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## The Ancient Monuments of Rome and Their Use as Suppliers of Remnants for the Construction of New St. Peter's Basilica: Building Activity in Rome during the Renaissance

### Summary

The start of the building of the new St. Peter's Basilica in Rome represented a huge event in Roman building activities, which were promoted by the popes after their return from exile in Avignon. This enormous construction site required building material, which in the Renaissance often entailed destroying the ancient city and reusing ancient material as spolia. But a closer look at the spolia used for the new St. Peter's reveals that almost no intact ancient structure had to suffer; it was mostly remnants that were transported to the Vatican, and thus new residential space was opened in the center of Rome for what was once again a growing population.

Keywords: St. Peter; Rome; Renaissance; spolia; deconstruction.

Der Beginn der Arbeiten am Neubau von St. Peter in Rom stellt ein bedeutendes Ereignis innerhalb der allgemeinen Bauaktivitäten dar, welche die Päpste nach ihrer Rückkehr aus dem Exil in Avignon förderten. Für die enorme Größe des Bauwerkes wurde eine große Menge an Baumaterial benötigt, was oftmals einen Eingriff in die antike Bausubstanz Roms zur Folge hatte, um dieses Material als Spolien zu nutzen. Ein genauerer Blick auf die für Neu-St. Peter genutzten Spolien zeigt jedoch, dass noch intakte antike Baustrukturen dabei nicht in Mitleidenschaft gezogen wurden; vielmehr wurden die Überreste aus bereits zerstörten Monumente entnommen und zum Vatikan transportiert. Dies schuf gleichzeitig neuen Freiraum im Zentrum von Rom, welches von der inzwischen wieder stetig wachsenden Bevölkerung neu aufgebaut wurde.

Keywords: St. Peter; Rom; Renaissance; Spolien; Dekonstruktion.

## I Introduction

The construction of New St. Peter's Basilica in Rome involved the largest construction site of its time in the city. This ambitious project required an enormous amount of material, which affected the ancient monuments of the city of Rome, as they had to serve in part as a quarry. In the traditional view this could be considered 'use of spolia,' which resulted in severe damage to ancient monuments.<sup>1</sup> But to what extent is there a correlation between the deconstruction of ancient monuments and the building activity in the Renaissance in the case of St. Peter's? What was the exact provenance of the material and the condition of the ancient monuments during the construction of the Basilica, which took place mainly in the 16th century? And can one speak of the destruction of the ancient city of Rome because of the use of spolia in the Renaissance, as is argued in many publications to this day?

After the popes returned from exile in Avignon in 1377, a number of projects were initiated to embellish the cityscape and rebuild the reputation of Rome.<sup>2</sup> This "instauratio Romae"<sup>3</sup> included the erection of new buildings as well as infrastructural improvements, such as new streets, new water supplies and other facilities. Along with the reconstruction of St. Peter's (1506–1626), various other building projects were initiated during this time period, including the rearrangement of Capitoline Hill and the construction of Palazzo Farnese.<sup>4</sup> The creation of the Tridente took place gradually in the 16th century,<sup>5</sup> as did the maintenance of parts of the Roman aqueducts,<sup>6</sup> and, a bit later, the realignment of the obelisks of Rome.<sup>7</sup> In the course of these new construction activities ancient monuments or rather their ruins were omnipresent as landscape elements.

It is common knowledge that the shape of the magnificent ancient city changed during the Middle Ages. At the beginning of the Renaissance, one side of the Coliseum had collapsed, the Forum Romanum was being used as Campo Vaccino, the Forum of Caesar was being used for agriculture, and the Forum of Trajan was filled with small wooden cottages.<sup>8</sup> Most parts of the huge public baths – like the Baths of Agrippa and the Baths of Nero/Severus Alexander in Campo Marzio – had been destroyed or converted into apartments or workshops. Sometimes new streets were built running right through ancient building structures.<sup>9</sup>

The reasons for the decline of Rome have often been discussed and don't need to be debated further here, but it seems clear that outside influences like earthquakes, flooding

1 This period was also called the "second destruction of Rome" by Syndram 1988, 11.

2 Frommel 1983, 111–112.

3 Laureys 2006, 217.

4 Hubert 2007, 165–167.

5 Zanchettin 2005, 211.

6 Hubert 2007, 158–159.

7 Hess 2008, 143–145; Batta 1986.

8 Meneghini and Santangeli Valenziani 2004, 45, 127–132, 185.

9 Yegül 1992, 135; Ghini 1988, 128–130.

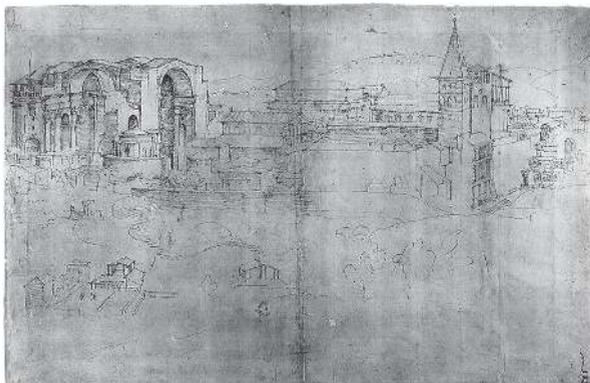


Fig. 1 Maarten van Heemskerck, ca. 1532–1537, Old and New St. Peter's (Marten van Heemskerck, Album II, fol. 51 r).

and looting also inflicted damage upon ancient monuments<sup>10</sup> which wasn't repaired in the Middle Ages, because no one was willing or able to do so. Even if the city of Rome remained a vital city at all times, almost no ancient monument survived intact. Although the popes generally disapproved of spoliation it occurred regularly. Most spoliation took place after Paul III issued a bull in 1540, which withdrew all former excavation licenses and empowered the *Fabbrica di San Pietro* alone to control excavations and manage ancient monuments and their ruins.<sup>11</sup> The construction of New St. Peter's generated a huge demand for material because of the sheer enormity of the church. The material, which was used, was partly new – extracted, for example, from the travertine quarries near Tivoli or from Fiano Romano<sup>12</sup> – and partly old. Hence, it seems plausible that material from Old St. Peter's, which was destroyed during construction, was also taken.

