

## Jerusalem on the Hill review excerpts

*"There are a lot of intriguing ideas to ponder (in Dr. Tanner's) book with its rich complement of illustrations and a text that should stir things up with bold proposals of iconographies that have not been dealt with previously in the huge bibliographies on St. Peter's."*

James S. Ackerman, Arthur Kingsley Porter Professor of Fine Arts Emeritus,  
Harvard University

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*"Dr. Tanner's volume focuses on the significance of planning in the mid-15th century proposed for St. Peter's in Rome during the reign of Nicholas V (1447-1455) [...] With the tomb of the apostle chosen to be the foundation of St. Peter's, also crucified and entombed near the site of his crucifixion, Rome could become "The New Jerusalem". Dr Tanner's study richly details the lasting significance of decisions made in the early years of the construction of new St. Peter's."*

Henry A. Millon, Dean Emeritus, Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts

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*"This volume by independent scholar Tanner is a formidable addition to the literature on the church of St. Peter's in Rome [...]. Elegantly produced with a wealth of useful images, this book is destined to become a staple of St. Peter's scholarship. Summing up: Essential. Lower-level undergraduates through researchers/faculty."*

Debra Pincus, in *Choice*, vol. 49, No. 2, October 2011

Renaissance Quarterly Review of "Jerusalem on the Hill"  
2011, vol. 11, issue 4, 1217-18

Marie Tanner. *Jerusalem on the Hill: Rome and the Vision of Saint Peter's Basilica in the Renaissance*.

London: Harvey Miller Publishers, 2010. 288 pp. index. illus. map. bibl. €120. ISBN: 978-1-905375-49-3.

*Jerusalem on the Hill* offers an iconographical and contextual study of Saint Peter's reconstruction, illuminating the rich symbolism underlying design choices made under Nicholas V (r. 1447–55) and Julius II (r. 1503–13). Tanner assigns primary responsibility for New St. Peter's to Nicholas and Leon Battista Alberti (1404–72) and asserts that not only can "the fundamental Nicholine organization of transepts, choir, crossing, and dome around and above Peter's tomb" be found in all successive iterations of redesign and rebuilding (149), but also "the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem was the underlying template" that ties the entire project together (151).

Tanner develops her hypotheses over twelve chapters divided into two parts. Part 1 reexamines the classicism of New St. Peter's through the lens of a deliberate and specific Flavian revival. Interest in Vespasian and Titus, especially their military campaigns in the Holy Land and resulting celebratory architecture in Rome, grew as the papacy strove to create a universal Church. Tanner traces the development of Titus's reputation as "Christ's Avenger" from late antiquity to the Renaissance to show how the emperor was credited with bringing "the seat of Judeo-Christian authority to Rome" (89) and thus became a key figure in the iconography of papal primacy. Tanner reinterprets the modeling of New St. Peter's on the Roman Forum's Basilica of Maxentius and Constantine, misidentified in the Renaissance as the Temple of Peace built to house the spoils brought by Titus from Jerusalem, as a deliberate reference to papal intent to recapture the Holy Land. The "thermal principles" on display in its soaring coffered vaults found additional resonance in Albertian architectural theory, which rooted Roman bath design in the Etruscan Temple. Tanner sees Alberti's Etruscan Temple as the underlying model for New St. Peter's throughout its history. With its indigenous pedigree, the Etruscan Temple and its offspring Imperial baths gave physical manifestation to the Italic nationalism born during the Avignon papacy and stoked during the restoration of Rome. A new St. Peter's designed to reflect the Temple of Peace (in fact Maxentius's

basilica) would thus be “a radiant symbol of the Apostolic See’s prestige and theocratic sovereignty” (14).

Part 2 takes a more specific look at the forms chosen for New St. Peter’s, as Tanner locates their Flavian classicism and references to Jerusalem in the Holy Sepulcher and Church of the Anastasis. The close connection between the tomb of Jesus and that of his vicar signals papal ambition to cement papal authority and the preeminence of Rome. Tanner credits Nicholas with first conceiving the main features of New St. Peter’s: the reorganization of streets leading to the basilica; the placement of the obelisk in a colonnaded piazza aligned with the church entrance; and the domed tribune with its vaulted transepts, apsed choir, reference to soaring imperial baths, and off-center placement of Peter’s tomb to mirror that of Christ at the Anastasis. Bramante’s work for Julius II is thus seen to “recapitulate the fundamental Nicholine organization” (149) “to emerge as the culminating expression of Jerusalem-related Christian sepulchral architecture in Roman imperial terms” (184).

To support her reading of New St. Peter’s as another Holy Sepulcher variant, and bolster her claims for Alberti’s authorship of its first ideation, Tanner discusses the sepulchral churches attributed to the humanist in Rimini, Florence, and Mantua. Glossing over the numerous problems of attribution and building chronology presented by the Rucellai chapel at San Pancrazio and the churches of San Francesco (Tempio Malatestiano), Santissima Annunziata, San Sebastiano, and Sant’Andrea, Tanner maintains Alberti’s authorship of all, seeing them together with Nicholas V’s plan for St. Peter’s as manifestations of his Etruscan Temple theory. Equally problematic is her lack of engagement with the role played by Bernardo Rossellino at Nicholas’s court, thus perpetuating the long-held contention that Rossellino, appointed *ingegnere in palazzo* in 1451 and documented in Roman payment records, was simply the brawn behind Alberti’s brain and “that a project of the rank of St. Peter’s had to go back to Alberti” (172).

