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Persistence and Polychronicity in Roman Churches

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Remembering the Middle Ages in Early Modern Italy

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Persistence and Polychronicity in Roman Churches

The persistence of an architectural type from late antiquity in the churches of medieval Rome is a cause of fascination as well as dismay to art historians. Even the most eloquent proponent of these buildings, Richard Krautheimer, was uncomfortable with the stubborn adherence of twelfth-century basilicas like Santa Maria in Trastevere to the design of fourth-century prototypes like Saint Peter's (Figs 1-2). Krautheimer's expressions of disappointment ("monotonous," "unexciting," "conservative and retardataire") were catalogued by Marvin Trachtenberg as a prelude to his own call to see these buildings as intentionally anti-modern; not retardataire, but reiterations of tradition that deliberately opposed the novel, non-Roman-looking churches being erected elsewhere in Europe (the Romanesque and Gothic buildings that in the modern canon are truly 'medieval').[1] Trachtenberg went on to argue that the Roman "semiotic valorization" of the early Christian basilica was important for Filippo Brunelleschi, who was directed by these belated avatars to the originals, which became the basis of his own Renaissance recreation of the basilica design.[2]

Viewed through another lens, Santa Maria in Trastevere is one of many examples of the principle of "substitutability" coined by Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood. According to the substitutional theory, "identity is preserved across long chains of restorations and replacements."[3] Regardless of style or date of construction, the church building is effectively the same as the first sacred structure on its site, as replacements of auratic progenitors become those progenitors through re-embodiment. In the case of Santa Maria in Trastevere, the extant church is a twelfth-century transept basilica; it stands on the foundations of a fourth-century basilica which in turn is believed to have replaced a "house of Callixtus" named in hagiographic histories of the third-century Pope Callixtus I (217-222).[4] Before these Christian constructions the site was occupied by the veterans' inn (*taberna [e]meritoria*) where a well of oil erupted in the time of Emperor Augustus, foretelling the birth of Christ.[5] This primary structure is commemorated in the inscription set into the seventeenth-century ceiling over the site of the miracle, just in front of the triumphal arch: "in this first house of the Mother of

1. Krautheimer 1980, 176 and Trachtenberg 1996. For a more recent view see Kinney 2012.

2. This is counter to the standard history, according to which Brunelleschi drew his ideas from Romanesque and Gothic paradigms in Florence.

3. Nagel and Wood 2010, 51.

4. Krautheimer et al. 1937-1977, 3:65-67 and Coccia et al. 2000.
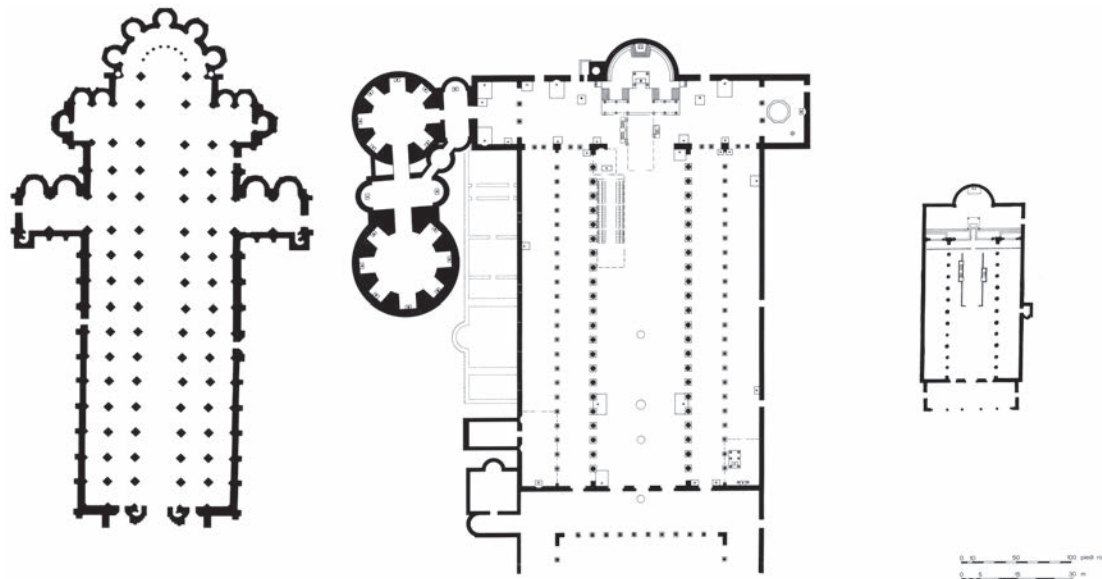
5. Einaudi 1990, 213-17.

Fig. 1. Comparison to scale of Santa Maria in Trastevere, Rome, 1139-1143 (right), Saint Peter's, *c.* 340 (center), and the third church of Cluny, 1088-1130 (left).

God, once the *taberna meritoria*, a fountain of oil bursting forth from the ground portended the birth of Christ" (Fig. 3).[6] Exactly as Nagel and Wood describe it, Santa Maria in Trastevere collapses its own history into one continuous presence; time "doubles or crimps […] over upon itself."[7] *This* shrine, *haec aedes*, is simultaneously the twelfth-century basilica covered by the seventeenth-century ceiling containing the inscription, the *domus Callisti* supposedly consecrated to the Virgin Mary before any other church in Rome, and the pre-Christian *taberna meritoria* where Mary's divine motherhood was foretold.

Nagel and Wood articulated a fundamental truth about churches and other sacred buildings. For art history, the principle of substitutability has the virtue of normalizing architectural manifestations that are shunned by teleological, style-based histories in which only forward-looking buildings find a place.[8] Santa Maria in Trastevere happens to be closer in form to its own prior instantiation than, for example, the twelfth-century remodeling of Saint-Denis (Fig. 4), but in a substitutional model both churches are interesting for their supra- or extra-morphological sameness to the event that brought them into being. Abbot Suger's proto-Gothic appendages were connected to the Carolingian basilica that replaced the Merovingian church erected over the tomb of Saint Denis, just as all the instantiations of Santa Maria in Trastevere are linked to the *fons olei*. As anachronic substitutions, the two twelfth-century buildings are equivalent.

The principle of substitutability is metaphysical. As such it is very capacious, applying to all buildings that claim their origin in an auratic prototype or event. The early modern basilica of Saint Peter's could be substitutionally identical to Constantine's, as they are both links in a chain originating in the site of Peter's tomb. In this case, however, the morphological difference between the original and the present basilicas is not a neutral fact, but a sign of discontinuity, a rupture that Nagel and Wood acknowledge with substitutability's "competitive model": performance. Performance is authorial intervention; in this case, the intervention

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6. "IN HAC PRIMA DEI MATRIS AEDE TABERNA OLIM MERITORIA OLEI FONS E SOLO ERVMPENS CHRISTI ORTVM PORTENDIT."

7. Nagel and Wood 2010, 45.

8. Trachtenberg 1996, 169.

Fig. 2. Santa Maria in Trastevere, Rome, interior.

of Bramante / Sangallo / Michelangelo / Maderno. Performance creates discontinuity by introducing a new point of origin for the artwork in the design of the artist. Nagel and Wood define the "artistic author" capable of making such interventions as the "institutionalized" artist "enshrined as a protagonist in histories of art and theories of art."[9] Performance disrupts anachronic continuity by insisting on temporal specificity and its corollary, anachronism.