## 2 The provenance of ancient material

The task of linking material in New St. Peter's to the ancient monuments of Rome is greatly assisted by the *Archivo della Reverendissima Fabbrica di San Pietro*, which has been collecting documents regarding the Basilica ever since its founding in 1506.<sup>13</sup> This includes, for example court decisions, construction plans and documents attesting the financing of the building project. The archive contains a significant number of

10 There are credible accounts of earthquakes in the year 801 and 1349, see Amanti 1995, 345–348; Krautheimer 2004, 263. Looting occurred under Robert of Guiscard in the year 1084, see Bünemann 1997, 144–149.

11 Wolf 2003, 38; for the complete text see Pollack 1915, 46–47.

12 Zanchettin 2008, 165.

13 Jones 2000, 399.

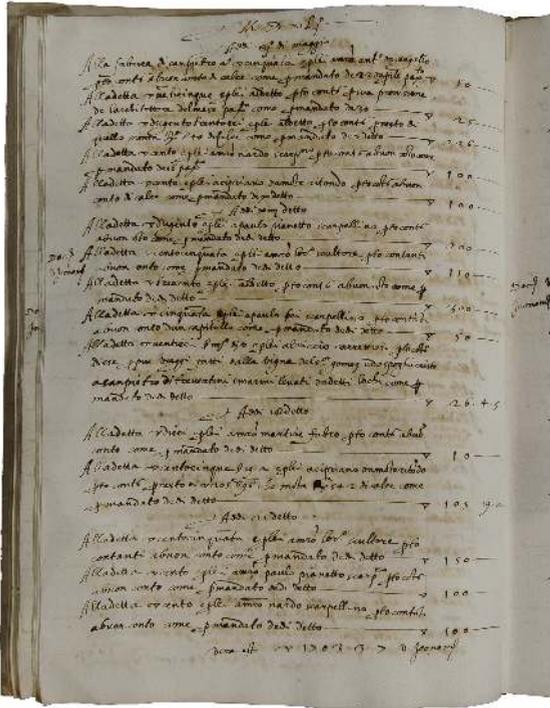


Fig. 2 Repro from the Archivio della Reverendissima Fabbrica di San Pietro, Arm. III, tom. 10, p. 53v. Accounts of material acquired for the construction of St. Peter's Basilica stating the price and in some cases its provenance.

short notices and receipts of every kind for building material that was brought to the construction site.

One also finds references here to at least around 40 ancient monuments as sources for material used in St. Peter's.<sup>14</sup> Apart from a few exceptions,<sup>15</sup> these monuments are all located in Campo Marzio and around the Imperial Fora – areas, which at the time were either populated or very close to populated areas.<sup>16</sup>

There is certain heterogeneity to this list of spoliated monuments. The record contains a number of pagan buildings as well as sacral monuments, and there is no obvious pattern underlying why the architects of the Basilica took spolia from one building or another, other than the material desired.<sup>17</sup>

14 These documents are published by Frey 1909, Frey 1911, Frey 1913, Pollack 1915, Frey 1916, Orbaan 1918, Cascioli 1921. Unfortunately we do not know how many more of these files are somewhere in the Archivio della Reverendissima Fabbrica di San Pietro.  
 15 Mainly the Baths of Caracalla and material, that came from the repositories from Ostia and Porto.

16 This is very apparent, for example, on the maps of Rome by Ugo Pinard (1555) or Stefano Dupercac (1577).  
 17 In the files, about half of the buildings mentioned are pagan and the other half used to be sacral in antiquity. Unfortunately, it is not always possible to refer to specific monuments, since only the name of a square is given, e.g. ["alla Rotonda"].



Fig. 3 Map of Rome by Ugo Pinard, *Urbis Romae descriptio*, 1555.

Furthermore, we have receipts showing that the Fabbrica had to pay private individuals and other congregations for the material. We find the names of Signora Giovannella de Conti, Virgilio Crescenzi and Giacomelli Cosmo, just to mention a few, as well as the Abbots of Santa Maria Nova (Temple of Venus and Rome) and Sant'Adriano (Curia Julia) in the files. Again, the decision about where to buy seems to have been based entirely on the size and color of the material that was offered.

One can certainly suggest a different motivation for taking ancient material out of Rome to faraway places like Ravenna or London, compared to carrying marble blocks that were lying around the center of Rome to the nearby Vatican.<sup>18</sup> Short transportation distances saved time, effort and money. Hence, within the city there arose something that could be called an industry consisting of lime burners, carriers and excavators paid by the Vatican.

Rodolfo Lanciani's view – that the Fabbrica di San Pietro destroyed hundreds of ancient buildings to take the material to St. Peter's – continues to prevail.<sup>19</sup> It is true

18 Lanciani 1901, 183–188 mentions the columns from the Domus Pinciana which were brought to Ravenna by Theodoric the Great (474–526) and marble which was brought to Westminster Abbey by Abbot Richard of Ware (1259).

