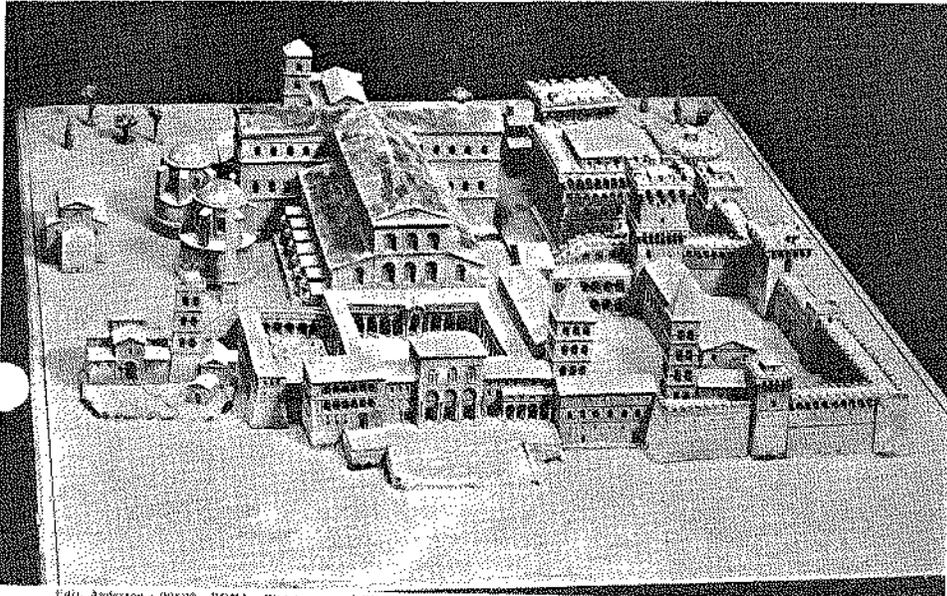


THE REBUILDING OF ST. PETERS BASILICA AND THE VATICAN PALACE (Cont.)

The plan of Nicholas V has been attributed to Leon Battista Alberti in its general conception and details. Nicholas V intended to build a more beautiful church in honor of St. Peter, and had carried out work on the walls of the choir apse raising them to the height of 52 feet. On the advise of Alberti this work was stopped and Alberti laid before the Pope his works on architecture. Nicholas had at that time no intention of pulling down the Old St. Peters, but had planned the restoration of the portico, repaving of the floor, renewing the mosaics, roof, doors and windows. He intended to retain the old basilica as long as possible by repairs and only to rebuild the apse. The impression made on Nicholas V by the 10 books on architecture by Alberti was instantaneous profound and convincing. He adopted the new gigantic plan.

Before a single step had been taken to rebuild St. Peters, Nicholas V died. Julius II later began the project but with a different set of plans. The idea of pulling down the ancient basilica of St. Peter was ill received both in the time of Nicholas V and later. Actually it was only a question of time before it must be done. It was stated that it would fall itself in 50 years. The old basilica was of daring architectural design. The upper walls were pierced by windows and rested on slender columns unsupported by buttresses. When these fall out of perpendicular to any degree, the condition of the building is hopeless and it must come down. Leon Battista Alberti states that the south wall of St. Peters leaned out 4 feet 9 inches; archivist Jacopo Grimaldi says that the paintings on the south wall were practically invisible because of the dust gathered on them due to the slant of the wall. Those on the north wall could be seen. Grimaldi estimated the building to be 3 feet 1/2 inch out of line in his day.



Reconstruction of the old Basilica of St. Peters.  
(By Prof. Marcelliani- Museo Petriani).  
Photograph- Fratelli Allinari- Florence.

In the first year of his reign, Nicholas V appointed a special architect for the Vatican Palace. One set of rooms was restored and decorated. Then the plan of Alberti was adopted and execution of it began. The new library, hall for equerries and the Belvedere, together with the Chapel of St. Lawrence were built in that order, while walls and towers rose round the citadel. Associated with Alberti as architects were Bernardo Gambarelli, surnamed Rosellino, and Antoniondo Francesco, both Florentines, and Fioravante degli Alberti, a Bolognese. Fioravante in 1452 transported four giant monolith pillars from an old building behind the Pantheon and placed them in the choir of St. Peters. He was chosen to execute the placing of the obelisk on the four giant statues of the Evangelists.

Work was done in three different ways: architects were paid fixed salaries and materials were supplied to them; work was paid by the piece; or a contractor put up an entire building. Beltramo di Martino of Varese was the contractor who built the choir of St. Peters. Nicholas V. was able to harmonize each art to its proportionate place, making architecture

the queen and all other subordinate. Sculpture seems to have been neglected, but only because its time had not arrived in the overall plan when Nicholas died. Marquetry and painting were employed in the decoration of the Palace.

Among the painters was Fra Giovanni Angelico da Fiesole (1387-1455). Fra Angelico's frescoes, started under Eugenius IV, and destroyed under Paul III, were the Vatican's most precious ornament at this time. In 1449 a study was decorated by Fra Angelico and his pupils. Fra Giovanni da Firenze did two windows in this room, of the Blessed Virgin Mary and Saints Stephen and Lawrence.



Distribution of Alms (Fra Angelico)

Photograph- Fratelli Allinari- Florence.

The paintings of Fra Angelico in the Chapel of Saints Stephen and Lawrence were done in this period and it has been inferred that these two rooms are one and the same, being built as a study and then turned into a chapel by Nicholas V. Three walls of this chamber are decorated by a double row of paintings of scenes from the lives of Saints Stephen and Lawrence, who were united by popolare custom when their remains were placed in the same tomb in St. Lawrence Outside the Walls. Fra Angelico was past sixty when he did these paintings, and still retained his mastery. The Ordination of St. Stephen, St. Lawrence receiving the Treasures of the Church, the Distribution of Alms and St. Stephen Preaching equal the best of the great master. Fra Angelico shows in his backgrounds that he grasped the principals of architecture of his time, combining the classic and the christian.

Among other painters attracted to Rome by Nicholas V were Benedetto Buonfiglio of Perugia, (one of Perugino's most distinguished predecessors), Bartolomeo da Foligno (master of Niccolo Alunno), Andrea del Castagno, piero della Francesca and Bramantino.

From Rome itself there was Simone da Roma. Nicholas V assigned each artist according to his judgement of their ability.

At this time also, Pope Nicholas V laid the foundation of the Vatican Library by his collection and search for manuscripts, translations by scholars, etc. The Library was intended for world-wide use by Scholars. (Pastor- Vol. IIpp. 169-190, 208-214)