s magnificent patronage. A Florentine canon, Albertini was well informed about the architectural project. He was secretary and chaplain to Cardinal Fazio Santoro from Viterbo, who, in turn, was one of Julius II’s most loyal courtiers and in charge of the renovation of Saint Peter’s.

Albertini’s rambling narrative describes Saint Peter’s and the Vatican in both its antique and its contemporary context. Starting with the walls and

---

12 See the reprint in P. Murray (ed.), Francesco Albertini, Opusculum de Mirabilibus Novae et Veteris Urbis Romae (Farnborough, 1972), which lacks folio numbers; see also Valentini–Zucchetti, IV, 457–546. Frommel, ‘Die Peterskirche unter Papst Julius II.’ (above, n. 7), 116, reproduces an abridged version of the section on the building project.
Epilogue: the antique basilica with a modern dome

gates of the antique city at the beginning of Book I, he mentions the Porta Pertusa, the eighteenth gate in his tour d’horizon, which entered the city from the Vatican hill to the west. Travellers using the gate were afforded a spectacular view of the apsidal end of the basilica, the papal palace to the left and the city of Rome beyond. He includes a new gate opened by Julius II between the Belvedere villa and the Vatican palace, presumably in Bramante’s corridoio, which allowed the pope and his cardinals easier access to the city. Where Saint Peter’s basilica now stands, he writes, there used to be a temple dedicated to Apollo. In the second book Albertini added that this temple stood at the place of the oratorium of Saint Petronilla, which is connected to the church of Saint Peter. After mentioning that Paul II gave two giant columns to the basilica, and the restoration of ancient monuments that were in a sorry state, he finally comes to the contemporary patronage of Julius II. Albertini states that Julius enlarged and embellished that which already existed, following the example of his uncle Sixtus IV who had initiated the instauratio of the city.

Renovating the old city is the subject of Albertini’s third book and Saint Peter’s figures large in it. Apart from Julius’s restoration of the Lateran basilica and baptistery, Albertini gives pride of place to the Basilica divi Petri Apostoli Principis in Vaticano. He stresses the Vatican basilica’s ancient pedigree; it was, he states, built by Pope Saint Silvester. He praises the basilica’s hundred columns before going on to describe Julius’s enlargement (amplificatio) of it. The pope was inspired by two edifices in particular, he claims: the Temple of Diana at Ephesus and Florence cathedral. To highlight Julius’s ambitions, Albertini describes their dimensions – the length of the Greek temple and the height of the Florentine dome – so that he can compare Saint Peter’s with the largest structures with which he was familiar. Returning to Julius II, Albertini claims that the basilica of Saint Peter would reach the stars because the pope wanted to surpass every other building, ancient or modern. He finishes the section by highlighting Cardinal Santoro’s leading role in the project: he does not mention any architect by name. Albertini clearly understood Julius’s patronage as an addition to the old basilica: the pope was adding a dome to Silvester’s nave.

In subsequent sections, Albertini describes the antique nave of the basilica and some of its subsidiary buildings, including the library, created by many popes but decorated at the behest of Julius II, and the chapel of Sixtus IV, Julius’s uncle. He refers to the portico and the Benediction loggia, enlarged by Julius II, and uses the same verb, ampliare, for the atrium and the piazza in front of the basilica, which had been enlarged by Pius II, Sixtus IV and Julius II. At the end of the third book, Albertini returns to Saint Peter’s
again, and describes it as the first of Julius’s great projects. He records the dedication ceremony of the foundation of the first, westernmost, pier and records the inscription on the foundation stone, using the actual text of the foundation stone of the eastern piers: ‘IVLIVS II. PONT. MAX. AEDEM DIVO Petro dicatam vetustate collebentem in digniorem amplioremque formam ut erigit fundamenta iecit anno Christi MDVII.’ The inscription, which was also quoted by the papal masters of ceremonies, Johannes Burcharudus and Paris de Grassis, refers to ‘amplification’ of the larger and more worthy structure that could only be the old basilica, and makes it clear that Julius II did not intend to construct a completely new edifice.

