

Quod Vocatur Paradiso: The *Pigna* and the Atrium at Old St. Peter's

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Today, a monumental ancient bronze *pigna*, or pinecone, rests on a marble capital in the Cortile della Pigna of the Vatican Museum in Rome (Figures 1 and 2). It sits at the top of a double flight of stairs, and though the sculpture is eleven feet tall and five feet around, it remains oddly inconspicuous to modern viewers.¹ The *pigna* is appreciated largely as a curiosity, or merely as an ornament to Pirro Ligorio's sixteenth-century exedra. What is often overlooked, by the casual visitor and the art historian alike, is the sculpture's rich history and the meanings assigned to it over the two thousand years it has spent in the vicinity of the Ager Vaticanus.²

The exact origins of the *pigna* are a mystery, but a signature on the sculpture's base suggests that it was produced in the first century CE.³ There is no specific, textual documentation of the *pigna* in the Vatican precinct prior to its description in the thirteenth-century *Mirabilia Urbis Romae*, or Marvels of Rome, but an eighth-century account of early church renovations suggests that, beginning c. 755 CE, the

pigna served as the essential and unifying water feature of a fountain located in the center of the atrium of Old St. Peter's in Rome.⁴ The eighth century is a critical time in the *pigna*'s history, marking the ancient Roman sculpture's insertion into a pre-existing fountain structure and providing a time and place to study a work with a complex history of movement and meaning. This paper addresses the *pigna* sculpture's eighth-century incorporation into the atrium of Old St. Peter's and examines its symbolic value within the architectural ensemble of which it once formed an essential part. It explores the *pigna*'s soteriological, or salvific, meaning, and suggests that the addition of the sculpture transformed the atrium into the embodiment of an earthly and celestial Paradise.

The earliest visual record of the *pigna* fountain is a drawing in pen and ink, dating from c. 1515-25 CE, which is now in the Uffizi in Florence (Figure 3).⁵ The unattributed sketch has received little scholarly attention and was formerly as-

I would like to thank Dr. Tanja Jones for her guidance in the development of this paper. I am also deeply indebted to Pat Causey, the Interlibrary Loan Specialist at the University of Alabama, who helped me locate many important resources. I am also grateful to the organizers and attendees of Florida State University's 31st Annual Art History Graduate Student Symposium, who created a welcoming atmosphere for the presentation of this research. This article is dedicated to my wife, Jessie.

¹ For basic facts about the *pigna*, see: *Census of Antique Works of Art and Architecture Known in the Renaissance*, s.v. "Colossal Pine Cone," accessed 2 January 2014, <http://www.census.de/census/database>; and Phyllis Bober and Ruth Rubinstein, *Renaissance Artists & Antique Sculpture: A Handbook of Sources*, 2nd ed. (London: Harvey Miller Publishers, 2010), 238-39.

² Modern scholarship on the *pigna* is primarily concerned with the sculpture's origins and its location before it arrived at Old St. Peter's in the eighth century. The most recent publications on the *pigna* are Margaret Finch, "The Cantharus and Pigna at Old St. Peter's," *Gesta* 30, no. 1 (1991): 16-26; and Finch, "The Stones of the Mons Vaticanus" (PhD diss., Bryn Mawr University, 1987), 16-34. I am very grateful to Dr. Finch for making portions of her dissertation available to me. Early studies on the *pigna* include Georges Lacour-Gayet, "La Pigna du Vatican," *Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire* 1, no. 1 (1881): 312-21; and Hartmann Grisar, "I monumenti del paradiso nell'antica basilica Vaticana," *La Civiltà Cattolica* 18, no. 12 (1903): 460-69. These contributions were followed by a series of early German articles that focused on the genre of pinecone fountains and Old St. Peter's example specifically. See: Josef Strzygowski, "Der Pinienzapfen als Wasserspeier," *Romische Mitteilungen* 18 (1903): 185-206; E. Petersen, "Pigna-Brunnen," *Romische Mitteilungen* 18 (1903): 312-28; and Ch. Huelsen, "Der Cantharus von alt-St.-Peter und die

antiken Pignen-Brunnen," *Romische Mitteilungen* 19 (1904): 87-116. Other useful sources include Sergio Angelucci, "Il restauro della pigna vaticana," *Bollettino: Monumenti musei e gallerie pontificie* 6 (1986): 5-49; Paolo Liverani, "La Pigna Vaticana. Note Storiche," *Bollettino: Monumenti musei e gallerie pontificie* 6 (1986): 51-63; and Richard Krautheimer, *Corpus Basilicarum Christianarum Romae* (Vatican City: Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana, 1977), 5:261-71.

³ For a detailed analysis of this inscription, see Ivan Di Stefano Manzella, "Le iscrizioni della pigna vaticana," *Bollettino: Monumenti musei e gallerie pontificie* 6 (1986): 65-78. *The Marvels of Rome* is critical to the study of the *pigna*, but the text has also caused a great deal of scholarly confusion. First, it offers an often-repeated myth as fact, stating that the *pigna* was once attached to a grate that covered the oculus of the Pantheon; on this see Margherita Guarducci, *The Tradition of Peter in the Vatican: In the Light of History and Archeology*, trans. Edward Egan (Rome: Vatican Polyglot Press, 1963), 34. The text is also mistaken about how water was dispensed from the fountain, stating that spouts emanated from each of the *pigna*'s spines rather than from a single pipe emerging from the top of the sculpture. This method of delivery is contradicted by physical evidence; see Angelucci, "Restauro della pigna," 5-49.

