CHAPTER ONE

Rome and Constantine

By the early fourth century, Rome had grown in the course of a thousand years from a few hill villages into a sprawling metropolis. Christianity had been taking root in the city ever since about A.D. 60, when Peter had preached and Paul had addressed his letter to the Romans. By the end of the second or the middle of the third century, a Christian community, well endowed and established, flourished in Rome. But, properly speaking, the history of Christian Rome starts on October 28, A.D. 312, when Constantine wrested the city from his co-emperor Maxentius, and with it the rule over the entire western half of the Roman Empire. A cavalry battle that started at a defile on the Cassian Road at saxa rubra and continued downhill to the Tiber and across the Milvian Bridge—whence its conventional name—ended with the conquest of the capital. Constantine attributed his victory to the Christian God, who in a vision had shown him the Cross. Christianity became Constantine’s lodestar; the Christian Church found in him a powerful protector, ever more zealous as, after the conquest of the East in 324, he united the empire. Baptized on his deathbed in 337, he died a member of the church in full standing.

The Rome Constantine entered was larger in area but smaller in population than it had been a hundred years before (fig. 1). The network of highways leading from the city to all parts of the empire, far and near, had been maintained: the Appia to Naples and Brindisi and to the shipping lanes to the East; the Flaminia across Umbria to the northern shores of the Adriatic Sea and beyond to the Danube countries; the Salaria through the Sabine mountains to Ancona and the east coast. Other roads linked up with the countryside and the hill towns close by: with Nomentum (now Mentana); with Praeneste (now Palestrina); with Lavinium; with the seaports of Ostia and Porto. Across the Tiber, the Cassia led into Lombardy by way of Arezzo and Florence, the Aurelia along the west coast to Genova, Provence, Gaul, and Spain. Bridges, some in use today, supported this network of roads. Crossing the Tiber two miles north of town, the Ponte Milvio took care of the Flaminia; to the northeast across the Aniene, the Ponte Salario served the Salaria. From the Cassia two bridges led into the city: the Aelian Bridge at the Mausoleum of Hadrian (now Castel S. Angelo), renamed Ponte S. Angelo, was rebuilt in the 1890s on the old site with original elements; the Neronian Bridge further downstream no longer exists. Via Aurelia, entering the city through Trastevere, was linked to the east bank by four bridges: the Aurelian Bridge, replaced in the fifteenth century by Ponte Sisto; the two bridges crossing the Tiber Island—the Pons Cestius and Pons Fabricius, the latter well preserved (fig. 2); and a hundred meters to the south, not far from S. Maria in Cosmedin, the Aemilian Bridge—it’s remains, the Ponte Rotto (Broken Bridge), still rising high above the river. Across highways and bridges travelers and provisions reached the city as they do today. But the bulk of supplies was shipped from overseas: oil, wine, grain, and heavy timber from North Africa, South Italy, Sicily, Provence, and Spain; luxuries, wines, and marbles from Greece and points east. Unloaded at Ostia or Porto, the Hoboken and Tilbury of ancient Rome, they were reshipped in lighter bottoms upstream to the river wharves at the foot of the Aventine. Parts of the quay for unloading marbles, the marmoata, are still seen; so are remains of warehouses—horrea in Latin—for storing grain and other goods. Some five hundred meters long, this main wharf seems to have extended as far as the Ponte Rotto, where Piranesi later drew it. Opposite and east of Castel S. Angelo, a sec-
ond smaller dockside received goods shipped downstream from northern Latium and Umbria. Rome's water supply was plentiful, flowing into the city over eleven (or, counting branches, nineteen) aqueducts, built from Republican times onward and always kept in good repair. Even now their long rows of arches lace the countryside all around Rome and continue inside the city, as witness those spanning the valley from S. Gregorio Magno to the Palatine and the long arcade of the Claudian Aqueduct from Porta Maggiore all along the crest of the Celian Hill, or the Aqua Julia near the railway station (fig. 3).

In Constantine's day, the population of the city, once perhaps as much as a million or a million and a half, and largely dependent on welfare, had been decreasing ever since provisioning had dwindled during the turbulent years A.D. 230-270. But it still may have stood at around 800,000. Rome had also waned in political significance. As part of the administrative reform devised by Diocletian (285-305), new imperial residences had been built for the four co-emperors of the tetrarchy, to be used as needed: in the east at Nicomedia on the Sea of Marmara, at Antioch, and at Thessalonica; in the Balkans at Sirmium; in the north at Milan, Trier, and York. No emperor now resided in Rome for any length of time. Large sectors of the higher civil and military services had moved to new administrative centers or they had become attached to the mobile courts of the tetrarchy. To be sure, the Senate remained in Rome, but in practice its role as a body was confined to honorific and ceremonial functions and to advisory participation in the city administration. Even the actual government of the city rested with a hierarchy of officials appointed by the emperor. Headed by the city prefect, the praefectus urbi, they comprised: the praefectus annonae, in charge of provisioning; the police prefect; the supervisor of aqueducts; that of the riverbed and the sewers; officials in charge of the harbors, of
public buildings, of street maintenance, of public statues, and more.

Rome, then, was no longer an effective center of power. Nonetheless, in the eyes of the world she remained the true capital of the commonwealth. Her age-old glories were reflected in her literature, from Livy and Virgil to Cassius Dio and the Historia Augusta; they were manifest in her monuments, buildings, statues, triumphal arches, and columns; and they were carried by the senatorial class and embodied in the Senate. Individually, some senators and their families still wielded considerable influence through their enormous wealth, social standing, and connections, and through the offices they traditionally held as praefecti urbi and consuls in Rome and as governors in the provinces. And although the Senate corporate was in fact powerless, its ceremonial functions were not without significance: it legitimized, albeit pro forma, the emperor's election; it approved legislation pro forma; and within limits it acted as check and balance for the power of the imperial court. Most important, it represented Rome's history, through both its members and corporality, and its presence made the city the only legitimate seat of government, regardless of the location of actual power at the emperor's court. In the minds of Romans—commoners and aristocrats alike—and of provincials and foreigners—from the Hebrides and the Berber mountains to the courts of the Sassanians and of India—Rome was still the capital, Mistress of the Empire and hub of the civilized world.