19 See, for example Lanciani 1990, 203, where he writes about the Forum Romanum: “Se la cam-

pagna decennale di sterminio, ordinate da Paolo III, non avesse avuto luogo, non è difficile immaginare in quale condizione il conte di Tournon, iniziatore degli scavi napoleonici, e noi stessi, avremmo trovato il foro. Avremmo trovato la gradinata e lo stilobate del tempio di Antonino perfetti in ogni loro parte, con cornicioni, e di statue frammentati:

that the bull of Pope Paul III represents a decisive event even in the files of the *Fabbrica*. But when one takes a closer look at certain monuments, it becomes apparent that actually there was not much left for the *Deputati* to destroy. Almost every building serving as a source of material for St. Peter's had suffered massive damage or almost complete destruction before the year 1506. The reasons why the ancient structures were in such poor condition vary. They include both natural disasters and manmade damage, whereas spoliation was very seldom the initiating factor for the destruction of the monuments.

The monument, which lost the most material to the Vatican, was probably the Baths of Caracalla (see Appendix, no. 1). We know for certain about at least 400 loads of material, which were carried to St. Peter's. But when the large-scale excavations started in the Baths there was not much left of the original structure. The area had belonged to the church of SS Nero e Achileo since the Middle Ages and was used as a cemetery and garden; some parts were sold as *Vigna*.<sup>20</sup> Numerous drawings from the Renaissance show only the remains of brick walls, hardly any marble or columns.<sup>21</sup> It is therefore difficult to find spolia from the Baths of Caracalla that can actually be identified as such in St. Peter's, even though a lot of material had been taken for the Basilica pursuant to the documents in the *Fabbrica*.

Quite a lot of material was also brought to the Vatican from the Temple of Venus and Rome (see Appendix, no. 2). The decline of this temple apparently started with the ban of pagan cults in the *Codex Theodoricus* in the middle of the fourth century.<sup>22</sup> But the earthquake of 847 also seems to have inflicted very serious damage on the Temple.<sup>23</sup> The church of Santa Maria Nova was built into the western part of the temple shortly afterwards. Thus, at the time when New St. Peter's Basilica was being built, the podium of what had once been the greatest temple in Rome was probably covered by a garden belonging to the church of Santa Maria Nova. Assembling the building material used for St. Peter's involved excavating a ruin, rather than destroying an ancient monument.

le vestigia del fornice di Fabio a piedi del clivo della Sacra via, con le storiche dediazioni: il tempio di Cesare perfetto sino al piano della cella, sulla quale posavano le fondamenta della torre dell'Insera, troncata nel trentasei: la Regia, coi fasti ancora nel proprio luogo: l'Arco di Augusto con le sue epigrafi monumentali: il tempio di Vesta con il suo peristilio, caduto bensì a terra, ma di poco mancante: l'atrio coi piedistalli delle Vestali massime ancora in piedi sotto il quadriportico: il tempio dei Catori, perfetto nella parte bassa, e sepolto sotto una montagna di Colonne, basi, capitelli e cornicioni che bastarono ad alimentare le fornaci farnesiane sino al 1550 [...]."

20 Steinby 1999b, 43.

21 For reconstruction and measurements of the columns, see DeLaine 1997, Appendix 3, or Jenewein 2008, mainly the catalogue, 203–217; for the drawings, see the CENSUS-Database (Census of Ancient Works of Art and Architecture Known in the Renaissance, <http://www.census.de>).

22 Lorenzatti 1990, 122; Pensabene 2006, 563 (*Cod. Theod.* 14, 10, 10).

23 Molino and Guidoboni 1989, 202 make just a brief mention about this event. There does not seem to be clear evidence of an earthquake in 847, whereas the earthquake of 801 is much better documented. Amanti 1995 does not mention an earthquake in 847 at all (but does refer to one in 801).

Not only did nature erode the monuments, but people also added to the devastation by foraging for building material. There are reports of material being taken from the Coliseum as early as late antiquity.<sup>24</sup> It is known that in later times material was taken for the Palazzo Venezia or for repairing the city walls – but there is almost no precise evidence of people starting to quarry out the stones from the intact structure. The earthquake of 1349 caused damage as well; it is likely that the collapse of the outer southern ring can be linked to this event.<sup>25</sup> The Coliseum is often cited as a quarry for stones for many different building projects. Eugene IV (1431–1447) even issued a special decree to protect the Coliseum.<sup>26</sup> Despite numerous reports of material being taken from the Coliseum,<sup>27</sup> it seems that the Coliseum must nevertheless have been preserved. We know of some efforts to make use of the amphitheatre for different activities. For example, there were three little churches built within its walls, and processions and markets were held there.<sup>28</sup> The north side would probably have been kept intact because it adorned the street connecting the center with San Giovanni in Laterano.<sup>29</sup> Overturned columns, stones and other material that was no longer used in the original structure were taken away (see Appendix, no. 3). All in all, it seems more logical that only material that had fallen down, for example due to the earthquake of 1349 and even before, would have been taken. This is also supported by a document from 1606 which specifically allows only material that had fallen from the upper floors of the arena to be taken.<sup>30</sup> This is a regulation that actually has precedents in late ancient laws: ... *quod reparari nullo modo viderimus posse in alterius operis nihilominus publici transferri iubeamus ornatum*.<sup>31</sup>

The nearby Forum of Trajan probably suffered massive damage during the earthquake of 1349 as well,<sup>32</sup> and at this time already bordered the populated center of Rome (see Fig. 4), which could also have contributed to the Forum's slow decay. Its marble pavement was removed in the ninth century and small cottages were constructed.<sup>33</sup> On the adjoining Forum of Caesar, feeders were found, indicating that the Forum was used