⁴ Pope Stephen II's (r. 752-57) biography records a renovation of the fountain. See: Raymond Davis, trans., *The Lives of the Eighth-Century Popes (Liber Pontificalis)* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007), 74-75; and Louis Duchesne, *Le Liber Pontificalis. Texte, introduction et commentaire*, ed. Ernest Thorin (Paris: Librairie des Écoles françaises d'Athènes et de Rome, du Collège de France et de l'École Normale Supérieure, 1955), 1:455.

⁵ The best reproductions of the drawing are found in: Alfonso Bartoli, *I monumenti antichi di Roma nei disegni degli Uffizi di Firenze* (Florence:

signed to Simone del Pollaiuolo.⁶ In the image, the *pigna* is covered with smooth, pyramid-shaped spines that are largest at its base and decrease in size as they move upwards. Four low-lying walls surround the base of the *pigna* to form a basin or *cantharus*. Each wall is made up of two panels in low relief; each depicts griffins holding candelabra. Eight columns support a canopy above the *pigna* that is, in turn, ornamented with two bronze peacocks. The birds face one another, necks crossed, in imitation of the christogram above. Dolphins at the four corners likely served as rainspouts. The top of the canopy is decorated with crockets which may be generic buds, fruits, or tiny pinecones.

To begin, it is helpful to briefly trace the history of the atrium and fountain prior to the *pigna*'s eighth-century addition. A single text, written by Bishop Paulinus of Nola in c. 397 CE, confirms the presence of a fountain in the atrium in the fourth century.⁷ The medieval *Liber Pontificalis* also contains references to many church renovation projects at Old St. Peter's. Entries from the pontificates of Pope Symmachus I (r. 498-514) and Pope Stephen II (r. 752-57) document changes involving the atrium and its central fountain. From them we learn that the atrium, originally an open area, or *campo*, in the fourth century, was only gradually defined as a

Bontempelli, 1914), 6:9; Finch, "The Cantharus and Pigna," 16; and Dale Kinny, "Spolia," in *St. Peter's in the Vatican*, ed. William Tronzo (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 33.

⁶ In spite of this change, the drawing's most commonly assigned date still reflects the time Pollaiuolo spent in Rome. For the debate over the drawing's date and attribution, cf.: Hubertus Günther, *Das Studium der antiken Architektur in den Zeichnungen der Hochrenaissance* (Tübingen: Ernst Wasmuth Verlag, 1988), 69-70; Finch, "Cantharus and Pigna," 16; Finch, "Stones of the Mons Vaticanus," 16; and Kinney, "Spolia," 44n108.

⁷ For an English translation of Paulinus' letter, see Annewies van de Hoek and John J. Hermann, Jr., "Paulinus of Nola, Courtyards, and Canthari," *The Harvard Theological Review* 93, no. 3 (July 2000): 174-75. For the original Latin, see Wilhelm von Hartel, *Sancti Pontii Meropii Paulini Nolani* (Vienna, 1894), 29.94-95, Ep. 13.13.

⁸ Duchesne, *Liber Pontificalis*, 262 and 455.

⁹ The emphasis on the atrium's boundary began with Pope Simplicius I (r. 468-83), who likely attached covered porticoes to the atrium's lateral and eastern sides to protect pilgrims from the rain; see Krautheimer, *Corpus* 5, 267. These three-sided—and likely wooden—porticoes were then replaced by Pope Symmachus I's (r. 498-514) four-sided, marble porticoes, which are described in the pope's biography and said to enclose (*compaginavit*) the atrium. Duchesne, *Liber Pontificalis*, 262. Other popes who made renovations to the atrium are John I (r. 523-26), who further embellished the space, and Donus I (r. 676-78), who paved the forecourt with marble flagstones; William Dudley Foulke, trans., *History of the Lombards / Paul the Deacon*, ed. Edward Peters (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 235; and Krautheimer, *Corpus* 5, 174-75.

¹⁰ For scholarship on the gradual destruction of Old St. Peter's, see: J.A.F. Orbaan, *Der Abbruch Alt-Sankt Peter's* (Berlin: G. Grote'sche Verlags Guchhandlung, 1918), 1-139. The *pigna* sculpture was removed from Old St. Peter's in c. 1608-10, and following its translation the last remnants of the old church were destroyed. The *pigna*'s move is described in detail in Giacomo Grimaldi's *Descrizione della Basilica*

walled entry space in the late fifth and early sixth centuries.⁸ Over time, the expansive, open interior of the atrium was maintained while its boundaries became more and more densely ornamented.⁹ The *Liber Pontificalis* was an important source for the church canon Tiberio Alfarano (1525-95), who referenced the text when creating a ground plan of Old St. Peter's (Figure 4). Alfarano's map is fundamentally a reconstruction, documenting the appearance of the atrium and church before the rebuilding projects of the sixteenth century.¹⁰ Significantly, Alfarano's plan emphasizes two key features of the atrium—the fountain's position in the center of the space and a boundary defined by porticoes.¹¹

