Hugo Brandenburg: Die konstantinische Petersbasilika am Vatikan in Rom. Anmerkungen zu ihrer Chronologie, Architektur und Ausstattung. Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner 2017. 144 S., 21 Tafeln, 19 Abb. € 24.95. ISBN: 978-3-7954-3272-0.

Drawing upon his own research and publications spanning some five decades, Hugo Brandenburg offers a highly readable *summa* of his thought regarding the genesis and appearance of the former basilica of St. Peter in the Vatican.[1] The illustrations and reconstructions are magnificent, the text shows care and combines erudition with an enviable ability to present materials clearly to the general public, and the overall quality of production is outstanding. As a physical artefact, this book is an exceptionally lovely specimen. As a work of scholarship, it will spur discussion.

Essentially a monograph-length restatement of the opinions expressed by Brandenburg in his article on St. Peter in the Vatican for *LTUR*, *Suburbium*,[2] this book possesses novelty in that there are many images and reconstructions that have been added to clarify matters. It is in effect an attempt to reaffirm the validity of the traditional view that the basilica was built by the emperor Constantine. To that end, Brandenburg has divided his book on the former basilica of St. Peter in the Vatican into nine chapters. These are clearly signposted, even if their logic sometimes seems an unhappy compromise of the chronological and the spatial. After a brief forward in which he sets forth his view of the *status quaestionis* (7–8), the first chapter commences with the *Liber Pontificalis* and an apodictic reaffirmation of the worth of its lists of donations (9–10). For Brandenburg the late and often manifestly false testimony of the *Liber Pontificalis* is a reliable basis for reconstructing the history of the genesis of this church. The second chapter deals with materials relating to the chronology of the basilica's construction: the donations of Datianus, the inscriptions of the *Phrygianum*, brick-stamps, and coins (11–

1 It may be worth noting that the first item from this involvement is the collective volume published by F. W. Deichmann (Hrsg.), G. Bovini, and H. Brandenburg (Bearb.) in 1967 (Repertorium der christlich-antiken Sarkophage. Mainz 1967). The work is erroneously listed as "Bovini, Brandenburg 1976" in the bibliography at the end of the volume (140).

2 H. Brandenburg: S. Petri basilica, coemeterium, episcopia, cubicula, habitacula, porticus, fons, atrium. In: Lexicon topographicum urbis Romae. Suburbium. Vol. 4, 2006, 185–195.

16). The absence of images of the evidence in question and the failure to quote documents such as the *Liber Pontificalis* and Grimaldi's account of the discovery of coins during the demolition of the former basilica of St. Peter in the Vatican are inexplicable and troubling. The third chapter covers the architectural layout of the basilica: nave, aisles, and transept, grave of St. Peter, exedras, altar, and bishop's throne (17–47). The fourth chapter returns to the issue of the chronology of the construction of the basilica, with brief discussion of items such as the coin of AD 318 discovered in the tomb of Trebellena Flacilla and Socrates' account of the visit to Rome made by the monk Ammonius in the train of Athanasius of Alexandria (48–52). The fifth chapter returns to the subject of architectural layout, so as to discuss in further depth items such as the inscriptions and artwork that once adorned both the interior and the exterior of the church (53–110). The images help readers to envision the basilica as Brandenburg imagines it, but, between errors in the Latin and an *a priori* thesis that the basilica was the work of Constantine, the handling of texts and the discussion of chronology leave much to be desired. The sixth chapter is dedicated to a discussion of the decoration and function of the atrium (111–119). The distinction between the *cantharus* described by Paulinus of Nola and the *pigna* of later centuries is usefully observed so as to shed light upon the changing nature of the decoration of the church. The seventh chapter deals with the evidence for the *secretarium* or sacristy (120–124). The burial here of pope Leo I (AD 440–461) and certain of his fifth- and sixth-century successors is an interesting deviation from tradition, both long-standing in Rome and recently formed in Milan and elsewhere, and the explanation in terms of liturgical function seems quite plausible. The eighth chapter surveys the function of St. Peter in the Vatican as a cemetery-basilica (125–137). The sarcophagi illustrated are a welcome addition, but it would have been more appropriate to include images of the sarcophagus of Iunius Bassus. After all, a securely dated artefact possesses much more value than something that has been dated merely by style. The ninth chapter briefly, pungently sums up the thesis of this volume (138–139). Begun *ca.* 320, the church was dedicated in 326, and completed at some point in the early 330s: Constantine built the church of St. Peter in the Vatican. There follows the bibliography (140–144). There are no indices to assist readers nor the usual list of illustrations (photographs), drawings, and reconstructions. These omissions make it difficult to find things. However, a full table of contents partially makes good the lack of the former, and due acknowledgements do accompany all of the images.

