
Period of Recognition AD 313—476

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Surely one of the most significant documents in history must be the so called Edict of Milan (313), a concordat between Constantine in the Western half of the Roman Empire and his co-Emperor in the East, Licinius, which recognized all existing religions in the Empire, most especially Christianity, and extended to all of them the freedom of open public practice. Equally important was Constantine's subsequent personal patronage of the Christian Church. Sixty years later Emperor Theodosius would declare Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire and followers of the ancient pagan rites, criminals. The pagans were soon subjected to the same repression as Christians had been, save violent widespread persecution. In less than one hundred years the *persecuted* had become the *persecutors*. Within another hundred years --in 476 -- the political Empire in the West would collapse and the Christian Church would become the sole unifying cultural force among a collection of barbarian kingdoms. Christianity would go on to dominate the society of Western Europe for the next thousand years. Thus the three sources from which modern Europe sprang were tapped: Greece, Rome, and Christianity.

Constantine's Christianity

Just prior to the Edict Milan, Constantine defeated his rival Maxentius for Emperorship of the Roman Empire in the West. He attributed his victory to the Christian God. He had a dream or vision in which the God of the Christians told him that he would be victorious if he marched his army under the Christian symbol of the *chi rho*, a monogram for the

name of Jesus Christ. He did so. It was a stunning victory at the Milvian Bridge on the outskirts of Rome when Constantine's smaller force caught Maxentius' army in a defile and drove many of them, including Maxentius, into the Tiber River.[63] The military action that day in 311 was a type of Christian baptism of the Empire —the old pagan Empire died in the waters of the Tiber and rose to a new Christian life under Constantine.

While Constantine's victory at the bridge would seem to have signaled a sudden reversal in Christian fortunes, Constantine, as early as 306, had already exhibited toleration for Christians in his area of govern-

63 The Battle at the Milvian Bridge

<www.heritage-history.com/www/heritage.php?R_m...>

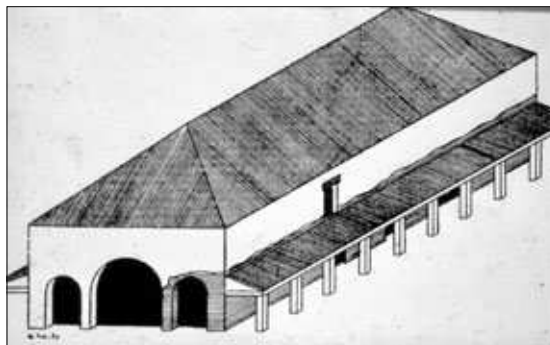


ance. The “Edict” further granted Christians throughout the entire Empire restoration of all property seized during Emperor Diocletian's “great” persecution. However, Licinius, ruling in the East reneged in 320 on the religious freedom promised by the Edict and began yet another persecution of the Christians in the Eastern half of the Empire. This was a challenge to Constantine in the West and it resulted in a great civil war in 324. In the show down Licinius represented the ancient pagan faith of the past while Constantine’s armies marched under the banner of Christianity. With his victory over Licinius’ forces Constantine became the sole ruler of the Roman Empire and Christianity was assured of its eventual total triumph over paganism.

Constantine’s devotion to the Christian God was sincere throughout his life even though his baptism didn’t take place until he was on his death bed in 337. Throughout his tenure as ruler in the West and, then, as sole Emperor, Constantine supported the Church financially, planned and built fabulous churches as shrines honoring the Christian martyrs, granted the same privileges to clergy as were granted to civil magistrates (exemption from taxes, the wearing of special insignia, etc), and appointed Christians to powerful positions in the government.¹

Constantine’s basilicas

It is estimated that at the start of the fourth century the population of the city of Rome was thirty percent Christian.² While not as high a percentage as that in the Eastern provinces of the Empire --estimated at fifty percent-- it was nevertheless a substantial portion of the city. Even so there



was no real public face to the Christian Church in the city. The Church owned or rented at least twenty-five apartments or apartment buildings (*insulae*) and old mansions but they were all indistinguishable from the other forty-four thousand or so buildings in the city. They were plain

brick structures tucked in among other apartment buildings, warehouses and shops.³ These were the latest generation of house churches (*domus ecclesia*) that had served the needs of Christians since the first century; community centers is how some might describe them as they served many needs of the Christian community in addition to worship.

In the years immediately leading up to the Edict of Milan Christians had been able to construct actual church buildings in Rome. Very few in number, these too were non-descript, being plain brick barn-like affairs that attracted little attention.[64]

In addition to locations within the cities of the Empire, Christians, like their pagan neighbors --and following the Roman tradition of reverence for the dead-- gathered together in the cemeteries in the country sides. It was outside the walls of cities that all cemeteries were located as the ancient Romans were very careful to keep the dead separate from the living.

64 San Crisogono, Christian meeting hall, Rome

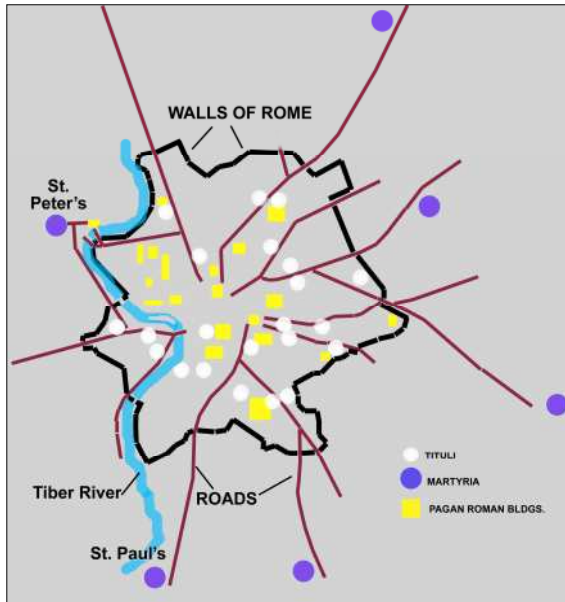
Probably built under Pope Silvester I (314–335) in Trastevere, the only area of Rome on that side of the river. The construction of impressive Christian churches still would have been opposed by the conservative pagan Senate even though Christianity had been legalized for a quarter century. The presence of basins in some of the walls have led some to believe that the original function of the building was as a laundry and dye house. The ambiguity of use is typical of these early church structures. For the most part they were indistinguishable from other city buildings. This structure was essentially a simple hall with an apse at one end. The building material of the walls was brick with a ceiling of open timber beams.

Richard Krautheimer with Slobodan Curcic, *Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture (Revised)*, (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1986) p 36

Like the Christian buildings in the cities the funerary buildings constructed by Christians in cemeteries were identical to those of their pagan friends.

These buildings in the countryside and in the city presented the only public image of Christianity to non-believers and, as they were indistinguishable from other similar use structures, they made no unique impression. A visitor to Rome during the first ten years of the fourth century would have had little clue that a third of the population was Christian.

