“INTER DUAS METAS”

URBAN MEMORY AND MONUMENTAL TRANSFORMATION ON THE VATICAN PLAIN

by

Margaret Cecile Reinhardt

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

Master of Arts

in

Art History

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY
Bozeman, Montana

May 2024

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure Page

LIST OF FIGURES CONTINUED

Figure Page

LIST OF FIGURES CONTINUED

Figure Page

ABSTRACT

During the Middle Ages, four funerary monuments in an area known today as the Borgo underwent a syncretic transformation of memory. These monuments are the Vatican Obelisk, Meta Romuli, Terebinth of Nero, and Mausoleum of Hadrian. All four were erected during the Imperial period, between the first-century BCE and the second-century AD. This thesis groups these four funerary monuments into a funerary program that shapes the historical narrative of the Vatican plain. They were established during the early Imperial period under a funerary precedent and contributed to the religious development of Rome into a Christian city after Saint Peter was martyred in *Vaticanum* during the first century. As a funerary program, they contributed to a shift in Rome's power dynamic as the religious narrative of the Empire changed from polytheistic to Christian during the Middle Ages. By analyzing these monuments' identities, architectural framework, historical progression and topographical connections, this study aims to explore how their legacy has been preserved and integrated within the *ager Vaticanus* from the Roman Empire through the Renaissance.

INDRODUCTION

Places have so forceful a power of suggestion that it is no wonder that the technical art of memory is based upon them. - Piso[1]

For Romans, ensuring the persistence of the deceased's memory was paramount when it came to erecting funerary monuments. A funerary monument can be generally defined as a work of architecture or sculpture that commemorates a deceased individual or family. The primary motive was not to contain remains, but rather to serve as a tangible reminder of the deceased for the living. The ultimate intent of a funerary monument was the lasting memory maintained through a persistent connection with a living audience. As Björn Ewald has pointed out in his discussion of funerary monuments and sculpture, for a society without cohesive views on eschatology and post mortal existence, a funerary monument could assure the memory of the deceased for as long as it maintained viewership.[2] Tombs that were eye-catching, whether in size, decoration, or location, were those that would maintain the most viewership and interaction with the living. The importance of memory in Imperial Rome can be inferred from the definition of the Latin *memoria,* which was concerned with oratory and central to the intellectual and political life of ancient Rome.[3] *Memoria* referred not only to the ability of a speaker to retain knowledge, but also the act of effectively communicating that knowledge to an audience. When speaking about *memoria* in relation to funerary monuments, it can be interpreted as an architectural form's

---

[1]Cicero, *De finibus*. Translated by C. Edwards. Interpreted by Davies, Penelope J.E. in *Death and The Emperor: Roman Imperial Funerary Monuments from Augustus to Marcus Aurelius.* University of Texas Press, Austin. (2000). Pg. 136

[2]Ewald, Björn, C. "Funerary Monuments" in *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Sculpture*. Oxford Academic (2015). Pg. 390.

[3]Burton, Gideon O. "Canons of Rhetoric: Memory" in *Silva Rhetoricae.* Brigham Young University (2007).

ability to both retain and communicate the knowledge of one's life - whether that be through location, plan, or decoration - to those viewing it. In Imperial and Republican Rome, the location of a funerary monument could be considered just as important in maintaining the deceased's memory as a monument's physical form and decorative program. For those who had the monetary means to do so, funerary monuments in the form of mausoleums would be erected to hold the remains of family members spanning generations.[4] Burial within the *pomerium*, or Rome's sacred boundary, was banned, so arterial roads leading in and out of the city became popular locations for families to situate their tombs.[5] These arterial roads also increased a tomb's viewership and interaction with the living, as citizens and visitors passed by on their way in or out of the city. Topographical associations between landmarks were influential when it came to a tomb's ability to maintain an individual or family's memory, and Romans were aware of a building's ability to communicate with other pre-existing monuments within their environment.[6] An example of this is the Mausoleum of Augustus built on the northern Campus Martius in 28 BCE, two years after Augustus' victory at Actium. The Mausoleum assumed the guise of a trophy, previously argued by Penelope Davies, and symbolically benefited from its location on the Campus dedicated to Mars, the god of war, as well as the other temples built there that were associated with victory.[7] Augustus furthered his funerary complex in the later years of the first

[4]The location and design of Funerary sculpture could depend on location, gender, and class. See Ewald, Björn, C. "Funerary Monuments". Pg. 392.
[5] Beard, Mary. North, John. Price, Simon. "Religions of Rome". (Vol. 1) *University of Cambridge* (1998). Pg. 180
[6] Davies, Penelope J.E. "The Power of Place" in *Death and The Emperor: Roman Imperial Funerary Monuments from Augustus to Marcus Aurelius.* University of Texas Press, Austin. (2000). Pg. 137.
[7] Davies ". Pg. 67. See Chapter 2, "An Image of Things Achieved".

century BCE by erecting the Altar of Peace (Ara Pacis) and the Solarium, where an obelisk was used as a sundial. This complex wove together inspiration from Egyptian sources, most evident in the Mausoleum's design and use of the obelisk. By incorporating these elements alongside the theme of peace embodied by the Ara Pacis, the funerary complex served as a testament to Augustus's accomplishments, particularly his victory at Actium while also symbolizing his contributions to the Empire.

A tomb's form and decorative program could further communicate topographical associations with other monuments by using specific visual elements that may persuade the tomb's audience to associate the deceased with a specific event, place, or person. This is exemplified by Augustus' use of Egyptian and traditional forms in his funerary complex. The ability of a monument to communicate with those viewing it through combination of form, place, and decoration, created a symbiotic relationship between the tomb, viewer, and the deceased's memory.

Between roughly the fourth and sixteenth centuries, four funerary monuments from the Roman imperial era - the Vatican Obelisk, Mausoleum of Hadrian, Meta Romuli and Terebinth of Nero - underwent a syncretic transformation of memory (Figure 1). All four were erected on the Vatican plain, between the first-century BCE and the second-century AD. Two still stand today, the Mausoleum of Hadrian, now Castel Sant'Angelo, and the Vatican Obelisk, which now stands in the courtyard of Saint Peter's Basilica. The monuments occupied a strip of land running east to west, between Nero's Circus and Hadrian's Mausoleum, now partially occupied by the Via della Conciliazione. The funerary monuments, all located within a two-mile radius of one another

defined the *ager Vaticanus,* or Vatican plain, from the first century BCE to the twelfth century, when the Terebinth was torn down.

The Meta Romuli, Terebinth and Mausoleum of Hadrian were tombs, interred with remains, possibly of several family members.[8] The Meta Romuli, a pyramid tomb and Terebinth, a circular mausoleum, possibly modeled after a tumulus mound, were both knocked down by the fifteenth-century. A fifteenth-century description of the Meta Romuli describes a burial chamber with several niches for urns, while archeological evidence from the Terebinth indicates a circular foundation and height similar to the Mausoleum of Hadrian. It is justified to propose that a tomb of this size would hold the remains of several family members.[9]

The Vatican Obelisk differs from the three tombs. When it was brought to Rome under Caligula in 37 AD, it wasn't intended for the interment of human remains; it was placed at the *spina* of the emperor's circus on Vatican hill. In its location at the center of a Roman circus, the Vatican Obelisk served as a gift to the sun and gained cyclical significance as chariots raced around it on the track, resembling an image of the universe. The obelisks' relationship to the circus's cyclical symbolism indicated funerary associations, which will be further discussed in Chapter 2. By the end of the second century, a tomb had been placed at the base of the Obelisk, transforming it into a funerary marker.[10]

---

[8] Hadrian's Mausoleum held the remains of the Nerva-Antonine dynasty from Hadrian to Commodus, including Antoninus Pius, Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus. See Borg, Barbara. *Roman Tombs and the Art of Commemoration: Contextual Approaches to Funerary Customs in the Second Century CE*. Cambridge University Press (2019). Pg. 99

[9] Petacco, Laura. "La Meta Romuli e il Terebinthus Neronis" in *La Spina: dall'agro vaticano a via della Conciliazione*. Gangemi Editore (2017). Pg. 38

[10] This is a tomb excavated by Castagnoli, see Castagnoli, F., II Vaticano nell'antichità classica (Vatican City 1992) and described by Liverani in "La Topografia Antica del Vaticano". *Monumenti, Musei e Gallerie Pontificie (Città del Vaticano)* (1999) Pgs. 130-133. For a diagram

Between 326 and 333 AD, Constantine erected Old Saint Peter's Basilica on the site of Peter's tomb in Rome, overlapping the northern end of Nero's circus.[11] The four monuments' topographical proximity to Peter's martyrdom and subsequent basilica, as documented by written accounts, led them to become powerful symbols tied to the founding of the church under the apostle.[12] The four monument's association with Peter's martyrdom is not due to one account specifically, but several. First, according to the second century Roman historian Tacitus, many Christians were killed in Nero's Circus in 64 AD, after the emperor blamed them for the Great Fire.[13] Peter is assumed to be one of these Christians, his body was later buried on the land just north of the Via Cornelia. Two other accounts of the martyrdom are given; one by pseudo-Lino and the other by pseudo-Marcello, both likely dated before Constantine as argued by L. Duchesne in 1902.[14] Pseudo-Lino accounts for both the crucifixion and burial, stating that the martyrdom happened *ad locum qui vocatur Naumachiae iuxta obeliscum Neronis* (.. a place called *Naumachiae,* near the obelisk of Nero).[15] While the account of pseudo-Marcello only mentions the burial, which was *sub terebinthum, iuxta Naumachiam, in locum qui appellatur*

---

of the tombs in the Vatican Circus see Gee, Regina "Cult and Circus in *Vaticanum". Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome*. Pg. 65.

[11] The term "Old Saint Peter's" refers to the first basilica erected by Constantine, later replaced by the current basilica in the 16th C. See Tronzo, William *St. Peter's in the Vatican*. Cambridge University Press, 2005.

[12]The Ancient legends of Peter's martyrdom are from the Pseudo-Marcello and the Pseudo-Lino, they both locate the martyrdom and burial within the Vatican Plain. See Tolotti, Francesco. "Dov'era il terebinto del Vaticano?" In *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome. Antiquité*, Rome 91 (1979). Pg. 491.

[13] Tacitus, *The Annals*. XV, 44, 45. Ed. by Church, John A. and Brodribb, William J. Discussed in Gee, Regina "Cult and Circus in *Vaticanum".* Pg. 72.

[14] Tolotti, Francesco. " pg. 492.

[15] Tolotti, Francesco. ". pg. 491.

Vaticanus (under the Terebinth, near the Naumachia, in a place called *Vaticanus*).[16] A second-century text, *The Acts of Peter,* describes the crucifixion as having happened *ad therebintum inter duas metas...in Vaticano* (at the Terebinth, between two *metae,* in *Vaticano*).[17] Of these four accounts, several identifiable terms may be noted: *obeliscum Neronis, therebintum, metae,* and *Vaticano* or *Vaticanus,* referring to the Vatican plain (*ager Vaticanus)*. The terms used in the accounts of Peter's martyrdom and burial were, from the fourth century onwards, associated with several architectural landmarks within the *ager Vaticanus;* the Vatican Obelisk, Meta Romuli and Terebinth of Nero. The Mausoleum of Hadrian, although not noted in the earliest accounts of the martyrdom, is still included in this study, because, like three other funerary monuments, it becomes associated with a Christian legend - Pope Gregory's sixth century vision of the Archangel Michael - and is thus incorporated into the larger Christian architectural narrative of the Vatican plain.

During the Middle Ages, from around the sixth to the fourteenth century, the four funerary monuments became popular attractions for religious processions and pilgrims, as they made their way to Old Saint Peter's Basilica. Medieval guidebooks like the *Mirabilia Urbis Romae,* gave short historical and decorative descriptions of these monuments, providing a kind of guided tour for pilgrims visiting the city. A Christian procession called the Major Litany that took place between the sixth and twelfth centuries also passed by the four funerary monuments

---

[16] Both inscriptions are thought to have been written no later than Constantine. See Tolotti, Francesco. "Dov'era il terebinto del Vaticano?". Pgs. 491-492.

[17] *Inter duas metas* seen in Liverani "La Topografia Antica del Vaticano" pg. 42. Further interpreted in Temple, Nicholas. *Renovatio Urbis: Architecture, Urbanism and Ceremony in the Rome of Julius II*. Florence: Taylor and Francis Group (2011) and Petacco, Laura. "La Meta Romuli e il Terebinthus Neronis". Pg. 34

on the way to the Basilica for mass. The presence of Peter's body and martyrdom on the Vatican plain, led the land to be historically bound to the church, tying it to foundational Christian chronology. As Christianity became the official religion of the Empire, solidified by Theodosius in 380, a gradual shift in religious authority took place, from Emperor as *pontifex maximus,* to the authority of the papacy. As *pontifex maximus,* the emperor was responsible for preserving and promoting religious life and cults in the Empire. The emperor held religious dominance in Rome and was an intermediary between gods and citizens.[18] The fourth century marked a period of transition, as Christianity was now legalized in Rome, the presence of traditional cults was maintained, while Christianity grew in popularity throughout the Empire. The status of Peter and Paul's martyrdom elevated the city to a high status, and the growth of the Christian population as well as pilgrims visiting the city steadily grew in the fourth and fifth centuries.[19] After the Western Roman Empire fell in the later fifth century, the religious authority held by the emperor was subsequently transferred to the papacy. A fourth century document, the "Donation of Constantine", discovered as forgery in the fifteenth century, asserted that Constantine had supposedly transferred the Pope temporal authority over the Western Roman Empire.[20] The power shift present - from Emperor as the *pontifex maximus* to the Pope - persuaded the church to find markers within the city's urban landscape that could aid in their claim to power. The church's need for topographical particularity led to certain monuments within Rome's landscape to be designated as predestined sites connected to the martyrdom of Peter; he was the preeminent connection for the church to the Vatican plain. The monuments that adorned the land, then

[18] Beard, Mary. North, John. Price, Simon. "Religions of Rome". (Vol. 1). Pg. 252
[19] Beard, et al. "Religions of Rome". Pg. 377
[20] Temple. "Signposting Peter and Paul" in *Renovatio Urbis.* Pg. 13

offered the popes tangible symbols that aided in the transformation of Rome from an Imperial city to a Christian one.

The Vatican Obelisk, Meta Romuli, Terebinth of Nero and Mausoleum of Hadrian, each tied to Christian history and Peter's martyrdom, collectively served as architectural features that preceded a pilgrim's journey to Saint Peter's Basilica. Each was described in guidebooks like the *Mirablilia,* and together, they emphasized the importance of Peter's remains and the precise site of his martyrdom. This thesis groups these four funerary monuments into a funerary program that shapes the historical narrative of the Vatican plain between the first-century BCE and the Renaissance. They were established during the early Imperial period under a funerary precedent and contributed to the religious development of Rome into a Christian city after Saint Peter was martyred in *Vaticanum* during the first century. As a funerary program, they contributed to a shift in Rome's power dynamic as the religious narrative of the Empire changed from polytheistic to Christian during the Middle Ages.

It should be noted that although a religious distinction may be made between "polytheistic Roman" and "Christian Roman", a cultural distinction cannot be. Christians, although possessing unique religious beliefs, were still citizens of Rome, and participated in the cultural, social and political aspects of the Empire. As Mary Beard points out, during the first and second centuries, many Christians still participated in local and traditional cults.[21] In terms of the importance of place and its relationship to religious identity, Benjamin Kedar proposes a

[21]An example is a group called the Naassenes, who partook in the cult of Magna Mater on the Vatican hill, not far from the site of Peter's grave. Although the Naassenes did not participate in all of the cult's practices, like castration, they still actively shared in some traditions, such as the consumption of sacrificial meat. See Beard et. al. *Religions of Rome* (Vol. 1). Pg. 310.

typology for studying what he calls “spiritual convergence” in holy places that have shared religious meaning.[22] The Vatican plain would occupy his first type titled “spatial convergence” in which two religions may occupy the same space and function separately.[23] During the first and second-centuries, both pagan and Christian cults were present on the Vatican plain. Under Augustus, worship of foreign deities was banned within Rome’s *pomerium,* or sacred boundary, requiring foreign cults to develop on the land outside the boundary, which included the *ager Vaticanus*.[24] The worship of several deities, including Magna Mater and Isis, were present within the territory of *Vaticanum* and the Campus Martius, contributing to the overall narrative of the funerary monuments located in the territory.[25] During the first century a martyr cult honoring Peter emerged on Vatican hill near the circus*,* evidence provided by a graffiti wall discovered underneath the present day basilica. The wall includes Peter’s name, mentioned in the context of *memoria Petri*.[26] The use of the Vatican plain by both foreign and martyr cults during the first and second centuries defines the territory as a space of spiritual convergence.

---

[22] Kedar, Benjamin “Convergences of Oriental Christian, Muslim, and Frankish Worshippers: The Case of Saydnaya.” In *De Sion exhibit lex et verbum domini de Hierusalem: Essays in Medieval Law, Liturgy and Literature in Honour of Amnon Linder*, edited by Yitzhak Hen, 59–69. (2001).

[23] Heyden, Katharina. "Construction, Performance, and Interpretation of a Shared Holy Place: The Case of Late Antique Mamre (Rāmat al-Khalīl)".) *Institute of Historical Theology, University of Bern* (2020) pg. 201

[24] Beard et. al. *Religions of Rome*. pg. 177.

[25] For a map of Foreign Cults in Rome and their locations see Beard, Mary. North, John. Price, Simon. “Religions of Rome”, Volume 1.

[26]Further evidence is provided in a letter by Presbyter Gaius, who states “But I can show you the trophies of the apostles. For whether you go to the Vatican, or along the Via Ostiense, you will find there the trophies of those who founded this Church”. From Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica*, 2, 25, 5-7, further interpreted in Tolotti, Francesco. “Dov’era il terebinto del Vaticano?”. Pg. 498 and 511.

The current state of the field regarding the transfer of power in Rome - from Emperor to papacy - and the subsequent urban development of the Vatican plain, from Constantine to Pope Julius II, has been well-researched and documented. Paolo Liverani's *La Topografia Antica del Vaticano* provides an archaeological map of the Vatican territory, establishing the archaeological evidence present in and around the current Basilica of Saint Peter. He discusses the several tombs found in and around Nero's Circus, including the second century tomb at the base of the obelisk. Liverani also discusses the archaeological evidence of the cult to Magna Mater and its physical presence at the *Phrygianum*. The topographical significance of the obelisk and circus pertaining to the cult of Magna Mater and martyr cult is further discussed by Regina Gee in her article "*Cult and Circus in Vaticanum "*. Gee argues for the progressive continuity of Nero's Circus and its role in the religious narrative of the city from the first through the fourth centuries. Nicholas Temple's *Renovatio Urbis: Architecture, Urbanism and Ceremony in the Rome of Julius II* documents a history of church liturgy and the architectural and urban development of the Vatican plain under the papacy. Throughout the chapter "Signposting Peter and Paul", Temple consistently refers to a line by Prudentius that outlines the topographical significance of the Tiber to the martyrdom and burial of the apostles. Temple argues that Prudentius' account suggests that the Vatican was "fated " to host the martyrdom of Peter before the event actually happened. The following chapters of his book discuss humanist interest in the topography of Rome during the Renaissance, and how the papacy's urban planning was shaped around the historical accounts of the martyrdom of Peter and Paul. Laura Petacco's chapter "La Meta Romuli e il Terebinthus Neronis" in *La Spina: dall'agro vaticano a via della Conciliazione,* discusses similar links between the architectural monuments on the Vatican plain, specifically the Meta Romuli and

Terebinth, and their connections to both each other and the accounts of Peter's martyrdom in *The Life of Peter*. Petacco includes archaeological evidence and written accounts of these monuments, providing an image of their original form and decorative programs. The four funerary monuments along with their original form, significance, location, sources of influence and historical records have been discussed individually by authors such as Penelope Davies, Mary Boatwright, and Brian Curran. However, they have not yet been assessed as a cohesive group that collectively provided an architectural progression contributing to a larger narrative as Rome's religious and temporal authority was transferred from the emperor to the Papacy.

The overarching goal of this study is to provide a comprehensive examination of the Vatican Obelisk, Meta Romuli, Hadrian's Mausoleum, and Terebinth of Nero as a cohesive group of architectural landmarks that have shaped and defined the topography and urban funerary narrative of the Vatican plain. By analyzing these monuments' identities, architectural framework, historical progression, and topographical connections, this study aims to explore how their legacy has been preserved and integrated within the *ager Vaticanus* from the Roman Empire through the Renaissance. This approach seeks to deepen our understanding of the monuments' interconnected role in the historical and religious progression of the Vatican plain.

References

Beard, Mary. North, John. Price, Simon. "Religions of Rome". (Vol. 1) *Universityof Cambridge* (1998).

Borg, Barbara. *Roman Tombs and the Art of Commemoration: Contextual Approaches to Funerary Customs in the Second Century CE*. Cambridge University Press (2019).

Burton, Gideon O. "Canons of Rhetoric: Memory" in *Silva Rhetoricae.* BrighamYoung University (2007).

Davies, Penelope J.E. “The Power of Place” in *Death and The Emperor: Roman Imperial Funerary Monuments from Augustus to Marcus Aurelius.* University of Texas Press, Austin. (2000).

Ewald, Björn, C. “Funerary Monuments” in *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Sculpture*. Oxford Academic (2015).

Heyden, Katharina. "Construction, Performance, and Interpretation of a Shared Holy Place: The Case of Late Antique Mamre (Rāmat al-Khalīl)".) *Institute of Historical Theology, University of Bern* (2020)

Kedar, Benjamin “Convergences of Oriental Christian, Muslim, and Frankish Worshippers: The Case of Saydnaya.” In *DeSion exhibit lex et verbum domini de Hierusalem: Essays in Medieval Law, Liturgy and Literature in Honour of Amnon Linder*, edited by Yitzhak Hen, 59–69. (2001)

Petacco, Laura. “La Meta Romuli e il Terebinthus Neronis” in *La Spina: dall’agro vaticano a via della Conciliazione*. Gangemi Editore (2017).

Temple, Nicholas. *Renovatio Urbis: Architecture, Urbanism and Ceremony in the Rome of Julius II*. Florence: Taylor and Francis Group (2011).

Tolotti, Francesco. “Dov’era il terebinto del Vaticano?” In *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome. Antiquité*, Rome 91 (1979).

CHAPTER ONE

SETTING THE SCENE: THE VATICAN PLAIN BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER THE IMPERIAL PERIOD

In Cicero's *De finibus,* Piso states...

> Is it our nature or fantasy, I wonder, that on seeing those places that tradition records to have been the favorite haunts of distinguished men, we are more moved than when we hear of their deeds or read something they have written?[27]

As Piso suggests, the ability of place to hold memory was extremely powerful to the Romans, to such a degree that we can assume topographical associations were grounded in their reasoning when choosing where to place their most beloved works of architecture. The Vatican plain holds powerful religious associations and historical memory within Rome's topographical landscape, providing a suitable area for the erection of funerary monuments erected during the early imperial period. The Vatican Obelisk, Meta Romuli, Mausoleum of Hadrian, and Terebinth were all erected within a two-mile radius and tied together in pilgrimage guidebooks written in the twelfth century. This chapter will discuss the history of the Vatican plain before, during and after the Imperial period to set the scene for the erection of funerary monuments fleshed out in later chapters. It will also map out the processional routes used to tie participants to the urban environment in the Middle Ages.

[27] Cicero, *De finibus*. Translated by C. Edwards, as in Davies, Penelope J.E. "The Power of Place". Pg. 136.

The Vatican Plain from the 7th - 2nd Centuries BCE

The earliest history of the territory, known to the Romans as *mons Vaticanus* or *Vaticanum* is suggested to trace back to the founding of Rome under Romulus.[28] Paolo Liverani suggests that the name *Vaticanus* is derived from the Etruscan territory, *Vaticum,* located within the territory that Romans came to know as the *mons Vaticanus*.[29] During the Roman Kingdom (753 – 509 BCE), the *ager Vaticanus* was associated with battles conducted by Romulus against the Veneti, and the sequence of hills that occupied the territory northwest of the Tiber became essential in the early defense of Rome against Etruscan troops. Starting with a fifth-century BCE Roman Consul named *Titus Romilius Rocus Vaticanus*, the title *Vaticanus* became associated with the *Romilia gens*, an ancient line that claimed descendance from Romulus.[30]

The settlements of southern Etruria, namely Veii and Tarquinia, had the most influence on Roman culture. Tarquinia, known for supplying Rome with the Tarquin Kings, who ruled them until the end of the Monarchy in 509 BCE and the rise of the Republic.[31] Veii was the closest Etruscan settlement to Rome geographically, and was eventually conquered in 396 BCE during the Republic. The funerary construction and topography of Veii had undoubtable influence over Rome, especially when it came to the placement of tombs within a landscape. Archeological evidence dating back to the seventh-century BCE, shows that around this time the elite classes in

[28] Liverani "La Topografia Antica del Vaticano", Monumenti*, Musei e Gallerie Pontificie (Città del Vaticano)* (1999). pp. 13-17.
[29] Liverani, "pp. 13-17.
[30] Liverani, "pp. 13-17.
[31] Leighton, Robert "Urbanization in Southern Etruria from the Tenth to the Sixth Century BC: The Origins and Growth of Major Centers". In *The Etruscan World*. Ed. by Jean MacIntosh Turfa. *Taylor and Francis Group* (2013). Pg. 143

Veii began investing in stone and tile buildings.[32] As Robert Leighton points out, this is suggestive of shifting priorities in property ownership that pertain to long-term investments. It is also around this time that burial mounds in Veii became multi-generational.[33] This shift in both property ownership and burial practice alludes to the increasing signs of dynastic claims to power, something which is present in Imperial Roman architecture, exemplified in dynastic tombs such as the Mausoleum of Augustus and Hadrian. Seventh-century burial patterns in Veii may also be related to those present near *Vaticanum* in Rome. Burial developments in the Etruscan settlement show the increasing popularity of erecting funerary monuments near the entry and exits of the city.[34] In these burial site patterns, it was common for higher ranking familial tombs to be located to the north of the city. In a map provided by Robert Leighton, it is indicated that several burials were located outside the city walls of Veii, with several located across the Cremera (a tributary to the Tiber). In Etruria, the act of crossing rivers, rather than the river itself, were associated with cult and funerary practice. This trend may be associated with the placement of our four funerary monuments located in *Vaticanum*, as those visiting would have to actively cross the river in order to visit the deceased.[35] The location of Roman tombs outside the city's boundary, although somewhat influenced by burial settlements in Veii, are mainly due to the ban of burial within the *pomerium,* which was enforced until the fourth-century.[36]

---

[32] Leighton. "Urbanization in Southern Etruria" pg.134
[33] Leighton, ", pg. 139
[34] Leighton, ", pg. 138
[35] Edlund-Berry, Ingrid. "Religion: The Gods and the Places" in *The Etruscan World*, pg. 559
[36] Beard, Mary. North, John. Price, Simon. "Religions of Rome". Pg. 177

During the seventh-century BCE tumuli started to be erected in Etruscan settlements, which would commonly house several members of a family including burial goods.[37] The tumuli were reflective of Etruscan altars, which in their earliest forms were mounds of earth that were eventually replaced by piles of stone.[38] Along with being a visual reference to an altar, a tumulus mound had similar celestial references to pyramids; they provided a 'stairway' to the sky. The form of a hill, in a funerary context, may also allude to protection. It is known that Etruscans choose to settle in places with clusters of hills or on hilltops as a means of natural defense mechanism.[39] The form of a hill can therefore be seen as a symbolic reference to protection, in hopes that loved ones remain invulnerable in the afterlife. Given the cross-over between Etruscan and Roman funerary practice, it comes as no surprise that Romans used *Etrusca disciplina* as a term for defining sacred space.[40] The location and forms that defined burial practice in Veii are certainly replicated in the establishment of funerary monuments in *Vaticanum* during the Imperial period. Our four monuments placement across the Tiber, to the north, and on the arterial roads leading in and out of Rome imitate the trends seen in the funerary architecture of Veii. Perhaps, to recall memory of the Etruscan territory their tombs now occupied, Hadrian, and the unknown elite responsible for the Terebinth and Meta Romuli, aimed to imitate traditional Etruscan burial practices in the erection of their own tombs.