- 24 Rea 2001, 182; see also Bauer 1996, 90–94 describing the extensive damage and restorations in late antiquity.  
 25 Magnusson 2004, 127.  
 26 Lanciani 1989, 59–59, taken from “Liber brevium Martini V., Eugenii IV, et aliorum”, Archivio vaticano, armadio XXXIX, tomo VII.a c. 341, n. 319.  
 27 See Gabucci 2001, 203; Luciani 2000, 197 and also Cascioli 1921, 375, note 3.  
 28 Rea 2001, 192–202.  
 29 Gabucci 2001, 203.  
 30 Gabucci 2001, 202.  
 31 Cod. Theodo. Nov. Mariorian, IV (458 Jul. 11) Aemiliano P. U. (Romae); Deichmann 1940, 115; see also Rea 1993, 71; citing Cassiodor: “[...] Only take care to use only those stones which have really fallen

from public buildings, as we do not wish to appropriate private property, even for the glorification of the City?” (Variae II, 7: *Sine usu iacere non decet, quod potest ad decorem crescere civitatis, quia non est sapientiae profutura contemnere. et ideo illustris sublimitas tua marmorum quadratos, qui passim diruti negliguntur, quibus hoc opus videtur iniunctum in fabricam murorum faciat deputari, ut redeat in decorem publicum prisca constructio et ornent aliquid saxa iacentia post ruinas: ita tamen, ut metalla ipsa de locis publicis corruiße apud te manifesta ratione doceatur, quia sicut nolumus ornatum urbis cuiusquam praesumptione temerari, ita privatis compendiis calurnniam detestamur inferri*).

32 Bauer 1996, 100.

33 Meneghini and Santangeli Valenziani 2004, 72.

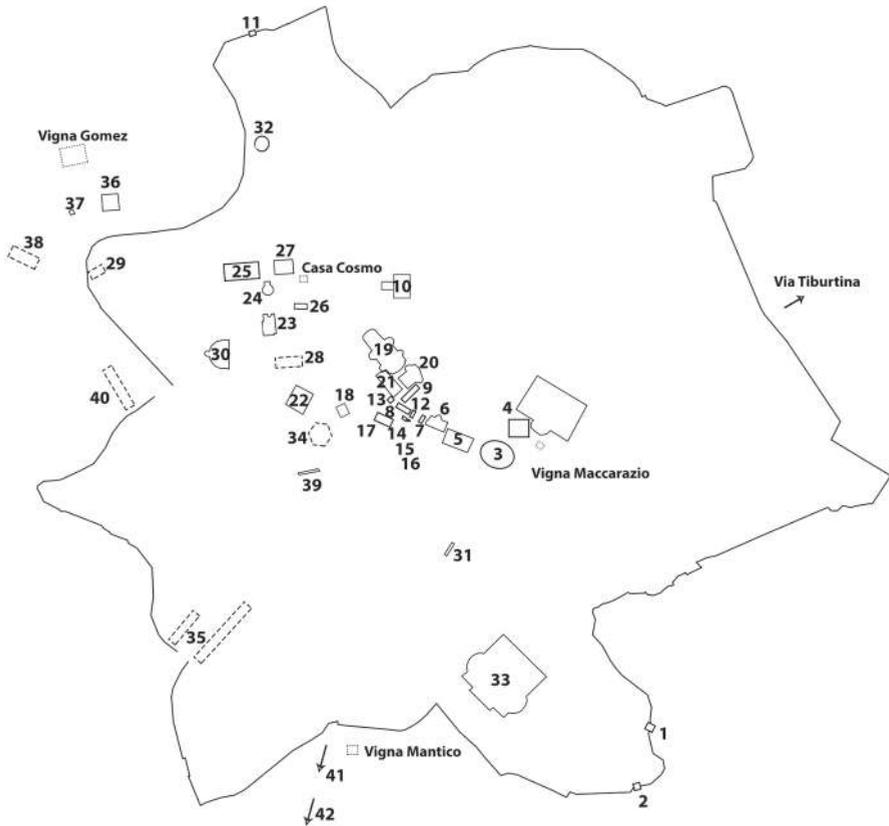


Fig. 4 Map of monuments mentioned in the Archivio della Reverendissima Fabbrica di San Pietro. 1 Porta Latina, 2 Porta San Sebastiano, 3 Colosseum, 4 Baths of Trajan, 5 Temple of Venus and Roma, 6 Basilica of Maxentius, 7 Temple of Romulus / SS. Cosma e Damiano, 8 Basilica Aemilia, 9 Forum of Nerva, 10 Temple of Serapis / Temple of Heracles and Dionysus, 11 Porta Flaminia, 12 Temple of Antoninus and Faustina, 13 Curia Julia, 14 Temple of Divus Iulius, 15 Regia, 16 Arch of Augustus, 17 Basilica Julia, 18 Capitoline Hill – Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus, 19 Forum of Trajan, 20 Forum of Augustus, 21 Forum of Caesar, 22 Porticus Octaviae, 23 Baths of Agrippa, 24 Alla Rotonda, 25 Baths of Alexander (formerly Baths of Nero), 26 Isis-Temple of Isis – Arco di Camigliano, 27 Temple of Matidia, 28 Botteghe Oscure, 29 Tarentum – San Giovanni dei Fiorentini, 30 Campo de Fiori – Theatre of Pompey, 31 Septizodium, 32 Mausoleum of Augustus, 33 Baths of Caracalla, 34 Piazza Montanara, 35 Emporium – Tiber, 36 Mausoleum of Hadrian – P. Aelii Hadriani Sepulcrum, 37 'Vatican' Pyramid, 38 Horti Agrippinae, 39 Ponte Rotto – Pons Aemilius, 40 Porta Settimiana, 41 Sacred grove of the Frates Arvales, 42 Ostia – Porto.

for agricultural purposes.<sup>34</sup> There was not much left of the magnificent monuments of antiquity in this area at the time of the construction of New St. Peter's (see Appendix, no. 4).