Clearly the lack of any significant public face to the Church in Rome at the start of his reign must have made Constantine uncomfortable. It was just not appropriate that the religion of the Emperor be so private and domestic; so unworthy.⁴ He determined to embark on a building program to create an honorable public image for the Church. His ability to implement his plan was blocked, however, by the pagan and staunchly conservative senatorial class of the city of Rome.⁵ They held sway within the city walls as it was their sacred duty to maintain the “glory of Rome” and properly attend to the worship of the ancient gods, the protectors of the city. Since Constantine’s pro-Christian policies had already met with strong resistance from this powerful group, the construction of impressive Christian buildings in the city



65 Map showing location of Constantine's martyria basilicas, Rome, ca. 330

Tituli churches within the walls of the city of Rome are shown as white dots on the map. They were the locations of the original house churches in which Christians first assembled. A titulus church carries the name of the owner of the property.

would simply not be tolerated. His strategy, therefore, was to direct his material patronage of Christians to areas *outside* the city or to properties that belonged to him personally in order to avoid any conflict with the powerful senators. The “churches” of the cemeteries, therefore, were the first to benefit from the benevolence of Constantine.[65]

In 330, Constantine moved his capital far to the East, to a fishing port on the Bosphorus called Byzantium. There he had little opposition to his Christian leanings and so he planned many beautiful Christian churches constructed within the city.

66 The Tomb of Cecilia Metella, Via Appia Antica, Rome; ca. 50 B.C.

The Via Appia was one of ancient Rome's major highways leading into the city. It was alongside these roads that cemeteries were maintained.



Martyria

Located outside the walls, Roman cemeteries straddled the major routes going in and out of the cities.[66] These were highly visible places as hundreds of people, both local and foreign, would pass by them every day entering and leaving the city. Although catacombs were also used if space was limited, surface cemeteries were preferred even

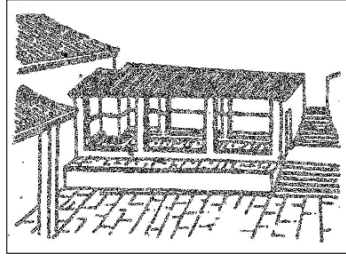
by Christians.⁶ For the most part the cemeteries and catacombs were located on the private estates of wealthy landowners. In many instances, a portion of an estate was gifted to a Christian servant or a Christian freeman for use as a cemetery for his family, friends, and co-religionists. Here, then, Constantine could plan and help sponsor impressive buildings that would give the Christian Church a public face.

There were four funerary structures or buildings commonly used in cemeteries: *trichlia*, *mausolea*, *cella trichora*, and *tetrapylon*.⁷ Imperial architects re-

67 Triclia

Funerary banquet hall found under the Church of S. Sebastiano, Rome, ca. 260.

Robert Ousterhout, <<http://www2.arch.uiuc.edu/courses/arch311/L-B/begin.html>>



ferred to them for inspiration in designing an entirely new architectural form, the Christian *martyrium basilica* (a hall *—basilica—* built over the tomb or relics of a martyr).

Triclia[67] were funerary banquet halls; not much more than picnic pavilions perhaps adjourning a small courtyard with a stone canopy over a grave or graves. They had for some

time provided space for commemorative meals in honor of deceased relatives. You will recall from our discussion of catacomb art in Chapter 1 that graveside commemorative meals were a common element of ancient funerary practices. Relatives and friends gathered at the grave to leave food offerings and enjoy a picnic lunch on the anniversary of the death of the deceased. Graves often had a stone or marble table (*mensa*) over the grave for just that purpose. Christians continued that tradition. Indeed, in addition to a picnic, the Eucharist might be sometimes celebrated at the



68 (above) The Tomb of Cecilia Metella, Via Appia Antica, Rome; ca. 50 B.C.

A pagan mausoleum. The tomb is of the type having a cylindrical body set on a square base. The rounded—or sometimes octagonal or square—forms at the apse ends of Christian martyria basilicas are assumed to have been influenced by pagan martyria similar to this one. They both, of course, had similar funerary purposes.

Alessandro Zangrilli<http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Tombs_by_type>

69 (above, right) Church of Santa Costanza, Rome, ca. 350

This was originally a mausoleum and so was designed accordingly. In many mausolea an ambulatory walkway ran along the inside wall separated from the central area by a row of columns.



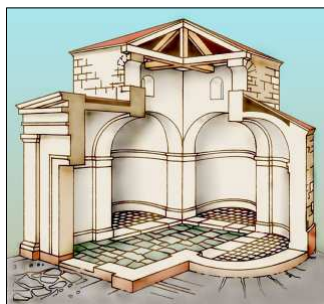
grave of a martyr or saint on the anniversary of his or her “passion.” Mass in those instances was attended by large crowds of residents who walked out to the cemetery from the city and by pilgrims visiting from other parts of the Empire,.

In addition to the triclia were *mausolea*[68] to memorialize the dead. These were normally round two story buildings (sometimes square or octagonal) that could vary in size from ten to twenty feet in diameter to nearly one hundred feet or more. The larger ones are usually associated with emperors or other imperial house members. Many mausolea often had an *ambulatory* (circular walkway/aisle) that ran along several feet in from the exterior wall, separated from the central space by a row of columns.[69] The columns might support an arcade which in turn supported either stone vaulted or open timbered ceilings that, in turn, might support the floors of a second story. The commemorative funerary banquets are generally thought to have taken place on the second floors of the mau-

70 Cella trichora (triconch); ca. 300-310

The tomb might be either below the floor or in a chamber of a catacomb.

<<http://www.aquincum.hu/kismuzeumok/cellakep.htm>>



solea. The body of the deceased rested in a grave under the structure or, perhaps, in a sarcophagus on the ground floor. Alternatively, niches in the walls might shelter urns containing the ashes of members of an extended family.

The third funerary structure found in cemeteries only appeared at the beginning of the fourth century. The *cella trichora*[70] had a

71 Tetrapylon, Aleppo, ca. 125

The form of the tetrapylon over a grave appears in Christian churches later as a canopy over the altar signifying, among other meanings, the presence of a saint's relics in or under the altar. Such altar canopies are known as *ciboria*.

<http://www.sonic.net/~tallen/palmtree/ayyarch/images/ladh1.jpg>



square plan (*bay*) off of which on three sides were projecting apses. Off the fourth side of the bay was a short nave that ended in a façade with a wide arched opening. The ground plan looked something like a clover. The ceilings of the apses were often stone as was the ceiling over the bay. If not stone vaulted, the bay and nave ceilings might be open timbered. A pediment crowned the top of the façade. Pitched roofs sheltered the nave, bay, and apses. The grave or sarcophagus of the owner