Among the important courtiers of Julius II Albertini mentions several who wrote about the pope’s plans for Saint Peter’s. These include Sigismondo dei Conti, the pope’s secretary and one of Julius’s advisers on Saint Peter’s, who includes the basilica in his History of the Popes. At the end of his historical narrative, Conti states that Julius set out to repair the basilica of the prince of apostles. He focuses in particular on the basilica as a material object, paying attention to its spolia – the hundred columns for which it was famous, and bronze tiles that once covered the roof of Jupiter’s Temple on the Capitol. Nevertheless Conti is critical of the basilica’s rude style and its dilapidated state, in particular the leaning wall to the south. This gives him the opportunity to mention the repairs undertaken by Nicholas V and to praise the piety and magnificence of Julius, who wanted to see to the basilica’s repair once and for all. According to Conti, Julius was going beyond a simple restoration so that Saint Peter’s might surpass all antique buildings in beauty and scale. The pope wanted to add a dome to the basilica, which would be larger and higher than the dome of the Temple

13 Albertini, Opusculum (above, n. 12); Kempers, ‘Diverging perspectives’ (above, n. 6), 225–6.

14 Frommel, ‘Die Peterskirche unter Papst Julius II.’ (above, n. 7), 94–5. Burchard states that the foundation stone ‘pro structura novi chori’, had the letters IVLIVS II PONTIFEX MAXIMVS HANC BASILICAM FERE COLLABENTEM REPARAVIT A.D. MCCCCCVI PONTIFICATUS SVI ANNO III. These words do not allow any other conclusion than that he understood the ceremony of 18 April to mark a western extension of the existing church. De Grassis indicates the same, referring to ‘chorum sive ciborium basilice principis apostolorum urbe’, quoting the inscription as: AEDEM PRINCIPIS APOSTOLORVM IN VATICANO VETUSTATE AC STV SQVALENTEM A FVNDAMENTIS RESTITVIT IVLIVS LIGVR PONT MAX ANNO MDVI. In the context of the whole text, this can only mean that the author considered the project to comprise a new section added to the existing building. Differences between both diaries indicate that one has to be careful with eyewitness reports. Grimaldi’s rendering of the 16 May 1507 inscription is nearly identical with Albertini’s, see Grimaldi, 100.
Epilogue: the antique basilica with a modern dome

of the Pantheon, but construction was proceeding slowly, he said, due not so much to a lack of funding as to the hesitation of the architect Bramante.\textsuperscript{15}

Albertini also referred to Lorenzo Parmenio, one of Julius’s librarians. On his own initiative Parmenio summarized Julius’s projects in a laudatory text, a finely executed manuscript that was kept in Julius’s new private library. He highlights Saint Peter’s, praising the Benediction loggia and the recently finished stairs from the basilica up to the palace, to which several additions had also been made. Parmenio notes that various parts of the basilica and palace threatened to fall into ruins, which had led Julius to instigate an \textit{ instanciaatio}, by which he meant renovation, restoration and enlargement of existing edifices, not construction \textit{ de novo.}\textsuperscript{16}

Another key figure in the court of Julius II, again referred to by Albertini, was Egidio da Viterbo, the prior-general of the Augustinian friars. In an oration of 21 December 1507, delivered in the basilica itself, Egidio praised Julius II for his initiative to raise Saint Peter’s to heaven. After the event Julius II asked the orator to put his sermon into writing, and in the late spring of 1508 a copy was also sent to the king of Portugal, whose triumphs in Asia had been the reason for the oration.\textsuperscript{17} Egidio praises the golden age under Julius II as a fulfilment of a providential scheme. It was Julius’s religious task to bring about a rebirth of the Hebrew temple in the house of Saint Peter, surpassing in height everything built before, be it by Solomon and Onias or Constantine and Silvester. Egidio used the verb \textit{ instaurare} to refer to the new splendour and ornament provided in the service of religion, cult and piety.