Santa Maria in Trastevere is not without an author. It is the composite work of many authors, including some "enshrined as protagonists in the history of art." Pietro Cavallini (fl. 1277-1330) is credited with the mosaics under the conch of the apse.[10] Martino Longhi the Elder (1534-1591) designed the chapel of Cardinal Altemps and the attendant restoration of the aisles.[11] Domenichino (1581-1641) created the nave ceiling and painted the *Assumption of the Virgin* in its center, and he also authored the so-called Strada Cupa Chapel and its stucco ornament.[12] Carlo Fontana (1634/38-1714) rebuilt the porch, reusing the four granite columns of its medieval predecessor.[13] The late thirteenth-century mosaics attributed to Cavallini underline the building's substitutional character by inserting the *taberna meritoria* into the scene of Christ's nativity, depicted in an anachronic combination of up-to-date style and archaic Byzantine iconography (Fig. 5). The later interventions, however, are temporally specific, beginning with the Altemps Chapel, which memorializes Cardinal Marco Sittico

9.   Nagel and Wood 2010, 16.

10. Tomei A. 2000, 22-51.

11. Lerza 2002, 149-53, Figs. 139-46.

12. Spear 1982, 1:87-88, 95-96, 189-91, 278-79, 328-29, 331; 2:166-69, 341-43.

13. Braham and Hager 1977, 77-79 and Johns 1993, 147-51.

Fig. 3. Santa Maria in Trastevere, Rome, nave ceiling, inscription.

Altemps (1533–1595) and his role in the Council of Trent. These interventions are mini-performances, held together by a final restoration in the nineteenth century sponsored by Pope Pius IX and executed by Virginio Vespignani (1808–1882), not quite a canonical architect, but a prominent one in the history of Roman medieval churches.[14] Vespignani modified previous restorations and filled the interstices between them, opening large windows in the upper nave walls separated by gilded pilasters and paintings of saints on gold backgrounds, laying down a new Cosmatesque pavement, and reworking the façade (Figs 6 –7). The result is polychronic, a synthesis of potential anachronisms that is somehow predominantly 'medieval.'

Polychronicity is a physical condition. It is the normal state of Roman medieval churches. Exceptions, like Santa Maria in Cosmedin and Santa Sabina, are simulacra: modernist restitutions of ideal originals made by eliminating interventions that had 'ruined' them and reconstructing features deemed authentic.[15] More commonly the medieval original persists as the substrate for later performances, creating the amalgam of persistence and anachronism that is particularly characteristic of Rome. My understanding of these polychronic structures is indebted to Italian restoration theory, in particular to the processual paradigm explicated by Gianfranco Spagnesi. According to Spagnesi, all historic buildings are processual composites and as such, they belong to no historical moment but the present. In a church like Santa Maria in Trastevere — or his example, Santa Prassede — "it is very clear that [the] originary value

14. Barucci 2006, 158–74.

15. Santa Maria in Cosmedin was stripped of its eighteenth-century mantle by G. B. Giovenale between 1892 and 1899 in order to "regain the appearance it had in the eleventh and twelfth centuries": Gustavo Giovannoni, "Prefazione," in Giovenale 1927, iv. Santa Sabina was similarly "restored as far as possible to […] its original [fifth-century] aspect, with additions of the ninth century," by Antonio Muñoz (1914–1919): Bellanca 2003, 116, quoting Muñoz.
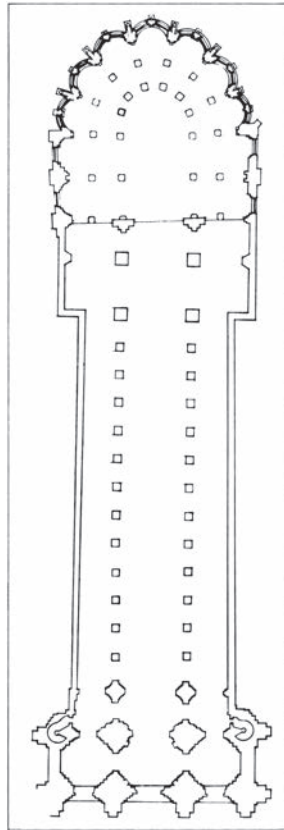
Fig. 4. Saint-Denis, plan at the death of Abbot Suger, 1151.

[that is, the primary ninth- or twelfth-century building] no longer exists, and also that its present 'form' does not belong to any of the historic periods that gave rise to its successive remakings."[16] Although it no longer exists as such, the "originary phase" can still be discerned in the later responses to it. The "originary phase" is

> the beginning of every process of transformation […] defining the type of organism which, because it is still present, one can 'experience,' and which, above all, is manifest as the point of reference of every successive phase of transformation.[17]

Rome is full of once-medieval churches that have been processually transformed. Each has its own combination of polychronic responses to an originary phase, the determining feature of which is the wall on columns. These churches all began as column-basilicas of the early Christian type, in which the nave and aisles are defined by colonnades and the colonnades, contrary to all classical precepts, support flat walls rising double or more their own height to sustain the ceiling (Fig. 8). The colonnades are almost always formed of *spolia*, that is, reused column shafts and (in most cases) reused capitals and bases. In the earliest examples — like the Lateran cathedral and Saint Peter's — the shafts were variegated collections of colored marbles and granites, but in some later examples they are more uniform, all-marble or, as at Santa Maria in Trastevere, all-granite. When the colonnades are not preserved, the originary phase is no longer medieval. For example, Santa Maria della Luce in Trastevere was built around the same time and probably by the same masons as Santa Maria in Trastevere, as one can see

16. Spagnesi 2002, 20; unless stated otherwise, all translations are mine.

17. Ibidem, 22.

Fig. 5. Pietro Cavallini, *Nativity* showing the *taberna meritoria*, apse of Santa Maria in Trastevere, Rome, *c.* 1290–1300.

from the exposed masonry of its apse and transept (Fig. 9). Inside, however, one finds a domed cross created in 1730 by Gabriele Valvassori (Fig. 10).[18] Despite its medieval shell, the originary phase of Santa Maria della Luce — "the type of organism which, because it is still present, one can 'experience'" — belongs to the eighteenth century.

Unlike modern textbook examples of Romanesque and Gothic churches, which are homogenous in design (modular), structure (stone), and ornament (stone and glass), the column basilica is a composite of many materials and was the product of independent artisanal specialists: brick masons, marble and stone workers, carpenters, mosaicists, mural painters. In modern terms these churches might be considered multi-authored, but according to medieval protocol they had one author, the patron. The author of Santa Maria in Trastevere was Pope Innocent II (1130–1143), just as the author of the Lateran cathedral (the "Basilica Constantiniana") was the Emperor Constantine (r. 305–337) and the author of Santa Prassede was Pope Paschal I (817–824). Churches acknowledged their authorship by means of inscriptions, portraits, and nomenclature. In the sixth century Santa Maria in Trastevere was known as the "titulus sancti Julii et Callisti" after the third-century founder of the *domus Callisti* and the fourth-century builder of the *basilica Julii* that replaced it (Pope Julius I, 337–352).[19] Callixtus's name remained attached to the church even after it was entirely

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18. Mocerino 2006.