3. Julian Aqueduct (Aqua Julia), near Lateran
4. Aurelian Walls

Materially, the city had rather improved, if anything, during the forty years preceding Constantine's conquest. The city wall of Republican Rome—wrongly termed the Servian Wall—had been swallowed up ever since the first century B.C. by the city's vast expansion; parts of it survive, such as a large tract near the railroad station. To create a modern fortification, the emperors Aurelian and Probus enclosed this expanded Rome in new defensive walls between 272 and 279. Though often repaired, these Aurelian Walls survive to nearly their full length of twelve miles, or eighteen kilometers (fig. 4). Starting upstream on the Tiber, they form a rough square on the left, the eastern bank of the river, enclosing some seven square miles. On the western bank, they form a triangle, protecting the quarter trans Tiberim, Trastevere; its apex stands on the crest of the Gianicolo. Fourteen gates supplemented by postern gates open on the highways entering the city, most named after the roads they serve: to the north, Porta Flaminia, now called Porta del Popolo; to the east, toward Tivoli (Tibur), Porta Tiburtina, now Porta S. Lorenzo; to the southeast, Porta Labicana, now Porta Maggiore; to the south, Porta Appia, now Porta S. Sebastiano, and Porta Ostiensis, now Porta S. Paolo; up on the Gianicolo, Porta Aurelia, the present Porta S. Pancrazio—to name only the most important. The Aurelian Walls were raised in 309–312, and again in 402/403. They reached their present impressive height of over fifteen meters in the second building campaign: only then were the half-round or square twin-towers flanking the main gates strengthened or newly built and the gates provided with defensive forecourts. Square towers, originally numbering over 380, project from the walls, always two arrowshots apart at crossfire angles; an arcaded gallery inside links the towers and the gates; crenelations topped the wall and towers. In the same build-
ing campaign, the walls were extended along the unprotected east bank of the Tiber, from opposite Trastevere to west of Porta Flaminia—a stretch built over but still visible until the Tiber embankments were laid out some eighty years ago. All the original construction and alterations were built of the materials customary in Roman Imperial times and after: a rubble concrete, strong and resilient, faced with brick curtains. Having survived through the centuries, the city walls and their gates are to this day the greatest monument of late-antique Rome. They formed an impressive defense perimeter, although they could never have been effectively manned; but neither could they be battered down or easily scaled. In any event, they were of unparalleled grandeur, designed to deter by sheer appearance any would-be attacker and to impress on the minds of both Romans and barbarians an image of eternal strength.

The building of the Aurelian Walls had marked the revival in Rome of construction on a large scale after half a century of stagnation; concomitant with the spirit of renewal pervading the policy of the tetrarchy, this revival was aimed at practical ends, such as fortification and sanitation, at political propaganda, and at improving the looks of the capital—ideally still the capital of the civilized world. It also served to create employment on a scale hardly known for centuries among Rome’s welfare population. It entailed training anew building crews, masters and master masons, brick layers and carpenters, sculptors and decorators, glaziers and house painters. It meant pilfering bricks from structures presumably in poor repair and, in short, reorganizing the entire building trade and related trades. The thirty years preceding Constantine’s conquest of Rome saw the culmination and the results of this reorganization. The Baths of Diocletian were built on the Esquiline, vaster even than the huge Baths of Caracalla, the last big enterprise preceding the fifty-year slump of the third century. On the Forum Romanum—the Forum proper—after a fire in 283, the new Senate House was erected, as it stands to this day, the Curia Senatus (fig. 5). Opposite, the Basilica Julia, damaged by the same fire, was rebuilt almost entirely. The rostra (the speaker’s

5. Curia Senatus

tribune in front of the curia) was repaired, backed up by five honorific columns as a monument to Diocletian and his imperial colleagues.

The enterprises of Maxentius during his short six-year reign, A.D. 306-312, are even more amazing, both in number and grandeur. At the eastern end of the Forum he remodeled from its very foundations Hadrian’s Temple of Venus and Roma, facing the Colosseum. Adjoining it and likewise facing the Colosseum, he built within three years, 309-312, the Basilica Nova: a colossal hall, its nave groin-vaulted and flanked on either side by three huge, barrel-vaulted niches—even now the most impressive ruin of the Forum (fig. 6). Finished and slightly altered by Constantine, it bore in popular parlance of the time his name, Basilica Constantini. Nearby, an older building, presently housing the church of SS. Cosma e Damiano, was thoroughly remodeled; divided in two by an apsed wall, its
front half was revetted with marble incrustation; facing the Forum, a domed rotunda, now erroneously called the Tempium Divi Romuli, was added and provided with a curved, colonnaded façade (fig. 7). Completed by Constantine—the revetment and the curved façade may well be his—the structure was possibly the audience hall of the city prefect, as has been suggested by Alfred Frazer. On the edge of the city, also along the Aurelian Walls, new buildings were set up. To the east, on the site of the Licinian Gardens, still stands today the ruin of a ten-sided domed garden hall, called the Minerva Medica. To the southeast, in the vast complex of a third-century palace—the Sessorium—rose an apsed hall, later known as the Temple of Venus and Cupid. Built in the early fourth century either by Maxentius or by Constantine, its tall ruin stands just left of today’s church of S. Croce in Gerusalemme. Not far off, to the west of the present church of the Lateran, a huge mansion was remodeled and, under Constantine, redecorated with murals, one showing presumably the mythical ancestors of the Constantinian dynasty. On the Via Appia, a villa including a huge circus was laid out and dedicated in 310 to the memory of young Romulus, Maxentius’ son; a mausoleum was also built, possibly intended for the Maxentian dynasty. But, the largest and most extensive enterprise undertaken by Maxentius was, of course, the raising of the Aurelian Walls to almost twice their original height. All told, it was an amazing achievement within a six-year reign.