[37] Leighton, ", pp. 139
[38] Rafanell, Simonai. "Etruscan Religious Ritual" in *The Etruscan World*. Pg. 567
[39] Edlund-Berry. ", pg. 560
[40] Edlund-Berry. ", pg, 557

The Vatican Plain and Imperial Rome

The *ager Vaticanus* saw low populations of inhabitants in the first and second centuries BCE. Its rough marshland terrain was susceptible to flooding and provided intolerable farming land.[41] The main function of the region, established in the first-century BCE, was the luxurious *horti* that covered most of the area. These large plots of undeveloped land allowed members of the imperial family and Roman elites to construct private estates and funerary structures. For example, the *Horti Agrippinae*, Agrippina the Elder's luxurious villa-estate, occupied part of the *mons Vaticanus,* in the area just south of the Via Triumphalis.[42] This is the land that Caligula would inherit and erect his circus on in 40 AD. After the Great Fire in 64, Nero, who had inherited the *Horti* from his mother, instigated a mass execution of Christians in the Circus and housed those who had lost their homes to the fire on the land (See Figure 1).[43] A bridge, called the *Pons Neronianus* was erected sometime during the first-century, probably by either Caligula or Nero in order to provide access to the Circus and garden estate.[44] Under Hadrian in the second-century, another bridge, the *Pons Aelius,* was erected in order to increase traffic to his Mausoleum.[45]

The religious narrative of the *ager Vaticanus* during the early Imperial period is partially defined by its topographical connections to Etruria and the mythical eighth hill of Rome, with cult activity in the region mainly fostered during the reign of Claudius (41-54 AD). Cult worship

---

[41] Davies, Penelope J.E. "The Power of Place". Pg. 158
[42] Liverani, " pg. 20
[43] Gee, Regina. "Cult and Circus in *Vaticanum*". Pg. 72
[44] Liverani, " pg. 20
[45] Boatwright, Mary T. *Hadrian and the Cities of the Roman Empire,* Princeton University Press, New Jersey (2000).

present in the Vatican region is associated with Cybele, Isis, and the misunderstood Robigo (m. Robigus). Paolo Liverani points out that the term “Vaticanum" was often paradigmatic to the cult of Cybele, citing several inscriptions from cities within the empire, including Lyon, that titled their local sanctuaries to the goddess “Vaticanum”.[46] Cybele’s worship in *Vaticanum* was associated with rite cleansing and renewal, and the performed practice of taurobolium, or the sacrifice of bulls that took place during her festival, the *Hilaria*. [47]

The Phrygianum, or sanctuary to Cybele, was thought to be located directly to the north of Nero’s circus and constructed during the second-century AD.[48] Archaeological evidence from 1609 unearthed altars that were erected in the area northwest of the circus, under the present day facade of Saint Peter’s.[49] Although the present archaeological evidence dates from the second to fourth-centuries, Cybele’s presence in Rome can be dated back to the third-century BCE, her early worship connected to the Circus Maximus. The Phrygian goddess’s association with the seasons paired well with the metaphorical representation of symbolic planets (chariots) traveling around the sun (obelisk) in Roman circuses. During her festival titled the *Megalensia,* worshippers would carry the goddess’s cult statue to the Circus Maximus, where the subsequent sacred games of Magna Mater were held.[50] The visual representation of the goddess seated in a chariot drawn by two lions seems to be a popular theme in Imperial art of the second-century AD. A small bronze figurine (Figure 2) dating to the second half of the second century depicts Cybele in a chariot drawn by two lions, holding her tympanum.

---

[46] Liverani “, pg. 28
[47] The Hilaria took place March 15-27. See Gee, Regina. “Cult and Circus in *Vaticanum*”.
[48] Liverani, “, pg.29
[49] Gee, Regina. “Cult and Circus” pg. 68
[50] Gee, Regina. “Cult and Circus” pg. 68

It was under Claudius that the cult of Cybele expanded into the *ager Vaticanus* during the first century. This dedication to Cybele and the expansion of her cult in the Vatican territory is most likely due to Claudius' inheritance of the land that was located next to Nero's Circus, where he was able to provide the property needed to expand the cult. The topography of the land and associations with the circus also happened to provide the perfect environment for Cybele's cyclical connections to thrive, further discussed in Chapter 2. Claudius's dedication to the goddess included officially recognizing Attis as her consort and dedicated the *Hilaria*.[51]

The theme of deities associated with seasonal cycles and vegetation seemed to be the main subject matter for cult worship within the area to the northwest of the Tiber. The cult site to Robigo, or Robigus, the god of wheat and 'rust', was present on the *Via Clodia* north of Rome.[52] The identity and gender of Robigo has been debated by scholars, some relaying that the deity was male, while others, based on evidence provided by Ovid, argue she is female. In Ovid's *Fasti,* he provides a detailed account of *Flamen Quirinalis* performing rites for the *Robigalia,* an agricultural festival honoring the deity. The official route of the *Robigalia* is provided by Joseph Dyer in his discussion of the Major Litany, which we will return to later in this chapter. The procession began in the seventh region of Rome and traveled up the *Via Lata*, eventually crossing to the *Via Flaminia* and continued north, crossed the *Ponte Milvio*, and concluded in a wheat field where sacrifice would take place.[53] In Ovid's *Fasti,* he provides a detailed account of

[51] Gee. " pg. 69
[52] Liverani, ", pg.19
[53] Dyer, Joseph. "Roman Processions of the Major Litany (*litanie maiores)* from the Sixth to the Twelfth Century" in *Roma Felix: Formation and Reflections of Medieval Rome*. ed. Éamonn Ó Carragain and Carol Neuman de Vegvar (2007). Pg. 115

the rites given during the procession, and helps characterize the deities' nature of worship. During the rites of the *Robigalia*, the *Flamen Quirinalis* states.

> Harsh Robigo, spare the blades of Ceres, and let the light shoot tremble on the topmost soil. You allow the crops to grow, nourished by the stars of a favorable sky, until they become fit for the sickles. Your power is not light: the crops that you have marked, the sad farmer counts those as lost; neither have the winds harmed Ceres so much nor the rains, nor blighted by frost resembling marble does she grow so pale, as much as if Titan heats the damp mounds: then there is a place, frightful goddess, for your anger. Spare, I pray, and take your rough hands away from the harvests, and do not harm the crops; it is enough to be able to harm.[54]

It is in this passage of the *Fasti*, the priest characterizes Robigo as 'harsh', and indicates that she will harm crops. He also contrasts the deity with Ceres, begging she won't be harmed. Morgan Palmer argues that during the time Ovid wrote his *Fasti,* the *Pax Augustae* was under threat, and the contrast between Ceres and Robigo illustrates the vulnerability of the peace. Palmer points out another passage in the *Fasti,* which states "And do not embrace the tender crops, but embrace hard iron, destroy first what is able to destroy others.".[55] Palmer claims this is an attempt by the *Flamen Quirinalis* to dissuade Robigo from 'rusting' the wheat, and to rather turn her rust towards iron weapons, which can harm the *Pax Augusta.* The association of Robigo with rust comes from Vergil's *Georgics,* where he states.

> Evidently also a time will come when a farmer in that land, having shifted the soil with a curved plow, will find javelins eaten away by corrosive rust, or will strike empty helmets with heavy rakes, and will wonder at the large bones from dug up graves.[56]

---

[54] Palmer, Morgan E. "A Blight on the *Pax Augusta*: The Robilagia in Ovid's *Fasti*". *Classical World.* Vol. 111, No.4. (2018). Pg. 511
[55] Palmer. "A Blight on the Pax Augusta" pg.509
[56] Palmer. ", pg. 515

In this passage, Vergil warns of a threat to farmers which is *scabra robigine,* or "corrosive rust". Palmer points out that the main meanings of robigo were "rust" or "rust like coating".[57] This identification of Robigo with rust, characterizes the deity as one associated with decay of wheat, in contrast to Ceres, who provides peace and prosperity. The land located on the west bank of the Tiber was filled with wheat fields, which were the main destination for the *Robiglia.* In Roman fashion, the festival seemed to be practiced to prevent Robigo from harming wheat, which would cause threat to agricultural fertility and peace instilled by the *Pax Augustae.*

The worship of agricultural fertility and the cycle of seasons seems to have been a recurring theme present in the religious narrative of the Tiber's right bank. The Janiculum hill and *mons Vaticanus*, which also provided a gateway to Etruria, functioned under association with Janus, the Etruscan god of gateways and transitions. The association with Etruria to the north and deities of fertility and the changing seasons, helped to characterize the Tiber's right bank as a topographical landscape charged with new beginnings and productivity. This religious narrative, which emphasized the cycle of life and death, provided useful associations for funerary architecture to relate to on a topographical level. The religious narrative of the Vatican plain would be furthered under a Christian context, as the land hosted the martyrdom of Peter.

The Cult of Peter and Christian Identity in the Vatican Plain

The association of Christian Cult activity on the spina od Nero's Circus begins with the crucifixion of Peter, which is said to have taken place *ad therebintum inter duas metas...in Vaticano.* Due to the martyrdom of Peter, and its placement within *Vaticanum* as suggested by

[57] Palmer, ".pg. 513

accounts, the subsequent construction of Old Saint Peter's led Rome to become the second most desired pilgrimage city (second to Jerusalem) by the twelfth century.[58] The Holy Year, first introduced by Pope Boniface VIII in 1300, and subsequent Jubilee celebrations attracted thousands of pilgrims and provided Popes an opportunity to solidify their legacy. The celebrations placed a special emphasis on sites and graves connected to apostles and martyrs in an effort to further religious meaning for pilgrims visiting the city.[59] In order to evoke Roman consanguinity and establish Christianity's mark on the city, and the Vatican in particular, several Roman monuments in the area of the Borgo were redefined under a Christian context.[60] The Vatican Obelisk, Meta Romuli, Terebinth of Nero, and Mausoleum of Hadrian, four monuments that evoked a connection to Imperial Rome and subtly transformed into Christian sites would provide pilgrims with a meaningful religious experience and etiological connection to their past. The legend of Peter's martyrdom and its relationship to each of the four funerary monuments will be further addressed in later chapters. While this last section aims to establish the Christian memory present within *Vaticanum* in order to validate the papacy's involvement with the transformation of the four funerary monuments during the Middle Ages.

As the Old Saint Peter's became an increasingly popular destination for pilgrims, processional routes, as Nicholas Temple puts it, provided the "glue" that binds the dispersed and fragmented topography of the city."[61] The emphasis placed on these routes during the Middle

---

[58] Temple, Nicholas. "Signposting Peter and Paul" in *Renovatio Urbis: Architecture, Urbanism and Ceremony in the Rome of Julius II*. Florence: Taylor and Francis Group, 2011. Pg. 13
[59] Temple. "Signposting Peter and Paul". Pp.12
[60] The Borgo was the name given to the Roman *Ager Vaticanus* during the Middle Ages. See Borgatti, Mariano (1926). *Borgo e S. Pietro nel 1300 - 1600 - 1925*. Federico Pustet, Roma.
[61] Temple. " Pg. 12

Ages is not so different from Augustan processions of the first century, which helped to provide an intentional urban image for those seeking religious affiliations throughout the city.[62] Processional routes, in creating clear pathways between architectural features, helped tie participants to their urban environment. The main pilgrimage route through Rome in the Middle Ages was known as the Via Peregrinorum, which entered the city from the north via the Monte Mario and continued down the Via Triumphalis.[63] The route then extended west through the Borgo and continued to Old Saint Peter's. After visiting the basilica pilgrims would turn south, crossing the Ponte Sant'Angelo (previously the *Pons Aelius*) into the Campus Martius, traveling further south and ending at San Paolo fuori-le-mura[64]. The fundamental purpose of the pilgrimage routes throughout Rome served to create ritualistic relationships between the followers of the Christian faith and the topography of the ancient city.

To locate the four funerary monuments and their participation in these pilgrimage routes during the Middle Ages, we must turn to twelfth-century pilgrimage guidebooks. The most popular of these guidebooks was known as the *Mirabilia Urbis Romae* or the "Marvels of Rome" written sometime around 1140.[65] The *Mirabilia* provided direction for pilgrims visiting the city, but also served in setting a precedent for Christian ownership of Rome by reiterating the Roman past within a Christian context. For example, in the second section of the book, titled "Diverse Histories touching certain famous Places and Images in Rome", six classical "legends" of Rome

---

[62] See Favro, Diane. *An Urban Image of Augustan Rome*. Cambridge University Press (1996). Figure 45 for examples of Augustan Age processional routes.
[63] Temple. " Pg. 9
[64] Temple." Pg. 9
[65] The Marvels of Rome (*Mirabilia Urbis Romae*) edited and translated by Francis Morgan Nicholas. *Italica Press,* New York (1986).

are told. One legend is that of Octavian's vision and the founding of the Basilica Santa Maria in Aracoeli. In this legend, Octavian "Hearkened to the Sibyl" of the Tiber River and heaven opens up to him[66]. Once opened he sees a virgin holding a child and hears a voice telling him that this virgin will conceive the savior of the world and that what he beholds is the altar of the son of God. On the spot where the sibyl of the Tiber prophesied the coming of Christ to Augustus, is where Santa Maria in Aracoeli was consecrated in the twelfth century. In its function as a guidebook for pilgrims, the *Mirabilia* was able to create notions that the city of Rome was predestined for Christianity.[67] The guidebook sought out creating essential connections between the founders of the Empire and the papacy.

The third section of the book, titled "A Perambulation of the City ", served as a guide to those visiting Rome on pilgrimage.[68] Although the section does not describe a specific route for pilgrims to follow, it gives several short descriptions (each will be discussed in later chapters) of ancient Roman monuments in a specific order pilgrims may have felt compelled to follow. The title of the chapter hints to the idea that a pilgrim may have addressed the chapter in a manner indicating it was intended to lead them on a kind of tour, hence the use of the term "perambulation".

In order of object's address, The *Mirabilia* first mentions the Vatican and "the Needle", or the Obelisk, which, during the twelfth century, would have stood at the south end of Constantine's Basilica (Figure 3). The obelisk could be accessed through a narrow road to the

---

[66] *Mirabilia Urbis Romae.* Pg. 37
[67] See Temple. "Signposting Peter and Paul" and Hamilton, Louis I. "The Rituals of Renaissance: Liturgy and Mythic History in *The Marvels of Rome".* in *Medieval Encounters.* Volume 17. *Brill Publishing* (2011). Pp. 417-438.
[68] *Mirabilia Urbis Romae.* Pg. 37

south of the basilica's courtyard, horizontally cutting through the Circus of Nero. The obelisk stood directly in front of the rotundas Sant 'Andrea and Santa Petronilla, attached to the transept of the church.

The guidebook then addresses the pinecone fountain that adorned the courtyard of the basilica and moves on to our next two funerary objects of interest, the Meta Romuli, a pyramid shaped tomb clad in white marble, and the Terebinth of Nero, a rotunda.[69] The exact location of both monuments can be somewhat difficult to differ, however there is a hypothesis that may be formed from archeological evidence and several medieval maps. According to a fifteenth-century document known as the *Nuremberg Chronicles* (Figure 4), the Meta Romuli was located on the northside of the ancient Via Cornelia, between the Mausoleum of Hadrian and the Vatican.

Another document which depicts the pyramid before it was torn down is by Pietro del Massio, which shows the *Meta* behind the walls of the city, in a similar location to where it is placed in the Nuremberg document (Figure 5). Archeological evidence from the 1948 construction of the Auditorium della Conciliazione revealed the cement foundation of the pyramid, which was originally torn down in 1499 for the construction of the Via Alessandrina.[70] The exact location of the pyramid in ancient Rome would have been on the northeast intersection of the Via Cornelia and Via Triumphalis, under the modern-day intersection of the Via della Conciliazione and the Via della Traspontina.

The Terebinth proves more challenging to locate due to the scarcity of visual culture depicting the monument and the speculation surrounding its nature as a possible tree (this will be

---

[69] *Mirabilia Urbis Romae.* Pg. 37

[70] Petacco, Laura. "La Meta Romuli e il Terebinthus Neronis" in *La Spina: dall'agro vaticano a via della Conciliazione*. Gangemi Editore (2017). Pg. 36.

discussed further in a later chapter dedicated to the monument).[71] However, historian Laura Petacco mentions that during the construction of the Palazzo Pio and Auditorium della Concillazione in 1948 the remains of a circular tomb were found.[72] This information would locate the Terebinth within close vicinity to the Meta, somewhere along the ancient Via Cornelia to the east of the basilica.

The *Mirabilia* then continues east to the Mausoleum of Hadrian, which it calls the "Castle of Crescentius", crosses the Ponte Sant'Angelo at its south entrance, entering the Campus Martius and continues towards Capitoline hill, briefly describing the monuments and recounting a history as it goes.[73] The purpose of the *Mirabilia*, was not to provide a detailed description of each Roman monument it crosses, but rather redefine the marvels of the pagan city as ones that were inherently tied to some kind of Christian destiny. As Stefano Riccioni states "As old objects were repurposed for new settings, the new city was "written" into being."[74] The *Mirabilia,* written by a canon of Saint Peter's, provided pilgrims an intrinsic connection to the old city, creating the illusion that it was predestined for the rise of the Christianity. That is not to say that the purpose of the guidebook was to erase Roman history, but rather it celebrated a renewal of ancient Rome, one that would organize the city in a way that highlighted the significance of the papacy in the area.

---

[71] Tolotti, Francesco. "Dov'era il terebinto del Vaticano?"
[72] Petacco, Laura. "La Meta Romuli e il Terebinthus Neronis", pg. 38
[73] The name comes from Crescentius's defense of it against Otho in 998. See The Marvels of Rome (Mirabilia Urbis Romae) edited and translated by Francis Morgan Nicholas. *Italica Press,* New York (1986). Pg. 78
[74] Riccioni, Stefano. "Rewriting Antiquity, Renewing Rome. The Identity of the Eternal City through Visual Art, Monumental Inscriptions and the *Mirabilia"* in *Medieval Encounters.* Volume 17. *Brill Publishing* (2011). Pg. 440.

We can only postulate that the order of monuments laid out in the guidebook was an exact route followed by pilgrims when they entered the city, although it does provide a strong outline to begin piecing a pilgrimage route together. For the purpose of this study, we will only focus on the monuments and route established in the area of the Vatican and Borgo, ending our journey at the Ponte Sant'Angelo.

The second popular topographical guide regarded by pilgrims in the twelfth century was the *Liber Politicus,* written by the same canon of Saint Peters that wrote the *Mirabilia,* titled Benedict.[75] The book contained an *Ordo*, or a liturgical record, as well as documented several processional routes traveled during the twelfth century. One processional route that predates the *Liber Politicus* and the *Mirabilia* was titled the Major Litany. Although somewhat altered in its later stages, the Major Litany survived far past the twelfth century and is recorded in the *Liber Politicus.*

Historian Joseph Dyer has pointed out the processional route got its name due to the fact that, during the Middle Ages, Roman processions were commonly accompanied by the chanting of litanies.[76] The Major Litany was an exceptionally popular route from the sixth to the ninth centuries and took place on the 25th of April. The date, and processional route followed both correlate with the ancient Roman *Robigalia,* as pointed out by Dyer.[77] The Christian procession followed the *Robigalia* for the first half, but then turned south and continued towards Saint Peters'. The Major Litany chose the starting point of their procession as the church of S. Lorenzo in Lucina, partially due to its proximity to the Via Lata, and partially due to the large area

[75] Hamilton, Louis. "The Rituals of Renaissance". Pp. 419
[76] Dyer, Joseph. "Roman Processions of the Major Litany." Pg. 111
[77] Dyer, " pg.115

provided by the *Horologium* of Augustus which provided sufficient space for participants to gather. The Major Litany then followed along the path of the *Robigalia,* traveling north through the Aurelian wall and crossing the Tiber at the Milvian bridge. The route then turned south, passing through the *ager Vaticanus* to Hadrian's Mausoleum. After this the group would turn west and follow the route of the Via Cornelia passing both the Terebinth of Nero and the Meta Romuli as they approached the basilica. It is unknown whether these were stopping points for the participants, however it should be noted that in recounting a Roman processional route, the participants of the Major Litany illuminated their Roman past, following the original route and ending with mass at Saint Peters. In following a pre-Christian ritual, the Papacy was, in a sense, resurrecting the pagan foundation of Rome while simultaneously creating a new tradition that glorified the Christian heritage embedded in the city.

This route that the Major Litany followed was well established until the early ninth century, when minor changes were made. Three centuries later, the route was split into three separate ceremonies, the first was for the papal-curial procession, the second for the urban procession of the clergy, and the third for the procession of Lateran canons.[78] All three ceremonies changed their starting point from S. Lorenzo to San Marco. Dyer suggests this is due to the road conditions north of the city present in the Middle Ages, plus an effort in shortening the route. The change of location to San Marco as the starting point for the procession eliminated the route of the *Robigalia* in the Major Litany, as the procession traveled northwest to Saint Peters, no longer following the path north and looping back around. The *Liber Politicus* is one primary source that accounts for the changes in the route, which, for the clerical and Lateran

[78] Dyer, Joseph. ", Pg. 125

procession, only differed in the starting point. The papal curial procession, however, began at the Lateran, traveled to San Marco, and then, as Dyer suggests, traveled through the Perione region, and crossed the Tiber at the Ponte Sant'Angelo, continuing west towards the basilica.[79]

Although the twelfth-century route no longer traced the pagan path of the *Robigalia,* the importance of imperial monuments to the Church was still present in the twelfth century as shown by the *Mirabilia.* The essential difference between a guidebook like the *Mirabilia* and a processional route like the Major Litany is that the procession itself was a religious practice. The *Mirabilia* rather laid out a route and described sites pilgrims may have felt obligated to stop at along the way. The guidebook set a new proprietorship for imperial monuments by both re-defining them under Christian context and re-organizing their topographical relationships. Although functionally different, both guidebooks and processional routes allowed participants to emulate ancient Rome in search of an etiological connection to the Christian present. In the following chapters, we will discuss the relationship between a Roman imperial past and a Roman Christian present, in the context of the Middle Ages, and aim to differ how these identities and relationships shaped the transformation of funerary monuments on the Vatican plain.

References

Beard, Mary. North, John. Price, Simon. "Religions of Rome". (Vol. 1) *University of Cambridge* (1998).

Boatwright, Mary T. *Hadrian and the Cities of the Roman Empire,* Princeton University Press, New Jersey (2000).

Davies, Penelope J.E. *Death and The Emperor: Roman Imperial Funerary Monuments from Augustus to Marcus Aurelius.* University of Texas Press, Austin. (2000).

[79] Dyer, " pg. 129

Dyer, Joseph. “Roman Processions of the Major Litany (*litanie maiores)* from the Sixth to the Twelfth-Century” in *Roma Felix: Formation and Reflections of Medieval Rome*. ed. Éamonn Ó Carragain and Carol Neuman de Vegvar (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 112-37

Edlund-Berry, Ingrid. “Religion: The Gods and the Places” In The Etruscan World. Ed. by Jean MacIntosh Turfa. *Taylor and Francis Group* (2013).

Favro, Diane. *An Urban Image of Augustan Rome*. Cambridge University Press (1996)

Gee, Regina. “Cult and Circus in *Vaticanum*”. *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome.* Vol. 56/57. (2011/2012). Pp. 63-83. University of Michigan Press for the American Academy in Rome.

Hamilton, Louis I. “The Rituals of Renaissance: Liturgy and Mythic History in *The Marvels of Rome”.* in *Medieval Encounters.* Volume 17. *Brill Publishing* (2011). Pp. 417-438

Leighton, Robert “Urbanization in Southern Etruria from the Tenth to the Sixth Century BC: The Origins and Growth of Major Centers". In The Etruscan World. Ed. by Jean MacIntosh Turfa. *Taylor and Francis Group* (2013).

Liverani, Paolo. “La Topografia Antica del Vaticano”. *Monumenti, Musei e Gallerie Pontificie (Città del Vaticano)* (1999).

Palmer, Morgan E. “A Blight on the *Pax Augusta*: The Robilagia in Ovid’s *Fasti*”. *Classical World.* Vol. 111, No.4. (2018). Pp. 503-523.

Petacco, Laura. “La Meta Romuli e il Terebinthus Neronis” in *La Spina: dall’agro vaticano a via della Conciliazione*. Gangemi Editore (2017). Pp. 33-39

Rafanelli, Simona. “Etruscan Religious Rituals: The Archeological Evidence” In The Etruscan World. Ed. by Jean MacIntosh Turfa. *Taylor and Francis Group* (2013).

Riccioni, Stefano. “Rewriting Antiquity, Renewing Rome. The Identity of the Eternal City through Visual Art, Monumental Inscriptions and the *Mirabilia " in Medieval Encounters.* Volume 17. *Brill Publishing* (2011). pp . 439 - 463.

The Marvels of Rome (*Mirabilia Urbis Romae*) edited and translated by Francis Morgan Nicholas. *Italica Press,* New York (1986).

Temple, Nicholas. “Signposting Peter and Paul” in *Renovatio Urbis: Architecture, Urbanism and Ceremony in the Rome of Julius II*. Florence: Taylor and Francis Group, 2011. Pp. 7-33.

Tolotti, Francesco. “Dov’era il terebinto del Vaticano?” In *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome. Antiquité*, Rome 91 (1979).

CHAPTER TWO

THE VATICAN OBELISK

The emperor Caligula (37-41 AD) moved the Vatican Obelisk to Rome from Alexandria in 37 AD and erected on the *spina* of his circus, built in his mother's gardens (*Horti Agrippinae*) on the *mons Vaticanus.* The inclusion of an obelisk in a Roman circus was established by Augustus in 10 BCE when he erected the one on the *spina* of the Circus Maximus. The intended function of an obelisk placed on the *spina* of a circus as established by Augustus was as a votive offering to the solar god, the chariots circumambulating the monument were representative of the planets.[80] The combined image of circus, obelisk and chariots promoted the obelisk's funerary symbolism denoting the progression of the seasons and cyclical life and death. The Vatican Obelisk's identity as a funerary monument was different from that of the Meta Romuli, Terebinth and Mausoleum of Hadrian, in that it was not initially erected by Caligula for the interment of human remains. However, after Caligula's Circus fell into disuse during the second half of the second century, a tomb was attached to the obelisk's base.[81] More tombs began encroaching the circus during the second and third centuries, marking the area as a popular funerary zone.

Two accounts allude to the obelisk's role in the martyrdom of Peter. The first by pseudo-Lino indicates that Saint Peter's martyrdom happened in the circus, near the Vatican Obelisk. The second in *The Acts of Peter,* indicates that the martyrdom happened, …. *Inter duas metas,* perhaps referring the *metae* that served as endpoints on either side of a Roman circus, the obelisk

[80] See Gee, Regina. "Cult and Circus in *Vaticanum*". And Davies, Penelope J.E. *Death and the Emperor.*
[81] Liverani, Paolo. "La Topografia Antica del Vaticano". Pg. 131

would be placed directly in between. Tacitus' first century account further supports the above descriptions. He comments on Nero's massacre of Christians in the circus, it can be assumed that Peter may have been amongst the individuals executed there. These accounts and the proximity of Peter's martyrdom led both the circus and obelisk to become valuable locations tied to religious authority and the growth of Christianity in Rome. In the fourth century, Constantine would erect a basilica to Peter on the northern edge of the circus. The obelisk's sepulchral purpose was furthered during the twelfth century when it was deemed the supposed tomb of Julius Caesar due to a misinterpretation of its inscription. The funerary monument's association with both Saint Peter's martyrdom and status as the supposed tomb of Julius Caesar, led it to become a popular stopping point for pilgrims during the Middle Ages. This chapter will map the progression of the Vatican Obelisk - from a solar votive offering to its current position marking Saint Peter's square - and establish topographical relationships between cults and other monuments, to locate its funerary significance within the larger picture of the Vatican Plain's funerary program.