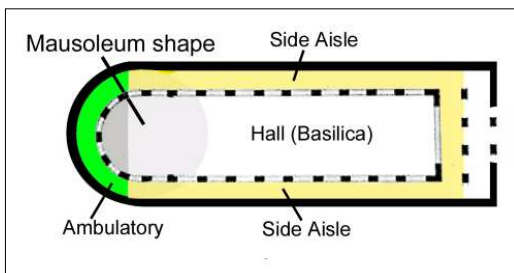
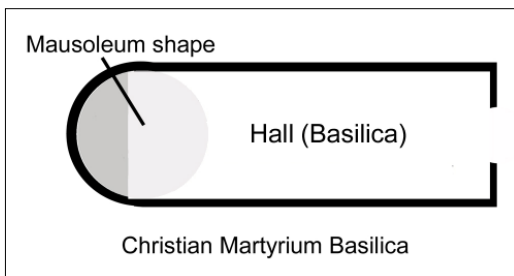
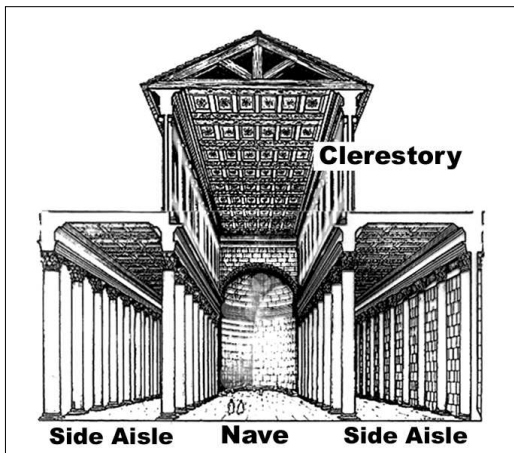
of the property/mausoleum was located in the central bay. A martyr entombed in a Christian catacomb might be memorialized by a mausoleum or *cella trichora* above ground. A small mensa was likely placed in the apse opposite the entrance.

A fourth structure was rare and appeared in the Eastern provinces of the Empire. The *tetrapylon*[71] was a stone or marble memorial consisting of four arches supporting a vaulted canopy sheltering the grave of a martyr. A mausoleum type it was more pretentious than the *trichlia*, mausoleum, or *cella trichora* described above.

72 (below, top) Cross Section of a basilica

73 (below, middle) Diagram of Martyrium

74 (below, bottom) Diagram of Martyrium with ambulatory and side aisles.



Christian martyria basilicas

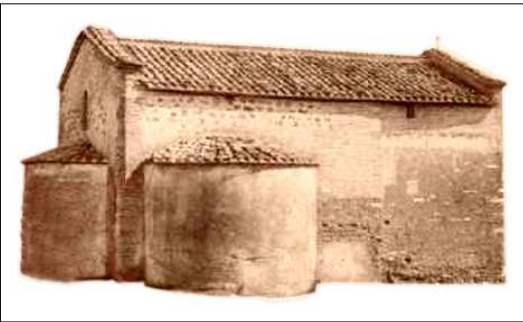
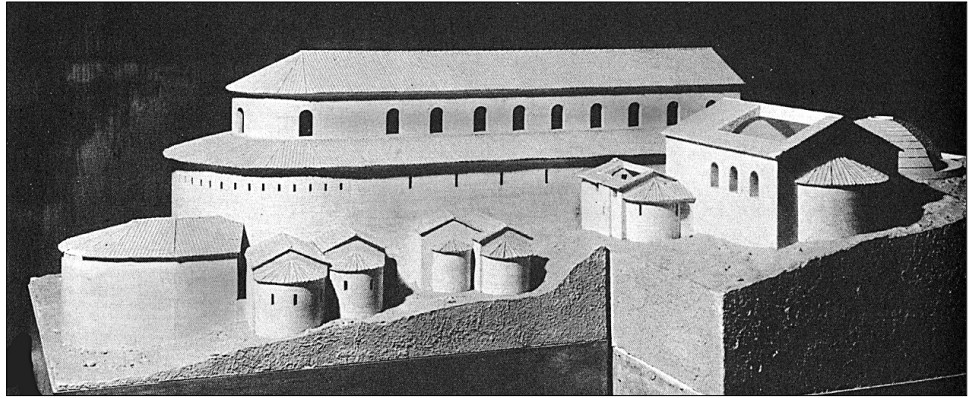
All four of the funerary structures --trichlia, mausolea, *cella trichora*, and *tetrapylon*-- influenced the design of the martyria basilicas Constantine planned in honor of those who had given their lives for Christ. The basilicas replaced the non-descript mausolea that were already there. In many cases the martyr's body lay deep in a catacomb below ground level but the impressive martyria above ground boldly proclaimed Constantine's Christian faith.

Constantine era basilicas essentially fused two architectural forms together: the *mausoleum* and the *basilica*. [73] The basilica was a commonly used civic hall structure with a rectangular form similar to that of a shoe box. In larger basilicas the center roof was raised up higher on walls supported from below by columns. *Clerestory* windows punctured the higher walls and allowed light to flood the central interior space. [72] The rows of columns below divided the interior central nave from surrounding side aisles. Usually a projecting apse the width of the central nave was located at one or both ends of the hall or sometimes on the long sides.

To commemorate the martyr and to provide burial space for those wanting to "rest" close to the martyr a round mausoleum form was fused with the rectangular box form of the civic basilica. The floor plan, then, consisted of a rectangle finished at one end with a projecting semi-circular form that was the same width as the basilica. The floor provided space for the cemetery and also a covered hall in which commemorative banquets could be held just as they had been in the *trichlia*. In addition, the ambulatory of the mausoleum form flowed into the side

**75 San Sebastiano (model),
Rome, 312/13?**

Richard Krautheimer with Slobodan Curcic, *Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture (Revised)*, (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1986) p53



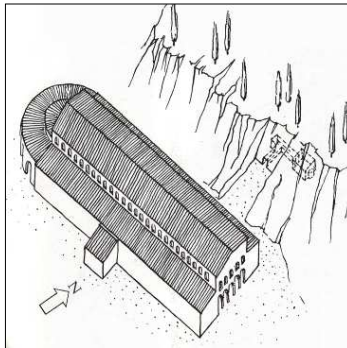
**76 Cella trichora, Catacombe
di S. Callisto, Rome; 4th C.**

Alinari, Fratelli <<http://www.lombardiabeniculturali.it/.../?current=26>>

**77 San Lorenzo Fuori le Mur,
Rome; ca. 330**

Isometric reconstruction of this
martyria basilica.

(after Krautheimer) James Snyder, *Medieval
Art*, (New York, Harry N. Abrams 1989) p. 33



aisles of the hall creating a continuous aisle encircling the entire interior space.[74]⁹

The martyria basilicas closely resembled the cella trichora but on a much larger scale. In fact, the trichora[76] could have been the actual model for the martyria basilicas[75]. It was not uncommon for martyria basilicas to also have projecting apses off the sides for the graves or sarcophagi of wealthier Christians.[75]

The martyria built by imperial architects at Rome included the complex of *San Lorenzo Fuori le Mura* (St. Lawrence Outside the Walls)[77] It was constructed next to a hill that rose above some catacombs. Stairs in the hillside descended to the martyr's grave below. Constantine installed a memorial shrine within a small apse at the grave itself, under the hill, and donated silver furnishings including candelabra for its decoration. The longitudinal hall above ground and to the side of the hill was of the plan we have been describing. The rounded end acted as a symbolic mausoleum and may have had a *cenotaph* or other memorial at its center. The floor of the hall was filled with flat gravestones upon which the faithful could gather for banquets. Martyria did not have fixed stone altars but rather portable wood tables that could be relocated anywhere in the basilica to accommodate commemorative meals. No doubt such

a mensa was set aside in each martyrium and used as an altar for the martyr's feast day Eucharist.

