

Tracing Heidegger's Bridge in the *Pons Neronianus*, Rome

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Abstract

This paper examines the *Pons Neronianus* in Rome, an ancient bridge that connected the east bank of the Tiber River with the Vatican, in the context of Martin Heidegger's thesis of the archetypal bridge as preserving and gathering the fourfold (man, gods, sky and earth) in its midst. I explore the symbolic significance of the bridge, in regard to its topographical setting at the bend in the Tiber River, by examining the etymology of *Ponifex Maximus* (meaning 'bridge-maker') that served as a title of the chief priest in antiquity, only later to be adopted by the papacy to reinforce the symbolic connections between the Vatican ('Jerusalem Restored') with Rome (the fallen city). The paper argues that the proposed reconstruction of the *Pons Neronianus* in the early 16th century by Donato Bramante was prompted by a deeply held mytho-historic understanding of the urban topography of Rome, in which the resurrected bridge provided a powerful metaphor of how the Christian (humanist) city could be revived in perpetuity through the actions and deeds of the pope, Julius II.

Theme: The language of the bridge – metaphors and meanings in social life