Both the *Liber Pontificalis* and Alfarano make it clear that embellishments to the atrium always concerned the center—in other words, the fountain—and the margins of the space. However, the *Liber Pontificalis* also implies that the atrium's fountain shaped the space around it, including language of centering and surrounding, suggesting that the atrium's four marble colonnades actually *belonged* to the fountain—they are the fountain's supporting columns, multiplied.¹²

While no text explicitly mentions the *pigna*'s addition to the pre-existing fountain, it was likely incorporated during the papacy of Stephen II, in c. 752-57 CE. Its presence can

antica di S. Pietro in Vaticano (1620): "Sub Paolo V pontifice maximo, dum ad templi frontem erigendam pinea praedicta loco suo mota fuit et in hortos Vaticanos translata...." Giacomo Grimaldi, *Descrizione della Basilica antica di S. Pietro in Vaticano: Codice Barberini latino 2733*, ed. Reto Niggli (Vatican City: Biblioteca apostolica vaticana, 1972), 32:186-87. Today, six of the eight porphyry columns and all the griffin panels making up the collecting basin are lost; on their removal and subsequent relocation, see Tiberio Alfarano, *De basilicae vaticanae antiquissima et nova structura*, ed. D.M. Cerrati (Rome: Tipografia Poliglotta Vaticana, 1914), 26:109. Two bronze peacocks are now in the Vatican Museum—the examples exhibited in the Cortile della Pigna are copies—and a pair of porphyry columns known as "Les Deux Philippes" are preserved in the Louvre. The fountain's bronze canopy was melted down in the seventeenth century and recast as the statue of the Madonna atop the column that stands before the Church of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome.

¹¹ On Alfarano's map, the *pigna* fountain is numbered "116" and bisects the atrium on a north-south and east-west axis. The plan also shows porticoes running along the north ("L"), south ("K"), east ("M"), and west ("I") sides of the atrium. Alfarano's marginal notes mention how the *pigna* is located "in the middle of the atrium" (*in medio Atrij*), and tells how the fountain was adorned with bronze peacocks (*aeneum tegmen pavonibus*), dolphin rain spouts (*delphinis deauratis aquam fundentibus*), and marble panels carved with griffins (*spondis marmoreis quae griffones incisos habent*). He also comments on how water was brought to the fountain through underground lead tubes (*plumbeas fistulas*), but incorrectly states that water issued from the body of the *pigna* through fissures (*foramina*) in each nut (*nucum*). Alfarano, *Basilicae Vaticanae antiquissima*, 108-10. For a treatment of Alfarano's plan, see Grisar, "Monumenti del Paradiso," 460-69.

¹² The *vita* of Symmachus I tells how the pope "embellished the area around the *cantharus* of Saint Peter with a quadruple porch made out of marble and adorned it with lambs and crosses and palms made of mosaics" (*Ad cantharum cum quadriporticum... marmoribus ornavit et ex musivo agnos et cruces et palmas ornavit*). Van Den Hoek and Hermann, "Paulinus of Nola," 184; and Duchesne, *Liber Pontificalis*, 262.

be inferred through a close reading of Stephen's biography, which mentions how the pope "renewed" (*renovavit*) the fountain structure to include eight supporting columns, rather than the initial four.¹³ Margaret Finch realized, as Richard had before her, that the *pigna* must have been added to the structure prior to that restoration, since the narrowed gaps between the additional columns would have prohibited the object from being inserted.¹⁴ In some ways, the change was minimal, since the *pigna* sculpture merely replaced a water feature belonging to the earlier, fourth-century fountain ensemble, but the effort it took to transport the monumental pinecone to this site—and the decision to insert it into a prominent, centrally located fountain—suggests that the change was significant and implies that the *pigna*'s symbolism contributed to a message that had been communicated since the church's founding.

There are several explanations for why a giant pinecone was chosen to mark one of the most important religious sites in the Christian world. The use of pinecones as grave markers, or *metae*, dates back to the first century BCE, and since Old St. Peter's essential function was to serve as a mausoleum for the bones of the saint, the object's funerary associations were fitting.¹⁵ The form of the *pigna* also referred to the history of the site by engaging in a kind of symbolic excavation. Half of the church of Old St. Peter's was built on top of the Circus of Gaius and Nero, next to the killing field where Peter was crucified. This circus functioned as a racetrack, with conical fountains that acted as turning posts at each

end. While not in the exact space of the ancient circus, it is possible that the *pigna*'s addition to the fountain alluded to both the topography of the site and the circumstances of Peter's martyrdom.¹⁶

Beyond these theories, this paper suggests that the *pigna*'s inclusion in the space transformed the atrium into a heaven on earth and achieved this meaning through its form and basic function. The key to understanding this effect is contained in an interpolation in the life of Pope Paul I (r. 757-67) from the *Liber Pontificalis*. As a living document with collective authorship, the book underwent constant revisions, particularly during the eighth century, when it was completely rewritten.¹⁷ In an early version of the text, likely written around 767 CE, the forecourt of Old St. Peter's is referred to as the "atrium." Then, in a subsequent edition, written no later than 791-92 CE, equivalence is made between the word "atrium" and another term, more recently minted—the "paradiso."¹⁸ Here, the text made clear that a chapel dedicated to the Virgin Mary abutted the atrium "quod vocatur Paradiso"—known as the *paradiso*.¹⁹ Importantly, this identification of the forecourt as a Paradise, and not simply an atrium, was made just after the *pigna*'s addition to the fountain structure at Old St. Peter's.²⁰