These, then, were the most recent large-scale constructions crowning the imperial splendor of Constantine’s new capital. Inside the ring of the walls stretched the city of Rome, as she had
grown over the centuries. Starting from the gates, the main arteries brought the cross-country highways toward the city’s core. Via Lata—“Broadway” literally—now the Corso, led from Porta del Popolo to the foot of the Capitoline Hill. Starting from the Nomentana Gate, along the ridge of the Quirinal and its southwest slope, another road, the Alta Semita, now Via XX Settembre and Via IV Novembre, ended in the same general neighborhood. Splitting off from it and descending into the valley south of the Quirinal, the vicus longus, the “long alley,” merged with the vicus patricius, coming from the Viminal Gate; the former corresponds roughly to the present Via Nazionale, the latter to Via Urbana. Jointly they met a third street, crossing the Esquiline from Porta S. Lorenzo, and continued toward the Forum. From the gates in the southeast quarter, Porta Maggiore and Porta S. Giovanni, two major streets, one supplanted by today’s Via Labicana, the other by Via S. Giovanni in Laterano, terminated at the Colosseum. Merging inside the city a ten-minute walk from Porta S. Sebastiano, the Appia and Latina ran through the present passeggiata archeologica to the southeast corner of the Palatine and continued on, like today’s Via dei Cerchi between its south cliff and the Circus Maximus, to Piazza Bocca della Verità and the river. At the corner of the Palatine, the street from the Ostia Gate, now Porta S. Paolo, cut across what are today’s Viale Aventino and Via di S. Gregorio, leading again to the Colosseum. Similar streets descended from the Aurelian Gate into Trastevere and from the Vatican to Hadrian’s Tomb; across the bridges spanning the Tiber, they joined with the system of main arteries on the east bank. Mostly, these main streets were straight, as if drawn with a ruler, and had steep gradings. They were paved with huge flagstones, but were quite narrow. Even the Corso—considered quite wide, as the Latin name via lata suggests—was never more than its present width of roughly ten meters; it was further narrowed by two triumphal arches, one near today’s S. Lorenzo in Lucina, the other near S. Maria in Via Lata. Side streets were naturally narrower still, often mere alleys, winding or breaking in sharp angles and rarely paved.

The great streets, then, all ended in the same general area, marked by the Capitoline Hill, Forum, Palatine, and Colosseum. Over the centuries this area had grown into a grand display of state architecture. There, Romans, provincials, and foreigners gawked at temples, palaces, administrative buildings, basilicas, theatres, porticos: heaps of marble, or marble imitation, gilded capitals, triumphal arches, honorific statues—the whole impression not too different, one fears, from that produced by the Monumento Nazionale on Piazza Venezia (fig. 8). To a fourth-century visitor, all this was the grand show that reflected the glory of Rome and her empire. There he saw the great amphitheatre, the Colosseum, where fifty thousand spectators would watch the games (fig. 9). He would see sprawling westward the buildings of the Forum Romanum (fig. 10): the Temple of Venus and Roma; Maxentius’ Basilica Nova, completed by Constantine raising its colossal vaults; the Arch of Titus; the presumed audience hall of the city prefect, now SS. Cosma e Damiano, and its circular vestibule; the Temple of Antoninus and Faustina; further down the Basilica Aemilia and the Basilica Julia, the Curia Senatus; the temples of Concord and of Saturn, the Arch of Sep-
timius Severus, not to mention dozens of smaller shrines, monuments, and honorific statues; and as a grand backdrop, the Capitoline Hill with its temples, its east cliff marked by the bare base wall, and the arcaded tier of the State Archives, the Tabularium. North of and parallel to the Roman Forum, the row of Imperial Fora had grown for the past three centuries. Their remains today are lined up along or buried under Via dei Fori Imperiali: Vespasian's Forum Pacis, laid out after the end of the Jewish War in A.D. 70; the Forum of Nerva—the colonnade and frieze of its east wall was known through the Middle Ages as the Colonnace—completed in A.D. 97; the Forum of Augustus, backed by its soaring rear wall, and the Temple of Mars the Avenger; opposite, adjoining the Roman Forum, the Forum of Caesar with the Temple of Venus, the legendary ancestress of his clan. The largest and the most splendid of all was the Forum of Trajan, consecrated in A.D. 113 after cutting away the southwest spur of the Quirinal Hill. Expanding in vast hemicycles, it sheltered the Basilica Ulpia, the largest basilica in the empire; Trajan's column, soaring high to this day and proclaiming his victories over the Dacians; and two monuments, now lost, the Temple of Trajan Deified, and a statue of himself on horseback. Above the well-preserved eastern hemicycle towered the market of Trajan, a covered souk, housing rows of shops on three and four levels (fig. 11). South of the Roman Forum, the Imperial Palaces rose on the Palantine, as they had grown and spread since the first century A.D.: the most recent part, and still the most impressive in its ruins, was that of Septimius Severus at the southeastern corner, overlooking the valleys to the east and south—the latter all but filled by the Great Circus, the Circus Maximus. At the western extremity of the Roman Forum, the
9. Colosseum and (foreground) Temple of Venus and Rome

10. Forum, looking east toward Colosseum
Capitoline Hill was covered with temples roofed with gilded bronze tiles. There stood the Great Temple of Jupiter, whose foundations now lie buried below the museum wing attached to the Palazzo dei Conservatori.