While rich with thought-provoking ideas, especially regarding Flavian and Anastasis iconography, the text suffers from an overuse of subheadings, frequently with marginal clarification to the topics at hand, and long introductory quotations that interrupt the flow of Tanner’s argument. Repeated references to other sections of the book raise questions about the text’s organization, and further inhibit easy comprehension of the author’s main points, as does the anachronistic presentation of architects, theorists, and events. The book suffers from repetition — another result of its confusing organization — and is marred by careless copyediting and typesetting errors, including the odd discrepancy in the book’s title on the title page and book jacket. Despite these structural flaws and the over-insistence on Albertian authorship, Tanner’s study offers a unifying vision of New St. Peter’s, demanding consideration that rather than a series of interruptions and about-faces, its reconstruction was a multi-generational effort to realize Rome’s authority as the New Jerusalem.

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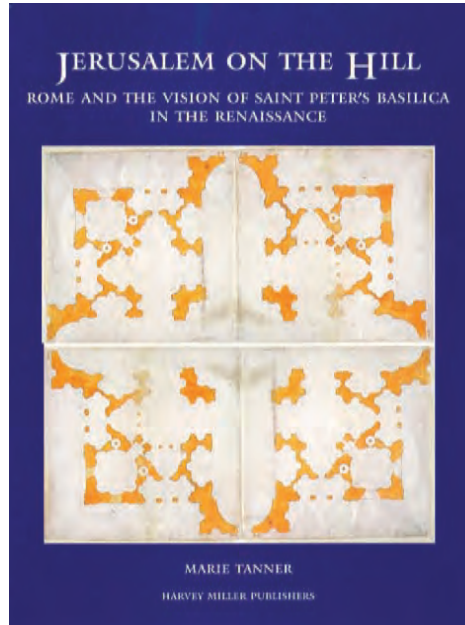
# TRANSFER OF THE COVENANT

*Jerusalem on the Hill: Rome and the Vision of Saint Peter's Basilica in the Renaissance.* By Marie Tanner. Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2012. 288 pp. ISBN 9781905375493. \$155.00.

Reviewed by Tod A. Marder

Saint Peter's Basilica was founded by Constantine around 325 AD and built in a fashion typical of early Christian architecture. By the dawn of the Renaissance in the early 1400s, this structure was dilapidated and in urgent need of repair. Restructuring was begun in the middle of the fifteenth century, but less than fifty years later the goal of shoring up the edifice was supplanted by the grand idea of a completely new building. This campaign was famously sponsored by Pope Julius II (1503-13) and continued by his successors for roughly one hundred years. Direction of the works was first entrusted to the High Renaissance architect Bramante, and he was succeeded by a chain of illustrious followers from Raphael and Antonio da Sangallo the Younger to Michelangelo, Domenico Fontana, and Giacomo Della Porta.

What were the goals of these men? What sort of intellectual program did they embrace, observe, modify, or develop over this long period? To what extent did any programmatic concerns reflect the earlier history of the fabric, contemporary political realities, or individual aspirations and tastes? These are some of the questions taken up in Marie Tanner's book on Saint Peter's. Simply put, the book is an interpretation of the Basilica of Saint Peter as the author believes it was conceived by its Renaissance architects and patrons. It also suggests how the building may have been understood and used by informed contemporaries. The presentation is divided into two parts, the first aimed at arguing for a "programmatic antiquarianism" in the concept of the new building (Julius II's New Saint Peter's), and the second part introducing a broader group of influences on the design and meaning of the architecture. These two clusters of concerns are fleshed out in a dozen chapters organized thematically rather than chronologically, so that the richness of individual themes is encouraged while



sequences of ideas are slurred. The programmatic integrity of the building is emphasized over the more usual parsing of developments over time. With a scope so broad and rich, no reviewer's account can do real justice to the author's erudition. What follows will account for some of the concerns raised in the first section of the text.

The first chapter proposes a thematic link between the Basilica and "Etruscan temple" forms, as well as the architecture of ancient Roman baths. The thrust of the argument is that the incorporation of these typically Italic forms in the planning process "served to solidify papal pretensions to Italic primacy in the context of universal theocratic rule." The second chapter introduces the influence of the "Temple of Peace," better known today as the Basilica of Maxentius in the planning efforts of Saint Peter's. The influence is based on associations between this "temple" (although it was never a place of worship) and Roman baths, and their mutual relations to Etruscan tradition as a fitting basis from which a "new Christian architecture" could emerge. In the third chapter the author introduces a literary association of the builders of New Saint Peter's with Noah as founder of the Etruscan race, propagator of the Etruscan temple, and symbol of papal succession from Old Testament priests and kings. These associations can be found in the writings of Annius of Viterbo, a Master of the Vatican Palace in 1499,

and the influential Egidio da Viterbo a few years later, that is, just before the foundation of the New Saint Peter's in 1506.