During the pontificate of Leo X, Egidio da Viterbo inserted a section on Bramante, Julius II and the renovation of Saint Peter’s in his ‘History of twenty centuries’. Coming before the historical narrative that concludes with Julius II and Leo X, it serves as a theological, spiritual and visionary interlude in the text.\textsuperscript{18} According to Egidio da Viterbo, Julius II wanted to raise a tabernacle above the tomb of Saint Peter, which resulted in the erection of a splendid temple above the divine tomb. But, he says, Bramante diverged from the pope’s plans and developed ideas of his own. He wanted to emphasize the entry to the basilica from the south and envisaged a major façade and vestibule to the south side that would enhance the visibility

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item This passage in Frommel, ‘Die Peterskirche unter Papst Julius II.’ (above, n. 7), 124. The bronze tiles only covered the western section: the two pseudo-transept arms, and probably a central construction in between, as well as the apse.
\item Frommel, ‘Die Peterskirche unter Papst Julius II.’ (above, n. 7), 99.
\item Frommel, ‘Die Peterskirche unter Papst Julius II.’ (above, n. 7), 103, with a limited section of the text.
\item Frommel, ‘Die Peterskirche unter Papst Julius II.’ (above, n. 7), 89–90.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
of the obelisk, considered to be Julius Caesar’s tomb. He proposed that the apostle’s tomb should be realigned on this axis and tried to persuade Julius II accordingly. However, he failed to convince the pope, who chose instead to preserve the sacred remains of the past, none of which were as important as the tomb of the prince of the apostles. Julius II did not mind if Bramante wanted to move the obelisk, and agreed with a new location near a new vestibule of the basilica: he could do whatever he wanted with the pagan monument, as long as he did not touch the apostle’s tomb. However, according to Egidio, Julius stated that nothing from the old temple should be replaced; nothing regarding the first pope could be changed. As for the obelisk, Egidio recorded that Bramante finally decided not to move it, as the process of doing so appeared technically too complicated. This interpolated story served Egidio’s conclusion. The sacred should be placed above the profane, religion above splendour, and piety above ornament. He concluded his rhetorical passage with a quotation: ‘It was not written that the tomb should be built in the temple but the temple above the tomb.’

Albertini, Conti, Parmenio, Egidio da Viterbo, Burchardus and Paris de Grassis were all eyewitnesses to Julius II’s plans and activities. With different emphases, they transmitted the same idea of Julius’s ambitious renovation of the old basilica, focusing on the new cupola above the tomb of the apostle. The ancient basilica of Saint Peter’s is their point of departure and they mention only the construction of the dome and choir. None reported any proposal to build a new nave, façade and atrium.

Bramante’s drawings

Although traditionally they have been incorporated into the holistic version of the basilica’s rebuilding, the architectural drawings that survive can also be interpreted to show that Julius II favoured only a partial renovation of Saint Peter’s. Probably the most important of these is Uffizi 20A, Donato Bramante’s composite drawing showing various superimposed structures, dated 1505–6 (Fig. 20.1). First, he drew the main outline of Constantine’s basilica. Second, he outlined Nicholas V’s project, which was modified and executed to a limited extent by Paul II, with its extended choir to the west and enlarged transepts to the north and south. The third element

19 For discussion of this text see, for example, Frommel, ‘Die Peterskirche unter Papst Julius II.’ (above, n. 7); it deserves more extensive analysis. On the obelisk see Osborne, this volume, 00–00.
comprises a series of rebuilding projects that took up increasing amounts of the antique nave. Bramante did not draw a complete nave with a new façade, and related all designs to the old basilica. First, he sketched new piers, aligned with the pre-existing columns. At a later stage he enlarged the piers and added extensions to the south, west and north. In the top corners he sketched elevations. The sheet was cut (in the bottom left corner and right-hand side) and then enlarged with the original pieces of paper glued on to a larger sheet. This composite drawing depicted several ideas for
the westernmost additions to the transepts and choir, emulating previous attempts initiated by Nicholas V, Paul II and Sixtus IV.²⁰