To modern readers, the use of *paradiso* as an architectural term is somewhat surprising. More common usages refer to heaven or Eden, but these significances are fairly recent and only begin to touch upon the word's etymological roots. In Latin, the word *paradisus* is derived from the Greek

¹³ "Meanwhile in the atrium called the quadriporticus, in front of the doors of St. Peter's, he renewed 8 marble sculpted columns of wondrous beauty; he linked them on top by stone blocks, and over the top he placed a bronze roof" (...renovavit in atrium ante fores... qui quadriporticos dicitur, columnas marmoreas VIII... sculptas quae desuper quadrio composuit et aereum desuper conlocavit tegnum...). See: Davis, *Lives*, 74-75; and Duchesne, *Liber Pontificalis*, 455.

¹⁴ Krautheimer, *Corpus* 5, 271; and Finch, "Cantharus and Pigna," 18.

¹⁵ Eugenia Strong, *Apotheosis and Afterlife* (Freeport: Books for Libraries Press, 1915), 196. The *pigna*'s symbolic use as a tombstone also fit easily into Christian theology, since it had optimistic connotations. In the pagan world, the pinecone symbolized regeneration, resurrection, and immortality. For Christians, the pinecone would have signified Christ's triumph over death and the believer's own hope in an afterlife. For a similar conclusion see, Finch, "Cantharus and Pigna," 21-22.

¹⁶ The *pigna* may have also been brought to Old St. Peter's to reinforce an architectural connection between the *cantharus* structure and the baldachin and aedicule of St. Peter inside the church. The location of Old St. Peter's had been determined by the presence of a shrine (c. 170) that protected the tomb of St. Peter. Excavations at St. Peter's have uncovered remnants of this structure where the nave and transept of New St. Peter's intersect. This structure was surmounted by the original baldachin at Old St. Peter's, built in c. 400 and destroyed c. 604. It is depicted in the Pola Casket, which is now kept in the Museo Civico in Rome.

¹⁷ Davis, *Lives*, xi.

¹⁸ The early date of 767 is determined by the death of Pope Stephen II.

For the later date and edition, see Duchesne, *Liber Pontificalis*, ccxxix n20. The interpolation is also discussed in: Jean-Charles Picard, "Les origines du mot Paradisus-Parvis," *Mélanges de l'École Française de Rome* 83, no. 2 (1971): 161n1.

¹⁹ "In front of the tower of S. Maria ad Grada, in the atrium called Paradise, he built with wondrous work a chapel in front of the Savior in honor of God's mother St. Mary, and he decorated it magnificently" (*Fecit autem et in atrium, ante turrem sanctae Mariae ad Grada, quod vocatur Paradiso, oraculum ante Salvatorem, in honore sanctae Dei genitricis Mariae miro opere et decoravit magnifice*). For this, see: Davis, *Lives*, 83; and Duchesne, *Liber Pontificalis*, 465.

²⁰ At this time the Latin *paradisus* was a completely new architectural term, and was used exclusively to refer to the atrium at Old St. Peter's. After its inclusion in the life of Pope Paul I, it appeared for the second time in the *History of the Lombards*, written by Deacon Paul sometime before 800. In this text, Pope Donus I (r. 676-78) is said to have "covered with large white blocks of marble in a wonderful manner the place which is called Paradise in front of the church of the blessed apostle Peter." Foulke, *History of the Lombards*, 235. The term then appeared in a *sylloge*, or book of inscriptions, which is now contained in the Vatican Library. This collection transcribes an epigraph to Pope John I (r. 523-26) which was once "in paradiso beati Petri," and also the inscription on the *cantharus* by Pope Simplicius I (r. 468-83), which was also located "in parad(iso)." The *sylloge* is catalogued as Vat. Lat. Pal. 833, and is known as the *Corporis Laureshamensis, sylloge I*, or the *Sylloge Laureshamensis prima*. Excerpts are contained within G.B. De Rossi, *Inscriptiones Christianae Urbis Romae septimo saeculo antiquiores* (ICUR) (Rome, 1888), 2:148, 220; and Picard, "Origines du mot Paradisus-Parvis," 159-64.

παράδεισος, used by Xenophon to describe the enclosed parks or orchards of the Persian kings.²¹ In that usage, the word is closely related to the Latin vivarium, an enclosure for wild game, and also the Old Iranian *pairidaēza*. The word's components reflect its intrinsic meaning. It is a compound of *pari-*, meaning "around," and *-daiz*, meaning "wall."²² This significance was inherited by Greek translations of the Old Testament, where παράδεισος refers to the earthly and celestial paradise. This garden is often depicted in Expulsion scenes as surrounded by a wall, signified by a gate.²³ Similarly, medieval maps of the world, or *mappa mundi*, depict Adam and Eve inside a walled Eden, reflecting the larger cosmogony defined by the edges of the map.²⁴ The architectural form of the earthly Eden is also closely related to that of the celestial Heaven, which both the Old and New Testaments describe as a walled structure. This city most often appears in images of the Last Judgment, where souls pass through a freestanding arch or gateway into the New Jerusalem. Viewed within this visual and etymological context, the renaming of St. Peter's atrium as a *paradiso* appears to have served a definitive purpose. First, it acknowledged the emphasis that had already been placed on the porticoes as a defining border element. Second, it established the space as a heavenly garden, with the *pigna* at its heart.