The fourth chapter attempts to link Bramante's archaeological interests in the ancient baths, the "Temple of Peace" (Basilica of Maxentius), and Etruscan tradition. Particular emphasis is laid on the Temple of Peace because, the author explains, it was "the repository of spoils brought by Titus from the Holy of Holies in Solomon's Temple, demonstrating God's Covenant with the Jews." This in turn was construed as proof of the transfer of the covenant to Rome. In chapter five this theme is expanded in pages discussing the figure of Titus in ancient and early Christian history. The theme of the sixth chapter is "spoils," meaning the association of the Titus-legend, the Jewish spoils from Jerusalem, and relics of Saint Peter's, especially Veronica's *sudarium* and the spiral columns that adorned the high altar, both of which reputedly came from the temple at Jerusalem. Titus belonged to the Flavian dynasty in Roman times, and the author makes a case for the builder of the new basilica of Saint Peter (Julius II) identifying with this emperor. The argument rests on a treatise written in 1508 in anticipation of a Crusade to return the holy city of Jerusalem from Muslim to Christian rule, and associations seen in the fabrics of the Vatican Palace and Saint Peter's. This, in any event, is the subject of chapter seven, which closes Part One of the book.

In Part Two, the chapters take up the concerns of Nicholas V, who attempted to rebuild the basilica around 1450; the role of Alberti at the court of Nicholas V; the connections between Julius II and the architect of New Saint Peter's, Bramante; Bramante's interest in the Holy Sepulchre; and the contributions of Bramante's followers to these themes.

Those who spend time with this book will discover a wealth of associative material pertaining, closely or loosely, to the conception of the papacy in the Renaissance and its program for New Saint Peter's. Regardless of whether those associations entirely convince the reader, one cannot leave the book without a deeply enriched

sense of the connections between the Basilica and imagery derived from Roman antiquity, Renaissance theory, and knowledge of Jerusalem. A huge part of the argument is sustained by impressive photographs of all visual aspects of these associations. For these images alone the book is essential for specialists. There they will find one of the most lavishly produced pieces of scholarship on Saint Peter's to appear in recent decades. If one's approach to the construction of Saint Peter's is ideological, literary, and associational—rather than aesthetic or technical—there is no better reference to the history of the Basilica.



*Tod Marder, Ph. D., is professor of art history at Rutgers University. He is an expert in the art of Bernini, the city of ancient and modern Rome, and Renaissance and baroque art. He has published Bernini's Scala Regia at the Vatican Palace: Architecture, Sculpture and Ritual (Cambridge University Press) and Bernini and the Art of Architecture (Abbeville Press).*



Photo: Jerusalem on the Hill

*Drawing by E. Duperac of Michelangelo's design proposal for the Basilica of Saint Peter*

## OBJECTS OF DEVOTION AND IDOLATRY

*Altars Restored: The Changing Face of English Religious Worship, 1547 -c.1700.* By Kenneth Fincham and Nicholas Tyacke. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. 450 pp. ISBN 9780198207009. \$153.00.

Reviewed by Duncan G. Stroik

The English reformation was not kind to altars and art. Along with the dissolution and destruction of the monasteries, other acts of iconoclasm were perpetrated during the reign of Henry VIII. Under his son, Edward VI, a plan was put in place to transform the liturgy, the theology, and the art of the English church. Central to the reformers' goals was the destruction of altars and altar-rails. In their stead they placed lengthwise wooden tables in the middle

of the nave. Crucifixes, statues, paintings of saints, and stained glass were destroyed because they were objects of devotion and fostered idolatry. In spite of the short-lived Catholic Restoration under Queen Mary (1553-1558) in which some churches brought back altars and images, the crown supported iconoclasm during the reigns of Elizabeth I and James I. However, not all agreed with the Puritan or Calvinist direction being promoted, including the chapel royal which tended to have a higher liturgy. Under Charles I, Bishop Laud promoted the return of altars to a raised sanctuary surrounded by altar-rails, a liturgy closer to Rome, and even imagery in special cases. Laudianism was fought against by prominent bishops, clergy,

and laity who considered it idolatrous and popish. The English Civil War, and the rule of Oliver Cromwell ended the British Counter-reform. However, with the restoration of Charles II many of the ideas of Laud came back into currency and eventually became seen as traditional. The fire of London in 1666 and the subsequent rebuilding of fifty-one of eighty-seven churches by Sir Christopher Wren (whose family were Laudians) saw the reintroduction of the wooden "Protestant altar" and the rail. This book helps to explain the liturgical battles between low and high church during the first 150 years of Anglicanism, while offering a surprising parallel with events in the Catholic Church during the twentieth century.