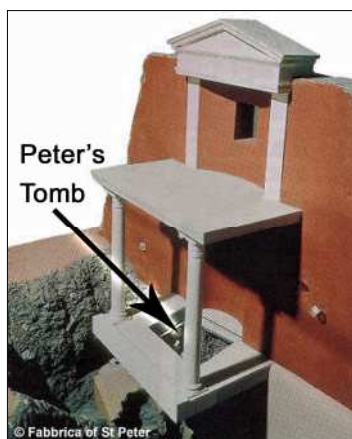
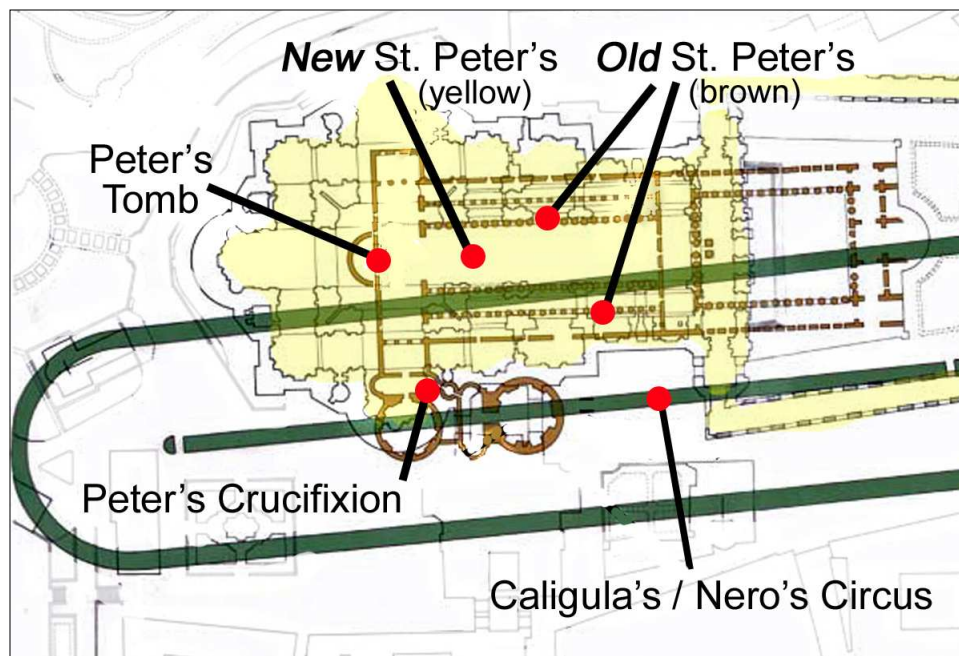
St. Peter's Basilica

The best known of Constantine's (it may actually have been built by his son Constans¹⁰) martyria basilicas, of course, is the one built to shelter the tomb of St. Peter[84] (begun 317-322 or, possibly after 325 or even 337¹¹). The "prince of the apostles" was buried just outside the *circus* of Nero[78] where Peter had been crucified in 64 or 67. The location is outside the city of Rome, across the Tiber River, on a hill known as the *Mons Vaticanus*. Peter's grave was among a small group of poor Christian ones that were surrounded by up-scale mausolea that belonged to followers of Eastern religious cults.¹² Adherents of the Eastern cults

78 Outline of St. Peter's —Old and New— and Circus of Nero

The brown lines indicate the ground plan of the old basilica. The yellow shape shows the area of the new basilica.

Edited image: <<http://www.saintpetersbasilica.org/images.htm>>



79 (above), 80 (right) Model of the 'Trophy of Gaius'

This model represents the funerary aedicula (shrine) erected over the Tomb of St Peter a century after his death. Remains of the monument, discovered during the pontificate of Pope Pius XII (Pacelli, 1939-1958), are visible beneath the Papal altar of the Vatican Basilica. The Roman Presbyter Gaius mentioned the aedicula at the beginning of the 3rd century by using the Greek term *tropaion*, meaning 'monuments of victory,' symbol of the victory over death through the profession of faith and martyrdom.

78: Fabric of St. Peter's: <<http://www.saintpetersbasilica.org/Necropolis/Trophy.htm>>.

79: Original drawing based on a model from Fabric of St. Peter's: <<http://www.saintpetersbasilica.org/Necropolis/Trophy.htm>>; also, Creating St Peter's. Knights of Columbus Museum, 2004



tended to live in the area of Trastevere, just a short distance from the Vatican hill. Sometime between 160 and 180 a 10 foot high wall (called the "red wall" because of its color) was erected which cut off half of Peter's grave[79]. At the same time, the grave was marked by an *aedicula* (niche) in the wall. A shelf projects from the wall about half-way up and is supported at the front two corners by columns. Two pilasters on the wall rise from the back corners of the shelf to an entablature and pediment on the top of the wall. This interesting monument is a version of the tetrapylon[71] and no doubt is the inspiration for wood, marble, or bronze architectural canopies (*ciboria* — *ciborium*) that tower over the altars of churches.

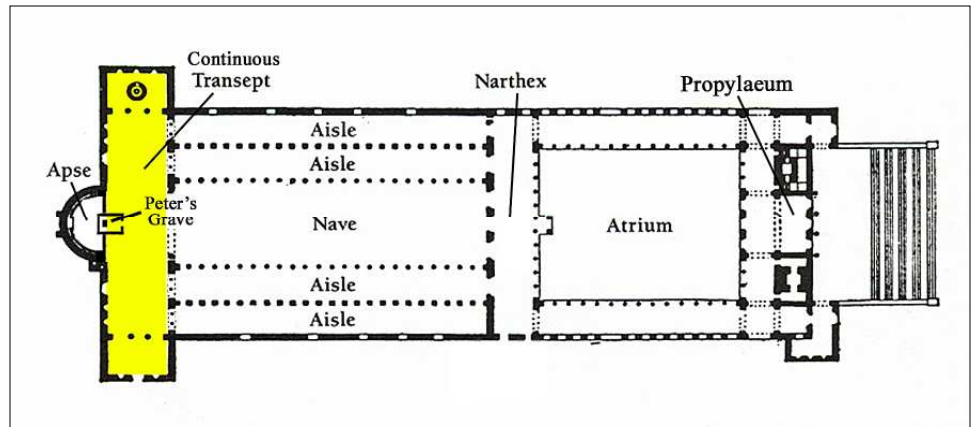
That *St. Peter's Basilica* was built around the actual tomb of St. Peter was never questioned until the Protestant Reformation. Since there was no biblical reference to St. Peter having been in Rome, the Protestants — ever devoted to the bible "alone" and opposed to any claims of papal authority — disputed that he was ever even in Rome much less buried there. Excavations conducted during the 1940s and 50s discovered, however, twenty-two feet directly beneath the high altar of the current basilica, the second century *tropaion* (martyr's memorial we described above) identified as belonging to St. Peter[80]. Numerous second century graffiti left by pilgrims appear on the red wall of the memorial. One of them matter-of-factly proclaims, "Peter is here".