The composite drawing demonstrates that Bramante was interested in recent history. It shows the antique basilica, an earlier plan for a western extension, and a variety of new ideas for ever more ambitious renovations, all still connected to the existing building. Bramante drew the edifice as it was first built and highlighted the mid-fifteenth-century renovation projects, but he left out intervening projects and additions. The crucial elements in his own vision for the basilica were a crossing with a dome, a monumental apse and large-scale transepts, none of which necessitated the demolition of most of the basilica’s nave, nor of its façade and atrium.

Bramante’s drawing has much in common with laudatory descriptions of Nicholas V’s ideas, primarily that provided by Giannozzo Manetti. This text is a literary exercise rather than a precise record of a building project, and in it Manetti described the ‘long and wide temple’, with its famous columns. To this edifice a new testudo or dome was to be added, crowned with a lantern, with a large tribuna or cappella attached to the western apse.²¹

The composite drawing is made over a precisely drawn grid that establishes its scale as 1:300.²² It depicts as accurately as possible Bramante’s concern to tie his western additions to the old basilica, which served as his frame of reference. Nevertheless, he provides only a general impression of the possible joins between the antique basilica and its new dome, transepts and apse. The extension relied on thick walls to sustain the roof, vaults and dome. The small apse and the comparatively low exedrae of the old basilica were to be replaced by a monumental structure, rising well above the nave.²³

Four rows of at least twenty columns were to remain in place, so only a small section of the nave would have had to be demolished.

Bramante’s vast parchment plan (Uffizi 1A) clarifies the ideas worked out on the composite plan, privileging the proposals for the western extension (Fig. 20.2). He made this plan on a larger scale of 1:150, sometime between

²⁰ The complex archaeology and chronology of this sheet, Uffizi 20Ar, has been thoroughly analysed by Thoenes, ‘Neue Beobachtungen’ (above, n. 4), 110–17, 125–6. Important additions and elaborations are provided by Niebaum, ‘Bramante und der Neubau’ (above, n. 13), 87–184.
²¹ On Manetti and other authors of the mid-fifteenth century, who discussed the restoration and renovation of churches, see Richardson, Reclaiming Rome (above, n. 6), 143–56, 317–421.
²² The squares measure one minuto, that is one-sixtieth of a palmo romano, the conventional unit corresponding to 0.2234 m. One square on the sheet represents 5 × 5 palmi.
²³ A. Arbeiter, Alt-St.-Peter in Geschichte und Wissenschaft, Abfolge der Bauten. Rekonstruktion. Architekturprogramm (Berlin, 1988), with the older literature; see also Alfarano, DBVS, 451–92, 515–28, 560; Blaauw, CD, 632–5 and CBCR.
Epilogue: the antique basilica with a modern dome

397

Fig. 20.2. Donato Bramante, more than half of the western extension to Old Saint Peter’s, 1505. Pen, brown ink and ochre wash on parchment, 54.0 cm × 1.105 m, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe degli Uffizi.

the first drawings of the more modest piers on the composite sheet and its later sketches with the larger piers. He conceived harmoniously designed walls, within an elaborate scheme of interconnected spaces, according to a mathematically ordered system of circles and squares for which he used a grid. To enhance the aesthetic effect he did not indicate scale and measurements, however. The parchment sheet was not a blueprint but a work of art in itself, designed to impress the patron and his advisers. 24 It was presumably to be used in conjunction with the composite sheet, which did provide the relevant measurements and showed how the new piers aligned with the old nave and its columns.

