

Saint Peter: Arnolfo di Cambio

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In St. Peter's Basilica there is an imposing bronze statue of Saint Peter grandly seated on a throne. The toe of the right foot of Peter is worn down and discolored. The bronze on the toe of Saint Peter was actually worn down after hundreds of years of people touching that toe after making a pilgrimage to Rome. Those pilgrims particularly swarmed Rome because of the Jubilee year in Rome in 1300. In the year 1300 Pope Boniface VIII declared that there would be a holy year and Jubilee in Rome. He offered extraordinary incentives in the form of indulgences, and the pilgrims came in droves. The second Jubilee year was in 1350, only two years after the plague swept through Italy. There is a linkage between the role of Rome as a pilgrimage site, the Jubilee year, and the impact of the plague.

A pilgrimage was one way that a person could go about getting an indulgence. The church and a pilgrim would essentially agree that if the pilgrim went on a journey and worshipped and left offerings at a Saint's shrine then the church would grant them an indulgence of a specific time period that was sanctioned by the Pope. The pilgrim could also hope to receive some sort of blessing or miracle from the specific Saint that they visited.¹ Pilgrims would journey to shrines and then give money to the shrines that they visited. That money would then supposedly go partially to the poor, but it often went only to the clergy. Rome was considered to be one of the most important pilgrimage sites. There were even books in Rome that a pilgrim could look at that would give a list of Rome's holy places and the indulgences that you could gain from them. Pilgrimage to Rome was often associated with solely the Saints Peter and Paul, and at times the Vatican attempted to bring in relics from Christ in order to increase the

¹ Adrian Bell and Richard Dale, "Rich Pickings from Medieval Pilgrims," *History Today* 63, no. 1 (January 2013): 30-37, *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost, accessed February 27, 2014.

popularity of Rome as a pilgrimage site.² Rome was clearly at the heart of the tradition of pilgrimage, and then an event occurred in 1300 that increased that prominence even more.

In the 13th century Rome was essentially in shambles. Joseph Byrne writes that it had around 20,000 inhabitants that mostly lived there to serve the pilgrims who journeyed to Rome.³ It was in the year 1300 that an event occurred to drastically change the role of Rome at the time. It was also precisely the same time as when the statue of Saint Peter was created. On February 22, 1300 Pope Boniface VIII declared a holy year and a Jubilee in Rome that would be repeated every set number of years. The idea of a Jubilee year was not originally a Christian tradition. Pope Boniface VIII looked to a Jewish practice that was mentioned in the Old Testament of the Bible. The Jubilee was originally considered to be a sacred year in which people could return to the lands of their birth and essentially make their sins right. Boniface's idea for a Jubilee was clearly quite a bit different. He veered away from the Jewish tradition and declared that any pilgrim who journeyed to Rome at that time would receive a plenary indulgence.⁴ An indulgence was something that the church would grant to an individual which would give them forgiveness for a specific sin and therefore allow them to spend less time in purgatory. What was unique about the plenary indulgence that Pope Boniface VIII offered was that it would offer forgiveness to the pilgrim for the sins that they committed over the span of their whole life. That type of extreme indulgence was usually only given to crusaders who fought in the Holy Land. Pope

² Bell and Dale, "Rich Pickings," 31-35.

³ Joseph Byrne, *Encyclopedia of the Black Death*, (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2012), 314.

⁴ Herbert Kessler and Johanna Zacharias, *Rome 1300 on the Path of the Pilgrim*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 1.

Boniface VIII's decreed his new idea in his papal bull called *Antiquorum Habet*. The pilgrims to Rome, known as the Romipetae, positively flooded the city.⁵

It was reported that there were such crowds in Rome as a result of the Jubilee that people were crushed and trampled to death.⁶ Besides the Jubilee there were additional reasons for Rome's popularity as a pilgrimage site. At the time, the Holy Land was particularly difficult and dangerous to travel to because of war and conflict.⁷ Another reason for the popularity of Rome as a pilgrimage site is directly related to the role of the statue of Saint Peter mentioned earlier. St. Peter himself was a factor that drew in the pilgrims, and St. Peter's Basilica was one of the major pilgrimage sites that a pilgrim would travel to. Rome was referred to as "*ad limina apostoloru*," a Latin phrase that translates to "the threshold of the apostles".⁸ Rome was called the threshold of the apostles because two of Jesus's major apostles, Peter and Paul, were martyred in Rome.⁹ If a pilgrim was from Rome and wanted the plenary indulgence they had to spend thirty days at the Basilica of Saint Peter and the Basilica of Saint Paul. The time period was reduced to fifteen days if the pilgrim was from outside of Rome.¹⁰ That shows that pilgrims journeyed from great distances in order to make the pilgrimage to Rome. St. Peter's basilica was required viewing for pilgrims, and they came from all over in order to see it.