More material arrived at the construction site of St. Peter's from Campo Marzio (see Appendix, no. 5–6). Here, for example, were the huge ancient monuments of the Baths of Agrippa and the Baths of Nero/Severus Alexander. The Baths of Agrippa had supposedly been preserved to a great extent before finally giving way to several houses and Palazzi built in the high Renaissance in the course of the enhancement of the cityscape.<sup>35</sup> This zone had been called the *Calcarium* since the Middle Ages because of the number of lime burners and other craftsmen who settled here – and it is hard to believe that they did not touch the marble décor that lay right on their doorstep. In any case, there was not much high-quality material left from the baths in 1506 when the building of New St. Peter's commenced.

Slightly to the north, the Baths of Nero/Severus Alexander went through a comparable development. In the Middle Ages there was apparently more need for churches and living space than for a huge bath right in the center of a populated area. Since the tenth century, the monastery of Farfa, the churches of S. Eustachio, S. Maria (later S. Luigi dei Francesi), S. Benedetto, S. Salvatore and the Palazzo Madama had come into existence, bit by bit, in the vicinity of the baths.<sup>36</sup> Even if there were imposing remains,<sup>37</sup> like high brick walls, there was not much ancient material of good quality left for the *Fabbrica* of San Pietro, only single blocks and stones that were not used in the new building structure and hence were taken away (see Appendix, no. 6).

Returning southwards to the Forum Romanum, not much is known about the post-ancient life of the Temple of the Deified Caesar and the Regia on the southeast side of the Forum Romanum.<sup>38</sup> But we do have the opinion of Rodolfo Lanciani, who cites Pirro Ligorio in claiming that both the Temple of Caesar and the Regia were still standing in the time of Pope Paul III (1534–1549) and were then destroyed by the *Deputati* of the *Fabbrica* di San Pietro within 30 days.<sup>39</sup> This would be the only known example of the *Fabbrica* destroying a more or less complete monument and using its material to build the Basilica of St. Peter. Unfortunately, Pirro Ligorio seems to be the only witness: thus far, no reference to these two buildings has been found in the *Fabbrica* or in any other report concerning St. Peter's. Moreover, we don't have any drawings of the two

34 Meneghini and Santangeli Valenziani 2004, 127–132.

35 See Frommel 1973, illustration in the bookcase.

36 Ghini 1988, 135; Steinby 1999b, 61–62.

37 Ghini 1988, 129.

38 For the ancient structures, see Steinby 1999a, 192 (Regia) and Steinby 1996, 116–119 (Temple of Caesar).

39 Lanciani 1990, 221–222, Lanciani 1906, 130.



Fig. 5 Maarten van Heemskerck, View of the Forum Romanum to the northwest (Marten van Heemskerck, Album I, fol. 06r).



Fig. 6 Maarten van Heemskerck, View of the Forum Romanum to the northeast (Marten van Heemskerck, Album I, fol. 09r).

monuments or their ruins from the Renaissance, although there are drawings of every surrounding building on this end of the Forum Romanum.<sup>40</sup>

Hence, it seems reasonable to assume that primarily an earthquake also damaged these two buildings. A further indication of this can be found in the compact ground plan, which implies that the temple had a somewhat unstable architecture, as well as in the documented damage to most of the surrounding buildings.<sup>41</sup> Lanciani's view that "the Deputati of the Fabbrica converted one of the best preserved and most dignified buildings of the Forum into a bulky mass" is hard to support.<sup>42</sup>

40 This can easily be checked by counting the hits for documents for the surrounding buildings in the CENSUS-Database (Census of Ancient Works of Art and Architecture Known in the Renaissance, <http://www.census.de>).

41 This would be the Temple of Venus and Rome, the Basilica of Maxentius, the Basilica Aemilia and the

Forum of Trajan in the ninth century, as well the Coliseum in 1349. Sande 1992, 9–10 also assumes, that the Temple of Castor and Pollux experienced static instability due to the marshy terrain and thus was abandoned.

42 Lanciani 1990, 221–222.



Fig. 7 The papal altar in the Basilica of St. Peter.

### 3 Economic rationality or elaborate selection

The dimensions of St. Peter's, plus the number of chapels, altars and special sacred places in the Basilica, make it difficult to find reasons for intentionally using spolia in the traditional sense.<sup>43</sup> A lot of the ancient marble seems to have been cut into pieces for incrustation, or to fill holes, and a lot of ancient material was burned to lime. In these cases the provenance of the material does not appear very important.

Moreover, the intact columns and marble blocks which were taken from ancient buildings and used in the Basilica are not presented in a special way and seem more likely to have been integrated normally into the overall building plan. Besides, we do not have any contemporary reports or notes stating that this material was used intentionally in the Basilica or any statement that the Vatican was looking for material for ideological reasons.<sup>44</sup>

In fact, the information we have about the marble block, which serves as the main altar today, and which was taken from the Forum of Nerva is quite mundane. As Lanciani describes it: "Giacomo Grimaldi says that while walking one day through the Lungara with Giacomo della Porta, they saw a great block of Parian marble being removed from this temple to St. Peter's. The block, belonging to the architrave, measured 11.55 cubic meters or about 346 cubic feet. Clement VIII made use of it for the high altar of St. Peter's."<sup>45</sup>

43 One exception, of course, is the twisted columns now on the balconies in the crossing, see Tuzi 2002.

44 As mentioned above, certain elements from Old St. Peter's, like the tortured columns, constitute a special case. Bosman 2004 tries to create such cases, see for example page 138: the connection between two Africano columns at the main entrance and the Jachin and Boaz columns in Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem.