Augustus's Model: The Obelisks of Rome

Augustus set a precedent for the imperial reception of obelisks when he moved two to Rome from Alexandria in 10 BCE. When they arrived, they were each crowned with a gilt-bronze sphere and pointers and given identical dedicatory inscriptions, both stating:

> When Imperator for the twelfth, consul for the eleventh, and tribune of the people for the fourteenth time, Imperator Augustus, son of divine Caesar, dedicated this obelisk to the sun, when Egypt had been brought under the sway of the Roman people.[82]

[82] Curran, Brian A. Grafton, Anthony. Long, Pamela O. and Weiss, Benjamin. "Obelisk: A History". *Burndy Library Publications*. (2009). Pg. 36.

The first, now known as the Flaminio Obelisk, was placed on the spina of the Circus Maximus and the second was erected in Augustus's funerary complex on the Campus Martius. The inscription alludes to their intended role as gifts to the sun, or Sol, and symbols of Augustus's victory over Cleopatra and Mark Antony in the Battle of Actium. Both obelisks would occupy both a religious and triumphal role, enhanced by their chosen placement within the urban landscape.

The use of a single obelisk on the spina of a circus - first demonstrated by Augustus in the Circus Maximus - was crucial to Roman's interpretation of their solar significance. A Roman circus was interpreted as a type of seasonal map, the obelisk placed at the center was an offering to the solar god. Charax of Pergamon, who wrote between the mid-first and sixth centuries, stated that a circus was an "image of the universe", its twelve caceres associated with the twelve months of the year.[83] As the chariots raced around the obelisk at the center, their counterclockwise movement could be equated to the movement of planets. Penelope Davies points out that although this cosmic allegory of circuses was present long before Augustus's reign, it was cemented by his placement of the Circus Maximus obelisk, which acted as a solar allegory.[84] The circus, obelisk, and chariot's concurrent use provided Romans a representation of seasonal life and death that could be equated with funerary symbolism. For example, the chariot and circus became popular motifs used on sarcophagi during the first and second centuries. A relief fragment dated to the reign of Trajan (Figure 6) depicts a veristic couple standing next to a

[83] Davies, Penelope. "Imperial Cosmos" in *Death and The Emperor.* pp . 83
[84] Davies, Penelope. *Death and The Emperor.* pp . 84

circus with a quadriga racing around an obelisk at the center. Commenting on the representation of circuses on sarcophagi, Davies states:

> Through depiction of the circus's circular motion, those who commissioned these works seem to have hoped to arrest the course of natural decay by symbolically harnessing the regenerative powers of the universe.[85]

The second obelisk, used as an sundial gnomon at Augustus's Solarium on the Campus Martius, occupied similar solar symbolism as its casted shadow moved across an inscribed slab of pavement which marked days, hours and the signs of the Zodiac.[86] The Solarium was placed directly across from the Ara Pacis, or Altar of Peace, both catered to the vision of stability and prosperity that Augustus's victory over Egypt brought to the Empire. Located to the north of the Ara Pacis and Solarium was the Mausoleum of Augustus, erected several years earlier. The Mausoleum's entrance was adorned with two smaller obelisks which flanked the inscribed *Res Gestae,* or "things achieved".[87] These obelisks served a funerary purpose similar to ones seen in Egypt during the Fifth Dynasty, when pharaohs began erecting smaller obelisks in pairs at the entrance of tombs.[88] These small funerary obelisks commonly faced east, so that they would meet the rays of the rising sun, an allegory embodying the resurrection of the dead.[89] The entire complex - Mausoleum, Solarium, and Ara Pacis - created an iconographic scheme alluding to peace, prosperity and victory that Augustus contributed to the Empire.

---

[85] Davie, Penelope. *Death and The Emperor.* pp . 84
[86] Favro, Diane. The Urban Image of Augustan Rome. *Cambridge University Press* (1996). Pg. 264.
[87] Favro ". pg. 264.
[88] Curran, et al. "Obelisk: A History".pg. 20.
[89] In Egypt, obelisks were considered mediators between heaven and earth. Their dedicatory inscriptions ensured a sustained afterlife for the names of those inscribed into their face. See Curran, et al. *Obelisk: A History.*

Although Augustus had an intended image for his obelisks and their topographical placement in Rome, the erection of a single obelisk, rather than two at the Circus Maximus and Solarium differs from their original Egyptian interpretation, placed in pairs at the entrance to a temple or tomb.[90] The erection of a singular obelisk, is identified with the Roman interpretation, initially done by Augustus, and duplicated by other Emperors. The concept of erecting a singular obelisk at the center of an architectural framework, rather than two flanking a temple's entrance, may also be traced back to Ptolemaic rule in Egypt. The first record of the erection of a single obelisk can be dated to the rule of Ptolemy II Philadelphus (284-246 BCE), who commissioned an obelisk in honor of his wife Arsinoe and placed it at the center of the courtyard to his Arsinoeion.[91] This obelisk was moved to the Forum in Alexandria between 12 and 15 AD, where it remained until the sixteenth-century, according to an Alexandrian map.[92] Augustus may have observed this obelisk's original placement at the Arsinoeion, inspiring him to erect his monoliths in a similar fashion. Whatever the inspiration, by erecting a single obelisk, Augustus, once again set a precedent for his successors, like Caligula, to follow.

When Augustus first moved obelisks to Rome, he did so with several intentions; first, as a display of triumph over Egypt, and second to encourage the use of the obelisk as a solar symbol.[93] Augustus re-dedicated his obelisks to the Roman solar personification, Sol and solidified an obelisks cosmic symbolism by erecting one in the Circus Maximus. Subsequently,

---

[90] McKenzie, Judith. "The Architecture of Alexandria and Egypt (c. 300 BC to AD 700). *Yale University Press* (2007).
[91] McKenzie, Judith. *"* Pp. 33
[92] McKenzie, Judith. *"* Pp. 52
[93] The use of an obelisk as a solar symbol mirrored their identification in Dynastic Egypt as representations of the rays of the sun. see Curran, et al. *Obelisk: A History.*

obelisks obtained funerary symbolism under Augustus in several ways. First, in a circus, where an obelisk assumed the role of the sun, equipped with regenerative powers, and connected to the passing of the seasons. The Circus Maximus became a religious institution itself, associated with the sun-cult, the obelisk placed at the center set the standard for all other obelisks brought to Rome.[94] And second, as monuments that adorned a funerary complex, both harnessing the powers of the sun, in the Solarium, as well as flanking the entrance to his tomb. It was only 27 years later that Caligula, the great-grandson of Augustus, would follow the obelisk model established by his predecessor and erect an obelisk in his own Circus on the *Mons Vaticanus*.

The Vatican Obelisk in Rome

The Egyptian origin of the Vatican Obelisk is somewhat debated, due to its lack of hieroglyphic inscription. Pliny tells us that the obelisk was commissioned by "Nuncoreus, the son of Sesostris", although some argue that the obelisk may have been commissioned by Cleopatra in honor of Caesar and it was lying at the site of the Forum Julium when Cornelius Gallus was appointed the first prefect of the new territory in 30 BCE.[95] Regardless of who originally had the obelisk cut, Cornelius Gallus was the first to erect it in the center of his newly built Forum Julium, which is said to have flanked the north side of Cleopatra's Caesarium in Alexandria.[96] Cornelius Gallus dedicated the obelisk to Augustus in 30 BCE, and added a bronze inscription recording his

---

[94] Zietsman, J.C. "Crossing the Roman Frontier: Egypt in Rome (and beyond)". *Acta Classica, Classical Association of South Africa.* (2009). pg. 7.
[95] Parker, John Henry. "The Twelve Egyptian Obelisks in Rome: Their History Explained by Translations of the Inscriptions Upon Them". *Leopold Classic Library* (1879). Pg. 21.
[96] McKenzie, Judith. *The Architecture of Alexandria Egypt.* Pp. 177

commission of the Forum.[97] When Gallus was forced from office his inscription was removed and the obelisk was rededicated to Tiberius and Augustus during Tiberius's reign, this time the letters were inscribed into the stone rather than drilled in.[98]

In 37 AD, Caligula ordered that the obelisk be brought to Rome, where he sunk it on the spina of his circus, built on his mother's gardens in the *mons Vaticanus.* Upon the arrival of the obelisk, Caligula, like Augustus before him, placed a gilt-bronze orb and gnomon at its summit.[99] The obelisk was placed with the inscribed dedicatory inscription to Augustus and Tiberius facing the east/west axis. In his investigation of the obelisk's inscription, Eric Iverson has pointed out that most Latin or Greek inscriptions on obelisks placed in Roman circuses were facing the longitudinal axis, this way the members of the audience would have an easier time viewing them. Iverson argues that the placement of the Vatican obelisks inscription facing the opposite direction was intentionally planned by Caligula, whose mother and brother were killed at the hands of Tiberius. Right after Tiberius's death, Caligula had his family members' remains returned to Rome and interred in the Mausoleum of Augustus. Iverson states:

> It is clearly improbable that Caligula, having made a public demonstration of filial piety towards his mother, would have followed it with an equally public and utterly unnecessary slight upon her memory by consecrating a memorial to her murderer in her own gardens.[100]

---

[97] This is the bronze inscription noted by Iverson that was removed. See Iverson, Erik. "The Date of the So-Called Inscription of Caligula on the Vatican Obelisk" *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*. Vol 51. (1965).
[98] This emulates the dynastic tradition of engraving text into the monument's surface. See Curran, Brian, AN. et al. "Obelisk: A History". Pp. 36
[99] Curran, Brian, AN. et al. ". pg. 44.
[100] Iverson, Erik. "The Date of the So-Called Inscription of Caligula on the Vatican Obelisk". Pp. 151

Iverson additionally points out that the eastern facing inscription was almost completely erased, concluding that Caligula deliberately intended to vandalize and conceal the inscription dedicating the monument to Tiberius. While his argument is convincing, it should also be acknowledged that most dynastic Egyptian obelisks, as well as Ptolemaic ones, were usually placed with their inscription facing east, so that they would meet the rays of the rising sun, an allegory embodying the resurrection of the dead.[101] Although Romans did not recognize an afterlife in the same way Egyptians did, Caligula, in modeling Augustus's use of the obelisk as a solar allegory, may have intended for the inscription to face the rising sun. Caligula's recognition of the obelisk's solar and cyclical symbolism was not foreign to Roman interpretation of the monument, as it had been firmly established by Augustus's placement of an obelisk on the spina of the Circus Maximus.

During the reign of Claudius (41-54 AD), the circus and obelisk became important topographical associations for the religious development of the Vatican plain. As discussed in the first chapter, several foreign cults were established on the Tiber's west bank, forbidden from entering Romulus's sacred boundary. Under the reign of Augustus, the worship of Egyptian rites would be banned within the *pomerium,* forcing them to be established in the *Transtiberim*.[102] There are several cults that were settled on the *mons Vaticanus* and surrounding area that topographically relate to the obelisk's funerary and cosmic significance. The first and most prominent is the cult of Cybele and her consort Attis, established on the land to the north of the Vatican circus during the

[101] Several examples can be seen at Saqqara and Abu Sir. See Curran, Brian, A. et al. "Obelisk: A History". Pp. 20-21.
[102] Beard, Mary. North, John. Price, Simon. "Religions of Rome". (Vol. 1). Pp. 177

reign of Claudius, and further developed during the second-century.[103] Cybele had already been associated with cult worship at the Circus Maximus, her relationship to renewal and the seasons symbiotically interacted with the identification of the circus as a universal map.[104] The establishment of Cybele's worship near the Vatican circus was most likely an extension of her role at the Circus Maximus, her seasonal associations further nurtured by her connection to Attis. Attis was associated with the seasonal cycle of vegetation, and funerary symbolism in nature, as flowers decayed in the fall and blossomed in the spring. The worship of Cybele and Attis on the Vatican hill supplemented the circus's cosmic associations, both alluding to the seasonal cycle of life and death.

Another deity that could be connected to both the obelisk's cyclical significance and its origin as an Egyptian monument is the worship of Isis-Ceres in Rome. The worship of Isis was revived during the reign of Domitian (81-96 AD), a temple to her and Serapis established on the Campus Martius during the second half of the first-century.[105] Her sanctuary was filled with Egyptian objects, including obelisks and sculpture, and her image was commonly depicted on the funerary monuments of women who served as her servants in life.[106] The identity of Isis was equated with Ceres in Rome, specifically her role in the invention of crops. A passage from the Temple of Hephaestus (Ptah) in Memphis, Egypt states "I am she who invented crops for humans. I am she who rises in the Dog Star. ..... I am in the rays of the sun. I accompany the passage of

[103] Gee, Regina. "Cult and Circus in *Vaticanum*". Pg. 68.
[104] Gee, Regina. "Cult and Circus in *Vaticanum*". Pp. 68
[105] The cult of Isis was suppressed in the late Republic. See Beard, Mary. North, John. Price, Simon. "Religions of Rome" (Vol. 1). Pg. 250.
[106] Beard, Mary. North, John. Price, Simon. "Religions of Rome". (Vol. 1). Pp. 308

the sun."[107] The Roman Ceres was commonly associated with the Dog Star or *cane sidero,* which would rise on the 25th of April, the same date the *Robigalia* took place, an agricultural festival honoring Robigo.[108] As noted in chapter one, the purpose of the *Robigalia* was to prevent Robigo from harming the crops of Ceres, an excerpt from Ovid's *Fasti* states "Harsh Robigo, spare the blades of Ceres", another passage stating "Let the ox come under the yoke, let the seed come under the plowed lands; peace nurtures Ceres, Ceres is the nursling of peace."[109] Morgan Palmer argues that Ovid's record of the *Robigalia* was written during a time when the *Pax Augusta* was vulnerable. Robigo may have been associated with this threat, as she endangered the agricultural fertility (Ceres) associated with Augustan peace, narrated in the frieze of the Ara Pacis.[110] Augustan peace was brought on by his victory in Egypt; Egyptian deities, like Isis, and artistic forms such as obelisks, would've served as visual and religious reminders of the *Pax Augusta.* In order to reach the Circus on the Via Cornelia, visitors would have to pass the Meta Romuli, a pyramid tomb clad in white marble. The tomb's pyramidal form and obelisks' Egyptian origin may have topographically benefited each other, evoking the memory of Augustus's Egyptian campaign and subsequent peace. The presence of sanctuaries associated with Egyptian deities, located outside the *pomerium,* would've also encouraged this image, acknowledging the religious growth of Rome under Augustus and his successors.

It should also be noted that cult worship surrounding the Circus Maximus, which inspired Caligula's placement of the Vatican Obelisk, was commonly associated with agricultural fertility

---

[107] Beard, Mary. North, John. Price, Simon. "Religions of Rome". (Vol. 2). Pp. 297
[108] Palmer, Morgan E. "A Blight on the *Pax Augusta*: The Robilagia in Ovid's *Fasti*". Pp. 517
[109] Palmer, Morgan E. "A Blight on the *Pax Augusta".* Pg. 515
[110] Ovid's *Fasti* was written between the 2nd and 8th centuries AD. See Palmer, Morgan E. "A Blight on the *Pax Augusta"* . pp. 508-511.

and the changing of seasons. The Consualia, which took place at the end of summer on August 21st, included a sacrificial rite and offering at the altar of Consus at the southeast end of the Circus Maximus. This rite was performed by the Flamen Quirinalis, the priest who performed the *Robigalia.* Consus was the deity charged with protecting grain and overlooking the harvest process, his festival honored the seasonal transition from summer to fall. Following the rite, horse races would take place in the Circus, which were open to the public, attracting citizens who wished to honor the horses and their hard work plowing fields during the harvest season.[111] Ceres, shrine was located to the northwest of the Circus Maximus, during her festival, the Cerealia, foxes were let loose in the Circus with torches strapped to their backs. The theme of agricultural fertility and seasonal vegetation surrounding the Circus Maximus was likely transferred to Caligula's Circus, exemplified by the sanctuary to Cybele and Attis. The equation of Isis with Ceres, and her role as the "inventor of crops" and "rays of the sun", may have furthered an obelisk's role in a circus, which symbolized the sun and its participation in the passing of the seasons, as crops came and went. It can be argued that there was a topographical relationship between Circuses and foreign cult practice in Rome, each benefiting from each other's cyclical symbolism. The circus's image as a metaphor of the universe, combined with cult practice of deities dedicated to the seasons and subsequent growth and decay of crops contributed to the Vatican Obelisk's overall image as a funerary monument.

It was under Nero (54-68 BCE) that the Vatican Obelisk's association with the sun was further cultivated. Nero modeled Republican leaders when he inherited the Horti Agrippinae from

[111] Favro, Diane. "The City is a Living Thing: The Performative Role of an Urban Site in Ancient Rome, the Vallis Murcia". *Studies in the History of Art*, Vol. 56. (1999). Pg. 210

his mother by opening up the gardens to the public, hosting games and banquets.[112] The emperor used the circus as a stage to act out the role of Sol/Helios, who is depicted riding in a chariot in most visual representations.[113] Nero's image as Phoebus-Apollo was first made public in 64, when drove his chariot through the Theater of Pompey, and again in the Circus Maximus, where he placed offerings to the solar god at the foot of the Flaminio Obelisk.[114] This image was transferred to the Vatican Circus, where Nero would dress as a charioteer and race around the obelisk at his public events, providing a grand spectacle of public display.[115] By the mid second-century AD, the combination of circus, chariot and obelisk had been firmly established as an allegory of the seasons and cycle of life and death. Nero's infamous use of the Circus to massacre Christians after the fire of 64 would cement the Vatican Obelisk's identity even after the Circus fell into disuse in the second century, as an artifact of the martyrdom of Saint Peter.

The Obelisk's Christian Identity

By the end of the second-century AD, Caligula's Circus fell into disuse and funerary monuments began encroaching the area where the obelisk stood. Excavations and historical reports have revealed that tombs began appearing in the circus the year it fell into neglect, dominating its north and western ends.[116] This included the tomb at the base of the obelisk previously mentioned. At the beginning of the third century, during the reign of Caracalla (198-217 AD), a domed

---

[112] This modeled the *plebs romana.* See Gee, Regina. "Cult and Circus in *Vaticanum*"
[113] An example can be found in a fresco at Tomb B in the Vatican Necropolis. See Gee, Regina. "Cult and Circus in *Vaticanum*" pp. 67
[114] Gee, Regina. "Cult and Circus in *Vaticanum*". Pg. 71
[115] Gee, Regina. ". pg. 72
[116] For more information on the excavations in the area surrounding the Vatican circus see Liverani, Paolo. "La Topografia Antica del Vaticano". *Monumenti, Musei e Gallerie Pontificie (Città del Vaticano)* (1999).

imperial Mausoleum was constructed over the spina of the circus, to the west of the obelisk. This mausoleum came to be known as the Rotunda di Sant 'Andrea and was eventually incorporated into the plan of Saint Peter's Basilica a century later. By the tenth century the track was almost completely covered in tombs.[117] The use of the Tiber's west bank for the construction of tombs had been established far before the third century; it was located outside of the sacred *pomerium* and already held several important funerary monuments including the Meta Romuli, Terebinth, and Hadrian's Mausoleum. The area was enriched with funerary symbolism from these monuments, but also provided sufficient land from the imperial *Horti* that occupied the area during the first century. The desire to be buried near the Vatican circus during the Imperial period is solidified by an early second-century inscription, written by C. Popilius Heracla who requested that his tomb be placed "in Vaticano ad circum."[118]

The draw of having a tomb located near the Circus specifically, was elevated due to its association with the crucifixion and burial of Saint Peter. According to Tacitus, Christians were executed under Nero in the circus after the Great Fire of 64 AD.[119] While the exact site of Peter's crucifixion is debated, *The Acts of Peter* provides that it happened within the circus, between two *metae*, or endpoints, in the form of pyramids.[120] This account has been interpreted to have several different topographical associations, including possibly having happened between the Meta Romuli and another pyramid tomb known as the Pyramid of Gaius Cestius, which will be

---

[117] Liverani, Paolo. "La Topografia Antica del Vaticano". Pp. 22
[118] Townend, Gavin. "The Circus of Nero and the Vatican Excavations". Pp. 216
[119] Curran, Brian, A. Grafton, Anthony. Long, Pamela O. and Weiss, Benjamin. "Obelisk: A History". Pp. 58
[120] Temple, Nicholas. *Renovatio Urbis: Architecture, Urbanism and Ceremony in the Rome of Julius II*. pp. 16

addressed in Chapter 3. The account of the pseudo-Lino tells us that the martyrdom happened *ad locum qui vocatur Naumachiae iuxta obeliscum Neronis* (.....near the Obelisk of Nero).[121] The accounts surrounding the crucifixion of Peter and the execution of Christians endowed both circus and obelisk as Christian property, both having stood witness to Peter's martyrdom. By the fourth century the Vatican obelisk was both topographically and spiritually associated with both the tomb and crucifixion of Saint Peter. The Church soon became intimately affiliated with the *mons Vaticanus* and surrounding area, transforming the previous Circus and gardens in 319 AD by erecting a basilica on the site of Peter's grave.

By the twelfth century, the Vatican obelisk was the only one left standing in Rome. The church justified this as "it was regarded as the last witness to the martyrdom of Saint Peter."[122] The location of the obelisk on private land and the additional structural protection provided by the basilica's south end may have contributed to the obelisk's preservation. The obelisk's funerary affiliation was promoted even further during the Middle Ages, when it gained the status as the tomb of Julius Caesar. After Constantine erected the first basilica to Peter in the fourth-century, Rome, and specifically the Vatican, were established as popular pilgrimage destinations due to the apostle's martyrdom. Several guidebooks, including the *Mirabilia Urbis Romae,* were written for the purpose of providing pilgrims with a meaningful religious experience. The main pilgrimage route to Rome from Europe entered from the north, the Vatican and basilica acting as emblems of victory after a long religious journey.[123] The obelisk, still located to the south of the basilica, was a

[121] Tolotti, Francesco. "Dov'era il terebinto del Vaticano?" In *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome. Antiquité*, Rome 91 (1979). Pp. 491.
[122] Zietsman, J.C. "Crossing the Roman Frontier" pp. 5
[123] Temple, Nicholas. *Renovatio Urbis.* Pg. 9

popular destination for pilgrims due to its association with both Peter and Julius Caesar. Master Gregorius, in *De Mirabilibus urbis Romae,* states that pilgrims would commonly crawl underneath the obelisk's base, supported by four bronze lions. Those who would successfully crawl under the monument would be "cleansed from their sins, having made a true penance."[124] This action served a ritualistic purpose to pilgrims; the obelisks' status as both a witness to Peter's martyrdom and tomb of Julius Caesar ingraining it with the divine power capable of purifying sin.

During the Middle Ages, the popular belief that the ashes of Caesar were in the orb above the obelisk was fostered by the interpretation of the monument given in guidebooks. The *Mirabilia* provides an account of the obelisk, calling it the "needle" and stating that it was located near "Nero's wardrobe now called Sant 'Andrea", referring to the third-century imperial tomb erected behind the obelisk. The guidebook states:

> Nearby is the memorial of Caesar, the Needle, where his ashes nobly rest in his sarcophagus, so that, as in his lifetime the whole world lay subdued before him, even in his death the world would lie beneath him forever.[125]

The "sarcophagus' " the text refers to is the gilt-bronze orb that was placed above the obelisk upon its arrival in Rome in emulation of the obelisks brought over by Augustus. The *Mirabilia* goes on to describe an inscription supposedly engraved on the side of the orb, which states "Caesar, you were once as great as the world and now in what a small cavity you are sealed."[126] The use of inscription in the *Mirabilia* as a means of justifying its status as Julius Caesar's tomb dates back to Imperial Rome, when funerary inscriptions written on monuments preserved the

---

[124] Temple, Nicholas. *Renovatio Urbis: Architecture, Urbanism and Ceremony in the Rome of Julius II.* Pp. 180
[125] *The Marvels of Rome* (Mirabilia Urbis Romae) edited and translated by Francis Morgan Nicholas. Pp. 33
[126] *The Marvels of Rome*. Pp. 72

memory of the deceased. Christian inscriptions were thought to retain similar supreme status, just written under a different religious context. During the Gregorian Reform in the eleventh-century inscriptions were seen as an authoritarian depiction capable of infusing an object with specific divine status or religious persistence.[127]

The height of the so-called inscription on the orb would have been impossible for visitors to view, as the obelisk, base not included, stood 84 feet tall.[128] Stefano Riccioni debunks the existence of this inscription, informing us that the inscription belonged to the *Planctus Hlothari I Caesaris,* not the obelisk.[129] The status of the obelisk as the tomb of Caesar was officially refuted in the early sixteenth-century under Leo X, who sent someone up to the top of the monument to look for the ashes of Caesar and the inscription, neither were found.[130]

The obelisk's status as the tomb of Caesar can be attributed to a misunderstanding of its inscription, placed there by Tiberius before it was moved to Rome in 37 AD, which states: DIVO CAESARI DIVI ILII F AVGVSTO CAESARI DIVI AVGVSTI F AVGVSTO SACRVM.[131] Angelo Decembrio, who writes a fifteenth-century site report on the obelisk states "I saw that Julius Caesar was mentioned straight away, followed immediately by Tiberius Augustus and by the great Augustus himself."[132] He continues to describe his general knowledge of obelisks, and that he has been informed of their solar symbolism, to which he responds:

---

[127] Riccioni, Stefano. "Rewriting Antiquity, Renewing Rome. The Identity of the Eternal City through Visual Art, Monumental Inscriptions and the *Mirabilia"* in *Medieval Encounters.* Volume 17. *Brill Publishing* (2011). Pg. 442
[128] Parker, John Henry. "The Twelve Egyptian Obelisks in Rome". Pg. 22
[129] Riccioni, Stefano. "Rewriting Antiquity, Renewing Rome.". Pp. 447
[130] Decembrio, Angelo. "A Fifteenth-Century Site Report of the Vatican Obelisk".
[131] Iverson, Erik. "The Date of the So-Called Inscription of Caligula on the Vatican Obelisk". Pp. 149
[132] Decembrio, Angelo. "A Fifteenth-Century Site Report of the Vatican Obelisk".

> (the obelisk) Takes the form of a tomb monument rather than a horoscope or a solar sphere.....it seems more likely that the brass ball which is on top of the stone, and is hollow, as one would expect, was set there as a tomb for ashes rather than as a gnomon to tell the time.[133]

Decembrio's site report informs us of a general lack of understanding for both Roman and Egyptian antiquities, contributed to by pilgrimage guidebooks. The term CAESARI was identified solely with Julius Caesar, rather than the line of Julio-Claudian emperors who bore the same name. The dedication of the obelisk as Caesar's tomb may also have to do with a misunderstood passage in Suetonius's *Life of Caesar,* which describes a monolith erected in a forum after his assassination; this forum is the Caesarium in Alexandria.[134] The identity of the obelisk as a "tomb monument" can be attributed to the several misunderstandings of obelisks as pyramids. Most Renaissance scholars were unable to visit the pyramids and relied on texts from classical scholars to create a general understanding of the large monuments.[135] In 1557, Pellegrino Bruccardo was able to visit Egypt and brought an artist along with him to draw and paint the pyramids of Cairo.[136]

During the fifteenth-century, the rise of humanism sparked the desire to study antique objects and rediscover Latin inscriptions. Both Pliny's *Historia naturalis* and Ammianus Marcellinus's *History* were published between 1469 and 1475; both give descriptions of obelisks in Egypt and Rome. The interest in Egyptian antiquities was cultivated by the presence of the obelisks in Rome, specifically the Vatican obelisk as it was the only one left standing by the time

---

[133] Decembrio, Angelo. "A Fifteenth-Century Site Report of the Vatican Obelisk". Pp. 242
[134] Curran, Brian, A. Grafton, Anthony. Long, Pamela O. and Weiss, Benjamin. "Obelisk: A History". Pp. 64
[135] Dannenfeldt, Karl H. "Egypt and Egyptian Antiquities in the Renaissance". Pp. 23
[136] Dannenfeldt, Karl H. "Egypt and Egyptian Antiquities in the Renaissance". *Studies in the Renaissance*. (1959) Vol. 6. Pp. 16

humanism developed. The monuments provided humanists a primary source of Egyptian culture in their attempt to understand the architectural marvels described by Pliny. In 1589 Mercati published *De gli obelischi,* in which he includes a large amount of Egyptian history including describing the Pharaohs of Egypt and their association with obelisks.[137]

Regardless of authenticity, the status of the Vatican obelisk as the tomb of Julius Caesar during the Middle Ages helped solidify the Catholic church's position as the inheritors of ancient Rome. The land that the first pope would be martyred at was also, conveniently, the land where the great republican general was laid to rest.