The *pigna*'s status as a symbol of paradise was also reflected in how it was used. Importantly, the *pigna* fountain in the forecourt did not present an opportunity for pilgrims to "wash up." That would have been accomplished in a bathhouse, such as the *diaconia* built for the poor in the vicinity of Old St. Peter's. The fountain was also not a drinking-well. The *Liber Pontificalis* describes another fountain, set up at the base of the church stairs, which was used for human necessity.²⁵ As a result, the atrium fountain likely served a purely ceremonial purpose. It was most probably used for ritualized ablutions, presenting an opportunity to stop, reflect, and perform a gesture that anticipated the placing of hands in a laver of holy water. In one sense, the pilgrims' ongoing

interaction with water was hygienic—after a long journey, they were unclean, but repeated cleansings also evoked the symbolism of baptism, and thus salvation.

The *pigna* also interacted with the atrium's eighth-century decorative program, an effect best understood by imagining pilgrims' arrival at the church. Devotees would have reached the atrium of Old St. Peter's by climbing a series of steps—often on their knees—to an open landing. After passing through the gatehouse and vestibule, they would have been rewarded by the sight of the *pigna* shimmering under a fantastic bronze baldachin. The sculpture must have had a stunning effect—it was gilded and massive, and a slight sheen of water would have made it oddly amorphous in the sunlight. Behind the *pigna*, in a display that was equally dazzling, was a mosaic of Paradise. This was the so-called *Lamb of the Apocalypse* mosaic, a monumental vision of the End Times that was installed in c. 450 CE. Pope Gregory IX (r. 1227-41) replaced the fifth-century image with a depiction of the Twenty Four Elders in the thirteenth century, but its appearance is preserved in a drawing kept at Eton College.²⁶ For those standing at the eastern end of the atrium, looking towards the façade, there would have been a definite optical relationship between the *pigna*, the mosaic, and the burial monuments of the popes located beneath the western portico of the basilica. In this line of sight, the *pigna* was literally integrated into a pilgrim's vision of paradise.

This expanded analysis of the pilgrim experience at Old St. Peter's—and the role of the *pigna* in the devotee's arrival—suggests new avenues for understanding the range of meanings the interrelated spaces evoked. The walls of the church become a threshold, separating earth and heaven. Pilgrims simultaneously become the *beati*, or blessed souls, entering the Heavenly Jerusalem, and the *pueri*, or children, of Matthew 18, entering the Kingdom of Heaven.²⁷ The connection was particularly strong at Old St. Peter's, given that the door of the church was known as the Judgment Gate (*portam Iudicij*), and the Gate of Heaven is often referred

²¹ Xenophon, *Hellenica, Books I – V* (Loeb Classical Library), trans. Carleton Brownson (New York: G.P Putnam's Sons, 1918), 269-71. For the etymology of the term, see *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "paradise," accessed 2 January 2014, <http://www.oed.com>.

²² *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "paradise," accessed 2 January 2014, <http://www.oed.com>.

²³ The tradition of a walled or gated Eden is not explicitly Biblical. The Bible records how Adam and Eve were "cast out" or "banished" beyond the boundary of Eden, and mentions an angel with a flaming sword who guards the "east side" of Eden, but a wall is not explicitly described (Gen. 3:21-24). The boundary appears largely in apocryphal texts, particularly those involving the Expulsion or Seth's Return to Paradise. In *The Gospel of Nicodemus*, Seth describes Adam's sickness and his journey "to the very gate of Paradise." Willis Barnstone, ed., "The Gospel of Nicodemus," in *The Other Bible* (San Francisco: Harper Row, 1984), 375. In *The Life of Adam and Eve*, Seth says he "will go to the nearest of the gates of Paradise and put dust on my head and prostrate myself before the gates of Paradise and lament and entreat the Lord with a loud and better lament...." H.F.D. Sparks, ed., "The Life of Adam and Eve," in *The Apocryphal Old Testament* (Oxford:

Clarendon Press, 1984), 155. Similarly, in *The Apocalypse of Moses*, the snake waits for Eve on "the wall of Paradise" since he cannot enter without an invitation: "And I opened the gate for him, and he came inside, into Paradise." H.F.D. Sparks, ed., "The Apocalypse of Moses," in *The Apocryphal Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 162-63.

²⁴ See, in particular, the *Psalter World Map* (c. 1265) now in the British Library in London and Hanns Rüst's *mappa mundi* (c. 1475-82) in the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York.

²⁵ Duchesne, *Liber Pontificalis*, 267.

²⁶ This miniature appears within an eleventh-century version of the *Life of St. Gregory*, written by John the Deacon, which was originally kept in the Abbey Church of Farfa. The larger volume is often referred to as the Codex Farfensis.

²⁷ This insight is deeply indebted to the work of Paul Barolsky. Paul Barolsky, *Giotto's Fathers and the Family of Vasari's Lives* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 5.

to as St. Peter's Gate.²⁸ Moving from the confines of the gatehouse to the open air of the atrium, visitors were likely filled with a sense of their own relative smallness, and the *pigna's* macrocosmic scale would have aided in this effect.

