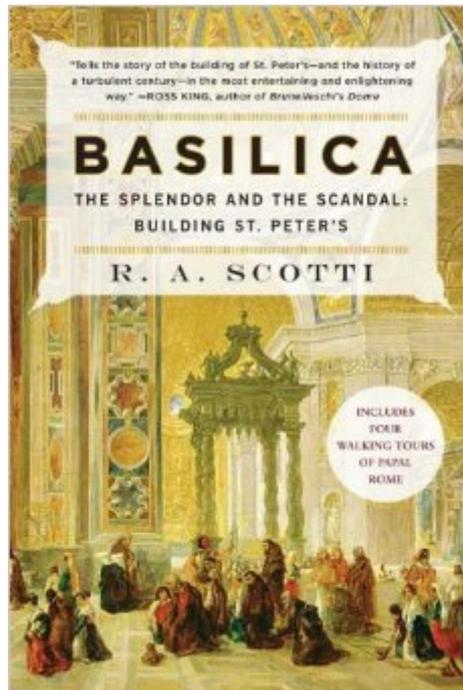


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Basilica: The Splendor And The Scandal: Building St. Peter's



Synopsis

In this dramatic journey through religious and artistic history, R. A. Scotti traces the defining event of a glorious epoch: the building of St. Peter's Basilica. Begun by the ferociously ambitious Pope Julius II in 1506, the endeavor would span two tumultuous centuries, challenge the greatest Renaissance masters—Michelangelo, Raphael, and Bramante—and enrage Martin Luther. By the time it was completed, Shakespeare had written all of his plays, the Mayflower had reached Plymouth—and Rome had risen with its astounding basilica to become Europe's holy metropolis. A dazzling portrait of human achievement and excess, *Basilica* is a triumph of historical writing.

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Customer Reviews

On a positive note, this book on the building of St Peter's does have some strengths. Scotti describes the dynamics between the patrons (the powerful dynastic families of popes and cardinals sponsoring Roman cultural projects) and the artists - and these are vivid personalities all. She breezily recreates scenes involving popes and painters, such as this typical passage describing the artist Perugino meeting the adult Raphael, formerly his pupil: "Perugino, eyes moistened, rushed forward and embraced Raphael like a son. It was an emotional moment for the old painter. He pinched the boy's cheeks affectionately, marveling at how he had grown." Although Scotti doesn't seem too bothered to examine original sources to create these scenes (the bibliography is entirely second source material), no matter, they are fun, lightly paced, and charming if this sort of pop historical creativity appeals to you. Unfortunately Scotti's creative energy also involves fundamental

fictions about her subject matter. There are the annoying, small errors like misnaming buildings in the Forum. These are forgivable -- what tourist hasn't got these confused? But then there are howlers that demonstrate she's unfamiliar with the building she's writing about: for instance, she incorrectly asserts that St Peter's was built with cast structural concrete. In order to "cast the concrete vaults for the Basilica," as Scotti puts it, Bramante (the 16th century architect building St Peter's) would have had to... invent concrete. Concrete as a technology was developed by the ancient Romans, but knowledge of its process vanished with the collapse of their building culture. So Scotti states that Bramante had studied the Romans and rediscovered their methods of using concrete.

As a lifelong and very active Catholic I was shocked to learn just how little I knew about the history of St. Peter's in Rome. For example, I was totally unaware that Constantine erected the first St. Peter's in the year 312 A.D. and that the original structure survived for more than 1200 years! And I had certainly never read very much about how the current St. Peter's came to be either. "Basilica" tells the remarkable story of the planning and construction of what many consider to be among the most beautiful and recognizable edifices in the world. It is a tale with more twists and turns, heroes and villains, triumphs and disappointments than one could ever imagine. It is a spellbinding story. The prime mover and shaker behind the second St. Peter's was Pope Julius II. The year was 1505. Julius envisioned a structure that would "embody the greatness of the present and the future." The new St. Peter's would dwarf the constructions of the Caesars and proclaim the power and glory of Christ and His Church. The pope would assemble the most brilliant minds in Rome and would spare no expense to achieve his dream. Among those he recruited for the project were Bramante, Raphael and yes, Michaelangelo. But building the new St. Peter's would turn out to be a much more costly and time consuming proposition than anyone could have ever imagined. "Basilica" tells the amazing story of what would turn out to be a 162 year project. The tale is replete with nasty politics, betrayal, bitter rivalries, greed and a variety of other moral shortcomings. But in the end the good really does outweigh the bad. R.A. Scotti writes of the remarkable engineering and architectural feats that made the new St. Peter's possible. She reminds us all of the genius of artists like Michaelangelo and Raphael.

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