Assuming that the two crossing piers depicted on the parchment plan would be mirrored by a further two to the east, there remained space for about half of Constantine’s nave. Around the same time, Giuliano da Sangallo (c. 1445–1516) produced his own plans to make a symmetrical, centralized church using Bramante’s parchment plan (Fig. 20.3). The size of the building was to be 700 palmi, as noted on Sangallo’s sheet, ‘in tutto

24 For important interpretations of the parchment plan, see Niebaum, ‘Bramante und der Neubau’ (above, n. 13), 118–26, 131–6, and Satzinger, ‘Die Baugeschichte’ (above, n. 3), 50–1, as well as the publications cited in Kempers, ‘Diverging perspectives’ (above, n. 6). On Bramante, see also J. S. Ackerman, The Cortile Belvedere (Vatican City, 1954).
canne 70'. This corresponds with the width of Bramante’s plans, but on this drawing the church is completed by mirroring the western portions in the east. Julius II rejected Sangallo’s plan for a centralized church and Bramante corrected his ‘mistake’ on the reverse of his drawing (Uffizi 8Ar and v), sketching several options to connect new and old, suggesting that the relationship between the new extension and the existing nave was yet to be resolved (Fig. 20.4). In Bramante’s version, three arms had an ambulatory. For the fourth arm, alternative solutions were taken into consideration, with variations in the preservation of the nave and the building of bays to the east.

One of the elevations for Bramante’s extension to the old basilica, elaborating on the pattern of the parchment plan, was included on the obverse of a portrait medal of Julius II (Fig. 20.5). Its most striking element is a huge dome, flanked by towers. Several versions of this medal were made, and Agostino Veneziano made a print after it, which allowed

---

Epilogue: the antique basilica with a modern dome

Fig. 20.4. Donato Bramante, studies of a western extension of Old Saint Peter’s with ambulatories and sketches of San Lorenzo Maggiore and the cathedral of Milan, 1506. Red chalk on paper, 40 × 39 cm, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe degli Uffizi.

Fig. 20.5. Cristoforo Foppa (Caradosso), Portrait of Julius II (obverse), Bramante’s design for a new western extension of Saint Peter’s (reverse), gold, silver and bronze medal, 1506, diameter 5.6 cm, British Museum, CM George III, Papal Medals AE III 6.
Fig. 20.6. Agostino Veneziano, copy of Bramante’s design for a new western extension of Saint Peter’s, Stick print, c. 1517, diameter 18.9 cm, British Museum.

an even wider audience to become familiar with the projected extension (Fig. 20.6).

On the medal the basilica is viewed from the west, not from the east, the side of the city and the basilica’s main approach. Crucially, in Julius’s building medals the Vatican basilica rises behind unpaved, rough ground that represents the hilly slope that extended to the west and north. The location on the Vatican hill is indicated by the text, VATICANVS M[ONS]. Medals of a later date, showing the eastern façade, lack such a text referring to the Vatican hill, and have a flat and regular surface in the foreground on which the projected building rises. Above the building appears the text INSTAURACIO TEMPLI S. PETRI. Instauratio, a concept formulated by

26 For a different view, see, among others, Satzinger, ‘Die Baugeschichte’ (above, n. 3) and Niebaum in his contributions to the catalogue, pp. 75–6.
27 On the medal view, see the extended discussion in Kempers, ‘Diverging perspectives’ (above, n. 6), 214–18.
Flavio Biondo in his *Roma Instaurata*. This word usually meant the renovation of an existing structure, and rarely referred to a creation *de novo*, while the *templum sancti Petri* in 1506 and throughout the early sixteenth century meant Old Saint Peter’s. Therefore the edifice represented on the medal corresponds to the building proposed in the parchment plan. To the sides of the main dome, secondary domes appear. According to the plan these were half the size of the central dome. In the middle and above the pedimented entrance, presumably into the new choir chapel, the medal shows a dome with a lantern, which reoccurs at the ends of what can only be the transepts. These three domes are conceived as three-quarter domes, like those of Florence cathedral, which, according to the measurements provided by the composite drawings and parchment plan, would have had a diameter of 120 *palmi*.