MARIE TANNER, *Jerusalem on the Hill: Rome and the Vision of Saint Peter's Basilica in the Renaissance*. (Studies in Medieval and Early Renaissance Art History 60.) London: Harvey Miller Publishers; Turnhout: Brepols, 2010. Pp. 288; 113 black-and-white and 59 color figures. ISBN: 9781905375493. doi:10.1017/S0038713413002601

The story of the building of New St. Peter's Basilica in Rome has proven to be one of the most absorbing in the history of architecture. It is certainly one of the most dramatic, with its episodes of destruction (notably of the great basilica over the tomb of Peter attributed to the first Christian Roman emperor, Constantine, which was painfully torn down in pieces), of immense creativity on the part of the genius-architects Bramante, Michelangelo, and Bernini (whose magnificent combined achievement now defines the city of Rome), and of extreme ambition on the part of the patrons, the popes (who practically broke the back of the church to pay for it). Marie Tanner's book relies on the reader's familiarity with the nuts and bolts of this narrative as told by many accomplished historians of architecture and art over the years (with much debate, too, among themselves on almost all of the important points). The book makes use of many of the familiar building blocks of the narrative in the drawings of plans and views (without any elaborate framing or explanation), in order to come at the matter from another angle.

The issue of overriding importance is the programmatic significance of the planning process in its critical beginning stages, essentially from the time of Nicholas V through the reign of Julius II. This significance Tanner deduces largely from what she calls "references" in the material forms that various architects build or propose. These references hold the key, in her opinion, to the intentions of the patrons who were spending the enormous sums that the increasingly grandiose project required. Tanner's references are revealed by and large through a vast array of disparate sources, verbal and visual, brought together in a complex (and at times almost overwhelmingly so) web of argumentation that binds the discrete elements into a chain of thought. The process is one that aligns with a form of art-historical reasoning championed generations earlier by Erwin Panofsky. Well into the exposition we learn that "modern studies of the new St. Peter's are thin in terms of iconographic investigation" (120), revealing the gap Tanner has intended to fill. Following Panofsky, one of the progenitors of this manner of decoding architecture was Richard Krautheimer, whose influential essay, "Introduction to an 'Iconography of Medieval Architecture'" (1942), dealt prominently with a building that looms large in Tanner's book, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. But operating essentially on a pattern of formal similarities from building to building (inflected, however, with a recognition of a medieval—as opposed to modern—frame of expectations for the quality of resemblance), Krautheimer's analysis seems far simpler by comparison. Tanner's references do not reveal themselves as easily.

In pursuit of her goal, Tanner does not begin her exposition with the immensely interesting Nicholas V, who initiated this revolutionary change-of-edifice, but with the architect Leon Battista Alberti, whose "participation in St. Peter's," in the author's words, "remains unresolved" (21). Alberti's significance for the author lies in his monumental *De re aedificatoria*, wherein is defined, according to Tanner, the foundation of an architectural tradition native to the Italian peninsula, an Italic tradition, in the building of the predecessors to the Romans in Italy, the Etruscans. But this tradition, too, has a backstory according to Tanner, which may be pieced together by a judicious reading of the *Grafia aureae urbis Romae*, Annius of Viterbo, and local legends, among others. It derived ultimately from Noah, whose ark made landfall in Italy and who founded the Etruscan race: thus "the Etruscan temple constituted the transfer to Roman soil of the divinely inspired temple of the Jews" (50).

Emphasis is placed on the form of the Etruscan temple as articulated by Alberti, which in its main lines is essentially a sanctuary divided into three sections preceded by a portico. Tanner sees the echo of this form in the planning process for St. Peter's, and especially in Bramante's famous parchment plan, Uffizi 1A, which is rendered on the dust jacket in a beautiful color reproduction as if it were complete. The plan was clearly for a portion of the church; but doubled in mirror image (as it is here), it looks like a centralized church. No matter that the reconstruction is one with which some scholars would disagree. The resemblances between Alberti's Etruscan temple and Bramante's plan are sufficient in Tanner's estimation to assert that the latter carried forward the meaning of the former as an exemplum of an Italic tradition or style which developed out of Jewish practice. Tanner then goes on to connect this "reference" to the political ambitions of the papacy under Julius II to extend the papal state across the territory of Italy and to the other important dimensions of papal ambition, the returning of Jerusalem to Christian dominion (citing Julius's plan for a crusade to the East) and the fashioning of Rome as a New Jerusalem.

Subsequent chapters are devoted to ramifying the connection with Jerusalem. For example, the Roman baths, or to use Tanner's designation, thermal architecture, which signifies lofty, vaulted longitudinal spaces, are the source of additional references. These coincide with the form of a building we know was never used as a bath, the Basilica of Maxentius and Constantine near the Roman Forum. Until modern scholarship discarded the identification as incorrect, the building was known as the Temple of Peace, the edifice constructed by the emperor Vespasian, in which were placed the spoils taken by the Romans from the Temple of Jerusalem in the siege of the city under Titus in 70 CE. Tanner sees this reference, which she entitles Flavian, carried through in plans for the nave of New St. Peter's and with it the aura of Jerusalem. Jerusalem resonates as well in the planning process in the form of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, which combines both centrally planned component (the Rotonda of the Anastasis) and basilica, not to mention the centrally planned Dome of the Rock, the Muslim shrine built on the Temple Mount. But the webs of connectivity extend outward to embrace Santa Costanza, Santo Stefano Rotondo, the Mausoleum of Theodoric in Ravenna, not to mention the Pantheon, which, though built long before the Rotonda of the Anastasis, "carried Anastasis imagery on a separate, and Roman, track" (197).