In 1586, when Pope Sixtus V ordered the obelisk be moved to its current location at the center of Saint Peter's square, a rite of passage took place. As author Brian Curran has stated "For Roman commentators like Pliny, the transport of the obelisk to Rome was almost a greater marvel than their fabrication and erection in the first place."[138] Under Egyptian patronage, the construction of obelisks from single monoliths of stone and their subsequent transport down the Nile to Heliopolis was seen as a display of power. Nautical archaeologist Armin Wirsching has argued that the Romans developed their seagoing obelisk ships based on the Egyptian model of double-ships; first observing their transport in 30 BCE when Cleopatra brought two to Alexandria from Heliopolis.[139] The arrival of the Vatican obelisk to the shores of Ostia in 37 AD was so highly revered that Claudius had Caligula's ship sunk in the Ostian harbor to serve as an image of the Empire's power and engineering magnificence. The ship would serve as the

---

[137] Dannenfeldt, Karl H. "Egypt and Egyptian Antiquities in the Renaissance". Pp. 23
[138] Curran, Brian, A. Grafton, Anthony. Long, Pamela O. and Weiss, Benjamin. "Obelisk: A History". Pp. 42
[139] Wirsching, Armin. "How the obelisks reached Rome: evidence of Roman double-ships". *International Journal of Nautical Archaeology.* (2000). Pg. 276

foundation of the harbor's facilities; soon after it was sunk three large moles (Figure 7) were constructed on top of it described by Suetonius:

> The ship that had carried the mighty obelisk from Egypt was sunk. On pillars, resting on the ship, he erected a very high tower after the example of the Pharos-tower of Alexandria. This tower was then used to direct ships on their way at night using fiery symbols.[140]

These moles served as a kind of memorial in the harbor, commemorating the Roman achievement of its transportation while simultaneously representative of the obelisk's original placement at the Forum Julium in Alexandria. The transportation and erection of obelisks were venerated to the extent that they became common images depicted in the reliefs of funerary sarcophagi. The most prominent example of this is the Tomb of the Haterii (Figure 8), which depicts a crane-like machine lifting an obelisk into an upright position next to the temple of Isis in Rome.

The interpretation of obelisks by both the Romans and Egyptians had imbued them with a connection to national feelings, they required the energy and resources of powerful rulers to execute. The Pope Sixtus V was aware of this triumphal significance and saw the Vatican obelisk as a victory monument capable of aiding the papacy's claim to authority. Between 1585 and 1586, Pope Sixtus V commissioned Fontana to create the engineering capable of moving the obelisk from its original location at the south side of the basilica, to its current position in Saint Peter's square.[141] This task could be viewed as a rite of passage for the church, just as the transport of obelisks had been so highly revered in Egypt and Rome before them. The movement

---

[140] Wirsching, Armin. "How the obelisks reached Rome: evidence of Roman double-ships". Pp. 281.

[141] For more information of Fontana's engineering and movement of the Obelisk see Curran, Brian, A. et al, "Obelisk: A History".

of the obelisk took place during a jubilee celebration on September 10th, 1586. The celebration emulated a religious ceremony that the population of Rome would bear witness to as silent crowds watched as the obelisk was lifted off its base.[142] After the obelisk was sunk in the square, a new inscription was added and the gnomon pointer on the top was replaced by a cross; the obelisk was officially property of the church. The transport of the Vatican obelisk was so successful that it set a standard for other obelisks throughout Rome. In 1587 the obelisk from the Circus Maximus was excavated and placed in the Piazza del Popolo. At the time the piazza was located right off the Via Flaminia, a common entrance point for pilgrims entering the city. Pope Sixtus re-erected obelisks around Rome to assert Catholicism's dominance after the Council of Trent had been held in 1545. The obelisks of Rome were embedded with national memory and pride, each of them topographically referencing the Vatican and the Catholic church's authority.

The obelisk was meaningful to both pre-Christian and Christian religious life in Rome in its dual role as solar gnomon and witness to Peter's martyrdom. Through its multiple identities - from votive offering to grave marker to tomb - the Vatican Obelisk has maintained shared funerary symbolism, under both a pagan and Christian narrative from its original placement on the *spina* of Caligula's Circus to its current placement at the entrance of Saint Peter's Basilica. The accounts of Peter's martyrdom were identified with another Egyptianized monument located within the Vatican plain, the Meta Romuli. This tomb's pyramidal form referenced the *metae,* which were two endpoints located at opposite ends of a Roman circus for chariots to race around.

[142] Curran, Brian, A. Grafton, Anthony. Long, Pamela O. and Weiss, Benjamin. "Obelisk: A History". Pp. 134

Its topographical proximity to the circus may have led to its association with the account of Peter's martyrdom, further discussed in the next chapter.

References

Beard, Mary. North, John. Price, Simon. "Religions of Rome". (Vol. 1 and 2) *University of Cambridge* (1998).

Brian Curran, Anthony Grafton, and Angelo Decembrio. "A Fifteenth-Century Site Report of the Vatican Obelisk". *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes.* Vol. 58 (1995). Pp. 234-248.

Curran, Brian A. Grafton, Anthony. Long, Pamela O. and Weiss, Benjamin. "Obelisk: A History". *Burndy Library Publications*. (2009).

Dannenfeldt, Karl H. "Egypt and Egyptian Antiquities in the Renaissance". *Studies in the Renaissance*. (1959) Vol. 6, pp.7-27

Davies, Penelope J.E. *Death and The Emperor: Roman Imperial Funerary Monuments from Augustus to Marcus Aurelius.* University of Texas Press, Austin. (2000).

Favro, Diane. *The Urban Image of Augustan Rome*. Cambridge University Press (1996).

Favro, Diane. "The City is a Living Thing: The Performative Role of an Urban Site in Ancient Rome, the Vallis Murcia". *Studies in the History of Art*, Vol. 56. (1999).

Gee, Regina. "Cult and Circus in *Vaticanum*". *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome.* Vol. 56/57. (2011/2012). Pp. 63-83. University of Michigan Press for the American Academy in Rome.

Iversen, Erik. "The Date of the So-Called Inscription of Caligula on the Vatican Obelisk". *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*. Vol 51. (1965). Pp.149-154

Liverani, Paolo. "La Topografia Antica del Vaticano". *Monumenti, Musei e Gallerie Pontificie (Città del Vaticano)* (1999).

The Marvels of Rome (Mirabilia Urbis Romae) edited and translated by Francis Morgan Nicholas. *Italica Press,* New York (1986).

McKenzie, Judith. "The Architecture of Alexandria and Egypt (c. 300 BC to AD 700). *Yale University Press* (2007).

Palmer, Morgan E. "A Blight on the *Pax Augusta*: The Robilagia in Ovid's *Fasti*". *Classical World.* Vol. 111, No.4. (2018). Pp. 503-523.

Parker, John Henry. “The Twelve Egyptian Obelisks in Rome: Their History Explained by Translations of the Inscriptions Upon Them”. *Leopold Classic Library.* (1879).

Riccioni, Stefano. “Rewriting Antiquity, Renewing Rome. The Identity of the Eternal City through Visual Art, Monumental Inscriptions and the *Mirabilia”* in *Medieval Encounters.* Volume 17. *Brill Publishing* (2011). pp. 439 - 463.

Temple, Nicholas. *Renovatio Urbis: Architecture, Urbanism and Ceremony in the Rome of Julius II*. Florence: Taylor and Francis Group, 2011. Pp. 7-33.

Townend, Gavin. “The Circus of Nero and the Vatican Excavations”. *American Journal of Archaeology.* (1958). Vol. 62. Pp. 216-218.

Wirsching, Armin. “How the obelisks reached Rome: evidence of Roman double-ships” *International Journal of Nautical Archaeology.* (2000). Pp 273-283.

Zietsman, J.C. “Crossing the Roman Frontier: Egypt in Rome (and beyond)”. *Acta Classica, Classical Association of South Africa.* (2009). Pp. 1-21.

CHAPTER THREE

THE META ROMULI

The Vatican Obelisk and Meta Romuli established similar topographical significance in Rome's urban landscape; as Egyptian forms, they were visual reminders of Augustus's victory at the Battle of Actium in 30 BCE and the subsequent *Pax Augusta.* The Vatican Obelisk, and other obelisks brought to Rome, were considered victory *spoila*, while the Meta Romuli, in its use of a pyramidal form, could be considered a "captured" Egyptianized form.[143] The Meta Romuli was knocked down in the late fifteenth-century for the construction of the Via Alessandrina, and much of the tomb's original form has been hypothesized based on the pyramid of Gaius Cestius, which still stands today outside of the Porta San Paolo. Due to their distinct form, both pyramids became memorable landmarks within Rome's topography and by the Middle Ages were identified as the tombs of Rome's mythical founders, Romulus and Remus.[144] Both pyramid's significance within the topography of Rome was enriched when they became connected to the martyrdom of Saint Peter under the papacy. Their association with Peter's crucifixion was based on the account of Tactius discussed in the previous chapter, the two *metae* he mentions were identified with the two pyramids, rather than the endpoints of the circus. The Meta Romuli's pyramidal form promoted its topographical significance under both a pagan and Christian context, as well as permitted further associations between the tomb and other funerary monuments on theVatican plain. This chapter will document the relationship between the Meta

---

[143] Davies, Penelope J.E.. *Death and The Emperor.* pg. 62

[144] Temple, Nicholas. "Signposting Peter and Paul" in *Renovatio Urbis: Architecture, Urbanism and Ceremony in the Rome of Julius II.* pg. 14.

Romuli's form and placement within the urban landscape, communicating how both form and location led the monument to assume various identities and promote both religious and patriotic memory as religious and temporal authority in Rome was transferred from the emperor to the papacy.

Inspiration for the Pyramidal Form

The Meta Romuli was erected sometime during the reign of Augustus, between the years 30 and 20 BCE.[145] The pyramid stood on the Via Triumphalis, west of Hadrian's Mausoleum, in the area now occupied by the Palazzo Pio and auditorium of the Via della Conciliazione (Figure 9). A fifteenth-century site report tells us that the pyramid measured 25 meters on each side of the base and was between 32 and 50 meters high.[146] These measurements are similar to the existing pyramid of Gaius Cestius (Figure 10), which measures 37 meters in height and 29 meters on each side of its base.[147] Excavations of the monument done between 1948 and 1949 revealed the Meta Romuli's base, along with paved travertine slabs, marble blocks, column fragments and the base of a candelabrum with depictions of Apollo, Latona, and Minerva (Figure 11).[148] Further details of the pyramid's original form may be acquired from a letter written by Michele Ferno, who witnessed the tomb's destruction in 1499.[149] Ferno describes the burial chamber within, reached by a long corridor, similar to the chamber located within the pyramid of Gaius Cestius (Figure 12). Ferno compares the dimensions of the interior *cella* with the one in

---

[145] Petacco, Laura. "La Meta Romuli e il Terebinthus Neronis"pg. 36
[146] Petacco, Laura.". pg. 35
[147] Lacovara, Peter. "Pyramids and Obelisks Beyond Egypt". *Aegyptiaca: Journal of the History of Reception of Ancient Egypt.* pg. 125.
[148] The Candelabrum is currently at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Accession Number 96.702
[149] Petacco, Laura.". pg. 36

Hadrian's Mausoleum, stating that it had "four niches for cinerary (urns)".[150] It was constructed of a concrete core and faced in slabs of marble. We know from the *Mirabilia* that some of the marble used to face the pyramid was removed to pave the atrium of Old Saint Peter's Basilica.[151] The dimensions of the pyramid, along with the excavations and account given by Ferno, indicate that the Meta Romuli probably had a similar shape to the pyramid of Gaius Cestius. The sides receded at a stepper angle from its base, giving it a long slender form, differing from the wider-based Pyramids of Giza. The Meta Romuli's dedicatory inscription, possibly inscribed directly onto one of the marble slabs or made up of bronze letters that were drilled into the monument's face, was most likely removed when the marble slabs were taken off to use at the atrium of Old Saint Peter's. Horace of the Pseudo-Acorn tells us that the ashes of Scipio Africanus were located in a pyramid at the Vatican, referring to the Meta as the *Sepulcrum Scorpionic*.[152] This information is most likely incorrect, as Horace's account was written during the fifth-century and the dedicatory inscription would've been removed at this time for the pavement of the basilica.[153] Due to the lack of an inscription or documentation of the pyramid before the early fourth century, the Meta Romuli's patronage remains unknown. However, motivation for the pyramids form may be gleaned from Augustus's own inspiration for his dynastic mausoleum that was erected in the Campus Martius in 28 BCE, as well as documentation of various campaigns and tours that took place after Egypt became Roman territory.

---

[150] Petacco, Laura.". pg. 36
[151] Marvels of Rome (*Mirabilia Urbis Romae*) edited and translated by Francis Morgan Nicholas. Pg.75.
[152] Petacco, Laura." pg. 33
[153] The Scipio family had their own tomb located on the Via Appia, this is where Scipio Africanus was likely interred. See Liverani, Paolo. "La Topografia Antica del Vaticano". *Monumenti, Musei e Gallerie Pontificie (Città del Vaticano)* (1999).

Inspiration for both the pyramid of Gaius Cestius and the Meta Romuli was a result of Augustus' introduction of Egyptianized forms to Rome after his victory at the Battle of Actium in 30 BCE. Penelope Davies has pointed out that Augustus's own mausoleum takes inspiration from Egyptian tombs in its ground plan and concrete core.[154] The mausoleum developed from the Mausoleum of Alexander in Alexandria, which was most likely inspired by the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus and the Tomb of the Christian in Algeria.[155] This tomb type is characterized by a cylindrical base, topped by a tumulus mound and crowned with either a statue or pyramidion. Davies states:

> This *imitatio Alexandri* found a suitable context in Rome after the Mausoleum's construction, when Egyptianizing motifs were introduced into art and architecture in a steady stream, best exemplified by the pyramid of Gaius Cestius and the similar Meta Romuli on the Vatican plain.[156]

In bringing Egyptian forms to Rome, Davies points out that Augustus was succeeding the tradition of "capturing" formal elements of architectural design as a symbol of triumph.[157] The Meta Romuli and pyramid of Gaius Cestius, built in the years following the construction of Augustus's Mausoleum, helped to establish the use of imported forms as symbols of triumph in Rome's topography. The pyramidal form became an ideal shape for a Roman tomb, it functioned as a symbolic staircase towards the heavens, while simultaneously referencing a revolutionary feat of architecture from the newly obtained territory of Egypt.

---

[154] For comparison between the Egyptian pyramid plan and the Mausoleum of Augustus see Davies, Penelope. "An Image of Things Achieved" in *Death and The Emperor: Roman Imperial Funerary Monuments from Augustus to Marcus Aurelius.* University of Texas Press, Austin. (2000).
[155] Davies, Penelope. *Death and The Emperor.* pg. 54
[156] Davies, Penelope. *"* pg. 60
[157] Davies, Penelope. *"* pg. 62

After Augustus popularized Egyptian forms in Rome in the first-century BCE, the use of pyramidal tombs expanded throughout the empire, reaching areas throughout the Italian peninsula and Gaul.[158] Unlike the pyramids of Giza, both the Meta and pyramid of Gaius Cestius tapered at a steeper angle from their base, reflecting the form of Nubian pyramids (Figure 13). These stepper sloped pyramids originated in the Kingdom of Kush and spread north from there; several can be found outside of Thebes in Deir-el Medina. In his discussion of Greek and Roman pyramids, Norman Neurberg states "It would not be illogical to suppose that Cestius may even have been along on that campaign (Augustus's conquest of Egypt) and been inspired to emulate what he saw in Egypt in his own tomb".[159] Peter Lacovara furthers this argument, providing evidence that the Romans would've been exposed to this pyramidal form during Publius Petronius's campaign to Nubia in 23 BCE.[160] Strabo informs us that during the reign of Augustus, touring Egypt became particularly popular among the wealthy. This tour would pass through Thebes, where Romans would have come across the Nubian pyramids on the Nile's west bank.[161]

Between the late republican and early imperial period, funerary monuments were a privileged way of conveying status, and were used to emulate the deceased's accomplishments in life. Just as Neuerburg suggests that Gaius Cestius may have been inspired to reflect the

---

[158] Examples include the "Street of Tombs" in Pompeii and the remains of a tomb on the Via Appia. For more pyramidal tombs throughout the Empire see Neuerburg, Norman. "Greek and Roman Pyramids". (Vol.22). *Archaeological Institute of America*, 1969.
[159] Neuerburg, Norman. "Greek and Roman Pyramids". Pg. 115
[160]There is also evidence of imported goods from the Roman Empire found in Meroe. See Lacovara, Peter. "Pyramids and Obelisks Beyond Egypt". Pg. 128
[161] Milne, J. Grafton. "Greek and Roman Tourists in Egypt". *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* (Vol. 3), 1916. Pg. 77.

pyramids he saw in Egypt in his own tomb, it is justified to suggest that the proprietor of the Meta Romuli intentionally used an Egyptian form in emulating his own achievements. Given the intended identification with Egyptian architecture, the deceased, interred within the walls of the Meta Romuli, for whatever reason, deliberately desired to be associated with Egypt in death. Just as the tomb's pyramidal form evoked the memory of the deceased's accomplishments in life, possibly alluding to a campaign in Egypt, its topographical placement was meant to aid in that memory, the tomb's form and location contributing to the communication between viewer and deceased's memory.

Location and Topographical Relationships

For those with the monetary means to do so, a patrons' placement of their tomb within Rome's topography was not chosen at random, but with intention, its surroundings aiding its formal symbolism. At the time of the Meta's construction, the Vatican plain was relatively underdeveloped. Caligula's circus had not yet been erected on the Vatican hill, nor had Hadrian's Mausoleum been built on the *Horti Domitiae*, leaving the Vatican plain somewhat sparse in terms of Imperial patronage. During the late Republican period the *trans Tiberium* was associated with foreign cults and occupied by wealthy private estates that began to dominate the land near the Janiculum hill, to the south of the *mons Vaticanus*.[162] The *Horti Agrippinae,* which belonged to Agrippina the Elder, occupied the Vatican hill during the early first-century.[163] The Campus Martius, located across the Tiber to the southeast, was susceptible to flooding and saw

[162] Favro, Diane. *The Urban Image of Augustan Rome*. pg. 32
[163] Davies, Penelope. *Death and The Emperor: Roman Imperial Funerary Monuments from Augustus to Marcus Aurelius*. University of Texas Press, Austin. (2000). Pg. 158

little permanent development during the late Republican period. The area held many public banquets, assemblies and large civic events, as public space within the *pomerium* was limited.[164] Access between the two banks of the Tiber was provided by several bridges mainly dominating the area south of the *mons Vaticanus*, crossing near the *Insula Tiberina*.[165] The Milvian Bridge provided access for those traveling in and out of Rome on the Via Flaminia, which entered from the north and extended south, through the Campus Martius, ending at the Roman Forum. It was under Augustus that the *trans Tiberium,* which included the Vatican plain along with the Janiculum hill, was acknowledged as the 14th Region of Augustan Rome.[166] Augustus also constructed his funerary program in the Campus Martius, consisting of his mausoleum, Altar of Peace (Ara Pacis), and Solarium. Those entering the city from the north on the Via Flaminia would have to pass the emperor's architectural projects on their way into the city.

Tombs had flanked the Via Flaminia and other arterial roads since the early Republican period, their traffic increasing a tomb's interaction with the living as visitors and citizens entered and exited the city.[167] The Meta Romuli, placed along the Via Triumphalis (see Figure 1) elevated the tomb's status and interaction with the living. The road, entering Rome from the north, was commonly taken by troops returning from battle, as they passed through on their way to the Campus Martius. The intended placement of the tomb along the triumphal way was most likely a deliberate decision made by the deceased or a family member in order to elevate the

---

[164] Favro, Diane. ". pg. 44
[165] Bridges include the Pons Cestius, Pons Fabricus and Pons Aemilius.
[166] Favro, Diane. ". pg. 212
[167] Petacco, Laura. "La Meta Romuli e il Terebinthus Neronis" in *La Spina: dall'agro vaticano a via della Conciliazione*. Gangemi Editore (2017). Pg. 33.

individual's or family's status as the massive pyramid drew the eye of those traveling in and out of Rome.[168]

Along with the Meta Romuli's location on the triumphal way, its size - between 30 and 50 meters - and proximity to the Tiber granted it further funerary associations and identification. This height, along with the monument's bright marble coating, would've made it fairly visible to those attending public events and assemblies in the Campus Martius. The via Recta, a road that intersected with the Via Flaminia and extended west into the Campus Martius, would've provided visitors with a clear view of the Meta Romuli across the river, after passing Augustus's funerary complex in the northern campus. After Nero opened up his Circus and gardens to the public in 64 AD, the traffic in the Vatican plain increased substantially.[169] The Via Cornelia, which extended the Via Recta across the Tiber to the west, and the Pons Neroniaunus, a bridge built under either Nero or Caligula, provided direct access from the Campus Martius to the *ager Vaticanus.* The funerary and solar symbolism of the obelisk may have extended to the pyramid tomb, evoking memory of Egyptian objects and religious influence brought to Rome under Augustus, and vice versa; the Meta Romuli's identity as a tomb shaped in a Egyptianized form promoting the obelisk's funerary significance.

The pyramid tomb's proximity to the river may have added important religious associations, including the Egyptian custom of crossing the river Styx on the journey to the afterlife.[170] Penelope Davies argues that in the construction of his mausoleum, the emperor

---

[168] Toynbee, J. M. C.. *Death and Burial in the Roman World*. United Kingdom: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996.
[169] Gee, Regina. "Cult and Circus in *Vaticanum*". Pg. 70
[170] Petacco, Laura."La Meta Romuli e il Terebinthus Neronis". pg. 33

Hadrian deliberately placed it close to the Tiber in order to invoke the Egyptian belief of a soul's journey across the river Styx in the underworld.[171] The Meta Romuli's placement on the banks of the Tiber, plus its large Egyptianizing form, may have emulated a river's association with the afterlife; those observing from the Campus Martius would be forced to enter the realm of the dead by crossing the Tiber. Hadrian erected his Mausoleum in 138, over a century after the Meta Romuli was built along the Via Triumphalis. Its Egyptian form may have inspired Hadrian in the design of his own tomb, which models that of Augustus and brings in Egyptianized forms, further discussed in Chapter 5. In formally recognizing Augustus, both the patron of the Meta Romuli and Hadrian intended to evoke the memory of the *Pax Augusta* and founding of the Empire.

The Meta's emulation of an Egyptian form "captured" during Augustus's conquest helped to solidify its presence among the topography of the Borgo. Through intentional design and placement of the monument on the highly trafficked Via Triumphalis, the pyramid's owner successfully established their tomb as visually compelling, increasing interaction between the living and the dead. When Constantine began the construction of Old Saint Peter's Basilica in 326, the Meta's placement within *vaticanum* led to further topographical associations as the Christian church claimed inheritance over the Tiber's west bank.

[171] Davies, Penelope. *Death and The Emperor.* pg. 158

Christian Transformation

After being exiled to Avignon for several decades, the Papacy was restored in Rome in 1420 at the Vatican under Pope Martin V.[172] In the centuries following the restoration of the papacy in Rome, the Renaissance marked the rebirth of the classical age, seeing many Roman monuments restored to their former glory and the reconstruction of the Basilica of Saint Peter. The Vatican's proximity to the site Peter was crucified at, and the added security offered by the Borgo in part due to the Mausoleum of Hadrian, made it an all too desirable place for the location of the papacy to begin staking their claim on the city as citizens of Rome.

In establishing themselves as the inheritors of the empire, the Popes aimed to emphasize connections between the burial site of Saint Peter in the Vatican territory and the ancient city center on the Palatine hill. Just as the Palatine hill marked the center of Rome's founding, the Vatican hill would mark the center of the new Christian Empire. Many Popes sought out to create connections between the Capitoline hill and the Vatican through the establishment of several pilgrimage and ceremonial routes.[173] Since the fourth-century, pilgrimage to Rome had rapidly increased due to the burial of Saint Peter and the erection of the basilica on his grave.[174] Processional pathways to the basilica, provided by roads like the Via Cornelia and Via Triumphalis, provided the glue that bound the church to the other architectural markers within

---

[172] The papacy was exiled from Rome and moved to Avignon in the first half of the 13th. C. Then moved back to Rome in 1420, located at the Vatican rather than the Lateran. The Vatican was closer to Peter and offered better security. Nicholas V abandoned Lateran officially in 1450. See Temple, Nicholas. "Signposting Peter and Paul".

[173] Examples include the Major Litany, Jubilee celebrations and paths provided by pilgrimage guidebooks like the *Mirabilia* and *Liber Pontificalis*. See Taylor, Rabun, Rinne, Katherine W., and Kostof, Spiro. "Chapter 14: Tetrarchic and Constantinian Rome" in *Rome: An Urban History from Antiquity to Present.* Cambridge University Press (New York, 2016).

[174] Taylor, Rabun, Rinne, Katherine W., and Kostof, Spiro. *Rome: An Urban History.* Pg. 199

the Vatican plain. The Meta Romuli, located on the ancient Via Triumphalis, served as a visual marker for pilgrims entering the city from the north, making their way up to Peter's trophy along the Via Cornelia. Just as Augustus had 'captured' forms from Egypt and erected them in Rome as trophies, Constantine erected a trophy in the form of *memoriae* over the tomb of the founder of the Christian church.

Similar to the Vatican Obelisk, the Meta Romuli became a popular stopping point illustrated in pilgrimage guidebooks from the Middle Ages. The *Mirabilia* mentions the pyramid, stating:

> In the Naumachia is the sepulcher of Romulus, that is called the Meta, or the goal, which aforetime was encased with marvelous stone, wherewith was made the pavement of the Paradise and the steps of Saint Peter.[175]

In this description the author of the *Mirabilia* equates the pyramid as the tomb of Romulus. The pyramid of Gaius Cestius, on the Tiber's east bank, was commonly called the Meta Remi, identified with the burial place of Romulus's brother.[176] These titles associated the monuments with the founders of Rome, perhaps in an attempt to create an ancestral link between Peter, the founder of the Christian Church, and Romulus, the founder of the city.[177] For pilgrims following the path of the Via Cornelia, the pyramid, as the tomb of the city's founder, would prelude the tomb of the founder of the Church, establishing a visual connection between the two within the Vatican's topography.

---

[175] The Marvels of Rome (Mirabilia Urbis Romae) edited and translated by Francis Morgan Nicholas. *Italica Press,* New York (1986). Pg. 75-76.
[176] Temple, Nicholas. "Signposting Peter and Paul". Pg. 14
[177] Temple notes that in a sermon from 441, Leo I compares Peter and Paul to Romulus and Remus. See Temple, Nicholas *Renovatio Urbis* pg. 275, note 19 for quote.