The martyria basilica of *St. Peter's* was completed, except for perhaps the interior decoration, in 329 (although some say it was still unfinished in 350). Its design differs from the other martyria in a significant way: *St. Peter's* did not use the mausoleum form over the grave of Peter. Instead, a *continuous transept* (nave) perpendicular to the basilica hall was in-

81 Ground Plan of Old St. Peter's Basilica

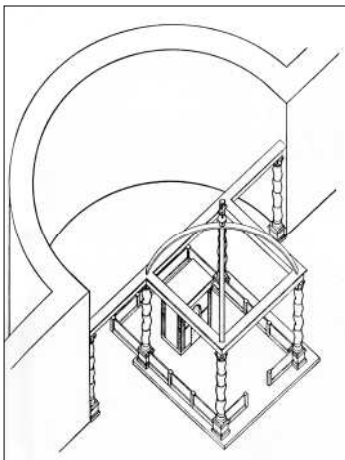
The *continuous transept* and nave, together, resembles a cross in the ground plan. It was, however, an unintentional association having been constructed solely for the purpose of adding more space for pilgrims to maneuver near Peter's tomb.

(after Krautheimer) James Snyder, *Medieval Art*, (New York, Harry N. Abrams 1989) p. 34



82 View down the nave toward the apse, St. Peter's

<<http://www2.arch.uiuc.edu/courses/arch311/L/C/const.html>>; Robert Ousterhout, School of Architecture University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign



83 (above) Constantine's memorial and ciborium; ca. 324

The *memorial* constructed in Constantine's basilica enclosed nearly all of the original *troparion*.

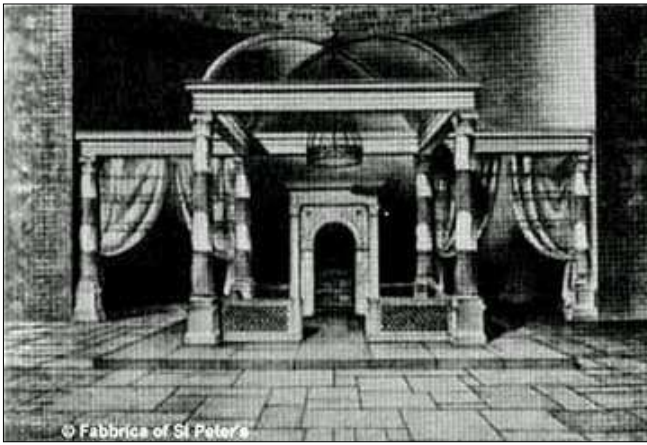
Fabbrica of St. Peter

serted in the plan between the hall and a normal basilica apse[81]. The top half of the aedicula was above the floor in the *chord* (front border) of the apse. The bottom half of the aedicula and the grave were below floor level. The transept was marked off from the hall nave by a triumphal arch [82] the same width as the nave and columns screened the transepts from the ends of the aisles. The aisles, then, did not meet up with a mausoleum ambulatory but terminated, abruptly, at the transept. In addition, the transept extended slightly beyond the width of the basilica hall at both sides.

The continuous transept appears to have been a practical way to accommodate the large crowds that showed up everyday wanting to get close to Peter's tomb. They gathered (probably jockeying for position in traditional Italian fashion) just outside a meter high railing (*cancellus*) that separated the memorial and apse from the transept[83]. An opening in the center of the railing was the control point through which a manageable number of people would be allowed in for a limited time. On the saint's feast day the crowds were probably kept at bay in the nave and side aisles while the transept became the reserve of the large number of clergy. On those days a temporary altar was probably placed in the transept between the railing of the memorial and the central nave of the hall. It could also have been placed between the railing and the memorial itself.

Like the other martyria halls the nave and aisles of the original *St. Peter's* was once paved with graves and functioned primarily as a funerary banquet hall.¹³ It seems that the original *St. Peter's* had seven mensa/altars but no fixed altar in the apse. The structure could accommodate over 14,000 people.¹⁴ Twenty-two marble columns, spoils from earlier pagan temples, separated the side aisles from the central nave. The capitals atop the columns were also spoils and varied in style and height from column to column. The church proper was 350 feet long, 215 feet wide, and covered by a roof that is estimated to have been 100-125 feet off the ground; higher than some gothic cathedrals. A large skeletal ciborium, supported by four twisting columns, covered the memorial and grave[83]. Two additional columns on either side of the ciborium joined the canopy to the sides of the apse along the chord of the apse.[84] Curtains were suspended between these columns and concealed the interior of the apse.

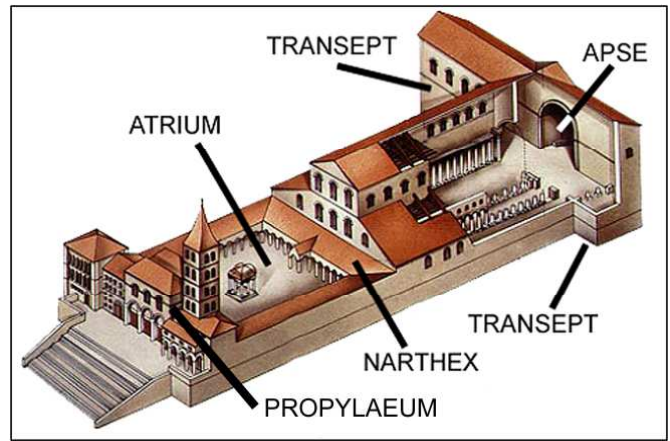
The first *St. Peter's* --it was replaced with the current one in the sixteenth century-- had open timbered ceilings as did all the early martyria.



84 Constantine's memorial and ciborium

The ciborium was connected to the front edges of the apse. Curtains veiled the apse from sight.

Fabbrica of St. Peter <<http://www.saintpetersbasilica.org/Necropolis/JW/TheBonesofStPeter-1.htm>>



85 (top, right) Drawing of St. Peter's Basilica

It was entered through a *narthex* (porch or entryway) from a large *atrium* (open courtyard surrounded by a covered columnaded walkway). Such open courtyards were a common feature of both domestic and public Roman architecture. Fronting the entire complex was a fairly large *propylaeum* (entrance gateway).[81,85] This longitudinal progression from the street –propylaeum, atrium, narthex, basilica hall, mausoleum form (later, the altar area)—was common in Constantine's church basilicas and later took on symbolic theological meanings.

The original basilica of *St. Peter* was intended to be a shrine to the apostle and a covered graveyard. Like the other martyria it was certainly not intended to function as a local parish church as such although it did fulfill that purpose on Sundays and holy days.

Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls

It is interesting that St. Paul did not get a large martyrium basilica until much later. Constantine initially built only a small basilica over Paul's tomb even though Paul was as well thought of as Peter.¹⁵ Peter and Paul were considered of equal importance and the "See" of Rome was often deferred to by the rest of the Church because it was the city where both had been martyred. Yet, an appropriate basilica of equal impressiveness for Paul was not begun until about 385, after Constantine[86,87,88]. It was mostly through the efforts of Pope Damasus (366-384) to promote the primacy of Rome that St. Paul's basilica was constructed. It was modeled closely after *St. Peter's Basilica*, with five aisles. There are a couple of differences between the two: *St. Peter's* was an *occidented* plan (the apse was in the west) while *St. Paul's* is an *oriented* plan (the apse is in the east); *St. Paul's* transept is higher and extends only very slightly beyond the width of the basilica. Also, the columns separating the central nave from the side aisles in *St. Paul's* supports arches whereas they supported an entablature/architrave (flat *lintels*) in *St. Peter's*. The altar and ciborium in *St. Paul's* are at the end of the nave rather than directly in front of—in the chord of—the apse. An immense fire in 1823 destroyed the church, or most of it. It was rebuilt much like the original and is the only one of the original martyria (reconstructed, of course) still stand-

86 The Nave and Apse of St. Paul's Basilica Outside the Walls, Rome, ca. 385

St. Paul's gives us a pretty good idea as to how the old *St. Peter's Basilica* probably looked.



ing. It was modeled closely after *St. Peter's Basilica*, with five aisles. There are a couple of differences between the two: *St. Peter's* was an *occidented* plan (the apse was in the west) while *St. Paul's* is an *oriented* plan (the apse is in the east); *St. Paul's* transept is higher and extends only very slightly beyond the width of the basilica. Also, the columns separating the central nave from the side aisles in *St. Paul's* supports arches whereas they supported an entablature/architrave (flat *lintels*) in *St. Peter's*. The altar and ciborium in *St. Paul's* are at the end of the nave rather than directly in front of—in the chord of—the apse. An immense fire in 1823 destroyed the church, or most of it. It was rebuilt much like the original and is the only one of the original martyria (reconstructed, of course) still stand-

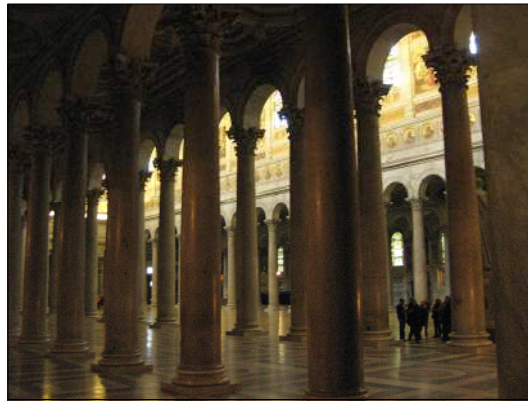


87 (above and right) *St. Paul's Outside the Walls*, begun in 385 and completed ca. 440-450.

blog.bibleplaces.com/2006/12/st-pauls-sarcoph... >

88 View from side aisles, *St. Paul's Outside the Walls*, begun in 385 and completed ca. 440-450.

About the same size as Old St. Peter's but with an *oriented* apse (in the east) and nave columns which support arches instead of an architrave. The façade *pediment* is decorated in mosaic.



ing and provides us with a pretty good idea of what the original *St. Peter's* would have felt like.

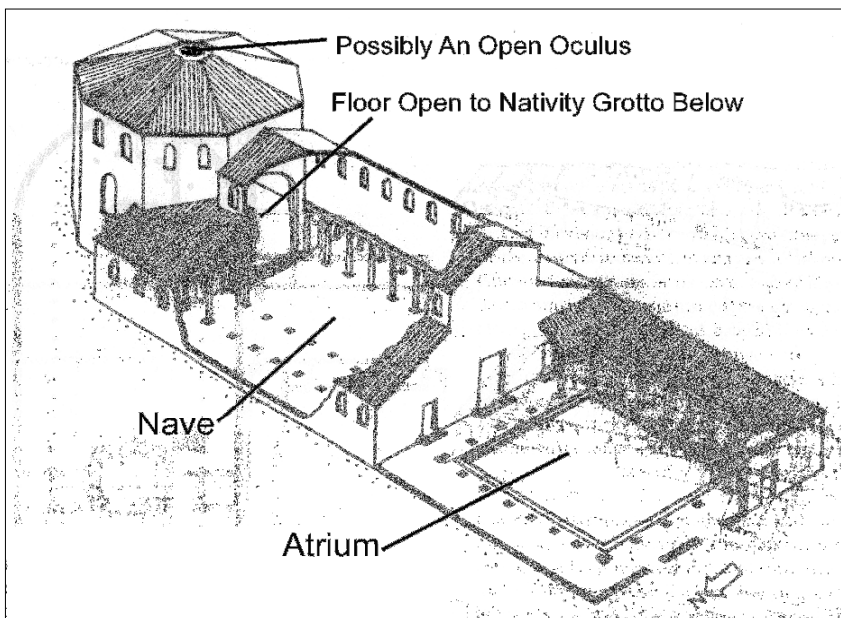
Constantine's Holy Land Martyria

Martyria basilicas were also built in the East, in the Holy Land, at the locations where

events in the life of Christ took place. There were several basilicas that Constantine had constructed there but the two most important are the *Church of the Nativity*[89] in Bethlehem (completed 333) and the *Church of the Holy Sepulchre*[89] (originally called the *Anastasis*; ca. 335) in Jerusalem. Unlike the martyria around Rome, these martyria were constructed in residential areas and so the buildings were used from the start as normal churches. Also, in contrast to the martyria around Rome, these basilica halls were not paved with graves. Technically –except for the *Church of the Holy Sepulchre*—these are not martyria at all as they are

not funerary buildings. They share with *St. Peter's Basilica*, however, an arrangement of architectural forms that included both the actual object of veneration and a large basilica hall.

The Constantinian *Basilica of the Nativity* in Bethlehem (begun in 317) had an octagonal mausoleum form fused to a basilica hall. In the raised floor of the octagon was an octagonal opening about four meters wide that allowed pilgrims to view the grotto of Christ's birth, below. The roof over this portion of the building may have been a pyramidal structure with an *oculus* (opening) at the peak. The basilica hall was five aisled like *St. Peter's* and, like *St. Peter's* was preceded by an atrium. Constantine's *Basilica of the Nativity* burned down in 529 and was replaced by the current structure in 564.