19. Krautheimer et al. 1937–1977, 3:66.

Fig. 6. Santa Maria in Trastevere, façade before 1860. From Giacomo Fontana, *Raccolta delle migliori chiese di Roma e suburbane* (Rome, 1855): 1, plate XXXVII (detail).
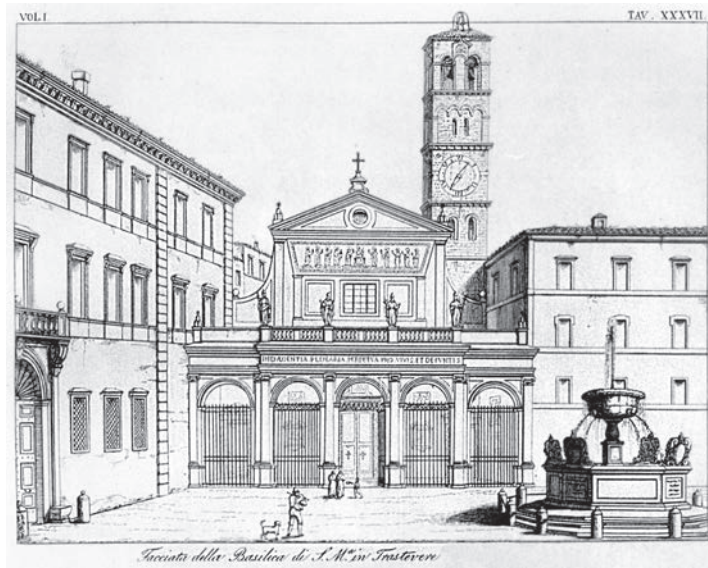

Fig. 7. Santa Maria in Trastevere, Rome, façade.

Fig. 8. Saint Peter's before 1605, section looking west, Vat. Barb. Lat. 2733, fols 104ᵛ–105ʳ. From Giacomo Grimaldi. *Descrizione della basilica antica di S. Pietro.*
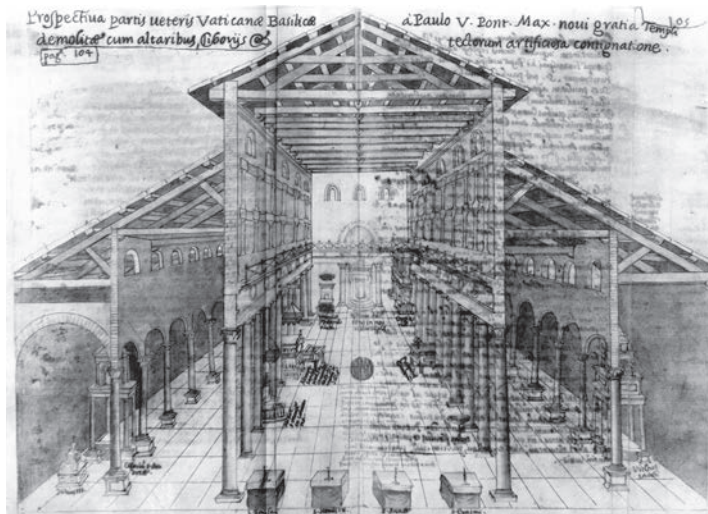
Fig. 9. Santa Maria della Luce, Rome, apse and transept.

Fig. 10. Santa Maria della Luce, Rome, interior.

rebuilt by Innocent II, at which time it was also called "fundens olei" (pouring forth oil).[20] Nomenclature preserved the memory of successive substitutions so that in Rome, at least, anachronic buildings were also explicitly historical.

Churches were kept alive through repair. In a city full of decaying antiquities, it was important that they appear new.[21] Repairs eliminated evidence of age, usually by cosmetic overlays or piecemeal rebuilding. Substitution occurred when repair no longer sufficed; it was justified by impending or actual collapse, as in the inscription in the apse of Santa Maria in Trastevere: CV(m) MOLES RVITVRA VETVS FORET ("since the old building was about to fall down").[22] Substitutions were figured as new works ("fecit," "construxit"), as restorations ("restauravit"), or renewals ("renovavit").[23] Renewal subsumed the other two; to rebuild or to restore was to renew a church, not as it had been at its origin, but according to the best standards of the present. Substitutions emphatically belonged to their own time. Polychronicity is the effect of their later history; it is the accumulation of anachronisms resulting from performative repair.

The polychronic building is the antithesis of the homogeneous creation considered typical of the Italian Renaissance. According to the textbooks, the early Christian basilica

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20. *Liber pontificalis*, 2:384: "ecclesiam beate Dei genitricis Marie tituli Calixti"; and Boldetti, 1: 98: "tempore Innocentii II. Papae S. Mariae Transtyberim fundentis olei fundatoris."

21. Trachtenberg 1996, 170.

22. Kendall 1998, 31.

23. *Liber pontificalis*, 1:205: "fecit basilicas II, […] [unam] trans Tiberim"; *Liber pontificalis*, 2:384: "ecclesiam […] totam innovavit et construxit"; Fabre and Duchesne 1905–1910, 2: 169: "ecclesiam […] novis muris funditus restauravit"; apse mosaic of Santa Maria in Trastevere: "INNOCENTIVS HANC RENOVAVIT PAPA SECVNDVS."

Fig. 11. Filippo Brunelleschi, San Lorenzo, Florence.

was reinvented in Florence by Brunelleschi as a conceptually and materially unified structure of harmonious modular and proportional design (Fig. 11).[24] This did not happen in Rome. There, the old basilicas were kept going in the medieval manner until the 1470s, when the Roman re-conception of the type appeared at Santa Maria del Popolo: vaulted throughout, with a domed crossing and groin vaults in the manner of ancient *thermae* in the nave.[25] Santa Maria del Popolo replaced a medieval church founded by Pope Paschal II in 1099, but it did not portend the disappearance of all of such newly anachronistic structures. On the contrary, around the same time, a new approach to restoring the old basilicas also emerged, which preserved their 'originary' character while also introducing elements of a contemporary aesthetic. In this development, distinctive to the fifteenth century, we might see the beginning of the valorization of the polychronic, "processual" interior that ultimately allowed some of Rome's early Christian and medieval churches to retain their architectural identities down to our own time.

The need for restoration was acute throughout the fifteenth century. Returning the papal seat to Rome in 1420, Martin V (1417-1431) encountered "an infinity of churches without roofs; [and] the frequent floods of the Tiber had worn and corroded all of the pavements" in the low-lying areas.[26] The pope enlisted cardinals and citizens in a program of repair and set an example for them with his own renovations of the patriarchal basilicas of Saint Peter's and the Lateran

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24. Trachtenberg and Hyman 2002, 280-84; Hartt and Wilkins 2006, 168-71; and Partridge 2009, 30-35. See also Nagel and Wood 2010, 157.

