

# La Pigna vaticana e la Pigna di Aquisgrana: due casi peculiari di fontane medievali a confronto

## Abstract

Examining the famous Vatican fountain of the Pigna, which was built in the mid-eighth century in the quadriportico of St. Peter's Basilica, this essay reflects on its typological and symbolic originality in relation to its counterpart, built at the beginning of the eleventh century in Aachen in the atrium of the Palatine Chapel.

Through the reconstruction of the documentary and historiographical framework, some key issues that both works raise are addressed, including the reconstruction of their original appearance, their dating, and their symbolic value. This last aspect, in particular, is at the center of a novel interpretation advanced here, in which, in order to understand the original meaning of the two monuments, attention is paid to their possible patronage and more generally to the historical context in which they originated. The placement of the colossal fountain in the atrium of St. Peter would in fact have occurred precisely during the mid-eighth century when the papacy, especially Stephen II (752–757), was seeking to strengthen the Roman Church's secular power and political-legal status, in addition to its spiritual authority, by redefining its alliances on the Italian and European scene. Similarly, the Pigna of Aachen, in imitation of its Vatican counterpart, seems to encapsulate the universalistic dream of Otto III (996–1002), who wished to re-establish imperial sovereignty and put the empire's relationship to the Church of Rome on a new footing.

The pine cone-shaped fountains, which appeared between the eighth and eleventh centuries in two of the most important political centers of medieval Europe, established themselves as monuments linked respectively to a specific historical context and to a particular client who transformed them into instruments of propaganda communicating a claim to political power.