Time and time again the problem of methodology arises, and the solutions offered are not altogether felicitous. Brandenburg is an art historian and archaeologist specialising in Late Antiquity and the churches of Rome, or, as the blurb on the back cover expresses it, "einer der besten Kenner der frühchristlichen Architektur". To wit, he is not someone who specialises in Classical or Semitic or Coptic philology, nor does he specialise in epigraphy, textual criticism, literary criticism, historiography, or prosopography. In short, someone who works with the material remains, he has no specific competence in the written record. Therefore, the uncritical acceptance of literary evidence of dubious value (e. g. *Liber Pontificalis*), the cavalier dismissal of evidence contrary to the thesis espoused (e. g. Athanasius of Alexandria), and the omission of full quotations and images of the most relevant artefacts and texts (e. g. the sarcophagus of the *praefectus urbi* Iunius Bassus) make his lack of competence particularly problematic. Paradoxically, that makes this a useful text for methodological exercise in the seminars. Students deserve to see how Brandenburg fails to engage with the divergent evidence from the letters of Athanasius of Alexandria, where one tradition speaks of the "tomb" (singular) of Sts. Peter and Paul and another tradition speaks of the "tombs" (plural) of those patron saints of Rome.[3] Students deserve to see for themselves that the text of the *Theophaneia* of Eusebius of Caesarea, as it is transmitted in Syriac, utilises the conjunction "as if" (*aykʷ d-*) that implies the irreality of the temple to which the author refers (cf. 51, overlooking the vital fact of the conjunction). Students deserve to see the list of donations of property and income attributed to Constantine in its full glory of sixteen items (cf. 12, overlooking the crucial fact of *tremisses* and failing to appreciate how central the expensive donation of Datianus was to the basilica's maintenance), with the donation of Datianus at the very head (Lib. pont. 34,17–18), just as they deserve to see documents such as the papyrus fragment informing us that his name was Censorius Datianus (AD 358) and the edict in the *Codex Theodosianus* that speaks of the properties of this *patricius* (AD 360). Each of these texts poses special methodological issues that must be considered on their own merits. To take the texts as demonstrating a pre-determined thesis is a Procrustean method that cannot survive intense scrutiny. Moreover, the exclusive focus upon St. Peter in the Vatican is deleterious to

3 Atanasio di Alessandria: Lettere Festali. Introduzione, traduzione e note di A. Camplani. Milano 2003, 534.

sound interpretation. What of the imperial mausoleum at the Roman suburban basilica of Sts. Marcellinus and Peter? What of the evolution of the layout of the basilica as a Christian architectural form? Where does St. Peter in the Vatican stand between St. John in the Lateran and the Constantinian cemetery basilicae? What of churches elsewhere in the Empire? Again, as the evidence from Constantinople demonstrates[4], there is good reason to think that it was Constantius II, rather than his father Constantine, who saw to the creation of the basilica at the Vatican.