The Meta Romuli was further associated with Saint Peter due to its supposed role as a witness to his crucifixion and martyrdom. The crucifixion of Saint Peter is said to have happened *ad therebintum inter duas metas...in Vaticano*.[178] The last line of the account *inter duas metas..... in Vaticano,* led to various interpretations for the possible site of martyrdom. Saint Jerome tells us that it happened somewhere near the Naumachia of Trajan, while the accounts of Tactius and the pseudo-Lino inform us that it happened in the Vatican Circus, near the obelisk.[179] The *metae,* while most likely referring to the endpoints of the Circus, were also interpreted as meaning the Meta Romuli and Meta Remi. The pyramidal tombs took on a similar form as that of the *metae,* which were cone shaped pyramids, usually grouped in threes at each end of a circus (Figure 14).

The interpretation of *inter duas metas* in reference to the Vatican circus, and the account given by Tactius, provide the explanation that Peter was crucified in between the two "*metas"* of the circus, perhaps near the obelisk, as discussed in the previous chapter. The association of *inter duas metas* with the Meta Romuli and Meta Remi, while likely due to their pyramidal form and titles, also provided a topographical connection between the east and west banks of the Tiber; the east marking the founding of Rome on the Palatine and the west marking the founding of the church on the *mons Vaticanus*. Just as the Meta Romuli served as a visual marker for those traveling to Old Saint Peters' on the Via Triumphalis, the Meta Remi served a similar purpose to those visiting San Paolo fuori le Mura on the Ostian way. Both pyramids, located on arterial roads near two of Rome's most popular pilgrimage churches, created a topographical connection between the founders of Rome and the founders of the Christian Church.

---

[178] Petacco, Laura."La Meta Romuli e il Terebinthus Neronis". pg. 34
[179] Temple, Nicholas. "Signposting Peter and Paul". Pg. 16

During the Renaissance, the Meta Romuli's association with Peter's martyrdom, as well as its distinct pyramidal form, were emphasized in art, specifically that of Raphael. Raphael was invested in the preservation of the monument and fought for the conservation of its base after Pope Alexander VI demolished the top half in 1499.[180] He represents the Meta Romuli in his *Vision of the Cross* (Figure 15), where it stands on the banks of the Tiber next to Hadrian's Mausoleum.

While designing the Chigi Chapel, Raphael referenced both pyramids in form, as well as their role in the martyrdom of Peter (Figure 16). The two pyramidal tombstones flank either side of the chapel, the Chigi family sigil located in the floor mosaic in between. Temple argues that Agostino Chigi meant to emulate both sides of the Tiber River in the design of his tomb, represented by the two pyramids that supposedly witnessed Peter's crucifixion.[181] The pyramidal representation in the design of the Chigi Chapel is used to support the topographical significance of these monuments and Rome's fate as the site of Peter and Paul's martyrdom.

Raphael's interest in the Meta Romuli reflects the similar stance of most humanists during the Renaissance. The purpose and function of Egyptian pyramids during the sixteenth-century was debated; Philip Melanchthon had hypothesized that they were built by the Children of Israel during their time in Egypt.[182] Karl Dannenfeldt has pointed out that Renaissance scholars were unable to visit the pyramids of Egypt, and they learned what they could about Egyptian antiquities from classical scholars.[183] Intellectual significance was placed on the

---

[180] Temple, Nicholas. "Signposting Peter and Paul". Pg. 28
[181] Temple, Nicholas. "Signposting Peter and Paul". Pg. 32
[182] Dannenfeldt, Karl H. "Egypt and Egyptian Antiquities in the Renaissance". *Studies in the Renaissance*. (1959) Vol. 6. pg. 13
[183] Dannenfeldt, Karl H. "Egypt and Egyptian Antiquities in the Renaissance". Pg. 23

pyramids and obelisks located throughout Rome as objects they could study first hand. Sebastiano Serlio's early sixteenth-century drawing (Figure 17) depicts a Renaissance interpretation of the Pyramids of Giza and a classicized version of the Sphinx.

The pyramid is representative of the tall slender Nubian type that both the Meta Romuli and Pyramid of Gaius Cestius are modeled after. As both pyramids provided Renaissance scholar's with insight into Egyptian antiquities, it comes as no surprise the Raphael and other humanists fought for the Meta's preservation in the early sixteenth-century.[184] While the status of the Egyptian pyramids may have been debated, the pyramids of Rome, as well as the obelisks, were interpreted as victory monuments, capable of being transformed by Rome's fate as the site of Peter and Paul's martyrdom.

The papacy, in founding the center of the Christian Empire within the Roman *Vaticanum,* transformed monuments engrained in Roman memory into symbols that identified with a Christian narrative. The Meta Romuli, built by a wealthy Roman in emulation of triumph over Egypt, was transformed into a topographic symbol that allegedly witnessed Peter's martyrdom and connected the founding of the Christian church to the founding of the Empire. Its pyramidal form contributed to its topographical interpretation under both an Imperial and Christian narrative; emulating Augustus's victory in Egypt and serving as an endpoint to Peter's crucifixion. The relationship between the Meta Romuli's form and its topographical associations with other architectural features in the landscape, like Hadrian's Mausoleum and the pyramid of

[184] In 1519 Raphael wrote a letter to Leo X in an attempt to preserve the remaining portion of the Meta Romuli after the upper half was destroyed in 1499. See Temple, Nicholas."Signposting Peter and Paul" in *Renovatio Urbis: Architecture, Urbanism and Ceremony in the Rome of Julius II*. pg. 29

Gaius Cestius, further promoted the persistence of its memory, whether pertaining to its original patron, Romulus, or Saint Peter.

References

Beard, Mary. "The Question of Triumph" and "The Impact of Triumph" in *The Roman Triumph.* Harvard University Press, 2007.

Campbell, Virginia L. "Stopping to Smell the Roses: Garden Tombs in Roman Italy". *Arctos* (2008). Pp. 31-43.

Dannenfeldt, Karl H. "Egypt and Egyptian Antiquities in the Renaissance". *Studies in the Renaissance*. (1959) Vol. 6, pp.7-27.

Davies, Penelope J.E. *Death and The Emperor: Roman Imperial Funerary Monuments from Augustus to Marcus Aurelius.* University of Texas Press, Austin. (2000).

Favro, Diane. The Urban Image of Augustan Rome. *Cambridge University Press* (1996)

Gee, Regina. "Cult and Circus in *Vaticanum*". *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome.* Vol. 56/57. Pp. 63-83. University of Michigan Press for the American Academy in Rome (2011/2012).

Lacovara, Peter. "Pyramids and Obelisks Beyond Egypt". *Aegyptiaca: Journal of the History of Reception of Ancient Egypt.*

Liverani, Paolo. "La Topografia Antica del Vaticano". *Monumenti, Musei e Gallerie Pontificie (Città del Vaticano)* (1999).

The Marvels of Rome (Mirabilia Urbis Romae) edited and translated by Francis Morgan Nicholas. *Italica Press,* New York (1986).

Milne, J. Grafton. "Greek and Roman Tourists in Egypt". *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* (Vol. 3), 1916. Pp.76-80.

Neuerburg, Norman. "Greek and Roman Pyramids". (Vol.22). *Archaeological Institute of America*, 1969.

Petacco, Laura. "La Meta Romuli e il Terebinthus Neronis" in *La Spina: dall'agro vaticano a via della Conciliazione*. Gangemi Editore (2017). Pp. 33-39.

Taylor, Rabun, Rinne, Katherine W., and Kostof, Spiro. *Rome: An Urban History from Antiquity to Present.* Cambridge University Press (New York, 2016).

Temple, Nicholas. *Renovatio Urbis: Architecture, Urbanism and Ceremony in the Rome of Julius II*. Florence: Taylor and Francis Group, 2011.

Toynbee, J. M. C.. *Death and Burial in the Roman World*. United Kingdom: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE TEREBINTH OF NERO

The location of Peter's martyrdom as described as *ad therebintum inter duas metas...in Vaticano*, permitted the defining architectural features surrounding the Vatican to be interpreted as holding a symbolic role in the Apostles' burial and martyrdom. The attachment of Church mythology to concrete forms within a landscape became significant in providing pilgrims with a meaningful religious experience. While the location of the *metas* was identified with both the circus and two pyramids on opposite banks of the river, the identity of the *terebinthus* was also given an authentic form that pilgrims could easily identify within the city's architectural framework. During the Middle Ages, the Terebinth's identity was associated with an imperial mausoleum located just to the north of the Meta Romuli, as stated in the *Mirabilia*. However, recent scholarship, as well as a re-examination of the legends of Peter's crucifixion and burial, have provided ample evidence that the *terebinthus* was just that, a terebinth tree marking Saint Peter's grave, replaced by Old Saint Peter's Basilica in 326 AD. This chapter will aim to locate the Terebinth within the topography of the Tiber's west bank and define its identity, as either a mausoleum or tree. By defining its identity and location, the Terebinth serves as an icon of religious and individual memory, aiding in the transition of the *mons Vaticanus* from pagan territory to the center of the Christian Empire.

The Architectural Identity of the Terebinth

Two accounts pertaining to the Terebinth's identity regarding the martyrdom and burial of Saint Peter are provided by pseudo-Lino and pseudo-Marcello, most likely written before

Constantine.[185] The former informs us that the martyrdom happened *ad locum qui vocatur Naumachiae iuxta obeliscum Neronis*.[186] This legend is associated with the Circus of Caligula and Nero, the identity of the place of martyrdom equated with the obelisk as discussed earlier. While this legend accounts for the martyrdom, the second, by pseudo-Marcello, accounts only for the burial, which he mentions is *sub terebinthum, iuxta Naumachiam, in locum qui appellatur Vaticanus*.[187] The account once again mentions the Terebinth, located in *Vaticanus,* which during the first and second-centuries was commonly associated with the Circus and surrounding gardens.[188] Francesco Tolotti points out that during the Middle Ages, the terms used in these accounts (*Naumachiae, obeliscum,* and *terebinthum*) were misinterpreted and misidentified.[189] The Terebinth, said by both inscriptions to have been near the Naumachia, was identified with a tomb that stood adjacent to the Meta Romuli, located at the intersection of the Via Cornelia and the Via Triumphalis (Figure 18).[190] To further this interpretation, Laura Petacco mentions that within this area (the intersection of both roads), Pliny notes several terebinth trees of the "anacardiaceae family."[191] The attempt to equate the terms in both descriptions with the

---

[185] Mons. L. Duchesne in 1902 suggests that both accounts are pre-Constantinian. See Tolotti, Francesco. "Dov'era il terebinto del Vaticano?" In *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome. Antiquité*, Rome 91 (1979).
[186] Tolotti, Francesco. " Pg. 491.
[187] Tolotti, Francesco. " Pp. 491-492.
[188] The Circus and Imperial *horti* where the main occupants of the current land Saint Peter's occupies. The circus fell into disuse in the 2nd-century, and graves began encroaching the area. See Liverani, Paolo. "La Topografia Antica del Vaticano". *Monumenti, Musei e Gallerie Pontificie (Città del Vaticano)* (1999). Pg. 20
[189] Tolotti, Francesco. "Dov'era il terebinto del Vaticano?". Pg. 492.
[190] The Naumachia of Trajan, sometimes referred to as the Naumachia of Nero, was an architectural structure for Naval games located in the area north of where Hadrian's Mausoleum now stands.
[191] Petacco, Laura. "La Meta Romuli e il Terebinthus Neronis" in *La Spina: dall'agro vaticano a via della Conciliazione*. Gangemi Editore (2017). Pg. 37.

topographical landscape of the Vatican comes as no shock, just as the obelisk stood in its original placement for pilgrims to observe and interact with, the association of the Terebinth with a nearby monument provided pilgrims a similar experience. The tales by pseudo-Marcello and the pseudo-Lino establish a correlation between the two monuments; the obelisk mentioned as one, it seems justified that an architectural framework would be added to the other.

The identification of the Terebinth with the Roman mausoleum was solidified during the Middle Ages, when it was mentioned by authors of pilgrimage guidebooks.[192] The *Mirabilia* states:

> About it (referring to the Meta) was the Terebinth of Nero, of no less height than the Castle of Hadrian, encased with marvelous stone, from which the work of the steps and the Paradise was finished. This building was round like a castle with two circles, whereof the lips were covered with tables of stone for dripping. Nigh thereunto was Saint Peter the Apostle crucified. (Mirabilia 76-77).

This narrative equates the Terebinth mentioned in the legends of pseudo-Marcello and pseudo-Lino with a circular mausoleum on the Via Triumphalis. It stood west of the Mausoleum of Hadrian, and was said to be of similar height, alluding to the idea that it must have possessed a large presence within the topography of the Tiber's west bank.[193] The monument's connection to Peter was solidified not just by the presence of his crucifixion within its proximity, but also in the use of its marble in the construction of the basilica; the so-called Terebinth was then tied to the

---

[192] Some examples include Prudentius and Master Gregorius' *Mirabilia Urbis Romae*. For more information on guidebooks see Temple, Nicholas. "Signposting Peter and Paul" in *Renovatio Urbis: Architecture, Urbanism and Ceremony in the Rome of Julius II*. Florence: Taylor and Francis Group, 2011. Pp. 7-33.

[193] This imperial Mausoleum was in the process of being destroyed during the 12th C. around the same time the *Mirabilia* was written (1140s). Most likely the author of the text was looking at the monument's ruins as its marble had been stripped in the fourth century during the construction of Old Saint Peters'. See Petacco, Laura. "La Meta Romuli e il Terebinthus Neronis".

Apostle in both legend and form, making it an ideal site for pilgrims to venerate upon their entrance into the city on the Via Triumphalis.

The Terebinth's association with this circular tomb was further affirmed in artistic representation. The most prominent example is Giotto's *Stefaneschi Polyptych* (Figure 19), the crucifixion of Saint Peter is depicted on the left panel, taking place between the Meta Romuli and the circular mausoleum thought to be the Terebinth. Giotto places a single tree on the top of the circular tomb, alluding to its association with the terebinths in the area as mentioned by Pliny.

Another, earlier depiction (Figure 20), dated to 1280 by an unknown artist depicts the pyramid and circular mausoleum as witness to Peter's martyrdom. In both paintings, the Terebinth, although circular, takes on a slender pyramidal form of similar height to the Meta Romuli. Perhaps, in an effort to define the circular mausoleum as the 'terebinth' mentioned in the legends of Peter's martyrdom, artists of the Middle Ages misinterpreted it as the other *metae,* replacing the pyramid of Gaius Cestius as discussed in the previous chapter. Rather than Peter's crucifixion taking place *under* the terebinth, as mentioned by pseudo-Marcello, the artists of the Middle Ages depicted it as taking place *between* the Meta Romuli and circular mausoleum.

Although this imperial mausoleum may not have been the actual Terebinth that the legends refer to, the presence of this monument was confirmed during the construction of the Palazzo Pio on the Via della Conciliazione in 1948. During these excavations its circular remains were found along with a pathway built between the location of the circular tomb and the Meta Romuli.[194] This pathway would've encouraged a topographical relationship between the two

[194] For more information on these excavations See Petacco, Laura. "La Meta Romuli e il Terebinthus Neronis".

monuments for pilgrims visiting the site; they could walk a similar path as Peter before his martyrdom, affirmed by the artistic representations and narrative told in the *Mirabilia*.

By connecting the identity of the Terebinth mentioned in the legends of Saint Peter's martyrdom to a large Roman mausoleum established in the funerary zone of the Tiber's west bank, just as they had done with the Meta Romuli and Vatican Obelisk, the twelfth-century popes continued their topographical transformation. Providing concrete forms for pilgrims to visit and venerate aided in establishing the Vatican as the center of the Christian Empire. While the identity of the Terebinth as the circular monument on the Via Triumphalis was widely accepted during the Middle Ages and up until the Renaissance, recent scholarship and excavations of the Vatican necropolis have revealed that the Terebinth may have not been a concrete form at all, but rather a tree, marking the spot of Saint Peter's grave.

The Congenital Identity of the Terebinth

A terebinth or Cyprus turpentine is a kind of tree, abundant throughout the Mediterranean region and known for its production of turpentine resin. Pliny the Elder mentions terebinth trees in his *Natural History* several times. Referring to their natural abilities as well the religious significance of trees in general, he states:

> In more recent times, it was the trees that by their juices, more soothing even than corn, first mollified the natural asperity of man; and it is from these that we now derive the oil of the olive that renders the limbs so supple, the draught of wine that so efficiently recruits the strength, and the numerous delicacies which spring up spontaneously at the various seasons of the year, and load our tables with their viands.....It is by the aid of the tree that we plough the deep, and bring near to us far distant lands; it is by the aid of the tree, too, that we construct our edifices. The

> statues, even, of the deities were formed of the wood of trees, in the days when no value had been set as yet on the dead carcass of a wild beast (referring to ivory).[195]

Along with their revered natural abilities, trees were a respectable part of Roman life, aiding in both funeral and triumphal associations. In her discussion of Roman funerary gardens, Virginia Campbell mentions the importance of peristyle gardens in Roman everyday life was commonly regenerated in death; seen through the construction of tomb gardens and vegetal motifs in funerary art.[196] In Pompeii, there is even evidence of funerary gardens that contained no physical tomb or monument, rather consisting of a large, enclosed area where a garden would've been planted. In reference to these plots, Campbell states: "Because there are no traces of any built structures in these areas, the dead they were meant to honor must have been commemorated by a means that left no archeological evidence, such as a garden."[197]

The use of trees in funerary art is also well documented; reliefs of full sized cyprus, laurel, and olive trees have been found decorating several funerary altars and tombs from imperial Rome. A first-century funerary altar belonging to a young boy (Figure 21), has two large laurel trees flanking either side, possibly alluding to protection of the deceased in death. Another fragment from a third-century sarcophagus (Figure 22), depicts a tree growing over a funerary inscription of a young girl in the bottom left register. A bird sits on top of the funerary inscription eating the fruit of the tree. This relief alludes to the protective powers associated with trees in imperial Rome, planted above or near tombs as grave markers.

---

[195] Pliny the Elder, *The Natural History*, (Book XII Chapter 2). Translated by John Bostock. Perseus Digital Library Project.
[196] Campbell, Virginia L. "Stopping to Smell the Roses: Garden Tombs in Roman Italy". *ARCTOS: Acta Philologica Fennica* (Vol. XLII). (2008). Pg. 34
[197] Examples of these plots include 39A and 19S in Pompeii. See Campbell, Virginia L. "Garden Tombs in Roman Italy". Pg. 40.

The association of trees with divinities in a funerary context is also well documented; in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* he mentions Cyparissus's transformation into a cypress tree by Apollo, who states "You shall be mourned by me, shall mourn for others, and your place shall always be where others grieve."[198] Within a religious context, trees in imperial Rome held a protective value, serving as grave markers within the topographical landscape, replicated in funerary relief between the first and fourth-centuries

Along with their funerary associations, trees held significant triumphal symbolism in imperial Rome. Commonly, Romans would hang the weapons of defeated enemies on solitary trees within a landscape as a metaphor of defeat.[199] Perhaps one of the most significant examples of a tree's triumphal significance is Caligula's 'capture' and transport of a large tree from Alexandria. This tree, a large fir, was documented by Pliny as having been carried to Rome on the same ship that carried the Vatican obelisk.[200] He states:

> It is a remarkable fact that ever since the time of Pompey the Great even trees have figured among the captives in our triumphal processions. The balsam-tree is now a subject of Rome and pays tribute together with the race to which it belongs.[201]

Just like the obelisk was captured as *spoila* from Egypt, the balsam tree served as an emblem of Rome's victory. Given both the funerary and triumphal symbolism associated with trees in imperial Rome, it would not be shocking to suggest that the Terebinth, mentioned by the pseudo-Marcello in his account of Peter's martyrdom, was in fact a tree, erected on the site of Peter's grave as both a marker and trophy.

---

[198] Campbell, Virginia L. "Garden Tombs in Roman Italy". Pg. 34.
[199] Tolotti, Francesco. "Dov'era il terebinto del Vaticano?". Pg. 511
[200] Wirsching, Armin. "How the obelisks reached Rome: evidence of Roman double-ships" *International Journal of Nautical Archaeology.* (2000). Pg. 274
[201] Campbell, Virginia L. " Pg. 33.

Francesco Tolotti, in a 1979 examination of the Vatican necropolis, provides substantial archeological evidence in support of a terebinth tree marking Peter's grave. In an area of the necropolis known as Camp P, records indicate a quadrangular space, east of the so-called red wall, where Tolotti believes the tree once stood. Three niches were found within a wall found to the south of the empty space, the first of which is thought to be the result of an impression of an object that stood in the space at the time the concrete was poured for the construction of Old Saint Peters'.[202] Above the second niche two large columns were found, which provided structural support for a large slab of travertine. Tolotti explains that these first two niches found within the south wall would've surrounded the base of the tree, taking on a non-uniform shape as " happens with the enclosure walls built in tree-lined areas, which often present deviations, curvatures, cavities or other artifices due to the purpose of saving the plants."[203] Tolotti further argues that walls of structures found surrounding this empty quadrangular space were built in an effort to avoid a pre-existing object, he states:

> We realize that the obstacle circumvented by the wall pre-existed the latter for such a long time that it remains conditioned by it.....The exact arrangement of the mausoleums 0, S, R and R ' - older than the wall - also seem to be affected, placed at a distance around that same centre, almost to respect it (tab. I). These are very convenient observations for the idea of an old tree growing on that slope.[204]

Due to the structural features (the columns and large slabs of travertine) surrounding the space where the tree would've been located, Tolotti believes that some kind of architectural framework encased the tree, similar to the kind seen in Roman relief and wall painting (Figure 23).[205] This

---

[202] Tolotti, Francesco. "Dov'era il terebinto del Vaticano?". Pg. 495
[203] Tolotti, Francesco. " Pg. 496
[204] See Tolotti, Francesco. "Dov'era il terebinto del Vaticano?". Pg. 496 for diagrams of the excavation site with mausoleums mentioned.
[205] Other examples include Porta Maggiore stuccoes and a relief at the cassa presso la Farnesina. See Tolotti, Francesco. "Dov'era il terebinto del Vaticano?".

drawing is a reproduction of a wall painting in Pompeii, found on the via degli Augustali. The work depicts a tree located within a rectangular structure with an open roof, allowing the tree's branches to extend above the entablature.

The temple-like structural framework surrounding the tree alludes to its religious significance by marking it as a venerated object, blending in with the other temples and architectural features of the urban landscape. In Tolotti's examination of the archeological evidence, he finds an opening located above the first niche; this opening is thought to be a clearing, added so that one of the tree's branches could extend through the surrounding framework.[206] To further support the tree's association with Peter, Tolotti mentions the graffiti wall, located just north of the empty space where the tree would have stood. The Greek line on the wall is short and includes Peter's name, written in the context of *memoria Petri.* The wall and other architectural features surrounding the empty space were most likely added after the tree was planted there, in order to provide some kind of structural support as a monument capable of hosting Peter's cult. Within the context of Romans using trees as grave markers and symbols of victory, it comes as no surprise that a tree would be planted on the site of Peter's grave, as some kind of visual indication for the tomb. The tree provided a recognized symbol for Peter's resting place, ensuring the memory of the site would not be forgotten within the topography of the *mons Vaticanus.* This memory was surely not forgotten, as this is the site where Constantine erected his basilica to Peter in 326.

It should be noted that Constantine's construction of Old Saint Peter's was not the only basilica he erected on the location of a sacred tree, indicated by the basilica he built on the

[206] Tolotti, Francesco. "Dov'era il terebinto del Vaticano?". Pg. 498

Terebinth of Mamre. This tree was where Abraham hosted three messengers of God and was a well-known religious venue during late Antiquity. The tree was known by Jewish, pagan, and Christian rulers, all who attempted to dominate the site by erecting holy monuments during their respective rules. Hadrian built some sort of architectural framework for pagan worship near the tree, indicated by several sculptural fragments of Hermes, Bacchus and Eros that were found underneath the basilica's ruins.[207] The identity of the Vatican Terebinth as a precursor to the later basilica is also referred to in Filarete's bronze doors for Old Saint Peters' (Figure 24). Here the Terebinth is depicted as a tree to the right of Hadrian's Mausoleum, the Meta Romuli is present on the far left, while Peter's martyrdom takes place in the upper left register. All three monuments stand on the opposite bank of the Tiber, lined up as if they are an audience bearing witness to the event. Presbyter Gaius, who lived in Rome from 198 to 217, states:

> But I can show you the trophies of the apostles. Because whether you go to the Vatican or along the Via Ostiense, you will find the trophies of those who founded this Church (« Ma io ti posso mostrare i trofei degli apostoli. Poiché sia che tu vada al Vaticano, sia lungo la via Ostiense, vi troverai i trofei di coloro che fondarono questa Chiesa»).[208]

Given the archaeological evidence provided by Tolotti, and the documented use of trees as symbols of victory and funerary motifs in imperial Rome, this 'trophy' mentioned by Gaius, may be interpreted as a terebinth tree, which marked Peter's grave, foreshadowing today's basilica. The presence of the graffiti wall suggests that the tree may have been a site of cult worship for *memoria Petri,* the added architectural framework as indicated by Tolotti provided a suitable environment for the tree to function as a cult item.

---

[207] Heyden, Katharina (2020). "Construction, Performance, and Interpretation of a Shared Holy Place: The Case of Late Antique Mamre (Rāmat al-Khalīl)".) *Institute of Historical Theology, University of Bern.* pg. 12.
[208] Tolotti, Francesco. "Dov'era il terebinto del Vaticano?". Pg. 511

By the time pilgrimage guidebooks were written in the twelfth-century, Old Saint Peters' stood on the site of the Terebinth tree. In order to make sense of the several legends surrounding Peter's grave as given by pseudo-Marcello and pseudo-Lino, pilgrimage guidebooks and Middle Age authors gave the terebinth an architectural identity in the form of a Roman tomb within *Vaticanum.* The Terebinth's identity as a Roman tomb, furthered the churches claim to the land as a site predestined to host the martyrdom of the Apostle. If we are to assume that the Terebinth's actual identity was a tree, its natural form would've preserved the memory of Peter within the architectural landscape of the *mons Vaticanus.* This memory was not only the beginning of the Christian claim over the landscape but was also rooted in Roman symbolism. In using a tree as a trophy and grave marker, whoever placed it on Peter's grave did so in a Roman fashion, its form representative of a trophy that would preserve Peter's memory among the tombs erected near Caligula's circus in the following centuries.

References

Campbell, Virginia L. "Stopping to Smell the Roses: Garden Tombs in Roman Italy". *ARCTOS: Acta Philologica Fennica* (Vol. XLII). (2008).

Heyden, Katharina (2020). "Construction, Performance, and Interpretation of a Shared Holy Place: The Case of Late Antique Mamre (Rāmat al-Khalīl)".) *Institute of Historical Theology, University of Bern.*

Liverani, Paolo. "La Topografia Antica del Vaticano". *Monumenti, Musei e Gallerie Pontificie (Città del Vaticano)* (1999).

The Marvels of Rome (Mirabilia Urbis Romae) edited and translated by Francis Morgan Nicholas. *Italica Press,* New York (1986).

Petacco, Laura. "La Meta Romuli e il Terebinthus Neronis" in *La Spina: dall'agro vaticano a via della Conciliazione*. Gangemi Editore (2017). Pp. 33-39.

Pliny the Elder, *The Natural History*, (Book XIII Chapter 12). Translated by John Bostock. Perseus Digital Library Project.