The book ends with an epilogue on an age-old symbol of harmony in the relationship of part to whole, the Vitruvian man. For Tanner, this image befits the church because "a microcosmic conception for the new St. Peter's endured from the first building campaign to the last" (212). That the shape of unity has triumphed in New St. Peter's is obvious to anyone who has even glanced at the church. In fact, it has triumphed so gloriously, so completely, it would seem to call into question the very explanation of a process of generation for it that involved such an intricately woven code.

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MARIKEN TEEUWEN and SINÉAD O'SULLIVAN, eds., *Carolingian Scholarship and Martianus Capella: Ninth-Century Commentary Traditions on "De nuptiis" in Context*. (Cultural Encounters in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages 12.) Turnhout: Brepols, 2011. Pp. xi, 391. ISBN 978-2-503-53178-6. doi:10.1017/S0038713413002716

This book comprises fourteen articles, all of them papers given at a conference in 2008 and exploring the glosses and commentaries on Martianus Capella as well as the intellectual contexts in which some of the ideas reflected in the glosses have arisen. Teeuwen is the leader of a research group that has edited the glosses of Leiden, MS Voss. Lat. F.

*Speculum* 88/3 (July 2013)

Jerusalem on the Hill reviewed in the *Catholic Historical Review* 2012, vol. 98, issue 3, pp. 624-25

Tanner, Marie. *Jerusalem on the Hill: Rome and the Vision of St. Peter's in the Renaissance*. (London: Harvey Miller Publishers. 2010. Pp. 288. \$174.00. ISBN 978-1-905-37549-3.)

Marie Tanner seeks the intellectual roots of the building of the new St. Peter's in the cultural history of the Renaissance in this richly illustrated volume. Italian architects and men of letters sought a historically regional inspiration in the Etruscan heritage, but they cross referenced their study of ancient remains with images of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. One conduit for humanistic ideas about Etruscan architecture was the Basilica of Maxentius in Rome, which was confused by scholars with the nearby Temple of Peace. Humanists also studied remains of other Roman buildings, especially the Pantheon, baths, and mausoleums. The architects' frequent emphasis on central plans (Greek crosses and circular structures, often with domes), also tied these architectural studies to the Holy Sepulcher site in Jerusalem. They annexed the triumph of Titus, depicted in his triumphal arch on the edge of the Roman Forum, to Christianity, seeing the Roman ruler as an avenger of Christ's Passion. These learned influences can be found in the early designs for the new St. Peter's, although a more conservative approach dominated much later, providing the church with a longer nave. The result was not a Greek cross but a more traditional Latin cross, now hidden behind Gian Lorenzo Bernini's colonnade.

Tanner ties the efforts of Pope Julius II (r. 1503-13) and his architect, Donato Bramante, to an earlier generation of humanistic architectural efforts,



that of Pope Nicholas V (r. 1447-55). Nicholas employed the humanist Leon Battista Alberti, one of the scholars most interested in Etruscan influences and Roman remains; and he started important works at the Vatican, including a new choir for old St. Peter's. The pontiff apparently saw Rome as his own new Jerusalem. Tanner looks at the designs of churches attributed to Alberti and drawings by Bramante and others not usually available to the interested reader. Many of these sites were in cities tied to Pope Nicholas's Italic League, intended to bring peace to Italy and act against external foes like the French and the Ottoman Turks.

The reader should be aware of certain aspects of Tanner's book. The argument is not always presented in a linear fashion, with important topics raised late in the volume or repeated. Beginning with the discussions of Pope Nicholas's plans might be advisable, since Pope Julius and Bramante may have been drawing inspiration from earlier ideas for the Vatican site. Alberti's influence in Rome is not always accepted by everyone, and it has been inferred where documents are vague or lacking. The humanist's attitude toward Nicholas is itself a topic of debate, especially since his *Momus* reads like a critique of papal ambitions. It is apparent, however, that Alberti looked for Etruscan remains and drew inspiration from them. Other scholars, such as Gianozzo Manetti, had different scholarly interests that focused on Jerusalem or Rome. These interests came together in pontificates half of a century apart, leading in the second period to the drafting of ambitious designs for St. Peter's, some of them executed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

THOMAS M. IZBICKI (*Rutgers University*)

## CHOICE REVIEWS ONLINE 2011

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Humanities \ Art & Architecture \ Architecture

Tanner, Marie. **Jerusalem on the hill: Rome and the vision of St. Peter's in the Renaissance.** Harvey Miller, 2011 (c2010). 288p bibl index; ISBN [9781905375493](#), \$174.00. Reviewed in 2011oct CHOICE.