25. Urban 1961-1962, 154-76 and Valtieri 2009, 97-99, 107-108.

26. Tomei P. 1942, 6.

cathedral.[27] According to the *Liber pontificalis*, he rebuilt the porch of Saint Peter's basilica "at great expense": 50,000 florins went for work on the roof.[28] At the Lateran he commissioned Gentile da Fabriano to cover the decrepit walls of the nave with brilliant paintings, and he replaced the damaged and patched Constantinian pavement with the enormous Cosmatesque floor that still exists. The emblem of the pope's family (Colonna) appears prominently on the main axis, which led to his tomb at the altar end of the nave (Fig. 12).[29]

Although the success of Pope Martin's program was lauded in the *Liber pontificalis* ("in imitation of him almost all of the cardinals […] repaired their nearly ruined title churches and brought them to great splendor"), there were still important churches "without a roof" and "about to collapse" at the time of his successor Eugenius IV (1431-1447).[30] Eugenius, too, sponsored city-wide repairs and made his own contributions at the Lateran, Santa Maria Maggiore, and Saint Peter's.[31] Already as a cardinal, he had taken on the massive task of cleaning up the basilica of Saint Paul outside the walls, which was all but abandoned, missing much of its roof and used as a stable for cattle.[32] As pope, he briefly continued Martin V's project of painting the nave of the Lateran cathedral, bringing in Pisanello to succeed Gentile da Fabriano; he also restored the roof of the entrance porch and contributed to the construction of a new canons' cloister.[33] At Santa Maria Maggiore he likewise repaired the roof.[34] His signature contribution was to Saint Peter's, where in addition to re-roofing the aisles and constructing a new sacristy, he commissioned Fra Angelico to paint the apse and thoroughly renovated the façade, remodeling its six windows with tracery designed by Michelozzo, restoring the surrounding mosaic, and replacing the door panels in the five entrances.[35] The central door, which had been of silver, was outfitted with the well-known bronze valves by Filarete, displaying an almost life-size portrait of the pope kneeling at the feet of Saint Peter prominently in the center of the right-hand valve.[36] The discarded silver doors had been donated by Pope Leo IV (847-855).[37] In their day they were considered magnificent,

> carved with brilliant and wholesome representations […] so that all who come to enter this basilica give praises to almighty God and to his holy prelacy, and pray that the many revolving years of life be extended to him who, by a work of such great splendor and such a great weight of beauty, has decorated God's hall with silver weighing 70 lb.[38]

27. *Liber pontificalis*, 2:522; Curcio 1992, 547-52; and Richardson 2009, 150-55.

28. *Liber pontificalis*, 2:522; Roser 2005, 57-60; and Richardson 2009, 153.

29. *Liber pontificalis*, 2:522; Krautheimer et al. 1937-1977, 5: 12; Gill 2005, 46-48; Claussen 2008, 178-84; Dressen 2008, 284-86, no. A3; Richardson 2009, 153; and Nagel and Wood 2010, 186-87.

30. *Liber pontificalis*, 2:522; Biondo, *Roma instaurata*, 1:49 ("brevi nisi succurratur, apparet ruituram" [San Pancrazio]), 1:107 ("breui ut apparet ruitura" [Santa Maria in Domnica]; "tecto nunc carentem" [Santo Stefano Rotondo]).

31. Gill 2005, 52-55 and McCahill 2013, 168, 182, 184-90.

32. Martinelli, 272-75; Krautheimer et al. 1937-1977, 5: 102; and McCahill 2013, 103-105.

33. Krautheimer et al. 1937-1977, 5:12; Burroughs 1990, 144, 146; and Claussen 2008, 69-70, 258. Roca De Amicis 1990-1992, 348-49, argues against the attribution to Eugenius of modifications to the nave colonnades.

34. Krautheimer et al. 1937-1977, 3:8 and Jacks 1985, 68.

35. Biondo, *Roma instaurata*, 1:67-69; De Blaauw 1994, 2:645-46; Roser 2005, 60-69; Smith and O'Connor 2006, 458; Glass 2013; and McCahill 2013, 168-69, 187-91.

36. Glass 2013, 349, Fig. 18.2; 357, Fig. 18.5; Plate 15.

37. *Liber pontificalis*, 2:127 and De Blaauw 1994, 2:525.

38. *Liber pontificalis* (a), 147-48. Noting that the wood under the silver was still "solid and unaltered" in the fifteenth century, Alberti curiously attributed the door to the ephemeral Pope Hadrian III (884-885): Alberti, 1:123 and Alberti (a), 43 (*De re aedificatoria*, 2:6).

Fig. 12. San Giovanni in Laterano, Rome, nave pavement.

To at least some fifteenth-century eyes, however, the Carolingian reliefs had "no artistic merit;" their value was solely material. Though of a baser substance, the new door was deemed equally magnificent because of the surpassing skill of the artist, which was four times more costly than the bronze.[39]

Expressions of superiority notwithstanding, church renovations under Martin V and Eugenius IV were squarely in the medieval tradition of ad hoc repair, vitalizing surface ornamentation, and impressive eye-level improvements like the bronze doors. They were piecemeal efforts that addressed the unavoidable problems with a building's fabric while creating the appearance of newness through shiny surface innovations like wall paintings and pavements. Often these innovations served to commemorate or glorify the patron; in this respect Filarete's door, for all of its classicizing features and topical iconography, was no different from the Carolingian door it replaced.[40] Martin V's pavement at the Lateran was equally medieval, almost literally so since Cosmati floors were an invention of the twelfth century. Several scholars have argued that fifteenth-century observers mistook them for "gut römisch" (antique) and that the intention in imitating them was to emulate antiquity, or as Claussen put it with respect to the Lateran, "to reinstate the basilica's early Christian luster."[41] Yet even in this respect, fifteenth-century patrons and artists unwittingly followed the model of their medieval predecessors, who also considered Cosmati adornment a kind of antique revival, not in the morphological sense of the Lateran pavement but in an aesthetic one: for them, ancient Rome was an "aesthetic utopia" characterized by the same materials, colors, and polish as their floors.[42]

A change is perceptible in the middle of the century in the papacy of Nicholas V (1447-1455). According to the panegyrical biography by Giannozzo Manetti, Nicholas's prodigious building program included the repair and remodeling of Rome's forty station churches as well as the "more celebrated, principal churches" — the Lateran cathedral, Santa

39. Biondo, *Roma instaurata*, 1:69 and Roser 2005, 66-67.

40. For theories about the iconographic program see Gill 2005, 54-55; Roser 2005, 67-69; and Glass 2013.

41. Claussen 2008, 181 and Nagel and Wood 2010, 185-94.

42. Claussen 2008, 151.

Maria Maggiore, San Paolo and San Lorenzo fuori le mura, Santo Stefano Rotondo, and Santi Apostoli — which were variously "reinforced," "repaired," "ornamented," and "renewed."[43] Saint Peter's, the most important church of all, was to be completely rebuilt from the foundations to its roof. Manetti described the rebuilt basilica as if it actually existed, proceeding from the piazza in front of the gatehouse to the "enormous chapel" called the *tribuna* beyond the crossing.[44] In reality, according to the pope's official biography in the *Liber pontificalis*, only the *tribuna* was underway when Nicholas died, though "he had set his mind on rebuilding the basilica […] in the form of the Baths of Diocletian."[45] The reference to the Baths of Diocletian has led some experts to conclude that the new basilica, or parts of it, would have been vaulted in the manner of the ancient *frigidarium* with rectangular groin vaults on columns attached to walls or piers; most reconstructions show such vaults at least over the rebuilt transept.[46]