89 Drawing showing the *Basilica of the Nativity* in the Holy Land ; ca. 333

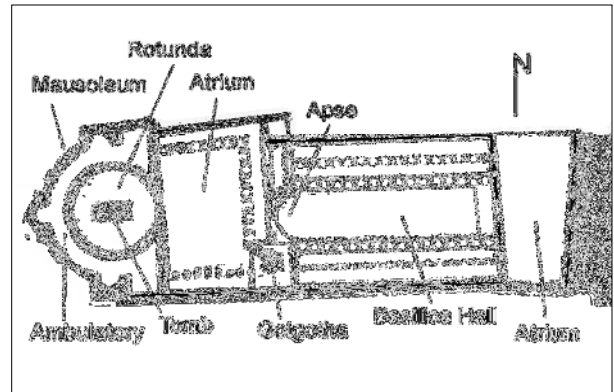
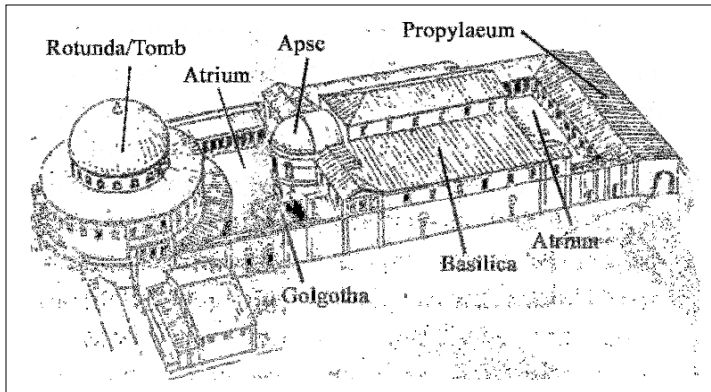
The floor of the octagonal structure had a large 4 meter opening which revealed the grotto of Christ's birth below. Revered sites, such as this one, and shrines of secondary relics (clothing and other objects associated with Christ, Mary and the saints), were treated architecturally in the same way—as a martyrium, with space for pilgrims to approach the object of veneration.

(after Krautheimer) James Snyder, *Medieval Art*, (New York, Harry N. Abrams 1989) p. 74

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The *Church of the Holy Sepulchre* in Jerusalem was most unique in that there were three important parts of the complex: the mausoleum surrounding the empty tomb of Christ (the Holy Sepulchre), the hill of Gogotha (Calvary) where Christ was crucified, and the basilica hall [90,91]. All three were separated from each other although they shared an atrium.

The basilica hall was five aisled with an apse that contained the altar and clergy benches. This was not a particularly large hall but it was apparently splendidly decorated. To the south of the apse—in the southeast



90 Drawing showing the Church of the Holy Sepulcher — the Anastasis— in the Holy Land in about the year 348

This original structure that Constantine had built over the tomb of Christ had a profound influence on all subsequent church building. Certainly that every church, in a sense, houses the tomb of Christ and the place of his crucifixion stems from the inspiration provided by this site. The distinctive architectural form of the *rotunda* has also been widely influential although its form originated with the style of ancient Greek and Roman mausoleums.

(after Conant) James Snyder, *Medieval Art*, (New York, Harry N. Abrams 1989) p. 73

91 (top right) Ground plan, Church of the Holy Sepulchre

92 (right) Cut-away view of site and Church of the Holy Sepulchre

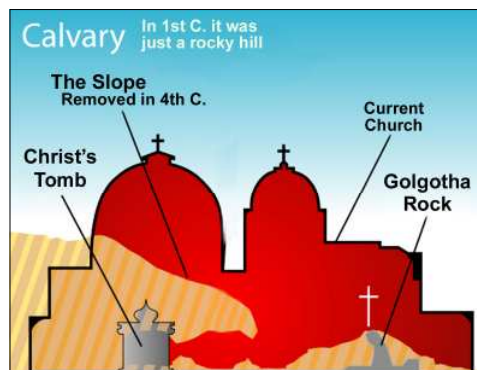
93 The burial site (Tomb of Christ) and the Edicule on top

Photo: Ron Peled

<www.feeljerusalem.com/videos/the_church_of_th...>

corner of the atrium-- was the hill of Golgotha. The hill was carved away to a large extent leaving only a slightly projecting outcrop where the cross had stood.[92] The top of the outcrop was higher than the floor of the basilica and the Holy Sepulchre.

Opposite the apse of the basilica, across the atrium, stands the mausoleum of the Holy Sepulchre. Like the hill of Golgotha, the hill surrounding the tomb was cut away leaving only the tomb which was enclosed in a tall memorial structure. A great mausoleum surrounds the site. Twelve huge columns arranged about 25 to 30 feet from the sides of the memorial formed the inner border of the ambulatory that ran around the *rotunda* (round space) in typical mausoleum fashion.[93] The columns were grouped into four sets of three and separated by four pairs of square piers. The piers were positioned in the four directions of the compass: North, South, East, and West. The twelve columns and four piers symbolized the twelve apostles carrying the four Gospels to the four ends of the earth.¹⁶ The roof over the rotunda was a timbered dome and rose higher than the roof of the ambulatory.



The Eucharist was apparently celebrated in the basilica hall, in the mausoleum, and at the chapel on Golgotha but all three sites within the complex were most likely “stational” stops for processions during some liturgies. The altar used in the mausoleum was the slab of marble that covers the tomb inside the Sepulchre. The Sepulchre has two chambers: the inner tomb chamber and a larger antechamber. Only about two or three people can stand in the tomb chamber. Attending clergy occupied the antechamber and the congregation all stood outside. It is cer-

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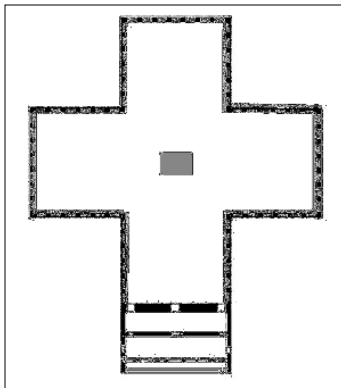
tainly possible that a portable altar could have been placed outside the tomb in front of the tomb entrance which is sometimes the arrangement utilized today.

The mausoleum of the *Holy Sepulchre Church* was frequently copied in the middle ages.

Constantinople

There is nothing left of Constantine's buildings in his Eastern capital, Byzantium –Constantinople. He moved the capital from Rome to the East for several reasons not the least of which was that Christians were of a far greater number there than in the West. His architects and those after him planned and constructed several churches in the city but none of these have survived except in written descriptions.

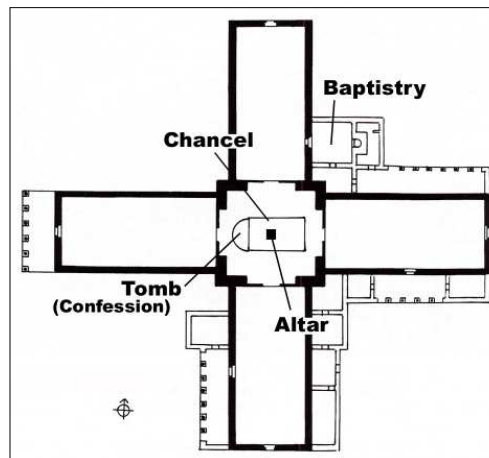
One basilica, the *Apostoleion* (*Church of the Holy Apostles*)[94], built by Constantine's son, Costantius—but enclosing Constantine's tomb—was constructed in the center of a wide courtyard surrounded by halls, baths, and pools. It was a cruciform shaped building; two equal length arms crossed each other (a *Greek Cross* plan). The entrance arm was probably a little longer. It is not known if there were any side aisles but the ceilings were coffered and gilded in gold and the walls covered in marble revertment. The *crossing* (where the arms cross) was covered with a cone shaped roof supported by a cylindrical *drum*. Being a martyrrium mausoleum, the sarcophagus of the Emperor became the focus of veneration and was positioned directly below the cone roof in the center of the crossing. Surrounding the sarcophagus were cenotaphs dedicated to the apostles. Constantine envisioned himself as the thirteenth apostle but this presumptuous arrangement was deemed too much so in 356/357 real relics of the apostles were brought in and Constantine's remains taken out to a traditional mausoleum separate from the church. Like *St. Peter's* in Rome and the *Church of the Nativity* in the Holy Land, the *Apostoleion* included the actual object of veneration as the focus of attention.