This volume by independent scholar Tanner is a formidable addition to the literature on the church of St. Peter's in Rome, perhaps the most discussed building of Western Christendom. What seems at first an overwhelming richness of references falls into place as an argument for the carefully plotted escalation of papal ambition in the 15th and 16th centuries. With the sacred sites of the East menaced by Turkish invasion, the papacy rebuilt St. Peter's as a building that was intended, the author argues, to subsume both Imperial Rome and Christian Jerusalem--the transfer of the Holy Land to Italian soil and the presentation of the papacy as a world-dominating power. The Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem is put forward as the key point of reference, thus setting Peter's tomb and the Roman papacy within the frame of Christ's tomb. Of particular note here is the emphasis placed on the program of Nicholas V, largely unrealized but seen as crucial for the later work of Bramante and Julius II. Elegantly produced with a wealth of useful images, this book is destined to become a staple of St. Peter's scholarship.

**Summing Up:** Essential. Lower-level undergraduates through researchers/faculty. --  
*D. Pincus, National Gallery of Art*

# Gerusalemme sul colle

Marie Tanner  
**Jerusalem on the Hill: Rome and the  
Vision of St. Peter's in the  
Renaissance.** Turnhout, Harvey Miller  
Publisher 2010. 288 pp., 172 ill.  
ISBN 978-1-905375-49-3. € 120,00

**Q**uesto sontuoso volume in carta patinata, con bellissime illustrazioni di alta qualità, ci invita a intraprendere un affascinante visita a un'inusuale „Gerusalemme sul colle”. Ma l'ascesa, purtroppo, non è affatto agevole. Ogni testo sulla basilica vaticana richiede una grande fatica che investe sia l'autore, sia il lettore. Si tratta di uno sforzo prevalentemente dovuto al fatto che San Pietro ha avuto una storia straordinaria e, di conseguenza, straordinaria è stata anche l'attenzione da parte degli studiosi già dalla fine dell'Ottocento: la basilica si erge oggi su una „montagna” di letteratura secondaria, che è arduo dominare in modo completo. E la salita, nel caso del libro di Tanner, viene ulteriormente complicata da una serie di difficoltà disseminate sul percorso.

## **L'ARCHITETTURA COME STRUMENTO POLITICO**

Frutto di una ricerca più che decennale, lo studio di Marie Tanner ha il merito di inquadrare il complesso fenomeno della ricostruzione della basilica dedicata al principe degli apostoli in un più ampio contesto che, anche grazie all'analisi di numerose fonti iconografiche e letterarie, tiene in considerazione eventi solo apparentemente scollegati e lontani. Così, il nuovo San Pietro – e, più in generale, la Roma rinascimentale, nuova Gerusalemme – vengono interpretati come uno strumento politico per la riaffermazione dell'autorità papale in Italia, do-

po la cattività avignonese, in relazione alla caduta di Costantinopoli (1453), alla conseguente impossibilità di raggiungere la Terra Santa e, dunque, all'esigenza di organizzare una crociata per riconquistare i territori dalle mani degli infedeli. Questo sfondo, su cui si stagliano in lontananza Gerusalemme e le figure di Noè e dell'imperatore Tito, è arricchito anche da un crescente „sentimento italico” e da un sempre più profondo interesse per l'antichità.

Protagonisti della secolare vicenda architettonica, di cui Tanner analizza la prima fase (dalla metà del Quattrocento ai primi anni del Cinquecento), sono due papi e due architetti: Nicolò V e Giulio II, Leon Battista Alberti e Bramante. A loro, secondo l'autrice, andrebbe totalmente ascritto il merito di aver dato corpo a quell'immagine della basilica che, traendo sostanza dalle radici etrusche dell'architettura albertiana, così come dalle espressioni artistiche dell'età dei Flavi e, soprattutto, da riferimenti puntuali al Santo Sepolcro di Gerusalemme, si sarebbe canonizzata e trasmessa nei decenni successivi. In particolare, Alberti sarebbe l'ideatore del progetto, in cui si riflettono le sue idee sul tempio etrusco, mentre a Bramante andrebbe il merito di aver intuito la portata di tali idee e di averle tradotte nell'edificio costruito. Tanner attribuisce così al processo progettuale e costruttivo un'omogeneità e unitarietà che probabilmente non ebbe affatto, vista la sua lunga durata e la caratura dei personaggi coinvolti, i quali agivano in contesti politico-religiosi molto diversi e avevano personalità e obiettivi alquanto individualizzati.

Il libro è diviso in due parti, rispettivamente di sette e cinque capitoli (con un epilogo), ma la struttura è solo apparentemente chiara e l'argomentazione non sembra svolgersi in modo del tutto organico, poiché soffre di numerose ripetizioni di alcuni concetti e di rimandi interni ad altre parti del testo. La fitta suddivisione in paragrafi preceduti da citazioni, le quali talvolta vengono nuovamente ripetute

te nel testo, non aiuta a seguire il filo del discorso, che peraltro Tanner ha scelto di intessere senza rispettare lo svolgimento cronologico dei fatti; così il lettore è costretto a continui salti in avanti e indietro tra personaggi ed eventi.