The statue of Saint Peter in Saint Peter's Basilica was most likely made by Arnolfo di Cambio in the year 1300. In modern times, the statue is located in a small chapel which is to the left of the apse in St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. The statue rises up behind the altar of the

⁵ Debra Birch, *Pilgrimage to Rome in the Middle Ages*, (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1998), 198-202.

⁶ Birch, *Pilgrimage to Rome*, 199-201.

⁷ Birch, *Pilgrimage to Rome*, 199-201.

⁸ Birch, *Pilgrimage to Rome*, 6.

⁹ Birch, *Pilgrimage to Rome*, 6-7.

¹⁰ Birch, *Pilgrimage to Rome*, 196.

chapel.¹¹ The statue is said to be based on an antique statue of a philosopher and in the past it stood in the Atrium of Old St. Peter's.¹² There used to be a great deal of debate over the dating of the statue, but the date was securely identified when Bruno Bearzi analyzed the bronze alloy in 1957 and dated the sculpture to 1300.¹³ There is little to no information to be found on the commission of the piece. However, the year of the creation of the statue of St. Peter is important. Jubilee years in Rome were always times of plentiful commissions. New pieces were being made in preparation for the flood of pilgrims. If the statue was indeed made in the year 1300, the statue would be at the center of the influx of pilgrims coming to Rome and St. Peter's as a result of the Jubilee.

Saint Peter was thought to be crucified in Rome during the reign of the Roman Emperor Nero. Peter was martyred in the name of Christianity and the fact that the martyrdom occurred in Rome explains Rome's hold on the Saint Peter pilgrimage market. Saint Peter had his own respective appeal to pilgrims, besides the fact that they were lured to Rome because of relative ease and promises of plenary indulgences. Saint Peter was thought to be the gatekeeper to Heaven, and as such he would have a particular affinity for being able to absolve ones sins. He was additionally seen as the prince of the apostles and he was entrusted with the keys to heaven.¹⁴ Those very keys can be seen in the statue of Saint Peter, further emphasizing his role as a Saint who held a great deal of weight in absolving sins. Saint Peter had a tremendous role in the attraction of pilgrimage to Rome.

¹¹ Kessler and Zacharias, *Rome 1300*, 206-207.

¹² Joachim Poeschke, "Arnolfo di Cambio," *Grove Art Online. Oxford Art Online*. (Oxford University Press, accessed February 27, 2014, <http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T004203>), 1.

¹³ Joachim Poeschke, "Arnolfo di Cambio," 1.

¹⁴ Birch, *Pilgrimage to Rome*, 27-39.

Rome was a city that was not as heavily impacted by the plague of 1348 as other Italian cities such as Florence or Siena. However, its role as a pilgrimage site certainly caused some problems. Pope Clement VI, who was the pope at the time of the plague that struck Italy in 1348, almost cancelled the Jubilee year of 1350 in Rome due to the plague. The Jubilee that had originally been declared by Pope Boniface VIII was incredibly successful, and so another Jubilee year was planned in 1350. The plague was attacking Italy in the year 1348 onward, and pilgrims were often blamed for spreading the plague. However, while that hysteria was unfounded, it is clear that pilgrims could spread the plague simply via contagion. Furthermore, pilgrimage increased because people wanted to make pilgrimages to protect themselves from the plague or from their sins if their death was a distinct possibility. Pope Clement VI originally planned on cancelling the Jubilee year in 1350 because of the death and destruction caused by the plague, but he changed his mind once the plague seemed to abate a bit.¹⁵ The Pope himself was not even in Rome at the time of his decision; he was in Avignon because of his allegiance to France and because the Papal See had been moved from Rome to Avignon in years prior. Ultimately, Clement VI ordered the Jubilee to go on as planned and the consequences were clear: the records of wills in the year 1350 indicate a large spike in the time period of June and July, which can be seen as evidence that the plague did in fact strike Rome.¹⁶

The situation in Rome from the years of 1300-1350 was one that had increased pilgrimage and problems of the plague almost as a direct result of that pilgrimage. Saint Peter and St. Peter's basilica were at the heart of what pilgrims made the long journey to Rome for. Thus, the statue of St. Peter Enthroned by Arnolfo di Cambio was also at the center of

¹⁵ Byrne, *Encyclopedia*, 273-314.

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pilgrimage to Rome. The tradition of the Jubilee that started in 1300 and the promises of plenary indulgences enticed pilgrims to flock to Rome, and that flocking of pilgrims led to further problems with the Plague in Italy.

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