Had the plan to rebuild Saint Peter's been carried out, it would have been a revolutionary departure from the received approach to restoring Rome's ancient churches, but as it was, Nicholas V's restorations followed the line of his predecessors'.[47] The painting of the Constantinian apse by Fra Angelico continued, and the windows there were upgraded.[48] The windows of the nave were remodeled to conform to the traceried ones introduced by Eugenius IV in the facade; they were filled with stained glass, and a Spanish painter was commissioned to decorate the exposed beams of the roof.[49] A tomb was made for Pope Innocent VII (1404-1406) in the chapel of Saint Thomas off the south outer aisle, and Nicholas arranged for his own burial in the same aisle near the tomb of Eugenius IV.[50] He improved the roof of the porch and replaced the bronze door of the gatehouse (Santa Maria in Turri) with a new wooden one.[51] Perhaps his most ambitious effort — except for the *tribuna*, which was rising outside the old apse while his renovations inside the church were in progress — was the repair of the ancient rotunda called Santa Maria della Febbre, whose concrete dome had collapsed. The pope had it replaced with a ribbed cloister vault; new windows were installed and, according to a later source, the pavement was embellished with one of the porphyry roundels (*rotae*) taken from the nave.[52]

The success of Santa Maria della Febbre may have been related to the renovation of San Teodoro, a small sixth- or seventh-century apsed hall at the foot of the Palatine Hill, which began with an embarrassing failure. The attempt to repair the hall caused it to collapse, perhaps because of technical incompetence.[53] The builder — Antonello d'Albano, who was active in many of Nicholas's restorations — was dismissed and the church was rebuilt on a new centralized plan by someone else (Fig. 13).[54] The new building incorporates the original

43. Manetti, *Liber secundus de Gestis Nicolai Quinti*, 27, translated in Smith and O'Connor 2006, 389.

44. Manetti, *Liber secundus de Gestis Nicolai Quinti*, 39-47, translated in Smith and O'Connor 2006, 399-407; Roser 2005, 73-75.

45. *Liber pontificalis*, 2:558: translated in Smith and O'Connor 2006, 460.

46. Curti M. 1997, 111, Fig. 1; 113, Fig. 3; 115, Fig. 6; 116, Fig. 9 and Frommel 1997, 106, Fig. 7. Roser 2005, 78-79, posits vaults on engaged piers "in the Gothic tradition," and only in the transept.

47. Smith and O'Connor 2006, 457-66.

48. Burroughs 1990, 117; Roser 2005, 72; and Richardson 2013, 350.

49. Burroughs 1990, 116-17 and Roser 2005, 70-71.

50. Roser 2005, 79, 149-50 and Richardson 2013, 335 and 324, Fig. 17.1.

51. Roser 2005, 69-70.

52. Ibidem, 71-72.

53. Ibidem, 79 and Smith and O'Connor 2006, 216-17.

54. Tomei P. 1942, 104 and Burroughs 1990, 121. The new builder was Pietro da Varese.

apse and its mosaic, but is otherwise an entirely fifteenth-century work. Under an eighteenth-century remodeling, it has walls built in the medieval manner with reused bricks, tall pointed 'Gothic' windows and, again, a ribbed dome.[55]

Bernardo Rossellino, charged with the restoration of Santo Stefano Rotondo, was up to the challenge. The original fifth-century church was of unique and intricate design, comprising three concentric circles defined by two colonnades and an outer wall. The inner circular colonnade carried a pitched roof or a dome; the outer colonnade supported the wooden roof of an ambulatory; and the outer wall enclosed a complicated alternation of trapezoidal chapels and open and closed curving courts (Fig. 14).[56] The building was lavish, huge (65 m. in diameter), and impossible for medieval patrons to maintain. Around 1140 Pope Innocent II erected a straight wall on columns through the central space to help support a new roof, and walled up the intercolumniations of the outer colonnade to create a smaller, more manageable perimeter, abandoning the third circuit to ruin.[57] These drastic measures kept the church going, but by the fifteenth century its central covering had again collapsed. Rather than simply re-roofing it, Nicholas V commissioned a comprehensive top-to-bottom restoration, in which the central space and the ambulatory received new coffered ceilings; the wall of the clerestory was strengthened by closing fourteen of its original twenty-two windows, while the rest were filled with marble tracery and stained glass; and a new pavement in *cocciopesto* was laid over what remained of the medieval one.[58] Windows at lower levels were likewise

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55. Fasolo and Fasolo 1984; Urban 1961-1962, 205-12; Krautheimer et al. 1937-1977, 4:279-80, 285; and Milella 2009.

56. Brandenburg 2004, 200-14, 308-12.

57. Ceschi 1982, 116-29.

58. Krautheimer et al. 1937-1977, 4:202-203, 206-207, 211, 225, 238; Ceschi 1982, 140-47; Burroughs 1990, 158; Frommel 2006, 15-24; and Dressen 2008, 299, no. A17. Ceschi 1982, 135, supposed that the medieval pavement was despoiled to make the new floor of Pope Martin V at the Lateran.
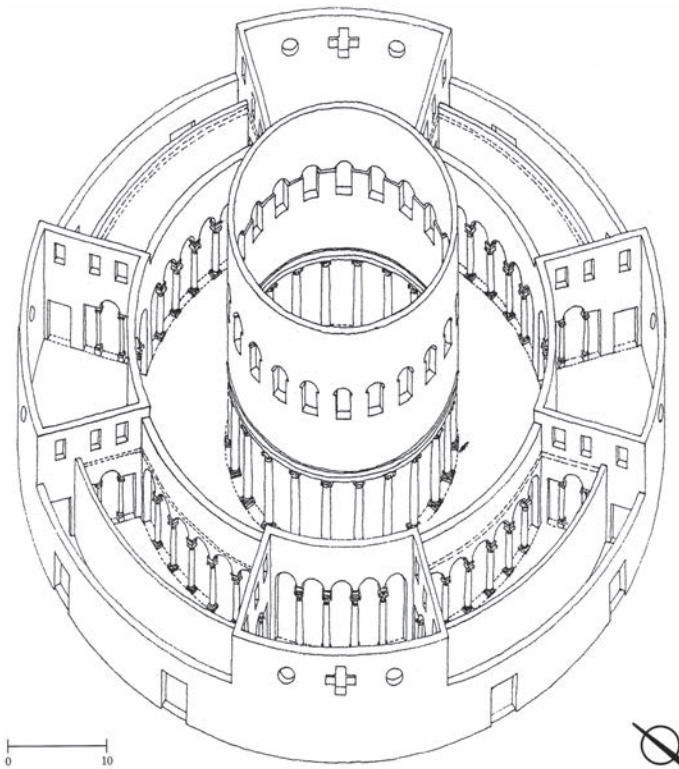
filled with stained glass. Additional alterations included the creation of a vestibule with marble doorframes behind the twelfth-century porch, a new sacristy, and renovation of the convent for use by the Pauline Fathers, whom Nicholas introduced there. The liturgical arrangements were completely revised. Rossellino cleared away the medieval *schola cantorum* and made a new altar to stand in the center of the building, where it formed the "radiating center of a cross" made with four peripheral altars, which he also refashioned.[59]