### TEMPLUM ETRUSCUM

La prima parte è dedicata ai riflessi che l'architettura antica getta sulla nuova basilica vaticana, grazie al tramite della teoria albertiana sul tempio *etruscum sacrum* e al linguaggio architettonico di Bramante. Tanner individua nell'orgoglio per l'architettura autoctona italica („indigenous architecture”, 20) il marchio distintivo del *De re aedificatoria*, composto da Alberti negli anni in cui il papa Nicolò V è impegnato a consolidare la pace tra gli stati italiani, così la proposta di un tempio italico si rivela adatta anche agli obiettivi papali di solidarietà nella penisola. Rigettando il modello della basilica paleocristiana e parzialmente allontanandosi dalle prescrizioni vitruviane, Alberti propone quello che Tanner definisce un „architectural neologism” (27), un tempio quasi quadrato, con tre absidi e profondo portico. È un modello che, secondo l'autrice, sarebbe rintracciabile in tutta la storia della progettazione del nuovo San Pietro. Un aspetto significativo è la forte analogia che Alberti individua tra il tempio etrusco e i grandi impianti termali dell'età imperiale: le terme rappresentano ai suoi occhi il legame con la perduta architettura dei templi italici. Ed è proprio la loro architettura „originaria” a chiarire, secondo Tanner, un primo legame con Gerusalemme, in quanto una leggenda fiorita nel medioevo (50) racconta che il tempio etrusco sarebbe il risultato del trasferimento a Roma del tempio ebraico, ispirato direttamente da Dio, per il tramite di Noè che, approdando in Italia dopo il Diluvio, avrebbe fondato la stirpe etrusca e insegnato l'arte di costruire i templi.

A partire dall'inizio del '400 un edificio viene interpretato come la sintesi tra il tempio italico e le grandi terme imperiali: si tratta di quello che era stato erroneamente identificato come il Tempio della Pace (in realtà è la Basilica di Massenzio). Il *Templum Pacis* era noto per i suoi tesori, ovvero il bottino che Tito portò a Roma dopo la distruzione

del Tempio di Salomone (70 d. C.). Tito, di cui Tanner analizza la fortuna sia nella storia antica, sia in quella cristiana, assume così il ruolo di „vendicatore” per l'uccisione di Cristo da parte degli ebrei. In questo modo il papato poteva imporre l'interpretazione che il trasferimento del tesoro del tempio – e la successiva collocazione nella basilica vaticana di alcuni tra gli oggetti-reliquie più importanti (colonne salomoniche, sudario della Veronica) – fosse la prova del piano divino di traslare l'Alleanza da Gerusalemme a Roma.

Se da tempo la critica ha riconosciuto che il Tempio delle Pace, con la sua architettura „termale” di grandi masse murarie e volte a botte cassettonate, è stato un modello formale per il San Pietro bramantesco, Tanner sostiene che anche l'aspetto ideologico connesso a questa architettura dei Flavi, e il riferimento al tempio etrusco che essa implica, abbiano giocato un ruolo essenziale nella scelta del modello. Un modello a cui Bramante si sarebbe avvicinato proprio grazie al trattato di Alberti. È un'ipotesi suggestiva, ma l'argomentazione sembra un po' debole, se Tanner interpreta la famosa *Opinio super domicilium seu templum magnum* di Bramante come un „treatise on temples” in cui l'autore, criticando il gotico, esprime un „nationalist bias” (57). Innanzitutto il testo non è affatto un trattato sui templi, ma riguarda il problema specifico del tiburio del duomo di Milano, anche se poi Bramante offre alcune considerazioni di natura più ampia. Inoltre Bramante esprime riserve sul duomo non tanto perché è gotico, quanto piuttosto perché manca di coerenza in alcune parti; infatti il suo suggerimento per risolvere correttamente il problema del tiburio è di comprendere l'organismo architettonico (in questo sì, è albertiano) dal punto di vista spaziale e di adeguarvi.

### I FLAVI E GIULIO II

L'autrice incorre in una semplificazione quando considera il celeberrimo piano di pergamena (Uffizi 1A) come esempio di aderenza ai „thermal principles” (59) in cui la grandiosità delle dimensioni, le forme curvilinee e i ritmi dinamici rimandano alle terme imperiali. Da tempo Christof Thoenes ha però avvertito come il disegno bramantesco celi

una sorta di paradosso: il progetto che è sempre stato valutato come l'apice dell'avvicinamento all'architettura antica si basa invece su un concetto strutturale non-romano, cioè la cupola centrale su quattro pilastri, circondata da masse murarie solo apparentemente solide (Bramante e la „bella maniera degli antichi”, in: *Sostegno e adornamento. Saggi sull'architettura del Rinascimento: disegni, ordini, magnificenza*, Milano 1998, 59–65). La mancanza di coerenza strutturale è probabilmente uno dei motivi per cui questo progetto „non ebbe effetto”, come registra Antonio da Sangallo il Giovane sul retro della pergamena (e non Giuliano da Sangallo, come afferma erroneamente Tanner, 62).