45 Lanciani 1897, 310 refers probably to: Giacomo Grimaldi, *Codex Barberini latino 2733, Descrizione della Basilica antica di San Pietro in Vaticano*, fol. 166r–166v (Grimaldi 1972, 205): *Maxima igitur ara e pario marmore Corinthio nobilissimo a foro Nervaimperatoris avulso absoluta, quod forum erat non longe ab ecclesia Sanctorum Quirici et Iulitae, iuxta turrim Comitum, in angulo quadriivii ad templum Pacis, dicatmque turrim tenndentis, ubi eiusdem fori reliquiae hactenus*

Thus, while the altar of St. Peter's can be considered spolia, the decision to take this block seems to have been based on color and measurements.

To summarize, we can say that the use of spolia in the construction of New St. Peter's is more a question of material quality than ideological quality or the material's original location.

We know that the construction of St. Peter's was occasionally interrupted because of financial problems, so an opportunity to obtain good material from nearby could not be passed up on. Furthermore, people who sold, for example, a broken column in their backyard were able to make money while simultaneously conforming to papal directives to clean up the city.<sup>46</sup>

It seems that after the return of the popes the ambition to enhance the cityscape outweighed the desire to protect ancient monuments. This is, corroborated by, for example, legislation passed by the Papal States that supported the building of new palaces by rich, private citizens.<sup>47</sup> Even though the administration for the protection of antiquities was municipal and autonomous, it was nevertheless dependent of the Apostolic Chamber, which controlled almost the entire infrastructure of Rome.<sup>48</sup>

Even if one argues that there was a clear intention to keep the ruins in place or to reconstruct them as postulated in some of the papal disposals, the question still remains why the architects of the Basilica of St. Peter did not look for material of good quality in other places which were sometimes easier to access? It is striking that all the notices of the Fabbrica refer to places, which were in more or less populated parts of Rome. Why didn't they search in abandoned regions, like parts of the Esquilin or the Quirinal? Without a doubt the most prominent buildings of ancient Rome were located in the center and around the Capitoline Hill, but there must have been some decent columns or ornaments in the ancient villas of the Esquilin or Quirinal (given the number of columns which were kept in storage in Ostia and Porto and the Emporium).<sup>49</sup> Excavating there

*cernuntur; araque praefata ex maximo et admirabilis portentosa eaque Romanae potentiae magnitudine supra, ut lapicidae vocant, XXXV carrettatas architrabis ingentium columnarum striatarum albarum eiusdem fori fabrefacta fuit, quod maximum marmor per Septimianam viam supra curules ligneos deductum summam omnibus admirationem inciebat; praesertim quomodo super altissimis columnis imposita tanti lapidis moles fuisset, miratus est mecum et ipse architectus basilicae Iacobus a Porta. Praedictae deinceps striatae columnae //166v: ingente set frontispicium ex ruinis immani bus dicti fori penitus amotae fuerunt elapsis annis et ibi novae constructae domus. Absoluta, inquam ara maxima beati Petri, summus pontifex Clemens die dominico XXVI iunii se consecrationem celebraturum indixit.*

46 Frommel 1973, 11: the papal decrees were apparently oriented at the standard of Tuscan cities in order to avoid dark places or barriers on the streets, see Braunfels 1953, 89.

47 Frommel 1973, 11–16.

48 Frommel 1973, 12; Claridge 2004, 35 defines the role of the Maestri delle Strade and the Antiquarians: “[...] inspect and evaluate new finds according to the terms of these licenses and chase up accidental discoveries, ...” meaning the search for building material.

49 Brandenburg 2007–2008, 170; for the discussion of whether private people could actually use the imperial storages, see Mattern 2000, 179 with further literature, and Pensabene 2006, 564–565.

would occasionally have been easier, considering that, as we know from the files, the Fabbrica sometimes had to pay for repairs that had become necessary once material had been removed:

1547 addi 20 detto di marzo: A messer Giorgio apreſo al pozo delle Cornacchie 5 3 bol. 20 per il danno, fatto al suo amattonato in conducere una colonna grande, caua in casa messer Batista Carosio.<sup>50</sup>

1547.12.VIII.: ... per paghare certe opere et calcia et puzolana per aconciar le mura, che si son rotte per caulare le colonne nel munistero dello Spirito Santo.<sup>51</sup>

On the other hand, why didn't they avail themselves of the large number of columns which lay and apparently still lie in or around Ostia and Porto and which were known to the Popes at the time?<sup>52</sup> In some cases, shipping would surely have been easier than carrying a column through the center of a city whose streets were probably not always in good condition.

One explanation could be that these columns lying in abandoned areas did not disturb anyone or obstruct any new projects.

Obviously the infrastructure of the city of Rome changed a lot during the Renaissance. A couple of new and important streets appeared, but as noted above, for example in the case of the Baths of Agrippa or the Quartiere Alessandrine,<sup>53</sup> these new roads were built disregarding the old structures.

In connection with the Baths of Agrippa, we do indeed have a testified transfer of valuable building material in the 15th century from an ancient monument to St. Peter's in the last years of the old church.