The *pigna's* symbolism can also be seen in its basic botanic function. A pinecone is fundamentally a container for seeds, and the *pigna* is referred to as such in an anonymous poem from the sixteenth century. Beyond comparing the *pigna* to gems (*gemme*), a half-moon (*mezzallun*), and a bell (*campanella*), the poet describes the sculpture as being *piantata*—"planted"—in the atrium.²⁹ The religious associations here are rich. As a seed, the *pigna* symbolized new growth, fertility, and resurrection. The *pigna's* spines are also ascended, suggesting that it is still green, and has yet to release its seeds. These connotations were particularly strong within a fountain installation because the presence of water, combined with *pigna's* enormous size, alluded to its remarkable potential for growth. In the world of botany, the pine tree was already seen as miraculous because it had the ability to renew itself from a tiny fragment, or slip. Through a slight elision, the *pigna* seed becomes a tree, and given the *paradiso's* significance as a garden, it can be argued that the sculpture was the centerpiece of a decorative program that recalled the Biblical account of the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden.

While the *pigna* may have started out as a piece of pagan *spolia*, its addition to the atrium transformed it into a Christian object capable of signifying important moments in Biblical history. As a reference to the Tree of Life, the *pigna* was the visual expression of a tradition joined to the Cross of Christ. After a period of gradual development, many of the stories involving the wood of this Tree were codified in Jacobus de Voragine's thirteenth-century *Golden Legend*. In Voragine's text, Seth sees that his father, Adam, is dying and returns to Eden to seek a cure.³⁰ Somewhat tangentially, the angel in the garden gives him a twig—or alternately, a seed—from the Tree of Life. When Adam dies, Seth puts this seed in his father's mouth, and it grows into a Tree.³¹ After several historical twists and turns, the wood from the Tree is used to fashion the Cross that was used in the Crucifixion. The story symbolizes Christ's redemption of mankind

and was reflected in variety of medieval images depicting a "living cross." One example comes from a mosaic in the twelfth-century apse of San Clemente in Rome (Figure 5). Here, the crucified Christ hangs on a cross that sprouts from an acanthus plant. Vegetative scrolls, often called the "vines of paradise," emanate from this bush. Closely related visually are the twelfth-century *Cloisters Cross* (Figure 6) and the thirteenth-century *Harbaville Triptych* (Figure 7). Although later, this paper suggests that these images partake in an iconographic tradition that the *pigna* was instrumental in establishing.

It is now possible to make one final connection relating to the visual resemblance between the *pigna* structure and the Tomb of Christ within the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. While the tomb exists today in highly altered form, its original appearance was translated into depictions of the Fountain of Life in medieval manuscripts, such as the eighth-century Godescalc Gospels (Figure 8).³² At first glance, the Fountain of Life image in the manuscript could be a depiction of the *pigna* structure—it also has a four-sided basin, eight columns, a barrel vault, peacocks, and is surmounted by a cross.³³ While the connection between the eighth-century *pigna* structure and depictions of the Fountain of Life is compelling, it merely serves to refer to their mutual source. In the fourth century, the Emperor Constantine was involved with numerous church building projects, including those at Old St. Peter's and the Lateran in Rome and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. In the earliest days of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, before the Rotunda was built, the Tomb of Christ may have been located in the center of an open, three-sided atrium. In its basic construction, this space was similar to the four-sided atrium being built in Rome. According to Eusebius, a baldachin was also erected over the Tomb of Christ, which was supported by columns.³⁴ Given this description, and medieval quotations of the Tomb in pilgrims' *ampullae* and memory boxes, it is apparent that the structure closely resembled the *pigna* fountain at Old St. Peter's (Figure 9).

The *pigna* fountain's relation to the Tomb of Christ unifies its significance. For Christians, the empty Sepulchre was the greatest expression of God's redemptive power,

²⁸ See, for example, Alfarano, *Basilicae Vaticanae antiquissima*, 109.

²⁹ For a transcription of the text, see: Liverani, "Pigna Vaticana," 56; and Gilberto Govi, *Intorno a un opuscolo rarissimo della fine del secolo XV intitolato antiquarie prospettiche romane composte per prospettivo milanese dipintore* (Rome, 1875-76), 3:51. Some scholars have suggested that this so-called "Prospettivo" is Donato Bramante, but Creighton Gilbert disagrees in his prose transcription of selections from the poem. Cf. Creighton Gilbert, "A Painter Comes to Rome to See the Sights," in *Italian Art 1400-1500: Sources and Documents* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1980), 101-103.

³⁰ Seth's journey back to Paradise is described in the Latin *Life of Adam and Eve* (c. 70) and the *Gospel of Nicodemus* (5th century). Flavius Josephus (39-100) also calls Seth the "seed" of Adam in his *Antiquities*, and this may be the inspiration behind later descriptions of Seth planting a branch from Eden at Adam's grave. On this tradition, see

Barbara Baert, *A Heritage of Holy Wood: The Legend of the True Cross in Text and Image* (Boston: Brill, 2004), 312-17.

³¹ Baert, *Heritage of Holy Wood*, 310-12.

³² The relationship between the *pigna* structure and images of the Fountain of Life are also explored in Finch, "Cantharus and Pigna," 17.