Originale è l'analisi dei riferimenti all'arte dei Flavi nell'iconografia di Giulio II (106–116), dove emergono chiaramente riferimenti a Gerusalemme; per esempio Nagonius nel *Prognosticon Hierosolymitani* (e non *Hierosomilytani*, 107) esorta il papa a imitare Tito e liberare la Terra Santa. Nel 1504 Giulio II entra in possesso di un bacino in granito dalle terme di Tito, che fa collocare nel cortile del Belvedere; le campagne di scavi alla ricerca di antichità proseguono e nel 1506 viene alla luce anche il gruppo scultoreo del Laocoonte, subito posto dal papa nel cortile delle statue. Bisogna tuttavia precisare che non fu Michelangelo (111) a identificare il gruppo scultoreo come Laocoonte, bensì Giuliano da Sangallo, come ricorderà il figlio Francesco in una lettera del 1567 a Vincenzo Borghini (Sonia Maffei, *La fama del Laocoonte nei testi del Cinquecento*, in: Salvatore Settis, *Laocoonte. Fama e stile*, Roma 1999, 110–111).

### GERUSALEMME CELESTE E TERRESTRE

Partendo dalla considerazione che la letteratura è ricca di riferimenti generici alla Gerusalemme celeste come modello per la basilica vaticana, la seconda parte del libro intende invece trovare un modello specifico tra gli edifici della Gerusalemme terrestre e vuole dimostrare che la ricostruzione della basilica di San Pietro si basa su una precisa scelta ideologica: il tentativo di creare un'analogia tra il sepolcro di Cristo e la tomba di san Pietro. Il legame tra le due chiese diventa evidente quando si considera che le due tombe non sono poste esat-

tamente al centro delle rispettive cupole, ma spostate di qualche metro verso ovest; un fuori-centro che era già stato riproposto nella prima imitazione del Santo Sepolcro su territorio italiano, cioè nella basilica di Santo Stefano a Bologna.

Tanner suggerisce così che proprio Nicolò V prenda a modello il Santo Sepolcro e questa ipotesi acquisterebbe ancora maggior spessore comparando la basilica di San Pietro con le contemporanee chiese commissionate ad Alberti come mausolei da personaggi vicini alla cerchia di Nicolò V: il sacello Rucellai a San Pancrazio, la Santissima Annunziata (Firenze), il San Francesco o Tempio Malatestiano (Rimini), San Sebastiano e Sant'Andrea (Mantova). Anche in questo caso, si tratta di un'ipotesi suggestiva, ma che è costruita sulla semplificazione di un panorama che in realtà doveva essere molto più articolato e complesso, se la stessa Tanner riconosce che queste chiese „are plagued by issue of authorship, dating, plan, and materials” (161). Anche Bramante e i suoi successori avrebbero, infine, rispettato il fuori-centro della tomba per rendere esplicito il richiamo al Santo Sepolcro. Persino Michelangelo, comprendendo l'importanza di questo riferimento, avrebbe messo in atto delle correzioni ottiche („optical accommodation”, 191), come lo slittamento delle finestre delle absidi, in modo che l'altare potesse sembrare al centro della crociera, suggerendo cioè la centralità e nello stesso tempo mantenendo il fuori-centro: ma se il riferimento al sepolcro di Cristo era così importante, per quale motivo Michelangelo avrebbe dovuto mascherarlo?

Il testo è sfortunatamente costellato da una grande quantità di refusi; vi sono poi alcune informazioni troppo generiche, come per esempio il fatto che Cosimo Bartoli venga curiosamente presentato come un „artist and Etruscologist” (27) o che Giuliano Leno (o Leni) sembri essere considerato un vero e proprio architetto (65), mentre gli studi di Ivana Ait e Manuel Vaquero Piñero (*Dai casali alla fabbrica di San Pietro: i Leni uomini d'affari del Rinascimento*, Roma 2000) hanno inequivocabilmente dimostrato che si trattava più che altro di un abi-

le impresario edile. Anche l'informazione che Vanvitelli avrebbe ruotato di 90° l'asse della basilica di Santa Maria degli Angeli costruita da Michelangelo nei resti delle Terme di Diocleziano è sbagliata (n. 103, 224), come già Antonio Pasquinelli aveva chiarito nel 1925 (Le vicende edilizie di S. Maria degli Angeli, in: *Roma: rivista di studi e di vita romana* 3, 1925, 395–356).

Una ricerca così estesa e complessa richiede l'impiego di una grande quantità di fonti letterarie, che Tanner conosce in modo approfondito e utilizza diffusamente, anche se non è chiara la scelta di tradurre alcune in inglese e lasciarne altre in lingua originale (latino o italiano). Si tratta, in ogni ca-

so, di uno studio di ampio respiro, che merita di essere letto perché ha il pregio di proporre nuove ipotesi in un campo, la letteratura petriana, che rischia di richiudersi su se stesso; ora invece si aprono nuove piste per andare alla ricerca di Gerusalemme nella città di Roma.

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