94 The *Apostoleion*, Church of the Holy Apostles, Constantinople

95 *St. Babylas Church*, Antioch, 378

Lyn Rodley, *Byzantine Art and Architecture: An Introduction*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 2001) p11; after Lasus

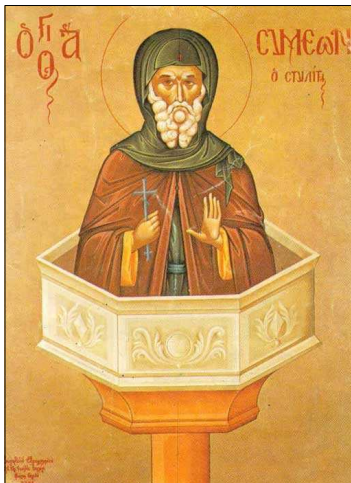


Post Constantinian Martyria

Dozens of churches after Constantine (late fourth century and early fifth century) copied Constantius' *Apostoleion* in Constantinople with plans that echoed the cross of Christ and were also dedicated to the apostles. In fact the centrally orientated cruciform plan eventually dominated church architecture in the Eastern provinces. One huge martyrrium laid out in a cruciform plan, *St. Babylas*

95 Icon of St Symeon Stylites

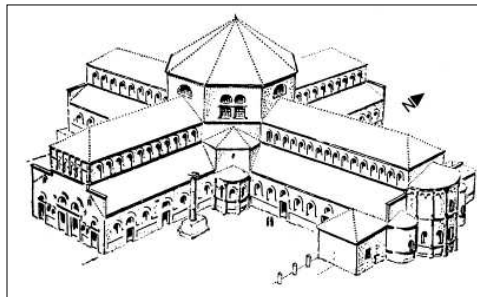
<<http://solzemli.wordpress.com/>>



96 (above, right) The Church of St. Simeon Stylites, Antioch, 470

Richard Krautheimer with Slobodan Curcic, *Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture* (Revised), (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1986) p148

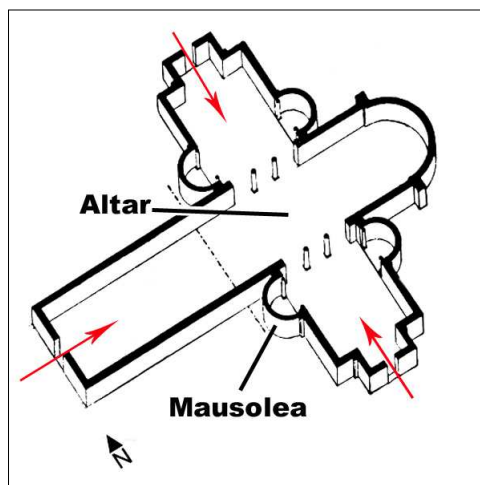
Church[95] (378), just outside the ancient walls of Antioch is said to have been inspired by the *Apostoleion*. The remains of St. Babylas, the first bishop of Antioch, were enshrined under the altar and large ciborium located at the crossing.



East of ancient Antioch the martyria basilica of *St. Simeon Stylites* [96] was built in a cruciform plan in 470. At the crossing was the venerated column atop which lived the hermit saint for the last 30 years of

his life.[95] The column may have been covered by a conical dome when the church was built. The four arms of the cross were each basilica halls. The eastern hall terminates in a triple apse design. This was a huge monumental structure and pilgrimage center that included many surrounding buildings that catered to the needs of pilgrims and resident monks.

A church built by St. Ambrose in Milan, Italy, in 382 is also believed to have been inspired by the *Apostoleion* in Constantinople. Known as the *Basilica Apostolorum*[98], its plan is cruciform as well except the stem of the cross is considerably longer (*Latin Cross*) than in Constantius' church. The altar in Ambrose's church was presumably in the center of the crossing. As a martyrium this church housed relics of the apostles Andrew, Thomas, and John the Evangelist in a silver casket below the altar. One of the mausolea niches projecting from the arms at the crossing



was the resting place of an imperial princess. Ambrose, in an inscription, stated that the "church in the form of a cross is a church dedicated to the victory of Christ." Gregory of Nazianus later referred the *Apostoleion* in Constantinople in the same way. Interest in the undisguised cross in representations and in symbolic interpretations of architectural forms began with the discovery in 326 of the true cross in Jerusalem by Constantine's mother, St. Helena.[99]

Also, Constantine had outlawed crucifixion as a method of execution out of respect for the way Christ had died. The repulsive nature of crucifixion had no doubt delayed the overt use of the undisguised cross in Christian art up to this time. But with these two events the cross gradually entered into the mainstream of Christian art.

Several churches in northern Italy –some of them regular churches--

**99 Constantine and Helena,
Mosaic in Saint Isaac's Cathedral**

[commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/
File:Constantine_a...](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Constantine_a...)



from the end of the fourth century through the beginning of the fifth century were influenced by Milan's *Basilica Apostolorum*.

Of the martyria basilicas constructed during the reign of Constantine, and for a hundred years following his death, not much remains. They have all either disappeared or been rebuilt in a different style. The ones planned and constructed in Constantinople by him and his son Constantius and the Holy Land ones built by him functioned from the start as regular churches as well as martyria shrines; those around Rome added the functions of a regular church, later. All of them had an influence on subsequent church architecture, if not immediately then in later centuries.

Different styles appeared in the early buildings constructed as regular church buildings serving local residential neighborhoods --what we might call local parish churches. We now turn our attention to the churches built for weekly worship.

- 1 R. Gerberding and J. H. Moran Cruz, *Medieval Worlds* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004) pp. 55-56
- 2 Marilyn Stokstad, *Medieval Art, Second Edition*, (Boulder, Westview Press 2004), p. 25
- 3 Richard Krautheimer with Slobodan Curcic, *Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture (Revised)*, (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1986) p. 41
- 4 Krautheimer with Curcic 41
- 5 Stokstad 25
- 6 Krautheimer with Curcic 30
- 7 Krautheimer with Curcic 33-37
- 8 Krautheimer with Curcic 36
- 9 Krautheimer with Curcic 53
- 10 G. W. Bowersock, *Peter and Constantine in St. Peter's in the Vatican*, William Tronzo, Ed., (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2008) p. 11
- 11 Bowersock 12
- 12 Krautheimer with Curcic 19
- 13 James Snyder, *Medieval Art, Painting-Sculpture-Architecture, 4th-14th Century*, (New York, Harry N. Abrams, Inc. 1989) p. 35
- 14 Louise Gardner, *Art Through the Ages, Ninth Edition*, (Fort Worth, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers 1991) p. 259
- 15 Walter Lowrie, *Art in the Early Church*, (Lowrie Press 2007) p.124
- 16 Krautheimer with Curcic 74