In a bull of 1454 the pope made the seemingly modest claim that his restoration of Santo Stefano Rotondo "brought it to a suitable state;" in other words, he made it usable.[60] His intervention was a consolidation — in that respect, an affirmation — and modernization of the early Christian building as it had been received in the fifteenth century, with its medieval structural truncation and intrusions. Rossellino's remodeling added another temporal stratum to a building that was already polychronic. The result was deplored by Francesco di Giorgio Martini, who probably first saw the church around 1458 and claimed that the pope had ruined it ("Pope Nicholas redid it, or much rather wrecked it").[61] It is not clear precisely to what the Sienese architect objected, whether errors of commission — like the utilitarian pavement or the reduction of light — or of omission — namely the failure to return the rotunda to its original form. Francesco di Giorgio was in the vanguard of architects who used their modern graphic skills not only to record ancient buildings as they were found in his day, but also to visualize their pristine state. Many of the best known architects of the era drew Santo Stefano

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59. Ceschi 1982, 143 and Frommel, 2006, 23.

60. "eamdem ecclesiam non sine magnis sumptibus […] instauravimus, et ad decentem statum reduximus"; quoted by Tomei P. 1942, 104, note 1; Krautheimer et al. 1937-1977, 4:203; and Ceschi 1982, 140.

61. Turin, Biblioteca Reale, Codice Saluzziano, fol. 84: "Rafationallo papa Nichola. Ma molto più lo ghuastò"; quoted by Frommel 2006, 27. According to Ceschi 1982, 136, Francesco di Giorgio first visited Rome in 1458-1464.
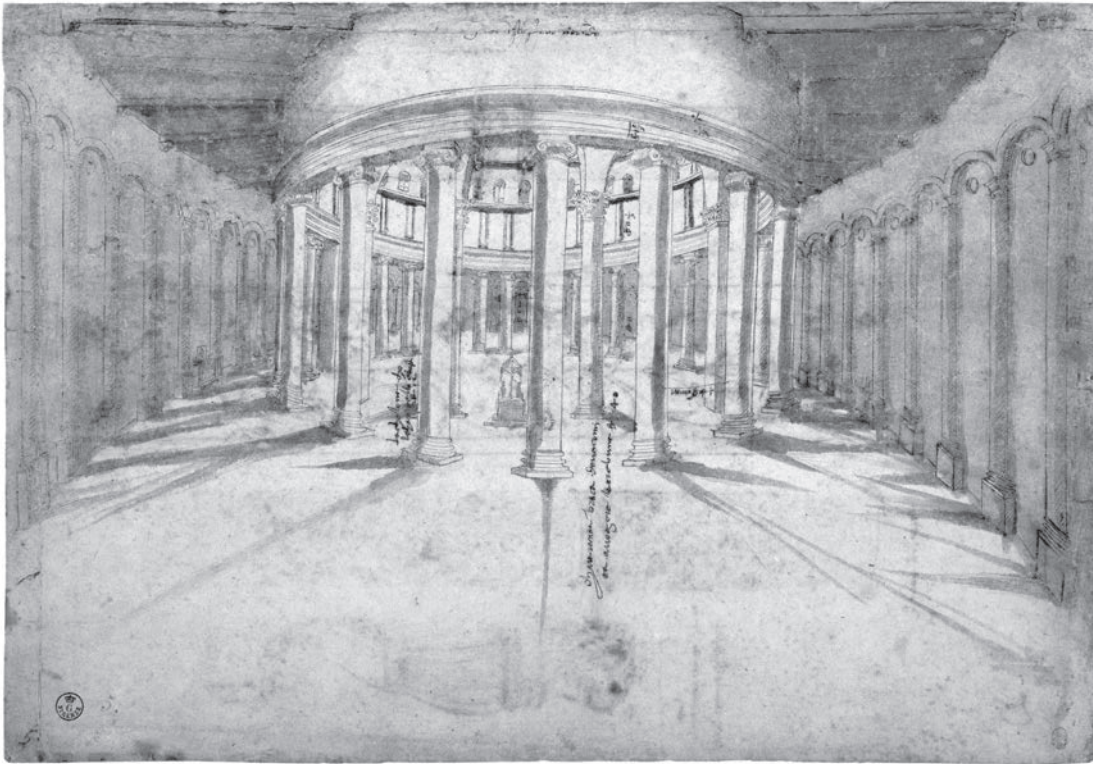
Fig. 15. Baldassare Peruzzi, interior of Santo Stefano Rotondo, Rome, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe degli Uffizi, Florence.

Rotondo with similar intentions. According to Frommel, it was Baldassare Peruzzi, around 1505, who first rendered the original ground plan correctly, in addition to making "the only trustworthy representation of [the interior] executed in the Renaissance" (Fig. 15).[62]

The archaeological interest in Santo Stefano Rotondo was driven by its shape. Whether or not fifteenth-century architects believed Flavio Biondo's claim that the rotunda originated as a Temple of Faunus, circular buildings were considered quintessentially antique.[63] Oblong ecclesiastical basilicas did not exert the same fascination. Nevertheless, the ability to represent any historic building as a three-dimensional whole and to speculate visually about its original form was a transformative innovation. Graphic debates like those over the original plan and elevation of Santo Stefano Rotondo were part of a multi-media discourse about the 'originary' appearance of old buildings that had no parallel in the Middle Ages. The verbal component of this discourse was also new and sometimes even polemical. Claiming a "vital turning point" as early as 1420, David Karmon cited treatises, papal edicts, and legislation relevant to the preservation of Rome's pre-Christian heritage, arguing that despite the well-documented pillaging of ancient structures like the Baths of Diocletian and the Colosseum, the fifteenth century saw the emergence of a "revolutionary" new doctrine of restoration that prized the antique building's original, historic form.[64]

For the old basilican churches, the turning point probably occurred with Nicholas V's

62. Frommel 2006, 10, Fig. 3 (Florence, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe degli Uffizi, 2059); 12, Fig. 5 (Florence, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe degli Uffizi, Santarelli 161 r); 27-28. GDSU 2059 has also been attributed to Jacopo Sansovino, *c.* 1550 (Krautheimer et al. 1937-1977, 4:205, Fig. 155). The Santarelli drawing has been attributed to Il Cronaca (Maria Fossi Todorow, in Tempesti et al. 1967, 30-32, no. 14).