This huge show area at the very heart of Rome sent its offshoots south, northeast, and west. South of the Capitol and the Palatine lay two smaller market and temple areas: the oil market (the forum holitorium), now marked by S. Nicola in Carcere; and the cattle market (the forum boarium) at S. Giorgio in Velabro and Piazza Bocca della Verita. Northwest of the Colosseum on the Oppian Hill rose the Golden House of Nero, the Baths of Titus, and the far larger Baths of Trajan—their ruins lofty even now. West of the Capitoline Hill the show continued in even greater magnificence: to the southwest stood the Theatre of Marcellus, dating from the time of Augustus, preserved today excepting its top part and the stage. Of the nearby Portico of Octavia, built in the early first century and rebuilt two hundred years later, a remnant survives in the Ghetto at S. Angelo in Pescheria: a vast rectangular colonnade, it originally enclosed a pair of temples. From there the Campus Martius, the Field of Mars, extended west into the bend of the Tiber, opposite what is now Castel S. Angelo, and north to near the Flaminian Gate. On it rose the Theatre of Pompey, now engulfed by medieval and later houses; the Stadium of Domitian, now Piazza Navona; the Baths of Nero, enlarged in the third century by Alexander Severus and extending from the present Piazza Navona to near the Pantheon; the Baths of Agrippa from the time of Augustus, enlarged and rebuilt from the late first to the fourth centuries; and the Pantheon, built by Hadrian to replace a sanctuary founded by Agrippa: the colossal rotunda, preceded by its colonnaded porch and domed, a symbol perhaps of Heaven and towering high over the surroundings then as it does today (fig. 12). Nearer the Corso rose the Temple of Hadrian Deified, now the stock exchange on Piazza di Pietra; on Piazza Colonna, the Column of Marcus Aurelius; to the north, the Mausoleum of Augustus and nearby the obelisk, erected by him as the gnomon of a huge sundial. At the western end of the Campus Martius, Hadrian’s Aelian Bridge spanned the Tiber.
to give access to his mausoleum, Castel S. Angelo, its huge cylindrical shape covered originally with marble plaques and its upper parts decorated with colonnades sheltering statuary—another grand showpiece (fig. 13). Indeed, although outside the city walls, the entire area across the river as far as the Vatican Hill simply continued the wonders of the Campus Martius. Among its monuments, a tomb pyramid, misnamed the meta Romuli, survived into the sixteenth century. An obelisk, known in the Middle Ages as the Terebinth, rose nearby. Still another stood at the southeast slope of the Vatican Hill, in front of a large round mausoleum of the second century: the mausoleum, known in medieval times as S. Maria della Febbre, appears time and again in drawings, paintings, and engravings until the eighteenth century; the obelisk, the guglia, now stands on Bernini’s Piazza S. Pietro. North of the mausoleum and now buried underneath the nave of St. Peter’s extended a cemetery composed of rows of expensive tomb structures. But the Christian community held fast to a poor, small area in the cemetery, where a niche surmounting the grave commemorated the Apostle Peter’s martyrdom. To the south, at the foot of the Vatican Hill, lay the Gardens of Nero and his circus, an earthen racecourse; only recently have its outlines been accurately traced. Another great showpiece along the Tiber, the Naumachia, built for mock sea battles, extended north of the Mausoleum of Hadrian; but all traces seem lost.

The whole show area was enveloped and penetrated by the residential quarters of the metropolis. The regionaria, or gazetteers of fourth-century Rome, survey both its public and private buildings. City quarter by city quarter, they list: 28 libraries, 6 obelisks, 8 bridges, 11 fora, 10 basilicas, 11 public baths, 18 aqueducts,
9 circuses and theatres (including a couple for staging mock naval battles); 2 triumphal columns, 15 huge fountains, 22 equestrian statues plus 80 golden and 74 ivory statues, and 36 triumphal arches; in addition there were the barracks of the army, the police, and the fire brigades. Besides this, the gazetteers list 290 granaries and warehouses, 856 private baths, 254 bakeries, and 46 brothels. Finally, they enumerate the buildings where the poor and where the rich lived: over 44,000 insulae, presumably multiple dwellings (some think just apartments, but that is unlikely) customary for housing the lower and middle classes; and 1,790 domus, private residences and mansions. The types of these latter are well known: low, sprawling structures, their rooms opening into one or more inner courtyards and presumably gardens, as they are found by the hundreds in Pompeii, Herculeanum, and Ostia. The insulae apparently varied a great deal in size, appearance, and material. Only some among the larger ones have survived in Rome, often through having been incorporated into later structures: one is at the foot of the Capitoline Hill (fig. 14); the remains of three lie underneath the church of SS. Giovanni e Paolo on the slope of the Celian Hill, and their façades show in the church's left flank; another was incorporated into the church of S. Anastasia at the southwestern foot of the Palatine, one forms part of the walls of the lower church of S. Clemente; substantial remains of yet others survive on the Esquiline, adjoining the church of S. Martino ai Monti and near S. Prassede; and a large complex of insulae lies buried below the Galleria Colonna in the heart of the city. All follow a standard plan, well known at Ostia also: the ground floor and mezzanine, often protected by arcades, balconies, or overhangs, were given over to shops-cum-storerooms and backroom apartments; the upper floors were divided into apartments of varying sizes, numbering some-
times twenty or more in one building. The length and height of the structures likewise varied: six- and eight-bays long was quite normal, and four or five floors in height was not unusual; indeed, some insulae were genuine skyscrapers. The materials of construction, too, were standard—concrete, faced with brick. All the same, alongside such large apartment houses and tenements there presumably stood innumerable smaller multiple dwellings, two-bays wide or less and possibly with only one or, at most, two upper floors, jerry-built of poor brick, half-timbering, and wood, regular slum buildings. A great marble plan of Rome dated to the early third century and now preserved in fragments, conveys an idea of the blocks of large insulae and the rows of smaller apartment houses. It also shows the streets that these buildings lined: a few, like the Via Biberatica in the market complex of Trajan, were wide for the convenience of shoppers (fig. 15); most were narrow, dark, crowded, and often spanned by diaphragm arches, as may be seen today on the Clivus Scauri on the west slope of the Celian Hill flanking SS. Giovanni e Paolo; all were not unlike those that now crisscross Trastevere—even by the first century B.C. the most densely populated quarter, where immigrants from the East crowded together.