³³ For an in-depth discussion of the iconography of the Fountain of Life, see Paul Underwood, "The Fountain of Life in Manuscripts of the Gospels," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 5 (1950): 41-138.

³⁴ "Above all, he [Constantine] embellished the sacred Grotto, the divine monument as the principle point of the whole.... The Emperor's magnificence in decorating this centerpiece with selected columns of abundant ornamentation, made the venerable grotto shine under a glittering ornament." Charles Couason, "The Church of the Holy

and the *pigna*'s connection to this potent symbol elevated the sanctity of the space. In this heightened discourse, the pilgrim's movement towards the *pigna* was analogous to the journey towards salvation. The *pigna*'s layered symbolism made this religious experience possible. It transformed the fountain and the surrounding space into a kind of sculptural palimpsest, evoking individually and simultaneously the Persian *pairidaēza*, the Garden of Eden, the celestial Paradise, the Tree of Life, the Cross, and the Tomb of Christ.

This paper has emphasized the *pigna*'s meaning and a multitude of potential referents, but a discussion of the "moment" of the *pigna*'s inclusion in the eighth century begs the question, "why then?" The answer is contained within the symbolism suggested here. The *pigna* was, fundamentally, a centrifugal object. It established a center for the liminal,

ornamented spaces around it, and a sacred *locus* for pilgrims preparing to enter the church. In the eighth century, Rome was in a state of disintegration, but pilgrimage was at its height, and this industry brought a massive amount of revenue into the city. The city's sense of importance, relative to the Byzantine East, was also rising, and Pope Stephen II's alliance with the Frankish Empire attempted to rescue Rome's identification as *caput mundi*.³⁵ The *pigna*'s evocation of Jerusalem also recalls that travel to the Eastern sites associated with Christ's Passion was extremely dangerous in the eighth century. The *pigna*'s integration into the fountain effectively collapsed this distance, and allowed for a kind of virtual pilgrimage that encouraged more and more followers to pass within its sacred walls.

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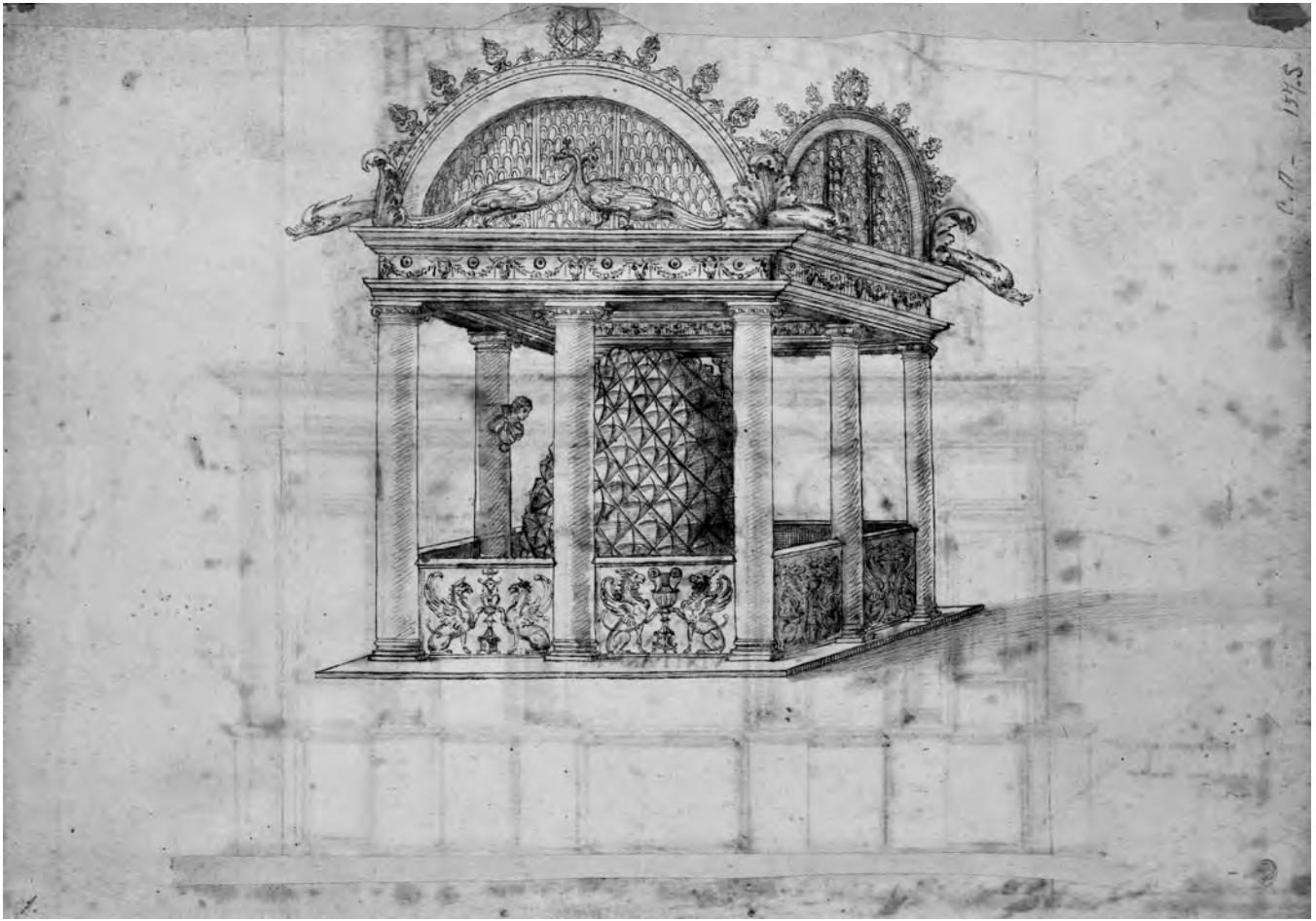
Sepulchre in Jerusalem," trans. J.P.B. Ross and Claude Ross (London: British Academy, 1974), 15.