Reporting on his visit to Rome, Nikolaus Muffel describes the transport of four huge and very impressive columns from the baths to the Vatican in the year 1452, the costs of which are detailed in a bill that has been preserved.<sup>54</sup> Unfortunately not much is known about the placing of these columns in the old St. Peter's, and the trail is completely lost with the construction of New St. Peter's. So even if Pope Nicholas

50 Frey 1913, 58, Nr. 328.115; for more payments of compensation see Cascioli 1921, 380–381, note 46.

51 Frey 1913, 59, Nr. 328. 122, Cascioli 1921, 377, note 17.

52 Maischberger 1997, 39–42; marble in the Fossa Traiana was known since the times of Pius II or Flavio Biondo, as were remnants on the mainland; see maps by Etienne Du Perac, as well as finds in the Emporium since the 16th century, Maischberger 1997, 67.

53 The Quartiere Alessandrine was developed at the times of Pius V (1556–1572) around the column of Trajan, see LaRocca, Ungaro, and Meneghini 1995, 30–32.

54 23.12.1451: „A m o Aristotele da Bologna [...] duc. 14 sonno per suo salario di 2 mexi al trare de la cholonna” – 27.4.1452: “Mo Aristotile di Fioravante da Bologna de dare duc. 125 d.c. cont. Al-lui [...]na adi 17 d[...] Aprile per tanti n[...] Jebi da N.S. [...] sone per parte di denari debe avere per condure la cholonna de la Minerva a palazzo” – 17.6.1452: “Duc. 16, b. 48 d c. [...] per resto di 2 colonne condusse” – Furthermore: “Per sua fadigha di 2 cholonne grosse condusse de la Minerva a tutte sue spexe”; Urban 1963, 169, note 69; Müntz 1978, 108.

V wanted to symbolize the papal ability to move huge stones as the antique emperors did,<sup>55</sup> it looks like the valuation of these columns was not as high as one could expect for such remarkable ancient columns. Hence the ideological impact of these spolia apparently did not last long. On the contrary the zone containing the Baths of Agrippa increased significantly in value due to papal arrangements to restore the city to its former glory. The new road from the Capitoline Hill to the Vatican, today the Corso Vittorio Emanuele, led to the construction of a number of palazzi in this region. It also resulted in a new street, the Via di Ciambella, which was built right through the middle of the baths, because the modern infrastructure required it. What was left of the Baths had to yield. But all things considered, the disappearance of the Baths of Agrippa was probably quite a long process which started in the Middle Ages, when people in Rome needed space to live in the secure center of the city and contemporaries were able to secure their livelihoods by burning lime or selling marble in that zone, then called Calcario. In the last stage, the ruins were apparently not impressive enough to keep up with the new development of the city and the two columns mentioned before were probably the last significant pieces left.

Another often cited example is the entry of Charles V in 1536. At that moment it was more important for the Romans that the city look good than that the ruins be saved, a point which is also documented in the archives of the Fabbrica: “.. nel cortile della pigna di S.to Pietro tutti li marmi della fabrica, che sonno da quella banda, per sgombrar detto cortile per la uenuta dello imperatore a Roma ...”<sup>56</sup>

There are in fact examples in the Renaissance of ancient monuments in better shape than today being systematically spoliated, such as the Basilica Giulia by Cardinal Giacomo Isolani, who gained permission to destroy the Basilica for private purposes in the year 1426.<sup>57</sup> However, at the time of the construction of New St. Peter's the papal bulls seem to have been at least a starting point for increasing how carefully ancient buildings were handled.

As John Philip Lomax has pointed out, trading in spolia in the Renaissance was also a quite legal business. Almost every property that contained ancient monuments was jointly owned by private people or churches, which were sometimes closely related. This made selling the spolia legal, because everything that belonged to a piece of private property could be sold. Apparently, the laws in the Middle Ages were slowly stretched to define stones as fruits of the property, which were legal to sell. Over time, popes, emperors and the city of Rome influenced this behavior and restricted certain laws regarding private property. Hence, trading in ancient material from private land was not

55 Satzinger 1996, 251–253; see also the article by Hermann Schlimme in this volume.

56 Frey 1913, 11, Nr. 291.

57 Lanciani 1906, 246.

forbidden and actually helped the Roman citizens to survive in the Middle Ages, since this was probably their best resource for earning money.

There may be some debate about the laws that the popes initiated following their return to Rome, especially about laws and rules for the protection of antiquities in public spaces. But the administrative office of the *magistri delle strade* began to provide at least some kind of official protection beginning in 1462.<sup>58</sup> Of course many exceptions were made. Licenses were sold as a source for income and, as has already been said, private property was still private – but only as long as the private land did not interfere with infrastructural arrangements. There was definitely a tendency in law to put public welfare above public interests. From about 1480 everything that was an obstacle to new streets had to disappear. And those with the most formidable construction plans were the first to obtain authorization. The objective was to beautify the city, which eventually led to the erection of new palazzi in the center of Rome. It seems that the remains of ancient monuments would therefore not have had a chance to survive in the new Rome. However, we do not really know if what was left of the ruins still represented the glory of the ancient city. If it wasn't, recycling these ruins was a logical step, more a matter of destroying ruins than of destroying the ancient city.

Even if, for example, Rodolfo Lanciani blames Renaissance Romans for destroying ancient monuments, a more appropriate allegation would be that rather than rebuild the ancient monuments they developed a more modern infrastructure.