But the tenement houses and show buildings were in no way confined to separate quarters of Imperial Rome. The only parts of town given over exclusively to monumental structures were the Palatine, the Roman Forum, and the Imperial Fora, the latter segregated from the mundane world outside by huge walls. Elsewhere, the tenement houses pushed their way in between the great showpieces wherever there was space. They crowded around the fora and the Capitol, where one of the best-preserved rises as a ruin; they were at the foot of the Palatine facing the Circus Maximus, and opposite the Column of Marcus Aurelius. They invaded the Campus Martius near the Mausoleum of Augustus and in the area between the temples on Largo Argentina and the Pantheon; and they rose among wealthy mansions on the Celian and elsewhere. True, parts of town consisted almost
wholly of tenement houses, primarily in the valleys between the hills, on the slopes, on the Tiber Island and the riverbanks, always threatened by floods. But by and large, tenements, mansions, and public monumental buildings were inextricably intermingled. Ground was expensive and then, as now in the old parts of Rome, public splendor, private wealth, and squalid poverty lived close together.

Only the very rich could afford large sites on which to set up their mansions, surrounded like public buildings by walls to secure the luxury of privacy. Only they could move away to the estates, the mansions and large gardens, which embraced the densely built-up area of imperial Rome in a crescent. In this outer greenbelt extending beyond the Aurelian Walls and occupying the crest of the hills, were the old villa of
Lucullus on the western height of the Pincio, near S. Trinità dei Monti; the Gardens of Sallustius near Via Vittorio Veneto; on the Esquiline, the Villa of Maecenas and the Licinian Gardens, the latter an imperial property; adjoining the city walls on the Celian, two more imperial estates: the Sessorian Palace, enclosing what is now the church of S. Croce in Gerusalemme, and the private amphitheatre nearby, the *amphitheatrum Castrense*; and behind the Lateran Basilica, a large group of mansions, which by the early fourth century were partly or wholly imperial property. In the greenbelt, too, rose the largest and the most lavish of the public baths, those of Caracalla and of Diocletian. This is understandable, given the neighborhood of imperial estates and military barracks: the Castra Praetoria, though no longer used by the Praetorian Guards, at the northeast corner of the Aurelian Walls; the new barracks of the Horse Guards on the site now occupied byS. Giovanni in Laterano; the police barracks underneath Sto. Stefano Rotondo and extending beyond.

We have become used to differentiating sharply between the areas inside and outside the walls, *entro* and *fuori le mura*. But such a distinction, still very real sixty and seventy years ago, dates no earlier than the sixth and seventh centuries. Prior to that, the contrast was anything but clearly marked. When built, the Aurelian Walls cut through the great estates on the rim of the city, and the greenbelt inside the walls continued unchanged outside. The grounds of the Sessorian Palace remained half within and half without the walls, and the villas of the rich extended for many miles along the highways across country: on the Appian Way that of Maxentius, opposite S. Sebastiano, and that of the Quintili further out; on the Tiburtine Road the estate formerly of the Emperor Lucius Verus, now the municipal cemetery, Campo Verano; on the road to Praeneste, the villa of the Gordian emperors, Tor de’ Schiavi; others along the Nomentana Road; on the Via Labicana, the villa *duos Lauros*, and the Gardens of Nero at the foot of the Vatican Hill—both imperial property. On the estates and in between rose the mausolea: those of the wealthy—the tombs of Caecilia Metella, of Maxentius’ son Romulus, of the Gordians at Tor de’ Schiavi are but a few examples; those owned jointly by funerary associations—*columbaria*—their walls set with niches for ash urns; rows of mausolea, like those on the Vatican Hill below St. Peter’s; and simple cemeteries for the poor. All were out of town. Roman law forbade burial within the city—the graves found there, including the Mausoleum of Augustus, all antedate the Aurelian Walls; and Hadrian’s Mausoleum remained outside.

As outlined, the map of Rome reflects the political, social, and economic situation in A.D. 312. Although real political power had moved away, attached as it was to the new residences and the migratory courts of the tetrarchy, the old ruling families continued to reside in Rome. Their wealth was immense, based primarily on landholdings, vast estates in Italy, North Africa, Gaul, and Spain; their political power focused on the Senate and on the government posts held by their members. The administrative buildings along the fora, the law courts in the basilicas, the buildings of the Senate and of the city prefecture, reflected their standing and power. So did the public buildings erected by their ancestors—the theatres of Marcellus and Pompey; so did the temples of the gods, kept in repair by these families’ efforts, whether from private or public funds. No less did their mansions in the greenbelt and the countryside mirror their wealth and power, as did, finally, their mausolea along the roads leading out of Rome. Yet, the map equally and abruptly reflects the seamy side of Rome as well. Occupying a good half of the city was the show area in the center—*fora*, Capitol, and Campus Martius; the Imperial Palaces on the Palatine and Nero’s Golden House; the estates in the greenbelt and the military barracks. The tenements, sheltering the mass of the population, were compressed into narrow strips that enveloped and invaded the center area. Overcrowding, narrow streets, and unsanitary conditions largely made these quarters into slums, where artisans and shopkeepers, small employers and minor officials, freedmen and slaves, who were set up in business by and for their masters, crowded together with the legions of the half-employed and jobless. In fact, Rome’s urban masses had been underemployed.
for centuries, subsisting largely on doles of money, grain, pork, and oil. Yet the public image of Rome was determined by its resplendent show area, its temples, the Imperial Palaces, and the mansions of the rich. Rome was still the head of the civilized world, the caput mundi. Eternal Rome, Roma aeterna, guaranteed under her rule the eternity of civilization, of prosperity and peace, as foretold by Virgil:

Tu regere imperio populos, Romane,
memento
Hae tibi erunt artes pacique imponere morem
Parcere subjectis et debellare superbos . . .