All Bramante’s drawings deal with western extensions of the existing basilica, none with a completely new edifice. Other sketches reflect his early thoughts on the renovation. Two sketches occur on the other side of the composite sheet. A quickly drawn elevation shows a view from the west: a central dome, wide transepts and a semicircular apse in the middle, which is repeated at the ends of the transepts. Using elements from the designs of his colleagues, he went on to develop his architectural concepts right up until the day of his death. Bramante also started work on a three-dimensional model in which various proposals, first rendered in drawings, were to be integrated. Several alternatives were considered, which briefly touched on the fate of the atrium and the Benediction loggia. In a letter, Bramante reported the possibility of its destruction according to a new design for Saint Peter’s. But none of the ambitious projects for the eastern side of the basilica was either approved or executed. In the summer of 1507 Julius decided upon a simple western extension: the apse walls were to be directly attached to the western crossing piers; the ambulatories and the semi-domes were eliminated. At his death, in March 1514, Bramante’s model was far from

---

31 Niebaum, ‘Bramante und der Neubau’ (above, n. 13), 167–9. The documents of 1507 allow the hypothesis that a more ambitious project, extending into the east, was under consideration, at least on behalf of the architect. Some of the Julian documents allow such a reading, but they never explicitly referred to a plan for a complete new edifice; see Frommel, ‘Die Peterskirche unter Papst Julius II.’ (above, n. 7).
finished, as several authors reported. His successors continued to struggle with the resolution of the new western extension and the remains of the old basilica.

**Conclusion**

The architects who worked for Julius were all more ambitious than the pope: previous scholarship on the drawings has only obscured the pope’s conservatism. The same story of ambitious architects and pragmatic popes might be told for the next century of the basilica’s existence.

On the reverse of the parchment plan (Fig. 20.2), Antonio da Sangallo, who was chief architect at Saint Peter’s from 1520, wrote ‘Pianta di Bramante di Sto. Pietro che non ebbe effetto’. With these words, he indicated the historical fate of this design: it was never used for construction. On the first complete design with a nave, submitted by Fra Giovanni Giocondo, who was appointed in 1513 to assist the aged Bramante, Sangallo noted ‘Opinione e desegnio di fra Giocondo’. In this way, Sangallo indicated that the drawing was to be interpreted as advice from Fra Giocondo, also not followed. Both notes mark the beginning of a new trend. Its focus was architectural design and attribution to individual architects rather than the progress of the project on the ground. Later in life, Antonio da Sangallo relayed more information orally to his son Francesco, who subsequently informed Giorgio Vasari. These three men formed and preserved a collection of architectural drawings devoted to Saint Peter’s and several smaller projects, which later entered the Uffizi in Florence, and which remain the key source for the basilica’s ‘reconstruction’.

Sebastiano Serlio established the revised version of events in his series of books on architecture, published from the late 1530s. In his third book on the architecture of antiquity, published in 1540, Serlio did not discuss Constantine’s basilica but, instead, focused on the designs by Bramante, Raphael and Peruzzi. He made Bramante the architectural hero responsible for the rebirth of ancient architecture that ran from the Pantheon to Bramante’s Tempietto. Serlio’s combination of engravings and texts, assertions and suggestions, created a new history for Saint Peter’s, which was represented as a completely new edifice. Serlio was one of Vasari’s sources for his life of Bramante. From 1540 onwards, historical interest focused on complete plans rather than partial renovations. The memory of Constantine’s basilica was

---

gradually marginalized, but returned in due course not in the history of architecture but through the efforts of the important historians and ecclesiastics, Onofrio Panvinio, Cardinal Cesare Baronio, and the canons of Saint Peter's, Tiberio Alfarano and Giacomo Grimaldi.  