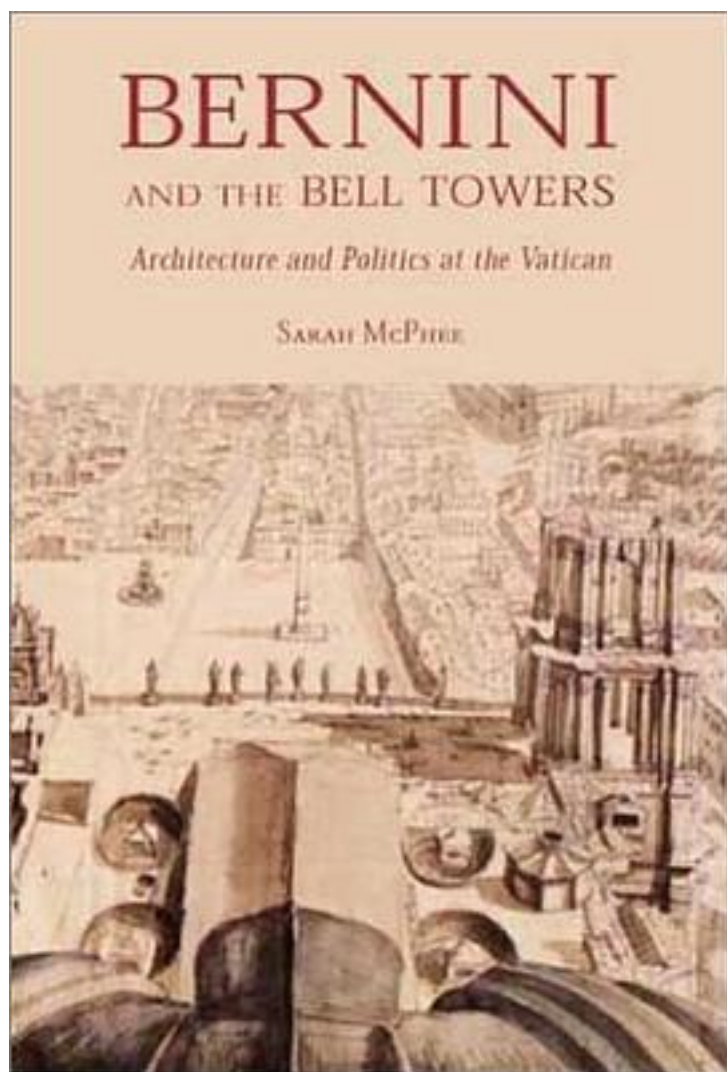


Bernini and the Bell Towers



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In 1638, the great artist-architect Gianlorenzo Bernini began one of the most ambitious architectural projects of his career: to design and construct massive twin bell towers atop St. Peter's basilica at the Vatican. But the project failed spectacularly. Bernini's reputation was permanently tarnished, and the scandal of the bell towers sparked a controversy that persists to this day. What happened? Who was responsible? How did events unfold in this dramatic episode of architectural history? This illustrated volume tells the complete story of the bell towers. Presenting both visual and documentary evidence, Sarah McPhee reconstructs the entire affair, the architectural and political milieu, the evolution of the designs, and the varying influences of all those involved in the project. McPhee examines the multiple constraints under which Bernini worked, including the ambitions of the Pope, the criticisms of rival architects, the financial and political constraints of the building committee, the monumental history of the basilica, and the geology of the site. She reinterprets Bernini's role as architect and shows convincingly that the failure of the bell tower was not Bernini's own. Instead, it was the failure of the institution of the Vatican, driven by liturgical and political imperatives, that doomed the project despite the architect's heroic efforts.

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