Christianity had grown within this milieu, and by 312 as much as a third of Rome’s population may have belonged to the Church or sympathized with it. Like the adherents of other foreign gods—Mithras, Isis, the Great Mother, the Syrian gods, the Jewish Jehovah—the Christian congregations owned their places of worship. These were not small sanctuaries like those of the other religions, and obviously not temples like those of the old gods, maintained by the state and its functionaries. Rather, their meeting places were “Houses of the Church,” community centers in modern parlance. Identified by the name of the original holder of title to the building—as titulus Clementis, Anastasiae, Caeciliae, Chrysogoni—they were ordinary apartment houses, insulae, or smaller mansions, rented, purchased by, or donated to the Church. By the fourth century, twenty-five such tituli are known to have existed in Rome—and given the discrepancy between that number and the size of the Christian community, many of the faithful must have met in additional prayer rooms in private houses, even in Constantine’s time. Remodeled as necessary, each community center served a variety of functions: worship, baptism, instruction, welfare, administration, living quarters for the clergy. The meeting places of small sects in modern Harlem or Whitechapel give an idea of what the situation was like in third-century Rome. Occasionally, in the years of religious tolerance just prior to 312, a congregation in Rome may have built a plain, barnlike hall, set aside for worship only: witness the first church of S. Crisogono—its walls now lie buried alongside the medieval church in Trastevere at Ponte Garibaldi. Remains of what may have been community centers survive, incorporated into the walls or foundations of newer churches that were built on their sites—insula-types at S. Giovanni e Paolo and S. Anastasia, a mansion at S. Cecilia. In many cases the names of such tituli survive: prefixed by “Saint”—S. Clemente, Sta. Sabina, S. Crisogono—at present they designate the titular churches assigned to the cardinals of the Church of Rome. Whether remodeled from apartment houses, mansions, or newly built barnlike halls, these “Houses of the Church” were utterly unpretentious. They blended with the hundreds of tenements, old-fashioned mansions, warehouses, and workshops in the popular quarters; and in number—only twenty-five even in the fourth century—they were lost among the forty-four thousand insulae of contemporary Rome. Notwithstanding the large numbers of adherents, then, Christianity had left no visible trace in pre-Constantinian Rome. This was no wonder: the believers came by and large from the middle and lower classes, with but an occasional well-to-do freedman, a lawyer, a civil servant, or an aristocratic lady. Even by the third century, when the new faith had found more adherents among the upper middle class, things did not change essentially. The believers in times of peace—and persecutions were rare, if violent—shunned the public sphere in their policy and in their buildings.

In the countryside, too, beyond the Aurelian Walls, Christian structures were widespread. Burial grounds and cult centers of the congregations were located as a rule on the big estates, the ground being purchased from or donated by the “lord of the manor” to his Christian freedmen and slaves. But like the meeting houses in the city, Christian burial grounds and cult centers were, at a cursory glance, indistinguishable from those serving other sects or, indeed, worshipers of the old gods. Burials took place in cemeteries under the open sky; or else, perhaps according to specifically Christian and Jewish custom, in catacombs: networks of many-storied galleries and tomb chambers underground, designed—for economy’s sake—to exploit in
depth the expensive available land. That the catacombs served as hiding places or secret meeting halls for the Christian community of Rome is pure legend, quite untrue. Small groups occasionally met in the catacomb chambers for a funeral meal on the anniversary of the deceased, but that is all. Small areas or halls for such funerary banquets were provided in the cemeteries above ground and even in the mausolea intended for wealthy believers, just like those of non-Christians nearby. Equally unpretentious and indistinguishable from their pagan neighbors were the cult centers laid out around Rome at the graves of Christian martyrs. Underneath S. Sebastian on the Via Appia, one such center served for the veneration of Peter and Paul, the Princes of the Apostles, whose feast or whose relics may have been moved to this spot in A.D. 258 (fig. 16). A small courtyard was terminated by a niche, probably a repository for offerings; a shed opened into the courtyard, its painted rear wall covered by pious visitors with hundreds of graffiti (one dated A.D. 260) recording funerary banquets in honor of the Apostles; a smaller banquet hall, possibly a private and later one, rose nearby; and a long flight of stairs descended to a deep spring; the whole was like any tavern on the green. Commonplace and inconspicuous, too, was the cult center of Saint Peter on the Vatican Hill, uncovered below the church over thirty years ago. Within a cemetery composed mainly of lavish mausolea, many owned by adherents of oriental cults from the nearby oriental quarter in Trastevere, a small plot with a few poor graves was stubbornly retained by a Christian congregation. Between A.D. 160 and 180 it was closed off on one side by a wall, arching over one of the graves; and the grave was marked by a small aedicula, or niche, gabled and flanked by columns; a projecting slab served to deposit offerings (fig. 17). Known around A.D. 200 as the “trophy” of Saint Peter, the sign of his victory over death, the monument is further identified by third-century graffiti appealing to
the Apostle. By the late second century, then, the grave apparently was believed to be his, and it is likely so. Again, the cult center is plain and commonplace. Aediculae just like this marked hundreds of graves around Rome and elsewhere. Nowhere had Christianity made a dent into the physical aspect of the city by 312, within or without the walls. Ordinary visitors to Rome would see the temples of the old gods, the administrative buildings, the palaces, the theatres, the great mansions; they might see the middle-class quarters and, reluctantly, the slums; but they would not notice the Christian community houses or the “trophy” of Saint Peter on the Vatican Hill, unless they were Christians themselves.