63. Biondo, *Roma instaurata*, 1:107.

64. Karmon 2011; quoted phrases on 9, 153.

plan to rebuild Saint Peter's. Christine Smith and Joseph F. O'Connor have shown that Manetti's exaltation of the project was rhetorical — just as the project itself was, in his hands, a rhetorical device — while Leon Battista Alberti's opposition to it was concrete.[65] The last book of Alberti's treatise on architecture, composed during or just after Nicholas's pontificate, is devoted to restoration (*instauratio*) and culminates in the description of a method for correcting the lean of the nave walls of Saint Peter's, which threatened to bring the church down.[66] The problem was due to a design flaw. Alberti opined that not all architects' errors could be set right by restoration, and when "a building cannot be improved without changing every line, the best remedy is demolition, to make way for something new."[67] He did not place Saint Peter's in that category. Its lineaments were basically sound and worth preserving.[68] Alberti approved of the many chapels that had been built along the sides of the basilica, because they protected it from moisture on one side of its sloping site and from erosion on the other.[69]

Alberti's recommendation for Saint Peter's — "sure to be costly but less sure to be successful" — was never taken up.[70] Many other ancient basilicas were restored in the second half of the century, however, in the context of the discourse generated by Nicholas V's variously failed, successful, and imaginary projects. As part of that discourse, *De re aedificatoria* offered a theory of architecture that begins with the definition of a building as "a form of body, which like any other consists of lineaments and matter":[71]

> It is the function and duty of lineaments […] to prescribe an appropriate place, exact numbers, a proper scale, and a graceful order for whole buildings and for each of their constituent parts, so that the whole form and appearance of the building may depend on the lineaments alone. Nor do lineaments have anything to do with material, but they are of such a nature that we may recognize the same lineaments in several different buildings that share one and the same form, that is, when the parts […] correspond with one another in their every line and angle.[72]

The conception of a building as an organism in which each part corresponds harmoniously to all the others and to the whole is fundamental to many styles of architecture, including Vitruvian temples and Romanesque and Gothic cathedrals, but not to the Roman spoliate column basilica, which was an assemblage of independent parts. Colonnades could be longer or shorter; nave and aisles could be wider or narrower; roofs could be higher or lower. The medieval patchwork approach to restoration was suited to the aggregative character of the buildings to which it was applied. In the Roman context, Alberti's definition of the building as a unity of parts was a new departure.

Nearly seventy-five years ago, Richard Krautheimer published his observation that the restoration of early Christian basilicas under Popes Sixtus IV (1471-1484), Innocent VIII (1484-1492), and Alexander VI (1492-1503) followed a pattern, and the pattern seemed to

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65. Smith and O'Connor 2006, 66-78, 191-223.

66. Alberti, 2: 999 and Alberti (a), 362 (*De re aedificatoria*, 10:17). See also Alberti, 1:75; Alberti (a), 27 (*De re aedificatoria*, 1:10). On the date: Smith and O'Connor 2006, 192-98. According to Arbeiter 1988, 108, both of the nave walls were out of plumb.

67. Alberti, 2:871 and Alberti (a), 321 (*De re aedificatoria*, 10:1).

68. On the meaning of *lineamenta*: Alberti (a), 422-23.

69. Alberti, 1:63 and Alberti (a), 22 (*De re aedificatoria*, 1:8).

70. Smith and O'Connor 2006, 214.

71. Alberti, 1:15 and Alberti (a), 5 (*De re aedificatoria*, Prologue).

72. Alberti, 1:19-21 and Alberti, (a), 7 (*De re aedificatoria*, 1:1).

reflect "the fifteenth-century conception of the appearance of an early Christian church."[73] His point of departure was San Pietro in Vincoli, a somewhat eccentric fifth-century basilica with Doric colonnades carrying arches, the usual timber roofs over nave and aisles, and a tripartite transept. In its present state (Fig. 16), the gloomy nave is covered by an eighteenth-century wooden barrel vault, so low that the fifteenth-century ceiling beams survive above it.[74] The beams are part of a new roof made by the basilica's titular cardinal Nicholas of Cusa (1448-1464), whose name was inscribed on them (Fig. 17); he also erected a new altar in the transept, where he was later buried.[75] Thus far the renovation was typical of the first half of the century in its piecemeal approach. Cusanus's successors, Francesco della Rovere (1467-1471) and Giuliano della Rovere (1471-1492), who would become respectively Pope Sixtus IV and Pope Julius II, proceeded differently, sponsoring a comprehensive remodeling that entailed structural alterations as well as cosmetic embellishments. Their work included the insertion of vaults over the aisles and transept and the rebuilding or strengthening of the aisle and transept walls, presumably to support the vaults (Fig. 18). A new vaulted entrance porch was added. Two of the three entrance doors were blocked up, while the center one received a fine marble frame. The small medieval windows in the apse were replaced by three large pointed ones filled with tracery, and similar windows may have been made in the clerestory and the façade. The remodeling also included the construction of two small lateral apses in the transept.[76]

The elements that comprised the "pattern," in Krautheimer's estimation, were the horizontal ceiling or roof beams in the nave, the groin vaults in the aisles and transept, and the groin-vaulted porch. He found this combination in the contemporary restorations of eight other medieval basilicas and traced it to Nicholas V's unrealized project for Saint Peter's.[77] Twenty years later, Günter Urban integrated this pattern into a larger history of quattrocento Roman church architecture, describing it as a "spatial reshaping" or *Neugestaltung* (new formation).[78] Urban supposed that the renovation scheme was devised specifically for the city's most venerable basilicas, the title and station churches, and he, too, counted nine instances: Santa Maria Maggiore, Santa Maria in Aracoeli, San Pietro in Vincoli, Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, Sant'Agnese fuori le mura, Sant'Agata dei Goti, Santa Cecilia, Sant'Eusebio, and Santa Maria in Domnica. The first was Santa Maria Maggiore, which was renovated by its long-serving archpriest, Cardinal Guillaume d'Estouteville (1445-1483).

Santa Maria Maggiore is a fifth-century basilica with Ionic colonnades that carry entablatures (Fig. 19). The narrow transept was added by Pope Nicholas IV (1288-1292), who constructed a new apse decorated by Jacopo Torriti and also had the upper part of the façade covered with mosaics depicting the legend of the founding of the basilica by Pope Liberius (352-366).[79] The façade mosaics are now hidden by the massive frontispiece added by Ferdinando Fuga (1743-1750), who also thoroughly reworked the interior in accordance with the classicizing taste of his day. Fuga regularized the colonnades, reducing the spoliate shafts to a uniform diameter and shaving the spoliate capitals to receive identical Ionic collars;

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73. Krautheimer 1941, 365.

74. Krautheimer et al. 1937-1977, 3:187.

75. Ibidem, 3:183.

76. Krautheimer 1941, 361-66 and Krautheimer et al. 1937-1977, 3:183, 186-88, 218, 226.

77. Krautheimer 1941, 364-65. The eight churches were Sant'Agata dei Goti, Sant'Agnese fuori le mura, Santi Apostoli, Santa Cecilia, Santa Croce, Sant'Eusebio, San Marco, and Santa Maria Maggiore.

78. Urban 1961-1962, 95-96.

79. Krautheimer et al. 1937-1977, 3:8, 23-24. The façade mosaics are by Filippo Rusuti.

Fig. 16. San Pietro in Vincoli, Rome, interior.

Fig. 17. San Pietro in Vincoli, Rome, ceiling beam of Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa.

Fig. 18. San Pietro in Vincoli, Rome, aisle vault.