To clarify what actions were taken in connection with construction sites in the Renaissance it would perhaps be helpful to specify what material was moved. The fact that *spolia* were collected as looted objects and were deeply connected with the idea of power and victory led to the use of the term 'spolia' to refer to architectural and decorative elements in the Renaissance by Vasari and others. These *spolia* bear only a general resemblance to another epoch and to everything connected with that period, for example antiquity.<sup>59</sup> This kind of *spolia* also leads to the transformation of space, and we have countless examples of that from the Middle Ages. With increasing building activity in modern times starting in the Renaissance it is no longer tenable to claim that ancient material was always reused for these ideological reasons. In a lot of cases, including the construction of New St. Peter's in Rome, the material was obtained legally and nonviolently, i.e. without obvious damaging being done to a building; in some cases the material was excavated, in others it laid within an unused structure. These objects did not necessarily transport ideas or certain images connected with their provenance, although they could do so. In any case, they also exerted a strong influence on the transformation of space, so they constitute more than just re-use.

58 Frommel 1973, 12; Claridge 2004, 35.

59 Liverani 2013, 352.

Presumably in the Renaissance people were better equipped to move material and realize infrastructural plans than they were in the Middle Ages. However, in many cases the remains of ancient buildings could not be utilized because they were already too decrepit and it made more sense to erect something new than to conserve the old. This also explains why there are not many spolia in the classical sense to be found in St. Peter's, because in the Renaissance the visible ruins just could not keep up with the new Rome.

#### 4 Appendix

Selected notifications from the Archivio della Reverendissima Fabbrica di San Pietro (AFSP)

##### 1. Baths of Caracalla:

14.VIII.5: Scudi 5.25 per portatura di carrettate 35 di scaglia dal Antoniana alla calcara dreto a S.to Pietro ...

AFSP, Cod. 23. fol., 51a; 27, fol. 41 a; 21. fol. 58b; Frey 1913, 53, Nr. 328.67

1546, Addi 23 di Luglio: A maestro Bastiano Perugino carraro 5 diciotto per il prezo di viuersi uiaggi, che lha fatto in condurre colonne et altre prete di marmo co suoij bufalj dalla Antoniana alla fabrica.

AFSP; Cod. 31/2, fol.13a; Cod. XXI, 82 b; Cod.XXVII, fol. 169a; Frey 1913, 57, Nr. 328.108

(An. 1546) A ms Savo frasca di venti a bon conto del condurre le colonne dalantoniana alla fabrica 20.

AFSP; Cod. 32, f. 63 Arm. III, tom. 26; Cascioli 1921, 378–379, note 33

##### 2. Temple of Venus and Roma:

20.XI.(1544): ... et 52 pro portatura unius capitelli ad eandem ab ecclesia Beare Marie Noue a die 7 per totam 15 am presentis portati ... Datum die 2 Nouembris 1544.

AFSP; Cod. 22. fol. 89a; Frey 1913, 52, Nr. 328.59

1545. Alla detta addi 18 di Maggio: 5 dieci di moneta, pagati per mandato de detti di detto di a fra Eliseo da (di) Santa Maria nuoua per vna colonna di marmo, uenduta alla fabrica.

AFSP; Cod. 21, fol. 52 A; Frey 1913, 52, Nr. 328.62

1545. Da dj 17 dAprile per tuto dj 14 dj Maggio: cunto delj viagj, che a fatto Rizo (Riccio) caretere: Per sesanta seij viagj de marmj, portate de S. M.a Noua a S. Piero, a bol. 30 per ciaschuno viagio ...

AFSP; Cod. 25, fol. 220b; Frey 1913, 56, Nr. 328.99

### 3. Colosseum:

1546 (26) Addi 13 Agosto: A maestro Bastiano carraro tre per conduttura di una carozza carica dal Culiseo alla fabrica et per auere adiutato tirare una colnna groÿa con una uetta alle carrozze di messer Jcopo oltre alle 3 uette sua.

AFSP; Cod. 31/2. fol. 17b; XXI. XXVII. sub 14. VIII; Frey 1913, 57, Nr. 328.109;  
Cascioli 1921, 375, note 3

1556. D\_adi 10. Genaro sino a di 16. detto: da Paulo del Longho e compagni, carteri, la portatura de carete 42 palmi 23 de trauertini, portati del archo del Coliseo in San pietro con caualli 54, a giuli 28 per cauallo, e piu ...

AFSP; Cod. 54; Frey 1916, 56, Nr. 567.12

### 4. Forum of Trajan:

(An. 1541) Addi XIII detto (maggio). Alla detta ventisei b. IIII d. V e plei al riccio carrettiere pto conto disse p. piu viaggi fatti dalla vigna del sor gomez ed a spogliachristo a san pietro di travertini e marmi levati da detti lochi ...

AFSP; Cod. 4, 53v Arm. III, tom. 10, 53v; Cascioli 1921, 380, note 41

1547.25.VIII.: Soluatis abbatisse et monialibus monasterij Spiritus Sanctj et pro eis reuerendo domino Bartolomeo de Capranico, canonico dicte basilice, 5 37 et bol. 50 pretij et valoris vnus colonne lapidis graniti cum septem octuis ad rationem 20 pro qualibet collonna, per eas nobis pro vsu dicte fabrifice die 24 presentis vendite.

AFSP; Cod. 31/32, fol. 77b, Frey 1913, 59, Nr. 328.124. Cascioli 1921, 377, note 16

### 5. Baths of Agrippa:

1544: ... e piu ne a portati cinque pezi de marmi dalla Ciamella, che sonno stati caualli sei.

AFSP; Cod. 13, fol. 46a; Frey 1913, 51, Nr. 328.56, Cascioli 1921, 375, note 1

6. Baths of Nero/Severus Alexander:

(112) 1543: ... portare li marmi da Roma in S.to Pietro ... et quatro uiagi na fati (da) S.to Aluisci (da San Luigi).

AFSP; Cod. 13, fol. 46a; Frey 1913, 51, Nr. 328.54

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