To Constantine this state of affairs must have seemed intolerable. He entered Rome, a sympathizer with Christianity if not formally a convert. Soon he evolved a policy largely aimed at securing within his dominions the triumph of Christ, who had granted him victory, and of His Church. In his later years Constantine apparently intended to turn the Roman Empire into a Christian Empire. This ultimate aim evolved slowly, but as early as 313, Christians, both clergy and laymen, stood high among his advisors, and the Church, raised from obscurity, turned into a major political force. Bishops ranked in the court calendar with high government officials; the hierarchy of the Church hardened; in the West the foremost bishop in fact, if not by law, was that of Rome—the term pope is late. Concomitantly, the Church acquired, through imperial and private donations, large landholdings and quickly became a powerful economic force. The estates and their income, given by Constantine to maintain his Roman church foundations and their clergy, are precisely known from original lists, later incorporated into the Liber Pontificalis, the official chronicle of the papacy. In the beginning of his rule, these gifts included property in Rome and Italy, somewhat later in Sicily, Sardinia, North Africa, and Greece; after his conquest of the East in 324, they included holdings in Egypt, Syria, Cilicia; and the yearly revenues from these lands amounted to 3,700 gold solidi, or roughly $25 million in today’s money, for St. Peter’s alone. The total income of the Church of Rome under Constantine amounted to 25,000 gold solidi; a very considerable sum, but little compared to the income and wealth of the great families, which at times was tenfold that of the Church.

Within this program of Constantine’s, the domestic and private character stressed by the Christian meeting places in houses scattered through town must have been intolerable. The
meeting houses in existence could not well be done away with. The congregations in possession would have objected, and it was politically inadvisable to set up Christian buildings in or near the center of Rome with its temples and administrative buildings dominated by the pagan Senate. Where his hands were not bound, for instance regarding imperial property, the emperor turned emphatically to a different category of building—public architecture. Within this category, one building type offered itself naturally: the basilica. Essentially a timber-roofed large hall, it had evolved for centuries ever-new variants of plan and design: with or without clerestory windows, with or without apses, along a transverse or longitudinal axis or both; by the fourth century A.D. it seems the well-lit longitudinal types were preferred. In function, too, basilicas had always served all kinds of needs: as law courts, bazaars, drill halls, sanctuaries, reception halls, and throne rooms—in short, public meeting rooms for scores of functions exercised by the government, the army, municipalities, religious sects, the ruling classes, and the emperor. For the newly arising function as meeting hall for a Christian congregation, the overall genus basilica was given as the easily adaptable traditional framework. Within this framework, obviously in collaboration with local church leaders, Constantine's architects evolved all through the empire new variants of the old genus for regular churches, martyrs' churches, and covered cemeteries. The most prestigious ones—in Rome, the Holy Land, imperial capitals such as Trier and, later, Constantinople—designed at the command of the emperor, likely received his approval. What interested him, though, was hardly the plan and its details. One supposes he would insist on large size, on resplendent decoration, on showy furnishings, and on simple plans and an uncomplicated building technique to allow rapid construction. Church leaders concerned with the functional requirements of planning would be only too glad to comply with the emperor's insistence on speed and to accept his bounty.

Both for the emperor and the Christian leaders, building and endowing large, resplendent churches as quickly as possible was a major means to demonstrate visibly to Christians and pagans alike the power of the New God and thus to propagate the new faith, promoted by the emperor. This Constantine set out to do following his victory over Maxentius, and as his rule spread over the empire, including the Eastern provinces after 324, churches rose all over, founded by the emperor and the pious ladies of his family. Nonetheless, it must be kept in mind that this policy of Christianization, both in general terms and more specifically in building activity, had its limitations, in Rome more than elsewhere.

Constantine's initial intention may well have been to leave his mark on Rome and to make this, his capital, into a Christian city. Possibly as early as the winter of 312/313 he decided to build at the Lateran a cathedral for the Roman bishop. The domus Faustae, a nearby mansion, perhaps imperial property, served as early as the fall of 313 for the meetings of a church council held under the auspices of the emperor. Adjoining it, the barracks of the imperial horseguards were razed—the corps had apparently fought for Maxentius—and in their place the new church was built. Remains survive in the foundations and walls of S. Giovanni in Laterano, remodeled and added to though it was through the centuries: in the Middle Ages; most thoroughly by Borromini in the seventeenth century; and again in the late nineteenth century. A mural at S. Martino ai Monti in Rome shows what Borromini's contemporaries or he himself thought Constantine's church looked like (fig. 18). But all kinds of evidence give a more precise, if less lively, picture (fig. 19). It was a basilica, a large longitudinal hall with a timber roof; the nave, terminated by an apse, was flanked by double aisles on either side, the inner ones higher than the outer ones; sacristies projected on each side near the end of the aisles. Nave and aisles were supported by columns, the former trabeated, the latter arcaded, and lit by large windows. Marble revetment covered the aisle arcades and possibly the aisle walls inside; small columns of precious green-speckled marble carried the aisle arcades—the mural at S. Martino ai Monti shows them, and twenty-four have been reused in Borromini's remodeling flanking the niches in the nave;
the apse vault of Constantine’s church shimmered in gold; gold and silver lighting fixtures and seven silver tables—one presumably the altar, the other to hold offerings—filled nave and chancel; on the chord of the apse, a colonnaded, gabled screen, or a canopy, sheathed in silver, sheltered or carried statues of Christ, the Apostles, and angels. Behind the church, built over part of an older mansion, the baptistery still rises, dating presumably about 315; its inside was re-modeled a century later. Clearly, Constantine viewed the Lateran cathedral, his first Church foundation, as a bold new venture in Christian building, a clean break with the unobtrusive, emphatically private, and modest design of the traditional community centers; a variant on one of the foremost types of public monumental buildings; a basilica, an audience hall of Christ the King, as it were, competing with the most magnificent public structures in decoration, fur-
19. Lateran Basilica, reconstruction Waddy, revised Lloyd

20. Lateran, as of ca. 1870, private collection, Rome
nishings and size—over 98 meters (333 1/3 Roman feet) long and over 56 meters (190 Roman feet) wide; an imperial foundation in every respect.