Tolotti, Francesco. “Dov’era il terebinto del Vaticano?” In *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome. Antiquité*, Rome 91, n°1. 1979. pp. 491-524

Wirsching, Armin. “How the obelisks reached Rome: evidence of Roman double-ships” *International Journal of Nautical Archaeology.* (2000). Pp 273-283.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE MAUSOLEUM OF HADRIAN

Under the emperor Hadrian (117-138 AD) the popularity of the Vatican plain as a funerary zone grew rapidly after he decided to erect his dynastic Mausoleum in his *Horti Domitae* in 123. The land was located directly north of the Campus Martius, and to increase access to both his Mausoleum and the Tiber's right bank, Hadrian erected a bridge, the Pons Aelius, in 134. At the time it was built, Hadrian's tomb became the defining feature of the *trans Tiberium*, its total height of 50 meters made it one of the tallest monuments in Rome.[209] In terms of the Vatican plain's developmental timeline - relating to the monuments previously discussed - Hadrian's Mausoleum is the newest, yet arguably had the largest impact on the topography. This is due to both the Pons Aelius, which made the land more accessible, as well as the imperial prestige conveyed by the tomb; it held several generations of emperors until the end of the second century. As pointed out by several scholars, Hadrian's decision to locate his Mausoleum in the *trans Tiberium*, and not within the perimeter of the Campus Martius, was unexpected, yet not unanticipated.[210] The Campus Martius was home to the Pantheon, which Hadrian had rebuilt after it burned down in the first-century, as well as Augustus' large funerary complex.[211] By placing his tomb on the relatively undeveloped land in the Vatican plain, Hadrian, like Augustus

---

[209] The Mausoleum was taller than the Pantheon, Trajan's Column and Mausoleum of Augustus. See Boatwright, Mary T. "Hadrian's Mausoleum and the Pons Aelius" in *Hadrian and the Cities of Rome*. Princeton University Press, 1987.

[210] Scholars including Davies, Boatwright and Barbara Borg in "Reviving Tradition in Hadrianic Rome".

[211] Boatwright, Mary T. "Engineering and Architectural Donations" in *Hadrian and the Cities of the Roman Empire,* pg.128

before him, intended to be the founder of his own dynasty. Rather than locate his tomb within the Campus Martius, where an imperial funerary footprint had already been made, Hadrian decided to erect his tomb on the opposite bank, where it would benefit from the topographical connections of surrounding monuments, including the Circus and Meta Romuli. The Mausoleum, like other funerary monuments discussed in this paper, was transformed under Christian patronage over the course of several centuries (5th - 16th). This chapter will evaluate the visual language present in Hadrian's Mausoleum and how it benefited from topographical interactions with the other funerary monuments previously discussed, as well as define its significance in the development of the Vatican plain as temporal and religious power was transferred to the papacy.

Form and Decoration

As Barbara Kellum has pointed out, imperial messages intrinsic to visual culture were usually initiated by the emperor himself or his family members.[212] When commissioning funerary sculpture, whether in the form of a large tomb or smaller altar, the emperors of Rome were aware of the sculpture's potential to remind citizens of their individual memory after they died. The public reception of a funerary object would help citizens establish both an ideal image of that ruler, as well as identify what that individual had done for them, within the political and social realm of the Empire. Architectural narrative - conveyed through decoration, placement, and form - was used by emperors to aid in the persistence of their memory, implanted in the urban landscape of Rome. Perhaps the most substantial purpose that architectural narrative could contribute to an imperial funerary monument was the argument for apotheosis. After Augustus

[212] Kellum, Barbara. "Imperial Messages" in *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Sculpture*. Oxford Academic (2015). Pg. 423

was awarded an apotheosis in 14 AD, all emperors who followed him became valuable candidates for the title, and convincing the Senate of their deserved deification became a considerable goal. Hadrian's Mausoleum, in both form and location, followed this tradition established by Augustus, while also demonstrating several innovative concepts that would assist his architectural footprint in the urban landscape of Rome.

While the base remains, the majority of the top half of the Mausoleum has been lost to time.[213] Several scholars, including Paolo Vitti and Rowland Pierce have proposed reconstructions (Figures 25 and 26) of the top half of the monument, while the remaining base provides a general understanding of its original form.[214] First, the present-day entrance on the south side is in a similar placement to the original entrance as well as the square base, which was restored on the foundations of the original structure.[215]

Within this square base, there was an inner wall that supported several radiating corridors connected to the first circular drum (Figure 27). These walls created radiating chambers with individual doorways placed in between, extending from the circular drum to the outer square base.[216] Extending upwards from the square base was the first circular drum, from which a second drum was supported and held the final structural element, a rotunda. Interior elements agreed upon by scholars include an entrance vestibule, which led into a second vestibule with a

---

[213] The Mausoleum was severely damaged during the Goths attack on Rome in 537. The upper half was converted into papal apartments during the Renaissance. See Pierce, Rowland S. "The Mausoleum of Hadrian and the Pons Aelius". *The Journal of Roman Studies*, Vol.15 (1925).
[214] For reconstructions see Pierce and Vitti, Paolo. *The Mausoleum of Hadrian Rediscovered: A new Architectural Study,* Lecture Rome-London, Institute of Classical Studies (2015)
[215] Pierce mentions brick stamps dating to 123 AD from the walls of the square base, indicating it is in a similar placement to the original structure. See Pierce, Rowland S. "The Mausoleum of Hadrian and the Pons Aelius". Pg. 82
[216] Pierce, " pg. 82

niche that previously held a colossal statue of Hadrian.[217] From this entrance vestibule, visitors were forced to the right and led up a spiraling ramp that continued in a counterclockwise movement to the main burial chamber.[218]

The overall form of the Mausoleum reveals several structural qualities intended by Hadrian as an argument for apotheosis. First, the tomb, in form, represents that of Augustus's Mausoleum (Figure 28), which sat on the opposite bank of the Tiber in the Campus Martius. Augustus's tomb took on the traditional form of a tumulus mound, supported by a circular drum; this was mimicked by Hadrian in the use of two drums rising from a square base. Augustus's inspiration probably comes from the Etruscan tumulus form, which were multi-generational tombs used to increase claims to power.[219] Augustus, as the leader and guardian of the republic, tended to emphasize traditional forms in architecture as an act of *pietas* and promised continuance of tradition. Hadrian, while imitating Augustus's form in his own tomb, also took reference to tradition one step further by placing it across a river to the North, seen in Etruscan settlements such as Veii.[220]

Although Hadrian references Augustus' tumulus form, Mary Boatwright has pointed out that the addition of the square base set his tomb apart from other Roman construction. Penelope Davies has suggested that the influence of the base came from the lighthouse at Alexandria,

---

[217] See Davies, Penelope J.E. *Death and The Emperor,* Vitti, Paolo. *The Mausoleum of Hadrian Rediscovered,* and Pierce, Stephen R. "The Mausoleum of Hadrian and the Pons Aelius".
[218] Davies, Penelope J.E. "The Monuments" in *Death and The Emperor: Roman Imperial Funerary Monuments from Augustus to Marcus Aurelius.* Pg. 37.
[219] Leighton, Robert "Urbanization in Southern Etruria from the Tenth to the Sixth Century BC: The Origins and Growth of Major Centers" in *The Etruscan World*. Ed. by Jean MacIntosh Turfa. *Taylor and Francis Group* (2013). Pg. 139.
[220] Leighton, ". Pg. 139.

which also had a spiraling ramp leading to its main chamber and was approached by a bridge.[221] This square base added extra height to the Mausoleum, which totaled 50 meters, making it the tallest monument in Rome at the time of construction.[222] The added element contributed to the monument's topographical significance not only due to height, but it also lined up directly with the east-west axis established by the via Cornelia and Circus; visually connecting it to the other imperial project on the Vatican plain. By combining both an innovative feature inspired by a well-known Alexandrian building, and the traditional Etruscan form of a tumulus mound that simultaneously referenced Augustus, Hadrian acknowledged the monuments ability as an argument for deification; His tomb would hold his dynastic line for the next several centuries, just as Augustus's Mausoleum had done previously.

Penelope Davies has argued that cosmic allegory was present in the structural framework of Hadrian's Mausoleum and contributed to the overall image of the monument as an argument for apotheosis. Hadrian's full name was Publius Aelius Hadrianus, Aelius was the Latin form of the Greek 'sun'. In erecting his own mausoleum in a similar fashion to that of Augustus, Davies suggests that Hadrian's new dynasty "was to be the dynasty of the sun".[223] As mentioned in the reconstruction, the spiral ramp at the entrance vestibule forced visitors to the right, circulating them around the main burial chamber in a counterclockwise movement before reaching the chamber within (Figure 29). Davies proposes that Hadrian's placement in a sarcophagus at the center of the main burial chamber was an intended symbol of him as the sun, with visitors

---

[221] The square base could also be inspired by the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus. See Davies, Penelope J.E. *Death and The Emperor* and Pierce, Rowland S. "The Mausoleum of Hadrian and the Pons Aelius"

[222] Boatwright, Mary T. "Hadrian's Mausoleum and the Pons Aelius". Pg. 171.

[223] Davies, "The Imperial Cosmos: The Creation of Eternity" in *Death and the Emperor.* Pg. 83.

circulating around him referencing the movement of the planets.[224] To add to this solar reference, Pierce proposes that the main burial chamber was lit by torches and only saw natural sunlight when the door to the main burial chamber was opened; illuminating Hadrian's final resting place with sunlight every time someone visited his tomb.[225]

The radiating walls that connected the square base to the first drum could also be used in support of this argument, representing the rays of the sun emulating out from the inner tomb (see Figure 29). Both Davies and Pierce have hypothesized that these walls were added to help stabilize the monument on the marshy ground of the river's bank. The use of radial chambers created by walls extending from a circular base can be seen in other Roman tombs, including one at the Via Lucio Fabio Clione.[226] However, these chambers were usually filled with earth in order to act as stabilizing elements, while the radial walls used at Hadrian's mausoleum create individual chambers with doors leading from one to the other.[227] There is also evidence that these radial chambers were prepped for mosaic, which Hadrian most likely commissioned, although they may not have been laid by the time of his death in 139.[228] It seems unlikely that the emperor would've intended for these chambers to be decorated if they only served a structural purpose. Although the Mausoleum was built on rough terrain and considered support systems in construction, Hadrian, in referencing solar symbolism in the plan, would intend to further this symbolism through needed structural components. As the radiating chambers extend from the

---

[224] Davies, ", Pg. 88
[225] Pierce, " pg. 88
[226] For a plan of the round tomb at Via Lucio Fabio Cilone see Davies "An Image of Things Achieved" in *Death and the Emperor.* Pg. 56
[227] Davies, "An Image of Things Achieved" in *Death and the Emperor.* Pg. 68.
[228] Pierce, " pg. 83

square base to the main circular drum, it can be argued that they are a metaphorical representation of the sun's rays, promoting the tomb's cosmic symbolism.

The cosmic symbolism present within the tomb's structure may have also benefited from the cosmic associations presented in the nearby Circus. The two monuments were linked by an embankment road that was added to connect the Pons Aelius to the Via Cornelia, the intersection of both roads was located directly east of the circus (See Figure 9 from Chapter 3, the embankment road is indicated by a dotted line that intersects with the entrance to the Mausoleum).[229] Those visiting the Campus Martius would be able to cross the Pons Aelius, passing the Mausoleum, and continue straight on a path that led them west towards. It should be pointed out that by this period the circus may have fallen into disuse; it has been estimated that by 150 there is no evidence pointing to its use as a racetrack.[230] Its abandonment, however, does not necessarily mean that those visiting west bank would be dissuaded from associating the two monuments; both built by emperors to allude to the powerful symbolism of cyclical life and death. Perhaps while circumambulating the central chamber of Hadrian's tomb, they were reminded of the cyclical dialog presented in a racetrack. The Meta Romuli, which they would've passed while traveling along the embankment road, served as a visual reminder of Augustus's victory in Egypt and subsequent peace. Its proximity to Hadrian's tomb, which looked like that of Augustus, may have benefited Hadrian's political image as the upholder of Augustan peace. As mentioned in Chapter 2, Davies has argued that Hadrian's choice to place his tomb across a river was meant to evoke the Egyptian custom of souls crossing the river Styx before entering the

[229] Davies, "The Power of Place", pg. 159
[230] Boatwright, Mary T. "Hadrian's Mausoleum and the Pons Aelius". Pg. 167.

underworld.[231] The Mausoleum's topographical proximity to the pyramidal tomb may have aided in emphasizing this Egyptian custom, the two monuments referencing each other's funerary symbolism. A sculpture of Hermes-Antinoo found within the gardens surrounding the Mausoleum may also support this narrative (Figure 30). This sculpture conveys Hermes' in the role of *Psychopompos*, in which he guides souls of the dead to the underworld.[232]

As Penelope Davies and Mary Boatwright have pointed out, the emperors were well aware of the advantage their monuments could obtain from others within the urban landscape of Rome.[233] Hadrian, in placing his Mausoleum on the west bank of the Tiber river, and referencing both Augustus and cosmic allegory in its intrinsic design, intentionally meant for his tomb to house a new divine dynasty, that was grounded in tradition and connected to the founding of the Empire.

Several scholars acknowledge that Hadrian's decision to place his Mausoleum across the river in the *Ager Vaticanus* was somewhat perplexing, as the Campus Martius, already marked by Augustus' funerary complex, would seem a more fitting place for the tomb of an Emperor.[234] Although the location may seem peculiar to host the intended dynastic tomb of an emperor, scholars, including Davies, Boatwright and Borg have acknowledged that the decision of Hadrian to place his Mausoleum within the Vatican Plain was not the first imperial project erected in the area, considering luxurious imperial *horti* occupied most of the land across the

---

[231] Davies, ". Pg. 159
[232] Mercalli, Marica. "Adriano e il suo Mausoleo: studi, indagini e interpretazioni". *Electa* (1998). Pg. 40.
[233] For other topographical associations within the urban landscape of Rome see Davies, Penelope J.E. "The Power of Place" in *Death and the Emperor* and Boatwrite, Mary T. *Hadrian and the City of Rome.*
[234] Scholars include Davies, Pierce, Vitti, Boatwright, and Borg.

river starting in the first-century BCE .[235] The land to the west, in the area currently occupied by Saint Peter's Basilica and Vatican palace, was home to Agrippina's estate and the *Horti Agrippinae,* where Caligula erected his circus in 40 AD. There is also evidence of a Palace located in the vicinity of the gardens, where Caligula would receive Jewish ambassadors.[236] Burials lined both the Via Cornelia and Via Triumphalis, as illustrated in previous chapters by the Meta Romuli and so-called Terebinth. Although these tombs were not imperial, they still helped to establish a funerary landscape on the west bank. The land occupied by the *Horti Agrippinae* was private for the first-half of the first century, eventually opened up to the public in 59 AD by Nero, who connected the Vatican plain to the western Campus Martius by erecting the *Pons Neronianus*.[237] Religious cult activity had been maintained in the area under Claudius, who expanded the cult of Cybele from the Campus Martius to the *mons Vaticanus* in the first-century.[238] Another cult to Peter was established in the area, due to his burial on the Circus's northern edge, possibly marked by a tree as discussed in the previous chapter. Peter's cult persuaded several Christian burials to occupy the area from the first century onwards.[239] Hadrian, in erecting his Mausoleum on the Vatican plain, capitalized on and expanded the imperial, religious, and funerary narrative that was already present. Rather than situate his Mausoleum within the already developed Campus Martius, Hadrian decided that he would expand on his predecessors' imperial projects within the *ager Vaticanus*. The Pons Aelius promoted communication between the right and left banks of the Tiber, and along with the Pons

---

[235] Davies, "The Power of Place", pg. 158
[236] Davies, ", Pg. 159
[237] Davies, ", Pg. 158
[238] Gee, Regina. "Cult and Circus in *Vaticanum".* Pg. 69.
[239] Boatwright, Mary T. "Hadrian's Mausoleum and the Pons Aelius". Pg. 168.

Neronainus, encouraged more visitors within the Vatican plain. After crossing the bridge, the embankment road provided a clear path west, connecting Hadrian's tomb to the Via Cornelia, where visitors would pass the several tombs on their way to the circus.

The Pons Aelius, while connecting the Mausoleum to the Campus Martius, also served an important role in the intended placement of the tomb on the west bank. Davies points out that archeological evidence has indicated a loading dock located to the north side of the bridge. This was a popular stopping point for merchants traveling on the Tiber, and often the first stopping point to unload cargo in Rome.[240] Since the Mausoleum was located straight above, it would provide an entrance statement for those visiting, serving as a grand visual spectacle of Hadrian and his dynasty to outsiders. Written on the side of the Pons Aelius was an inscription that stated, "The Emperor Caesar Trajanus Hadrianus Augustus, son of Divine Trajanus Parthicus, grandson of Divine Nerva, with tribunician power for the 18th time, in his third consulship made this."[241] This inscription was on view for both visitors coming into Rome from the Tiber, as well as Romans walking across the Pons Neronianus located south of the Pons Aelius. The statement was Hadrian's way of portraying that he, as a descendant from a divine dynasty, was responsible for these grand forms of architecture.[242]

The Mausoleum was finished a year after Hadrian's death, in 139, originally the emperor was buried in Puteoli. The Roman senate had disapproved of Hadrian in his final years of rule, mainly due to his decision not to consult them while choosing a successor, and decided not to

---

[240] Davies, "The Power of Place", pg. 160.
[241] Davies, ", pg. 161
[242] Both Nerva and Trajan were deified before Hadrian. See Peirce "The Mausoleum of Hadrian and the Pons Aelius" and Davies, Penelope J.E. *Death and The Emperor.*

grant him apotheosis after death.[243] It was only by the persuasion of his successor, Antonius Pius, that Hadrian's remains were disinterred from his resting place in Puteoli and moved to his Mausoleum in Rome in 139.[244] Upon the interment of his remains within his intended tomb, Antonius Pius set up a dedicatory inscription to both him and his wife, Sabina, above the south entrance of the Mausoleum.[245] After Hadrian was laid to rest in his imperial monument, the Mausoleum became known as the Antinoeion, serving as the final resting place for several generations of Antonines and Severans including Antoninus Pius, Marcus Aurelius, Lucius Verus and Commodus.[246]

Although the Vatican plain had been developed under the Julio-Claudians and emergence of Peter's cult, the establishment of Hadrian's Mausoleum solidified the area as a funerary zone with the added prestige of imperial power; generations of emperors buried within the walls of the monument. Boatwright points out that after the erection of Hadrian's dynastic tomb, pagan burials began multiplying along the Via Cornelia by 150 AD.[247] Not only did Hadrian's Mausoleum help establish the funerary narrative of the Vatican plain, but the erection of the Pons Aelius and adjacent embankment road encouraged the growth of Rome to the north. As popularity and burials within the Vatican plain grew, so did the emergence of Peter's cult, the territory solidified under Christian patronage in 326 with the erection of Old Saint Peter's

---

[243] The Senate blamed Hadrian for several deaths including that of his brother-in-law L. Julius Servianus. See Boatwright, Mary T. "Hadrian's Mausoleum and the Pons Aelius". Pg. 180.
[244] Davies. "The Monuments". Pg. 35
[245] Einseiedelm MS records the inscriptions of the Mausoleum, see Pierce "The Mausoleum of Hadrian and the Pons Aelius". Pg. 78.
[246] Borg, Barbara. "Reviving Tradition in Hadrianic Rome: From Incineration to Inhumation" in *Roman Tombs and the Art of Commemoration: Contextual Approaches to Funerary Customs in the second century CE*. Cambridge University Press (2019). Pg. 99.
[247] Boatwright. ", pg. 168.

Basilica. As already seen with the Vatican Obelisk, Meta Romuli and Terebinth, pagan monuments in this area served as important symbols of Christian transformation, while alluding to the Roman memory that the city was founded on. The erection of Hadrian's Mausoleum on the Vatican plain, and the subsequent popularity it brought to the area, aided in the transition of the area in religious terms - from pagan to Christian.

Hadrian's Mausoleum becomes Castel Sant'Angelo

After the construction was finished on the Mausoleum in 139 AD it served as an imperial tomb up until the reign of Commodus, who according to sources seems to be the last emperor interred there, marking the end of the Nerva-Antonine dynasty.[248] The monument maintained its active status as an imperial funerary monument until 401, when it was converted into a military fortress.[249] We do know that several of the Mausoleums' decorative elements were used in the construction of Old Saint Peter's basilica in 326. This includes two bronze peacocks and two porphyry columns with busts of Nerva and Trajan that historically adorned the Fontana Della Pigna in the basilica's square (Figure 31).[250] Peacocks were a common vehicle for female apotheosis in Imperial symbolism and were probably placed there by Antonius Pius to signify the burial and deification of Sabina, Hadrian's wife, who was interred in the Mausoleum in 139 AD.[251]

---

[248] Borg, Barbara. "Reviving Tradition in Hadrianic Rome". Pg. 99.
[249] Contardi, Bruno, and Marica Mercalli. *The Angel and Rome: Castel Sant'Angelo, September 29th-November 29th 1987*. Rome: Palombi. (1987).
[250] For the columns see Louvre Museum, Paris. *Catalog of Roman Portraits,* (1996) inv. MA 1068 and 1069.
[251] Davies, "Fire, Fertility, Fiction: The Role of the Empress" in *Death and the Emperor.* Pg. 109.

In 590 Pope Gregory I had a vision of the Archangel Michael sheathing his sword on the summit of the Mausoleum while leading a procession to Santa 'Agata de Goti.[252] This vision was thought to signify the end of the plague and marked the Mausoleum's transformation into a distinctly Christian monument. In response to this vision Pope Gregory founded the Church of Sant'Angelo di Castro Sant'Angelo and situated it at the monument's summit, replacing the rotunda that originally stood there.[253] This chapel was eventually replaced by a fortification tower in the tenth-century.[254] Pope Gregory initiated the Gregorian Mission six years later in 596, during which he aimed to convert all of the pagan monuments in Rome to Christian ones.

In the centuries between Pope Gregory's vision and the Renaissance the Mausoleum was further incorporated into the Christian narrative of the Vatican plain. The monument is mentioned in the *Mirabillia,* along with the obelisk, Meta Romuli, and Terebinth. It calls the Mausoleum the Castle of Crescentius, and mentions the bronze peacocks and a bull, as well as quadriga groups that adorned each corner of the square base.[255] The guidebook also mentions that Hadrian's Sarcophagus was used in Pope Innocent's tomb in 1143, later destroyed in the Lateran fire of 1308.[256] The lid of this sarcophagus was used by Carlo Fontana in the baptismal font of Saint Peter's basilica in the 1690's. Barbara Borg points out that the massive size and expensive material allude to its use in the final resting place of an Emperor.[257] The Mausoleum's

[252] Mercalli, Marica. "Adriano e il suo Mausoleo: studi, indagini e interpretazioni". Pg. 66
[253] John of Antioch records a quadriga in the 5th-century. See Peirce "The Mausoleum of Hadrian and the Pons Aelius".
[254] Davies. "The Monuments". Pg. 36.
[255] The name comes from Crescentius' defense of the monument against Otho in 998. The Marvels of Rome (*Mirabilia Urbis Romae*). Pg. 79.
[256] Borg, Barbara. "Reviving Tradition in Hadrianic Rome". Pg. 106.
[257] Borg. ". Pg. 111.

proximity to Old Saint Peters', as well as its mention in the *Mirabilia,* made it a likely stopping point for pilgrims visiting the city. Nero's bridge had fallen by the third century, meaning that the Pons Aelius provided pilgrims entering from the Via Flaminia access to the Vatican.[258] When crossing the bridge, perhaps viewing the inscription from the banks of the Campus Martius, pilgrims would acknowledge the identity of the imperial Roman monument and Hadrian's effort in erecting both it and the bridge. The *Mirabilla's* inscription, which described decorative elements taken from the Mausoleum in the decorative program of the basilica, would have persuaded pilgrims to make a topographical connection between the two monuments, it may have evoked both a sense of national and religious pride, as they acknowledged both the Empire and the founding of the Church. The Mausoleum was further linked to the Vatican, when in 1277 Pope Nicholas III built a covered walkway from the now fortress to the Vatican Palace which served as an escape route for popes needing to evacuate.[259]

When the papacy was reinstated in Rome in 1420, the decision to locate it at the Vatican, rather than the Lateran, was in part due to the added security measures that Hadrian's Mausoleum provided for papal residences.[260] The Vatican was also heavily populated during the fifteenth and sixteenth-centuries, as most merchant and banking headquarters were located in the Ponte Rione near the entrance to Vatican city, accessed by the Pons Aelius.[261] Saint Peter's Basilica, which at this time dominated the urban landscape of the west bank, served as a visual

---

[258] The bridge was replaced in 1892. See Peirce "The Mausoleum of Hadrian and the Pons Aelius".
[259] Davies. "The Monuments". Pg. 36.
[260] The papacy was exiled to Avignon in the first half of the 13th-Century. See Temple, Nicholas. "Signposting Peter and Paul" in *Renovatio Urbis: Architecture, Urbanism and Ceremony in the Rome of Julius II*.
[261] Temple, ". pg. 24

emblem to Rome's rebirth as a Christian city. Other monuments, including the obelisk, Meta Romuli and Hadrian's Mausoleum (the rotunda identified as the Terebinth had been torn down by the twelfth century), helped aid in this transformation. The Christian identity that had been attached to these funerary monuments through guidebooks like the *Mirabilla,* enabled them to hold a dual identity; one that reminded pilgrims of the city's ancient past, while simultaneously infusing that past with Christian symbolism. While pilgrims made their way to the basilica, each monument adorning the landscape would serve as reminders of both Christian and Roman memory.

Like the use of the Meta Romuli's and so-called Terebinth's marble facing in the paving of Old Saint Peters', several elements from Hadrian's Mausoleum were also included in both the old and new versions of the basilica. As mentioned earlier, several decorative elements including the peacocks were used in the fountain which adorned Old Saint Peter's courtyard. Of the elements used in the current basilica, Lanciani informs us of two large granite columns with "composite capitals showing the bust of the Emperor Hadrian framed in acanthus leaves' ' that flank the entrance.[262] It is also recorded that Pope Gregory XIII removed several of the monument's original inscriptions in 1579, including the dedicatory one added by Antonius Pius, and worked them into the basilica's decoration.[263] In the 1690's the lid to Hadrian's sarcophagus was used in the Baptismal font and recorded by Fontana.[264] The use of the original monuments' decorative features in the architectural framework of the basilica, while practical, also

[262] Lanciani, Amedeo Rodolfo. *The Destruction of Ancient Rome.* University of Michigan Libraries (1899). New York, MacMillan Company.
[263] Pierce, ". Pg. 80.
[264] Borg, ". pg. 111

symbolized a transformation - from pagan to Christian - that was exhibited in the urban landscape of the Vatican plain. Due to the *Mirabilia's* description of the funerary monuments within the Vatican plain, pilgrims would have been aware of what decorative elements were used in the construction of Old Saint Peters'.

Further efforts to connect the mausoleum and basilica were made in preparations for the Jubilee celebrations of 1500.[265] In 1499, ten months before the celebration took place, Alexander VI opened the Via Alessandria, which connected Saint Peter's square to the front of the mausoleum.[266] After the decision was made to reconstruct the basilica in 1506, Pope Paul III began converting the Mausoleum's upper half to papal apartments between 1534 and 1549.[267] While renovating the Mausoleum for the use of Papal apartments, the church did not forget the pagan heritage of the monument, rather they embraced it. This is best exemplified by frescoes adorning two of the rooms, the Sala Adriano and the Sala Paolina (Figures 32-33).[268]

In the Sala Adriano, a cycle of frescoes by Prospero Fontana depicts the several imperial monuments of the west bank, including the Meta Romuli, obelisk and mausoleum, flanked by pairs of caryatids. These frescos, titled *Monumenti Romani,* allude to the imperial memory of the Vatican plain - symbolized by several identifiable monuments - which were subsequently tied to the, now Christian, topography. In the Sala Paolina, two frescoes by Girolamo Siciolante da Sermoneta are situated parallel to each other. One depicts Hadrian, the other the Archangel

---

[265] Frommel, Christoph L. "The Planning of Rome during the Renaissance". *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*. Vol. 17 (1986). Pg. 49.
[266] Frommel, ". pg. 42.
[267] Mercalli, ". Pg. 255.
[268] For images of the frescoes by Prospero Fontana in the Sala Adriano see Mercalli, Marica. "Adriano e il suo Mausoleo: studi, indagini e interpretazioni", pp. 266-267.