Fig. 19. Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome, interior.

Fig. 20. Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome, aisle vault.

similarly the bases were replaced with uniform marble half-rings.[80] The nave pavement was extensively remade. Responds were added to the aisle walls under the vaults.[81] D'Estouteville's remodeling, which is well documented by pre–eighteenth-century sources, was also extensive but, at least on first consideration, less self-consciously driven by style. The nave was left largely as it was. Roofs were repaired and the transept and aisles were covered by masonry vaults. Two new entrances were made at the west (apse) end of the basilica, which faces the city, and the bell tower at the east was completed.[82] The cardinal also built or rebuilt several chapels, including the finely decorated chapel of Saints Michael and Peter in Chains.[83] He donated

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80. Ibidem, 3:9, 21, 25–26.

81. Urban 1961–1962, 99 and Krautheimer et al. 1937–1977, 3:24.

82. The apse faces northwest; Krautheimer et al. 1937–1977, 3, plate I. For simplicity I use "west" and "east."

83. Gill 1996.

Fig. 21. San Marco, Rome, interior.

Fig. 22. San Marco, Rome, porch façade.

a monumental ciborium with reliefs by Mino da Fiesole for the main altar and many other precious objects, among them bells, organs, and liturgical accoutrements.[84]

The fifteenth-century vaults of the transept were removed for structural reasons in 1928-1931. Urban observed that they were ribbed groin vaults anchored in the walls without visible supports.[85] The aisle vaults, which still exist under Fuga's decorative additions, are elliptical barrels penetrated by cross vaults over the intercolumniations. Although the eighteenth-century overlay gives the impression of bays (Fig. 20), Urban ascertained that originally there were no transverse arches; at its apex, each barrel vault was continuous. The penetrating cross vaults rose directly from the nave entablature on one side and from the aisle wall on the other, without supporting brackets or the responds added by Fuga. The minimal articulation allowed the architect to finesse the irregularity of the spoliate colonnades, whose intercolumniations

84. Krautheimer et al. 1937-1977, 3:8, 30 and Gill 2005, 65-70.

85. Urban 1961-1962, 97.

vary in width by nearly half a meter.[86] The cross vaults could be unobtrusively adapted to this unevenness. The result was a longitudinal vault both continuous and rhythmically punctuated by the lunettes under the cross vaults.

Urban saw this solution as more than a practical response to an essential characteristic of the spoliate column basilica — although it was also that. In his view, the vaults created a new "spatial form" (*Raumform*) determined by flat walls and continuous vault lines, which was both a response to the old flat-roofed basilicas and a means of modernizing them. Vaulting revaluated the early Christian type by adapting it to a spatial design (*Raumschema*) specific to quattrocento Rome.[87] Moreover, the new "spatial sequence" (*Raumabfolge*) of the renovations influenced the design of all-vaulted buildings like Santa Maria del Popolo, which also eschewed transverse arches and wall responds in favor of uniform vault height and continuity.[88]

Whether or not we agree with Urban's description of its aesthetic character, there was clearly a "pattern" in the renovations of Santa Maria Maggiore, San Pietro in Vincoli, and at least seven other church basilicas in the second half of the fifteenth century. The pattern took the essential features of the column basilica as its point of departure: the uninterrupted longitudinal nave and the planar vertical walls supported by spoliate colonnades. In respecting and valorizing these features, the pattern preserved the originary, early Christian phase of the building's design. In contrast stands the renovation of San Marco, initiated by Cardinal Pietro Barbo (1444-1464) and continued after his election to the papacy (Paul II, 1464-1471) on a design attributed by Frommel to Francesco del Borgo. The fifteenth-century project has been obscured by alterations of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Fig. 21), but scholars have reconstructed it.[89] The church was a ninth-century column basilica with arcades. Its renovation included a new coffered ceiling; the enlargement of the clerestory windows, which were filled with tracery and colored glass; repair of the Cosmati pavement; and the usual addition of vaults over the aisles. Atypically, however, the vaults were supported by a new system of niched walls and piers. The aisle walls were thickened by almost two meters in order to accommodate a suite of semi-circular recesses, and pilasters between the recesses receive the transverse arches of the vaults. On the nave side, the old columns were partially enveloped by travertine piers that support the aisle vaults and much of the weight of the new coffered ceiling. The columns, now only half-visible against the piers, lost their independent structural function and were ultimately removed in a later remodeling (when they were replaced with the free-standing, marble-clad brick shafts seen today).[90] The character of the elevation was thus fundamentally altered; San Marco was no longer a column basilica but, as Urban pointed out, a pier basilica, respecting the classical maxim that piers, not columns, should carry arches.[91] The classicizing transformation of the interior echoed the extraordinary treatment of the porch (Fig. 22), which, like the new Benediction Loggia at Saint Peter's (also attributed by Frommel to Francesco del Borgo) was modeled on the elevation of the Colosseum.[92]

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86. Ibidem, 99: between 2.26 m. and 1.85 m.

87. Ibidem, 112.

88. Ibidem, 95-96, 114-15.

89. Ibidem, 125-54; Krautheimer et al. 1937-1977, 2:244; Frommel 1984, 84-92, 115-22; and Dressen 2008, 309-10, no. A29.

90. Urban 1961-1962, 141, Fig. 140. See also Frommel 1984, 89, which rejects the reconstruction of entablature pieces over the columns.

91. Urban 1961-1962, 140.

92. Frommel 1984, 150-52. Only the lower story was completed by Francesco del Borgo.

The renovation of San Marco effectively replaced the ninth-century column basilica with a new originary moment. Unlike Fuga's remodeling of Santa Maria Maggiore, which responded to the Ionic column basilica of the fifth century, subsequent remodelings of San Marco responded to the fifteenth-century basilica of Francesco del Borgo. It had become "the type of organism […] manifest as the point of reference of every successive phase of transformation."[93] In the terms of Nagel and Wood, it was a performance. The vaulting scheme applied in Santa Maria Maggiore and the other eight basilicas was not. Unlike Krautheimer, who named Alberti and Bernardo Rossellino as possible originators of the vaulted formula, Urban saw it as independent of any particular architect. In his view, it was a collective response to the Roman visual environment, which included many examples of ancient vaulting.[94] In applying the lessons of these exempla to the restoration of medieval churches, the cardinals who sponsored the renovations may have been guided by lesser architects or builders, as well as by their own discussions in the curia.[95] The consequence was an important yet unobtrusive approach to restoration. In contrast to the new ceilings, pavements and ciboria that loudly announce themselves as renovations, vaults over the aisles and transept are easily overlooked. In retrospect, however, they reveal a new sensitivity to the essential character of the medieval Roman column basilica that enabled its polychromic survival.[96]

93. Spagnesi 2002, 22.

94. Krautheimer 1941, 365; Urban 1961-1962, 96, 114.

95. Burroughs, 99-139 on the networks of administrators, contractors, and builders under Nicholas V.

96. Throughout this essay I have used the terms "renovation" and "restoration" interchangeably, partly because I am not convinced that the distinctions among these and other cognate words were clear-cut in the fifteenth century and partly because they are not so today. For a different approach see Karmon 2011, 17-20.