³⁵ Richard Krautheimer, *St. Peter's and Medieval Rome* (Rome: Unione internazionale degli istituti di archeologia, storia e storia dell'arte in Roma, 1985), 19-23.

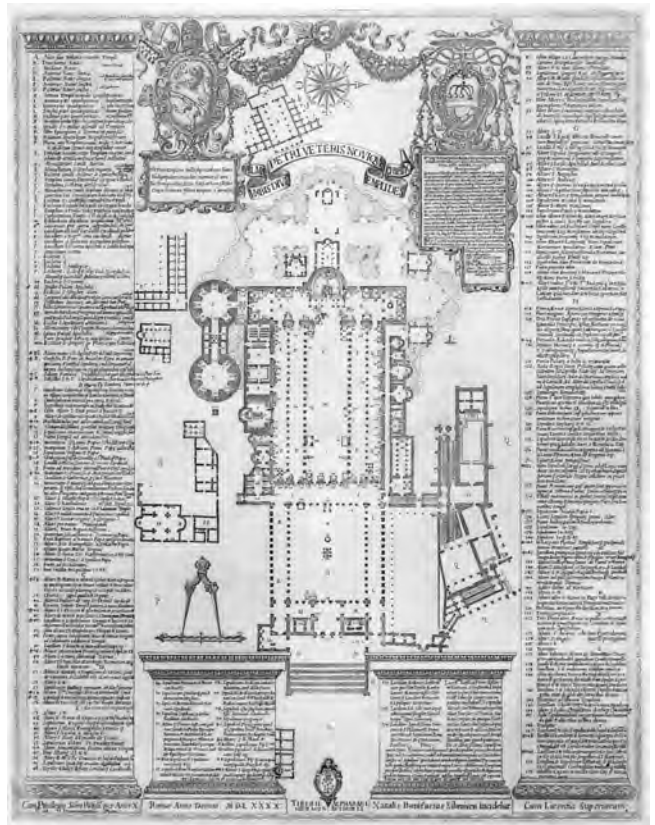


▲ Figure 2. Nicchione and Pigna, Cortile della Pigna, Pirro Ligorio (c. 1500-83) and Donato Bramante (1444-1514 CE), the nicchione (apse) was added in 1560 by Pirro Ligorio to the courtyard designed by Bramante, Cortile della Pigna, Vatican Palace, Vatican State, Italy © Vanni Archive / Art Resource, New York.

◀ Figure 1. Pirro Ligorio (c. 1500-83), Nicchione (and Pigna), Cortile della Pigna, 1st century CE, bronze with traces of gilding, 356 cm x 175 cm. Cortile della Pigna, Vatican Palace, Vatican State, Italy © Vanni Archive / Art Resource, New York.



▲ Figure 3. Anonymous, formerly Il Cronaca (Simone del Pollaiuolo), *Cantharus and Pigna of Old St. Peter's*, c. 1515-25 CE, sketch in pen and wash, h. 245 mm x w. 342 mm. Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe, Santarelli Collection 157, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, Italy © Gabinetto Fotografico Uffizi.



► Figure 4. Giovanni Battista the Elder and Giovanni Battista the Younger, engraving after Tiberio Alfarano's plan of the basilica of Old St. Peter's, engraving originally from c. 1589-90 CE and based on a drawing from c. 1571-82, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1945 (45.82.2, pl. 6) © The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Image source: Art Resource, New York.



◀[facing page, upper left] Figure 5. Apse mosaic of San Clemente, detail of the cross, 12th century CE, Photo Luciano Romano © Scala / Art Resource, New York.

◀[facing page, upper right] Figure 6. Cloisters Cross, c. 1150-60 CE, walrus ivory, 57.5 x 36.2 cm (overall), created in England. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Cloisters Collection, New York © The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

◀[facing page, bottom] Figure 7. Reverse of the Harbaville Triptych: Deesis and Saints, Byzantine ivory from Constantinople, 10th century CE, 24 x 27 cm, Inv.: OA 3247, Photo: Daniel Arnaudet © RMN-Grand Palais / Art Resource, New York.



►Figure 8. The Fountain of Life, illuminated manuscript page from the Godescalc Gospels MS nouv. acq. nal. 1203 fol. 3v, c. 781-83 CE, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris © The Art Archive at Art Resource, New York.



►Figure 9. Top left, Tomb of Christ, surmounted by the Rotunda. Reverse of lid from pilgrim's box with stones from the Holy Land, 6th century CE, created in Syria or Palestine, painted wood, stones, wood fragments, and plaster, h. 24 cm x w. 18.4 cm (overall), Museo Sacro Vaticana (inv. no. 61883a), Vatican State, Italy © Vatican Museum.