Michael sheathing his sword; the two identities of the monument are juxtaposed, both contributing to its current reception as a monument that aided in the transfer of authority from the emperor to the papacy. The depiction of Hadrian and other Imperial monuments within the visual narrative of the papal apartments, acknowledges the topographical history of the Vatican plain, and the monument's identities which are rooted in both Christian and Imperial memory.

As the Mausoleum of Hadrian was the first Imperial dynastic tomb to be erected within the Vatican plain, it aided in accelerating the area's popularity through adding imperial prestige. Hadrian, by creating an urban image that connected the two imperial projects of the Vatican plain - the Circus and Mausoleum – with the embankment road, aided in the funerary narrative of the area during the Imperial period. When pilgrims began visiting the city in the Middle Ages, a topographical image had been set; one that linked the four funerary monuments to the Church both in decoration and Christian history.

References

Boatwright, Mary T. "Hadrian's Mausoleum and the Pons Aelius" in *Hadrian and the Cities of Rome*. Princeton University Press, 1987.

Borg, Barbara. "Reviving Tradition in Hadrianic Rome: From Incineration to Inhumation" in *Roman Tombs and the Art of Commemoration: Contextual Approaches to Funerary Customs in the second century CE*. Cambridge University Press (2019).

Contardi, Bruno, and Marica Mercalli. *The Angel and Rome: Castel Sant'Angelo, September 29th-November 29th 1987*. Rome: Palombi. (1987).

Davies, Penelope J.E. *Death and The Emperor: Roman Imperial Funerary Monuments from Augustus to Marcus Aurelius.* University of Texas Press, Austin. (2000).

Favro, Diane. The Urban Image of Augustan Rome. *Cambridge University Press* (1996)

Frommel, Christoph L. "The Planning of Rome during the Renaissance". *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*. Vol. 17 (1986).

Gee, Regina. “Cult and Circus in *Vaticanum*”. *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome.* Vol. 56/57. (2011/2012). Pp. 63-83. University of Michigan Press for the American Academy in Rome.

Kellum, Barbara. “Imperial Messages” in *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Sculpture*. Oxford Academic (2015).

Lanciani, Amedeo Rodolfo. *The Destruction of Ancient Rome.* University of Michigan Libraries (1899). New York, MacMillan Company.

Leighton, Robert “Urbanization in Southern Etruria from the Tenth to the Sixth Century BC: The Origins and Growth of Major Centers”. In *The Etruscan World*. Ed. by Jean MacIntosh Turfa. *Taylor and Francis Group* (2013)

The Marvels of Rome (Mirabilia Urbis Romae) edited and translated by Francis Morgan Nicholas. *Italica Press,* New York (1986).

Mercalli, Marica. “Adriano e il suo Mausoleo: studi, indagini e interpretazioni”. *Electa* (1998)

Pierce, Rowland S. “The Mausoleum of Hadrian and the Pons Aelius”. *The Journal of Roman Studies*, Vol.15 (1925). Pp. 75-103

Temple, Nicholas. “Signposting Peter and Paul” in *Renovatio Urbis: Architecture, Urbanism and Ceremony in the Rome of Julius II*. Florence: Taylor and Francis Group, 2011. Pp. 7-33.

Vitti, Paolo. *The Mausoleum of Hadrian Rediscovered: A new Architectural Study,* Lecture Rome-London, Institute of Classical Studies (2015)

CONCLUSION

For a pilgrim visiting Rome in the twelfth century, guidebooks like the *Mirabilia* offered them a tour, supplying brief information about some of the monuments they passed as they neared Old Saint Peters'. The Vatican Obelisk, Meta Romuli, Terebinth of Nero and Hadrian's Mausoleum each obtained a mytho-historical identity, aided by their descriptions in guidebooks.[269] These monuments helped tie Peter and the founding of the church to the urban landscape, providing pilgrims with a religious experience connected to several architectural monuments. As a pilgrim entered the city from the north, referencing the *Mirabilia* as they traveled through the Vatican plain, the experience may have looked something like this:

Approaching the city from the north on the Via Triumphalis, the Meta Romuli and alleged Terebinth were the first monuments they would encounter. The pyramidal tomb, identified as the *Sepulchre of Romulus,* and *Meta,* evoked the memory of Rome's founding under Romulus, noted by pilgrims as they made their way to the shrine of the founder of the Christian church. The Terebinth of Nero, as it was called in the *Mirabilia,* according to ecclesiastical tradition, was the site of Saint Peter's martyrdom. Just as the Meta Romuli was mentioned in the guidebook and could be identified with a landmark, so was the Terebinth.[270] Pilgrims may have felt compelled to follow the travertine path built between the two monuments, which aided in physically connecting their respective roles in Peter's martyrdom; one was the possible site of martyrdom,

---

[269] I borrow the term "mytho-historic" from Nicholas Temple.

[270] By the 12th C. the monument was likely in the process of being destroyed. The *Mirabilia* mentions the monument in the past tense, indicating that it was likely torn down by the time the guidebook was written in 1140. While the precise date of destruction is unknown, pilgrims likely knew of its existence and location, suggested by its mention in the guidebook. Given the ecclesiastical importance of the monument, there may have been remains left for pilgrims to observe.

while the other was an 'endpoint' or witness of said martyrdom. The two, together and separately, provided a cohesive religious experience for pilgrims seeking divine meaning in the city's urban framework.

After passing both the Terebinth and Meta Romuli, pilgrims would likely turn west, approaching Old Saint Peter's. The obelisk, still located at the basilica's south end, would've been a popular stopping point. Given Master Gregorius's account, pilgrims may have felt compelled to crawl underneath its base, as the obelisk was thought to hold divine power capable of purifying sin.[271] The *Mirabilia* identified the obelisk as the sepulcher of Julius Caesar. Both Egyptianized monuments within the Vatican topography, the obelisk and Meta Romuli, could be related to substantial figures in Rome's history, Caesar and Romulus, providing pilgrims with a visual connection between Rome's ancient past and their present experience. After visiting the obelisk and basilica, pilgrims would travel down the Via Cornelia, approaching the Mausoleum of Hadrian before crossing the Pons Aelius to enter the Campus Martius. They may have entered the emperor's tomb, which at the time was adapted into the city's fortifications. The Church of Sant'Angelo di Castro Sant'Angelo, erected on the Mausoleum's summit by Pope Gregory had been replaced by a fortification tower in the tenth century. After visiting the Mausoleum, pilgrims would cross the Pons Aelius, its inscription reminding them of Hadrian's civic contribution of providing citizens further access to the Vatican plain.

After reading about the four funerary monuments in the *Mirabilia,* pilgrims may seek out the several decorative features used in the construction of Old Saint Peter's. The marble facing

[271] Temple, Nicholas. *Renovatio Urbis: Architecture, Urbanism and Ceremony in the Rome of Julius II.* Pp. 180

from both the Terebinth and Meta Romuli that was used in the paving of the atrium, as well as the several decorative features from Hadrian's Mausoleum, connected the funerary monuments of the Vatican plain to the founding of the Christian church in form; each monument contributed elements to the building blocks of the basilica. The physical use of the funerary monuments in the church's form strengthened their connections to the Christian narrative of the Vatican plain.

The Church's need for topographical particularity mirrored the Romans' appreciation for the powerful impact of geographical associations. Piso's suggestion that memory is rooted in place is particularly relevant when examining the religious and funerary narrative of the Vatican plain. The evolving "memory" indicated by the four funerary monuments was one that changed, from being associated with the deceased interred within each tomb, to being associated with Peter and the Christian faith, as religious and temporal authority was transferred from Emperor as *pontifex maximus* to the papacy in the Middle Ages. The Vatican Obelisk, Meta Romuli, Terebinth and Mausoleum of Hadrian each held individual memory, manifested in their location and form by those who erected them, then subsequently adapted to support the papal claim to authority. All four monuments, individually and collectively through identity, architectural framework, historical narrative, and topography contributed to the overall historical and religious progression of the Vatican plain.

REFERENCES CITED

Beard, Mary. *The Roman Triumph.* Harvard University Press, 2007.

Beard, Mary. North, John. Price, Simon. *Religions of Rome*. Vol. 1 and 2. *University of Cambridge* (1998).

Boatwright, Mary T. *Hadrian and the Cities of Rome*. Princeton University Press, 1987.

Borg, Barbara. *Roman Tombs and the Art of Commemoration: Contextual Approaches to Funerary Customs in the Second Century CE*. Cambridge University Press (2019).

Brian Curran, Anthony Grafton, and Angelo Decembrio. "A Fifteenth-Century Site Report of the Vatican Obelisk". *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes.* Vol. 58 (1995).

Burton, Gideon O. "Canons of Rhetoric: Memory" in *Silva Rhetoricae.* Brigham Young University (2007).

Campbell, Virginia L. "Stopping to Smell the Roses: Garden Tombs in Roman Italy". *ARCTOS: Acta Philologica Fennica* (Vol. XLII). (2008).

Contardi, Bruno, and Marica Mercalli. *The Angel and Rome: Castel Sant'Angelo, September 29th-November 29th 1987*. Rome: Palombi. (1987).

Curran, Brian A. Grafton, Anthony. Long, Pamela O. and Weiss, Benjamin. "Obelisk: A History". *Burndy Library Publications*. (2009).

Dannenfeldt, Karl H. "Egypt and Egyptian Antiquities in the Renaissance". *Studies in the Renaissance*. (1959) Vol. 6, pp.7-27

Davies, Penelope J.E. *Death and The Emperor: Roman Imperial Funerary Monuments from Augustus to Marcus Aurelius.* University of Texas Press, Austin. (2000).

Dyer, Joseph. "Roman Processions of the Major Litany (*litanie maiores)* from the Sixth to the Twelfth-Century" in *Roma Felix: Formation and Reflections of Medieval Rome*. ed. Éamonn Ó Carragain and Carol Neuman de Vegvar (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 112-37.

The Etruscan World. Ed. by Jean MacIntosh Turfa. United Kingdom: *Taylor & Francis* (2014).

Favro, Diane. *An Urban Image of Augustan Rome*. Cambridge University Press (1996)

Favro, Diane. "The City is a Living Thing: The Performative Role of an Urban Site in Ancient Rome, the Vallis Murcia". *Studies in the History of Art*, Vol. 56. (1999).

Frommel, Christoph L. "The Planning of Rome during the Renaissance". *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*. Vol. 17 (1986).

Iversen, Erik. "The Date of the So-Called Inscription of Caligula on the Vatican Obelisk". *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*. Vol 51. (1965). Pp.149-154

Gee, Regina. “Cult and Circus in *Vaticanum*”. *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome.* Vol. 56/57. (2011/2012). Pp. 63-83. University of Michigan Press for the American Academy in Rome.

Hamilton, Louis I. “The Rituals of Renaissance: Liturgy and Mythic History in *The Marvels of Rome”.* in *Medieval Encounters.* Volume 17. *Brill Publishing* (2011). Pp. 417-438.

Heyden, Katharina (2020). "Construction, Performance, and Interpretation of a Shared Holy Place: The Case of Late Antique Mamre (Rāmat al-Khalīl)".) *Institute of Historical Theology, University of Bern.*

Kedar, Benjamin “Convergences of Oriental Christian, Muslim, and Frankish Worshippers: The Case of Saydnaya.” In *De Sion exibit lex et verbum domini de Hierusalem: Essays in Medieval Law, Liturgy and Literature in Honour of Amnon Linder*, edited by Yitzhak Hen, 59–69. (2001)

Lacovara, Peter. “Pyramids and Obelisks Beyond Egypt”. *Aegyptiaca: Journal of the History of Reception of Ancient Egypt.*

Lanciani, Amedeo Rodolfo. *The Destruction of Ancient Rome.* University of Michigan Libraries (1899). New York, MacMillan Company.

Liverani, Paolo. “La Topografia Antica del Vaticano”. *Monumenti, Musei e Gallerie Pontificie (Città del Vaticano)* (1999).

The Marvels of Rome (*Mirabilia Urbis Romae*) edited and translated by Francis Morgan Nicholas. *Italica Press,* New York (1986).

Mercalli, Marica. “Adriano e il suo Mausoleo: studi, indagini e interpretazioni”. *Electa* (1998)

McKenzie, Judith. “The Architecture of Alexandria and Egypt (c. 300 BC to AD 700). *Yale University Press* (2007).

Milne, J. Grafton. “Greek and Roman Tourists in Egypt”. *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* Vol. 3, (1916). Pp.76-80.

Neuerburg, Norman. “Greek and Roman Pyramids”. Vol.22. *Archaeological Institute of America,* (1969).

The Oxford Handbook of Roman Sculpture. Ed. by Elaine K. Gazda, Elise A. Friedland, Melanie Grunow Sobocinski. Spain: *Oxford University Press* (2015).

Palmer, Morgan E. “A Blight on the *Pax Augusta*: The Robilagia in Ovid’s *Fasti*”. *Classical World.* Vol. 111, No.4. (2018). Pp. 503-523.

Parker, John Henry. “The Twelve Egyptian Obelisks in Rome: Their History Explained by Translations of the Inscriptions Upon Them”. *Leopold Classic Library.* (1879).

Petacco, Laura. “La Meta Romuli e il Terebinthus Neronis” in *La Spina: dall’agro vaticano a via della Conciliazione*. Gangemi Editore (2017). Pp. 33-39.

Pierce, Rowland S. “The Mausoleum of Hadrian and the Pons Aelius”. *The Journal of Roman Studies,* Vol.15 (1925). Pp. 75-103.

Pliny the Elder, *The Natural History,* (Book XIII Chapter 12). Translated by John Bostock. Perseus Digital Library Project.

Riccioni, Stefano. “Rewriting Antiquity, Renewing Rome. The Identity of the Eternal City through Visual Art, Monumental Inscriptions and the *Mirabilia " in Medieval Encounters.* Volume 17. *Brill Publishing* (2011). pp . 439 - 463.

Tacitus, Cornelius. *The Annals.* Ed. by Church, John and Brodribb, William J.

Taylor, Rabun, Rinne, Katherine W., and Kostof, Spiro. *Rome: An Urban History from Antiquity to Present.* Cambridge University Press (New York, 2016).

Temple, Nicholas. *Renovatio Urbis: Architecture, Urbanism and Ceremony in the Rome of Julius II*. Florence: Taylor and Francis Group (2011).

Tolotti, Francesco. “Dov’era il terebinto del Vaticano?” In *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome. Antiquité,* Rome 91 (1979). pp. 491-524.

Townend, Gavin. “The Circus of Nero and the Vatican Excavations”. *American Journal of Archaeology.* (1958). Vol. 62. Pp. 216-218.

Toynbee, J. M. C.. *Death and Burial in the Roman World*. United Kingdom: Johns Hopkins University Press (1996).

Vitti, Paolo. *The Mausoleum of Hadrian Rediscovered: A new Architectural Study,* Lecture Rome-London, Institute of Classical Studies (2015).

Wirsching, Armin. “How the obelisks reached Rome: evidence of Roman double-ships” *International Journal of Nautical Archaeology.* (2000). Pp 273-283.

Zietsman, J.C. “Crossing the Roman Frontier: Egypt in Rome (and beyond)”. *Acta Classica, Classical Association of South Africa.* (2009). Pp. 1-21.

APPENDIX

FIGURES

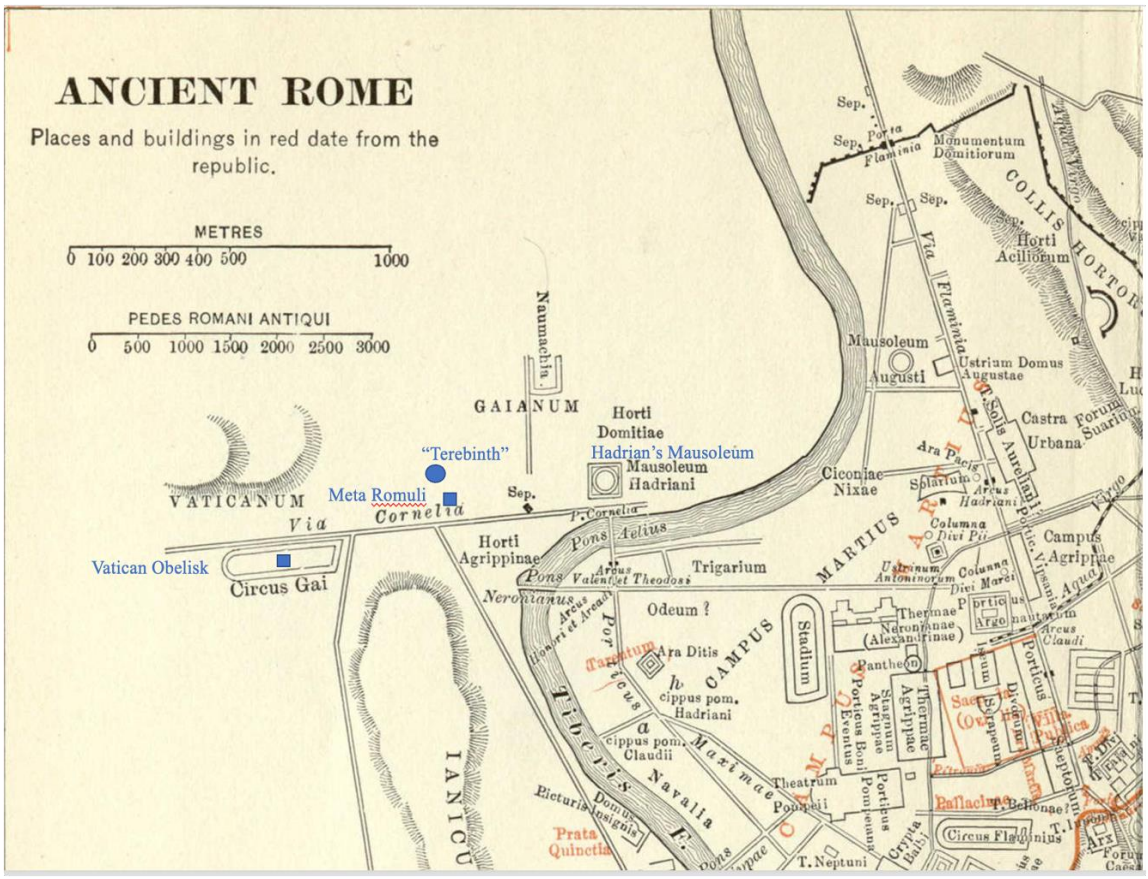

Figure 1. S.B. Platner. Map of Rome. 1911. Edited to show funerary monuments location from 1st-century BCE to 2nd-Century AD.

Figure 2. Cybele in Chariot. 1st C. AD. MET

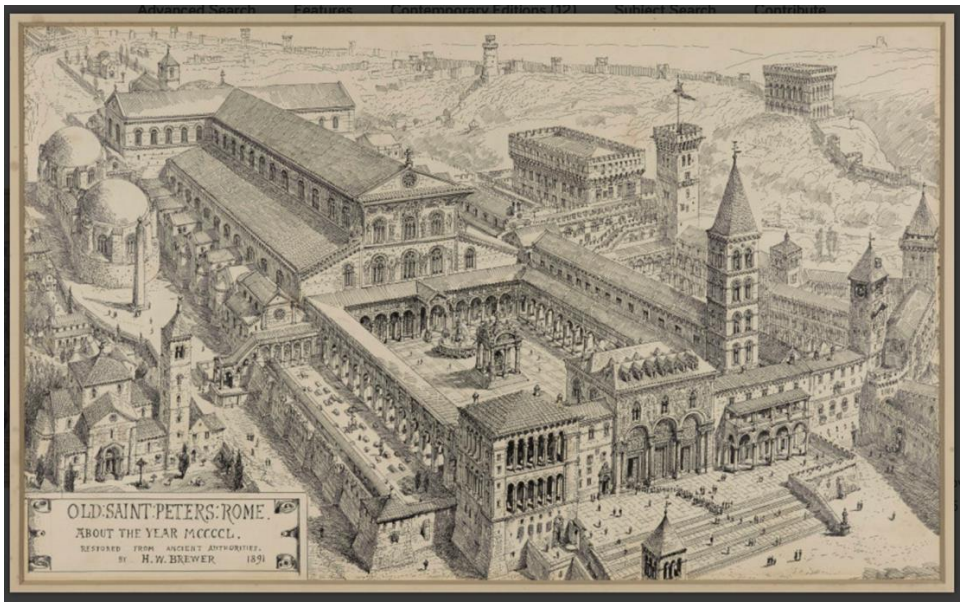

Figure 3. Brewer, Henry William. Old Saint Peter's Basilica in the year 1450. 1450. (RIBA. Ref. # RIBA127584.

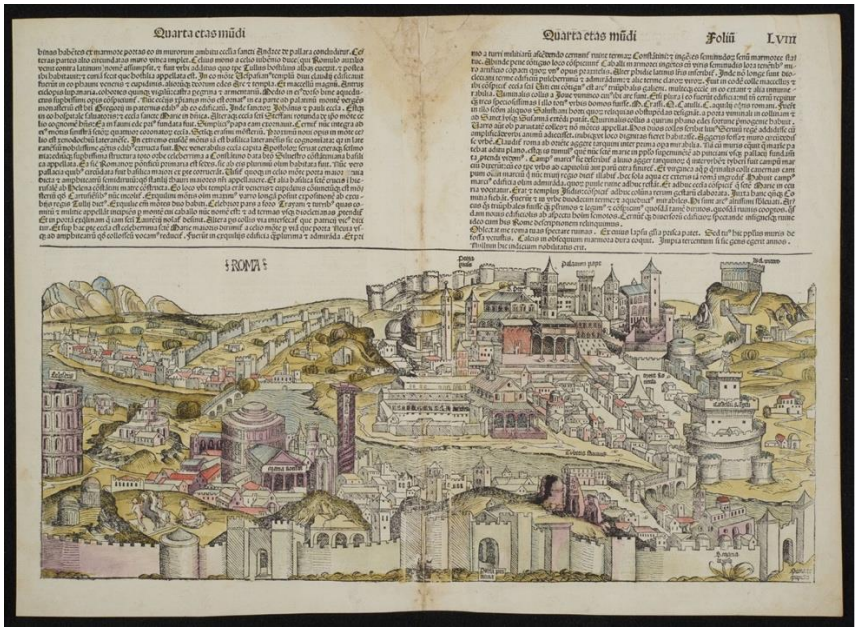

Figure 4. Schedel, Hartman. Nuremberg Chronicles. 1478. National Gallery of Art.

Figure 5. Massaio, Pietro del. Mappa di Roma. 1471

Figure 6. Relief fragment from a funerary monument (98-117 AD). Located in the Vatican Museums.

Figure 7. Port of Claudius at Ostia Antica by Georg Braun and Frans Hogenberg (1580). The moles built on top of Caligula's ship are seen to the right.

Figure 8. Relief fragment from the Tomb of the Haterii (100 AD). Museo Gregoriano Profano, Vatican City.

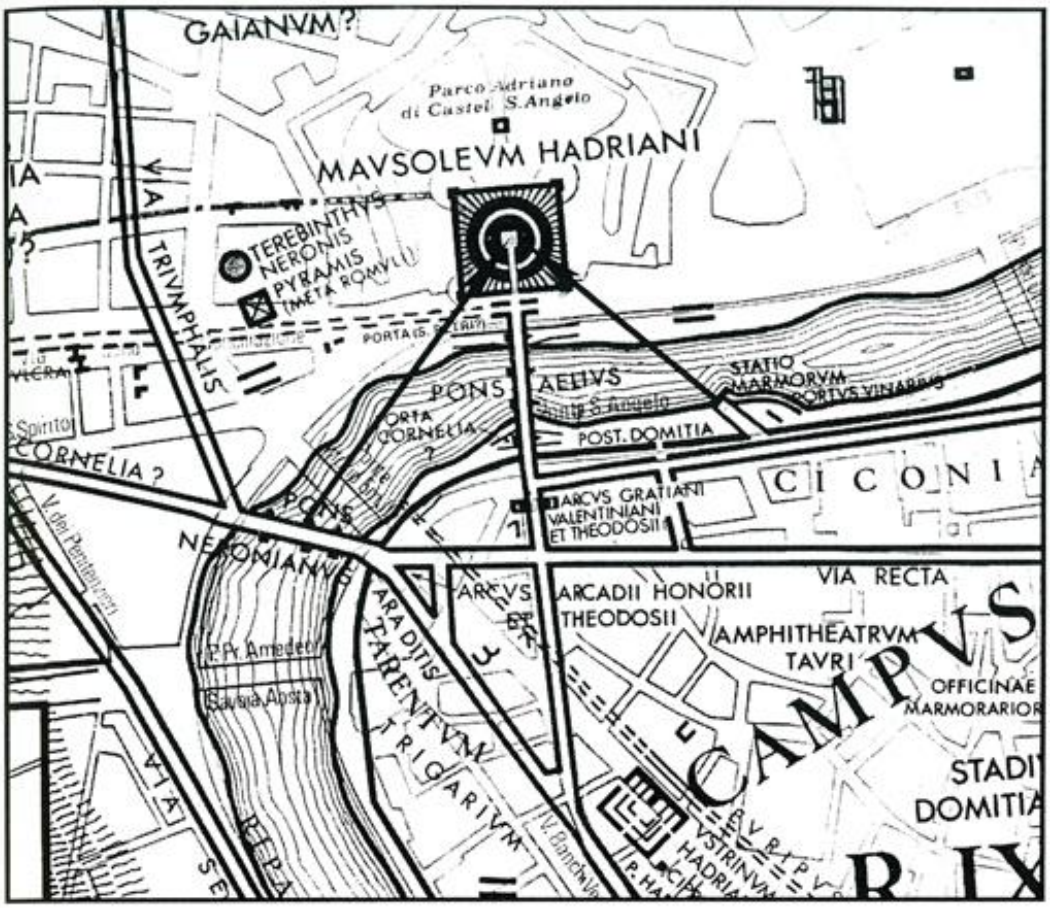

Figure 9. Plan showing viewpoints of Hadrian's Mausoleum with location of the Meta Romuli (labeled Pyramis) and the Terebinth of Nero, to the left of Hadrian's Mausoleum. Constanze Witt. See Davies, Penelope J.E. Death and the Emperor. Pg. 158.