Of course, the principal question here is that of chronology, as indicated by the book's subtitle and in view of the identity of the reviewer. Having dealt with the chronology in an article of nearly 40 pages[5] and in an unpublished book of some 350 pages, the reviewer must perforce be brief here. Suffice it to observe that the force of the thesis advanced in 2015 is such that Brandenburg has felt compelled to claim that Datianus made his donation to the church of St. Peter in the Vatican between AD 326/330 and AD 337 (12, cf. 138–139). That a lowly *notarius* should have made the most magnificent of all the donations around 25–30 years before he achieved pre-eminence as *patricius* is a desperate attempt to square the circle.[6] Acceptance of the prosopographical identification inevitably leads to the conclusion that Constantius II was the patron of the church. Indeed, a question needs to be answered by those who insist that Constantius II did nothing of the sort. In view of the public emphasis that Constantius II put upon his Christianity, what Christian memorial survives from his famous visit to Rome in the spring of AD 357? Surely an emperor who took the trouble to set up a new obelisk in the Circus Maximus for the undistinguished masses of the imperial capital did something even more spectacular for the Christian community in which he demonstrated so lively and invasive an interest. Removal of the Altar of Victory from the Senate is merely a negative action. What positive trace of his passage did Constantius II leave upon the landscape of Rome? That is a question which deserves an answer.

4 R. Westall: Constantius II and the Great Church of Constantinople. In: Nea Rhome 8, 2011 [2012], 21–50.

5 R. Westall: Constantius II and the Basilica of St. Peter in the Vatican. In: Historia 64, 2015, 205–242.

6 The earliest evidence that Datianus was *patricius* dates to AD 358. For discussion of P. Mich. inv. 4615, see P. J. Sijpesteijn: The Consuls of A.D. 358. In: ZPE 112, 1996, 218.

The major contribution made by this book resides not in the discussion of the building's chronology, but rather in the lavish use of illustrations to reconstruct the late antique church and to document aspects normally ignored or hitherto unknown except to a very select company of experts. Photographs of late antique sarcophagi and architectural elements recovered during excavation and work at the Vatican, reproductions of early modern drawings, and ground-plans, axonometric drawings, and digitally generated images make this book a veritable feast for the eyes, offering much of the material culture needed to imagine how this important church once appeared. As Brandenburg notes in fine print on the copyright page, these images serve to provide readers with an "impression" (*Eindruck*) of what is thought to have existed. *Caveat lector*. The digital reconstruction of the apse of the basilica of St. Peter in the Vatican shows the dropping of a nasal ("N") from the emperor's name and the modern distinction between vocalic "U" and consonantal "V" even though have would both been written as "V" in Antiquity (Plate 8). On another note, the use of light blue ("baby blue") as the background colour for the façade of the front of the basilica (101–102, Plate 17) is demonstrably wrong. Raised upon the verses of Vergil, the educated contemporaries of Paulinus of Nola would have instinctively identified the adjective *caeruleus* as signifying "dark blue", in view of its application in epic verse to the sea and to the heavens threatening stormy weather.[7] The mistake is instructive on two counts. It reveals the naive use of the lexica, a use that philologists are trained to avoid, and it draws attention to the fact that the colour scheme of late antique apses and triumphal arches such as those of SS Cosma e Damiano (6th century) and S Prassede (9th century) allow us to imagine the appearance of the façade of the former basilica of St. Peter in the Vatican. These, of course, are minor faults, just as the unavoidable division when an image covers two pages. That the digital reconstructions should altogether lack the poor, the clergy, and monastics, however, seems not only unfathomable but unforgiveable. The few individuals who populate these images would be far more at home in the civic space of the Basilica of Constantine at the Forum Romanum or the temple of the Pantheon in the Campus Martius. Where have the Christians disappeared? And what of communal meals such as that offered by Pammachius for the funeral of his beloved wife? The legionaries firmly ensconced in the atrium before the doors

7 M. Bradley: Colour and Meaning in Ancient Rome. Cambridge 2009 (Cambridge Classical Studies), 9–11.

giving access to the church's interior are appropriate to the current situation in Italy, but they have nothing whatsoever to do with the normal life of the late antique church and they are at best a paltry substitute for the masses of poor who ought to have been represented. How many people today fail to see the poor while entering or exiting churches or walking the streets of the post-modern world?

Notwithstanding the reservations expressed above, the reviewer finds much of use and interest in this beautifully produced book. Should it help to encourage debate and discussion, then it, too, will have made a noteworthy contribution to the subject.

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Empfohlene Zitierweise

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