Figure 10. The Pyramid of Gaius Cestius outside of the Porta San Paolo in Rome

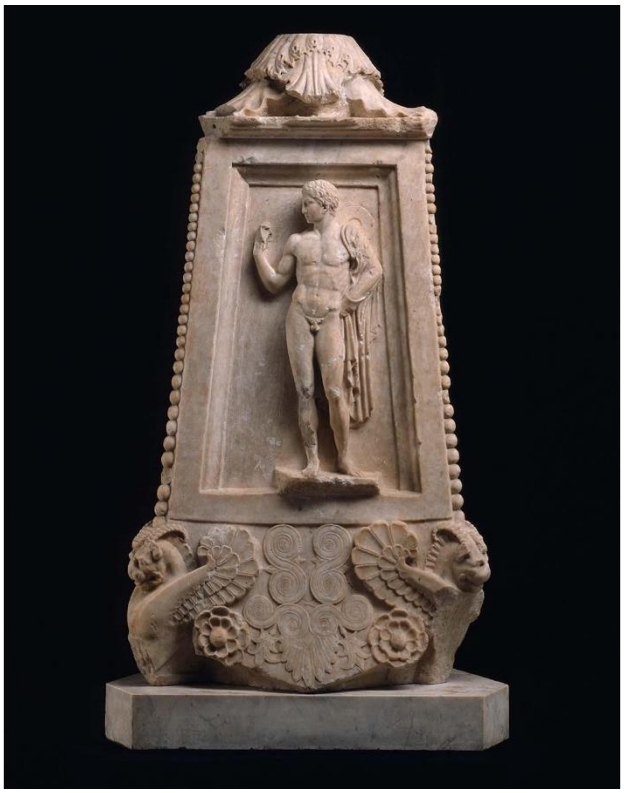

Figure 11. Candelabra base found in the Borgo (30-20 BCE). The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Accession Number 96.702

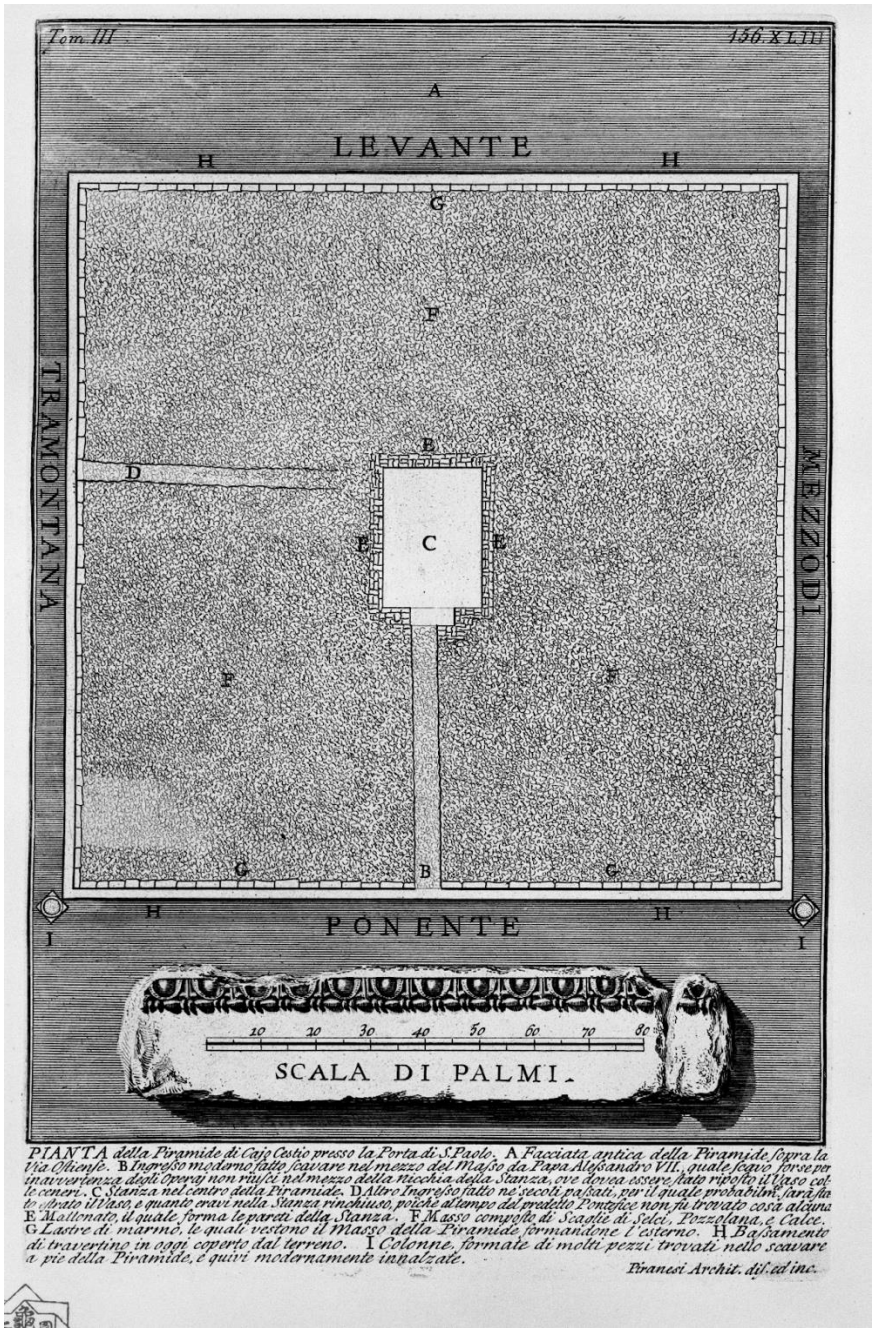

Figure 12. Giovanni Battista Piranesi. *Plan of the Pyramid of Gaius Cestius.* 18th-Century.

Figure 13. Nubian pyramids of Meroe, Sudan. 25th Dynasty, Egypt.

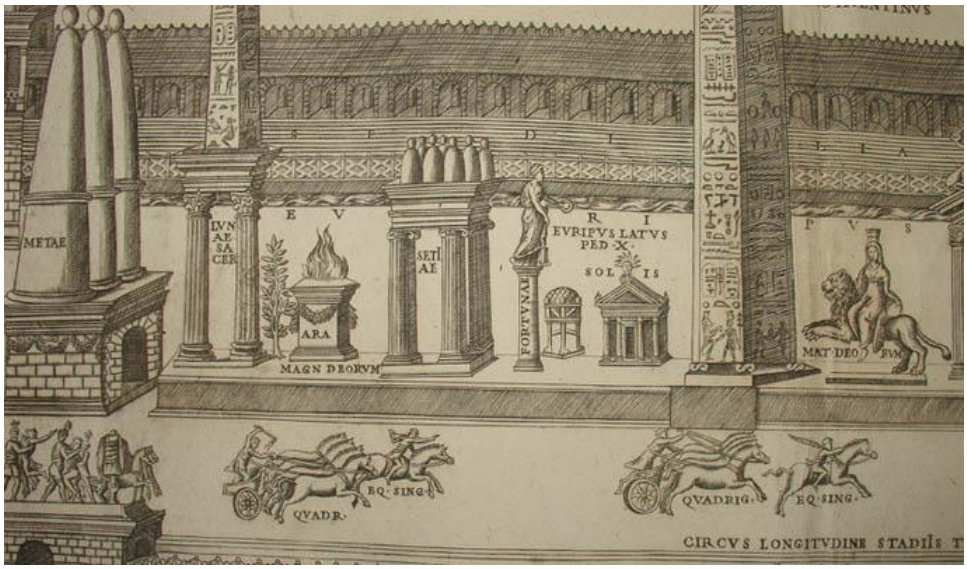

Figure 14. Pirro Ligorio. Circus Maximus with metae labeled to the left of the obelisk. Engraving, 1582.

Figure 15. Raphael. *Vision of the Cross,* 1520-1524. Meta Romuli depicted in the background next to Hadrian's Mausoleum.

Figure 16. Interior of the Chigi Chapel, located in the nave of the Basilica of Santa Maria del Popolo, Rome.

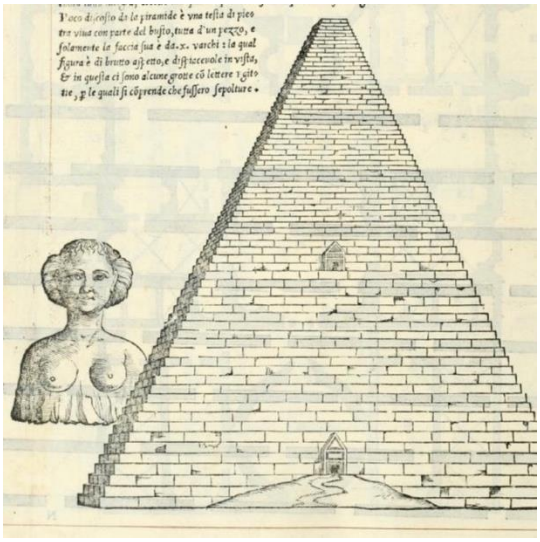

Figure 17. Sebastiano Serlio. *Giza Pyramid and the Sphinx.* 16th- Century.

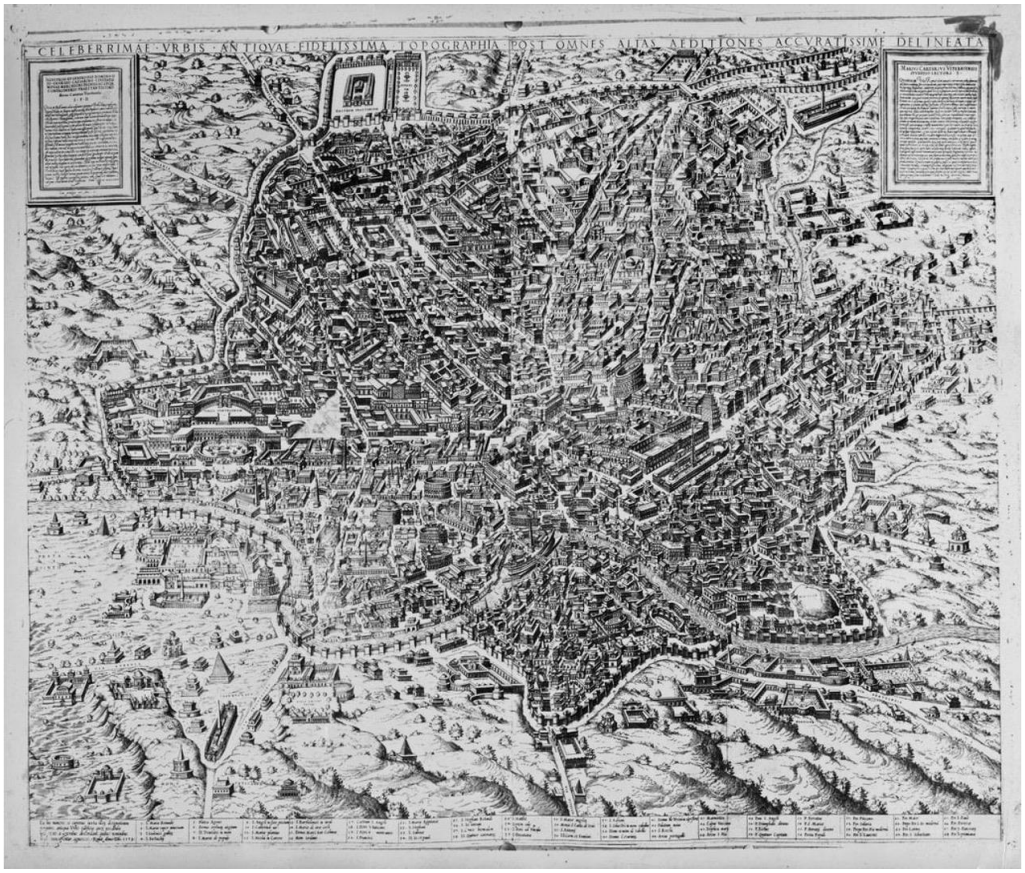

Figure 18. Mario Cartaro. Map of Rome (1579). This map is oriented with northern Rome on the left side. The intersection of the Via Triumphalis and Via Cornelia can be seen in the bottom left corner with identifiable features including the Meta Romuli, Hadrian's Mausoleum, and Vatican Circus.

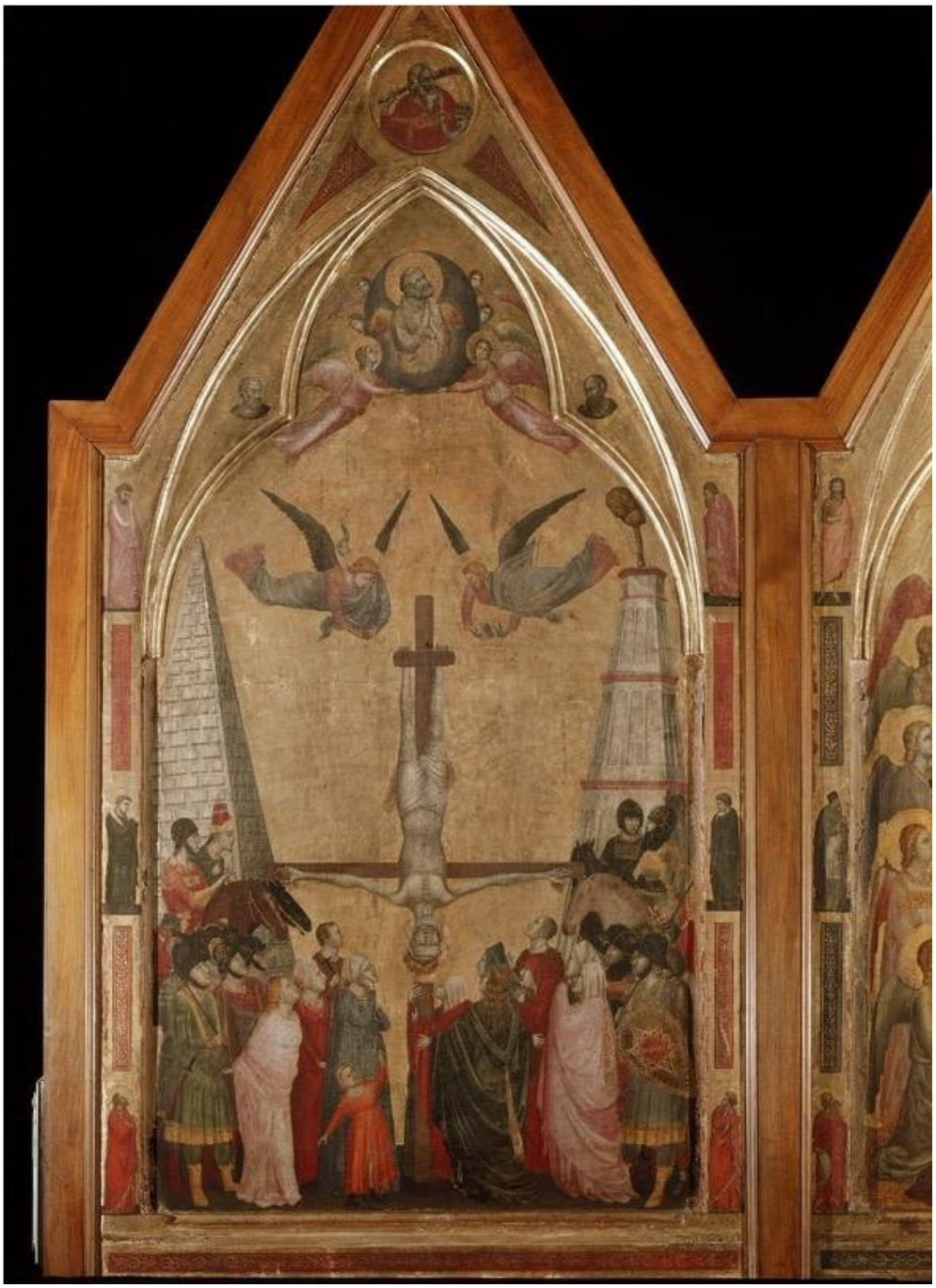

Figure 19. Giotto. Left panel of the Stefaneschi Polyptych (1330). The circular Roman tomb identified as the Terebinth stands on the right, the Meta Romuli on the left.

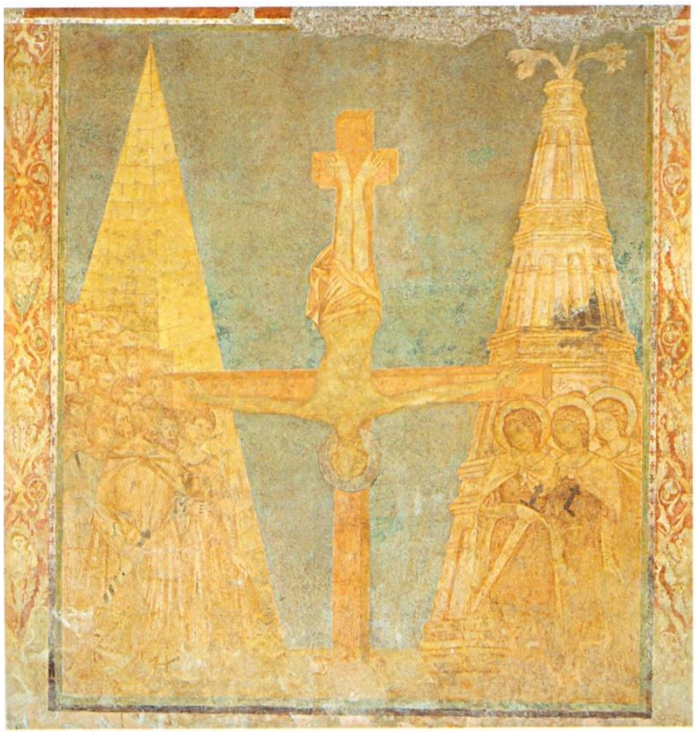

Figure 20. Unknown artist. *The Martyrdom of Saint Peter* (1280).

Figure 21. Funerary altar from 1st C. Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Figure 22. Sarcophagus fragment from the end of the third-century. From the collection of princess Cornelia Constanza Barberini.

Figure 23. Reproduction of wall painting in Pompei, via degli Augustali. (M. Rostowzew, *Die hellenistisch-römische Architekturlandschaft*)

Figure 24. Filarete, Bronze Doors of Old Saint Peters'. 1433-1445.

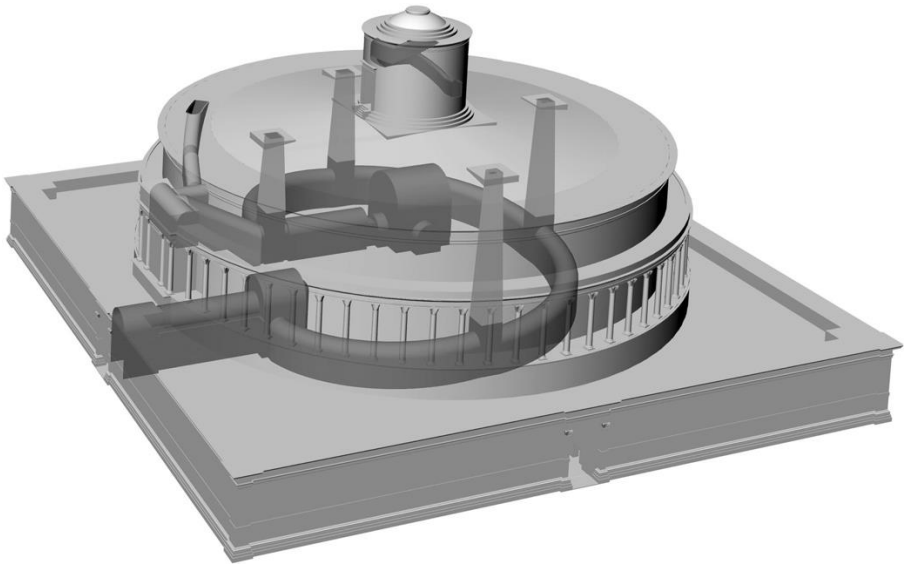

Figure 25. Paolo Vitti; Reconstruction of Hadrian's Mausoleum (2015)

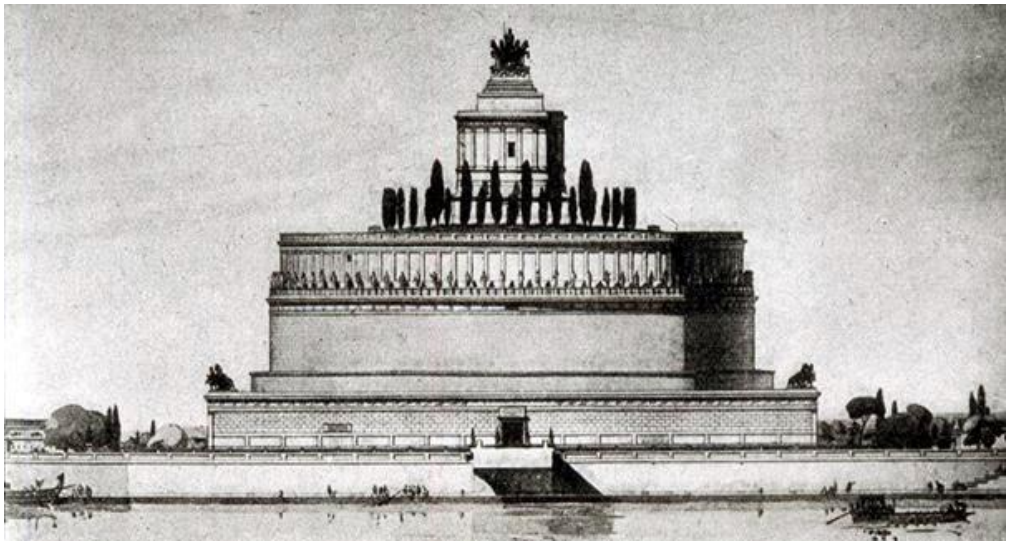

Figure 26. Stephen Rowland Pierce; *Reconstruction of Hadrian's Mausoleum* (1925)

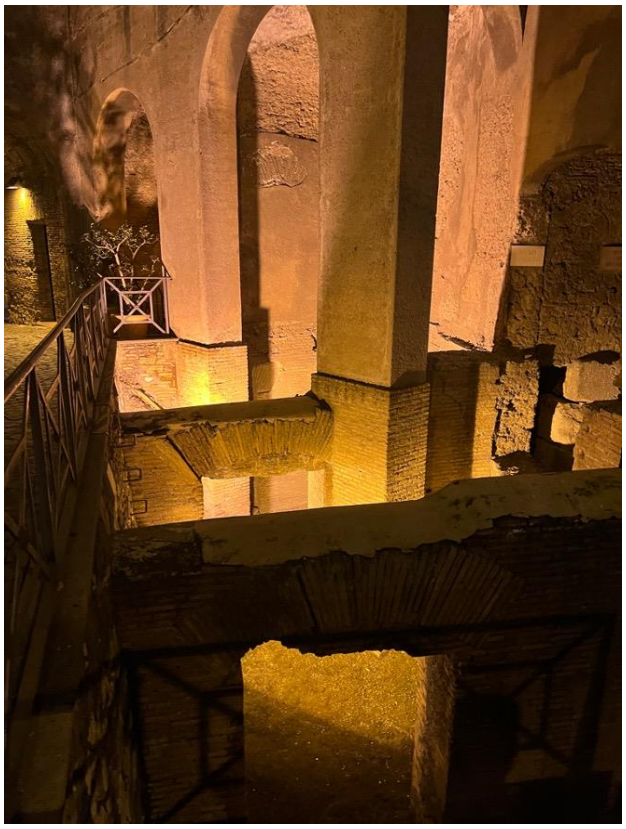

Figure 27. Radiating corridors with entryways at Hadrian's Mausoleum. Photo Credit: Maggie Reinhardt.

Figure 28. The Mausoleum of Augustus, Rome. 28 BCE.

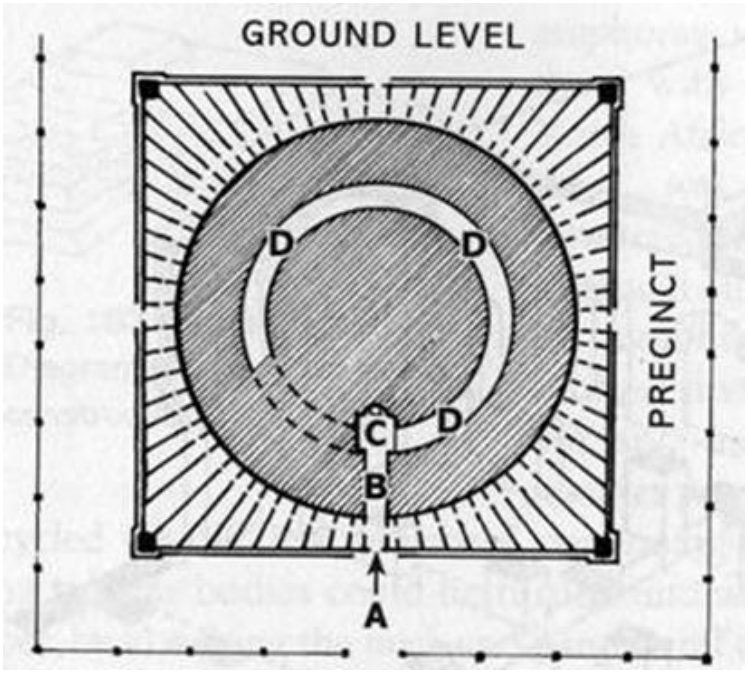

Figure 29. Amanda Claridge; Reconstruction of the floor plan of Hadrian's Mausoleum (1998)

Figure 30. *Hermes-Antinoo.* Vatican Museums. 2nd-century AD.

Figure 31. Vatican Museums; Bronze Peacock from Hadrian's Mausoleum

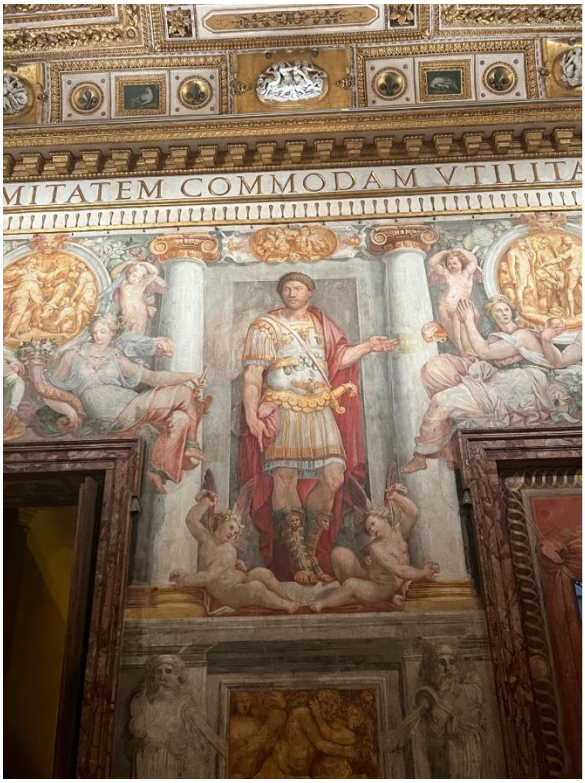

Figure 32. Girolamo Siciolante da Sermoneta. *L'imperatore Adriano.* 16th-Century

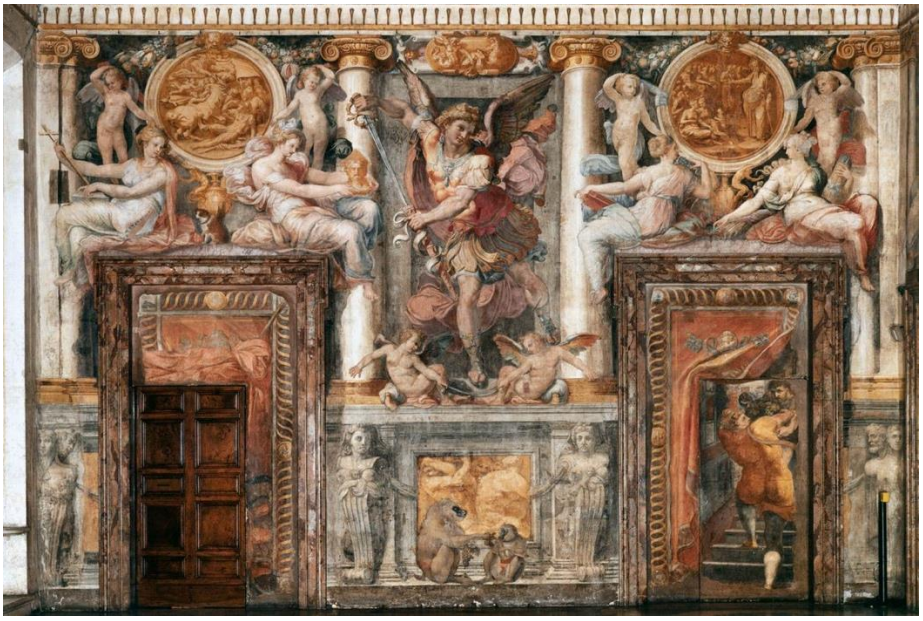

Figure 33. Girolamo Siciolante da Sermoneta. *Archangelo Michele.* 16th-Century.