Though purported to be public buildings, neither the cathedral nor the baptistery at the Lateran were such in the proper sense. They rose on ground that was at the emperor's free disposal, among mansions and gardens, all or mostly imperial property, tucked away at the edge of the city: not so different, one would like to think, from what the present church looked like a century ago when it rose amidst villas, fields, and vineyards (fig. 20). Even more than the Lateran cathedral, the palace church of the Empress Dowager Helena blended into the buildings of the Sessorian Palace. Founded probably as late as 326-328, and endowed with a relic of the True Cross brought from Jerusalem—hence its name, S. Croce in Gerusalemme—it was installed in a palace hall of early third century date; the old walls are still visible from the outside, and the interior and the splendid façade date from the eighteenth century, overlaying a twelfth-century remodeling. The imperial architect simply added an apse to the old hall and divided the space into three bays by two triple arches thrown across; it would well serve the needs of a palace chapel where their majesties and suite, separated from the servants, would face the clergy around the altar. The private character of the structure could not be brought out more strongly. Seen from the outside at least, it was just another building within the palace complex.

The Lateran Basilica, its baptistery, and S. Croce in Gerusalemme were the only structures built inside the walls of Rome by Constantine and his family for the Church. Located as they were on imperial property and at the very edge of the city, they contributed nothing to transform Rome into a Christian capital. Beyond the walls, the countryside with its great estates was more visibly Christianized with the help of the Constantinian House. Near catacombs and venerated cult centers, mostly on imperial property, structures were built for the Church's use: huge, well-appointed basilicas, visible from afar. In the course of time, those surviving were turned into regular churches; but when built, they were utilized as covered cemeteries. Adjoining catacombs, sheltering the graves of venerated martyrs, or built over old cult centers, they served as burial grounds for the faithful and for funeral banquets honoring them or the martyrs. Mass was celebrated only on a martyr's anniversary, and no permanent clergy was attached to these cemetery structures. One such
covered cemetery, or funerary hall, survives, and though remodeled, its original appearance is easily envisaged: S. Sebastiano, constructed over the third-century cult center of the Apostles on the Appian Way (fig. 21). The present church fills only the nave of the old one, whose grand size again gives an idea of the ambitions either of Constantine or of the local church leaders. Indeed, construction was possibly started on the initiative of the Roman congregation, before Constantine entered the city; no imperial endowment is recorded, but Constantine certainly took over and completed the structure. The nave and aisles communicated through an arcade on piers; and the aisles, linked across the façade through an inner narthex, envelop the apse, U-shaped, in an ambulatory. The floor was entirely carpeted with graves; others were stacked along the walls, shelflike, both above and below floor level; and mausolea of various sizes and plans crowded the building outside. Another funerary basilica of nearly the same plan, though even larger at 98 meters long as against 75 meters, stood by the Tiburtine Road at the foot of the cliff where the grave chamber of Saint Lawrence, richly decorated by Constantine, was long venerated inside a catacomb. U-shaped like that of the basilica on the Appian Way, the ambulatory, rather than the façade, faced the highway and was accessible through five large openings; a portico, still preserved in the eighth century, ran all the way to the city gate, protecting the faithful from sun and rain. The land where the basilica rose, adjoining the present church of S. Lorenzo, had been imperial property ever since the second century. A third funerary basilica of the same plan has been traced on the grounds of the imperial villa ad duos lauros on the Via Labicana, adjoining the catacomb and tomb chamber of the martyrs Marcellinus and Peter. Attached to its front portico rose a huge mausoleum, still preserved, which sheltered the sarcophagus of the Empress Dowager Helena; it seems Constantine had originally intended both the sarcophagus and the mausoleum for himself. A fourth hall of this type, an imposing feat of engineering, was built perhaps after Constantine’s death by his daughter, Constantina/Constantia, on her estate near the grave of the martyr Agnes on the Via Nomentana. Large parts of the outer walls and their substructures survive to their full height (fig. 22). Against the flank of the covered graveyard whose floor was carpeted with tombs, the imperial princess placed her mausoleum, S. Costanza: large, a full 22.50 meters in diameter; the center domed and resting on twelve pairs of splendid columns and capitals, all spoils from older buildings; the circular aisle barrel-vaulted—a colonnaded outer ambulatory has been lost; the walls inside originally sheathed in marble decoration, the vaults covered with mosaic—only those on the aisle vault remain, but the rest are known from old drawings; and the whole immensely impressive even deprived of such splendor (fig. 23). Jointly, the covered graveyard and the mausoleum con-
vey the leading features of Constantinian church building: hugeness, a simple plan and exterior, and a gorgeous interior.

St. Peter's, too, although different in plan, was founded by Constantine primarily as a covered cemetry and funerary hall, serving mainly for burials, commemorative banquets, and the veneration of a martyr, the Apostle Saint Peter. Its floor was covered with graves; funerary banquets were customary—Saint Augustine tells of them as late as about A.D. 400; mausolea crowded around its walls, one—S. Maria della Febbre—older than the church and surviving until the eighteenth century. St. Peter's was on an imperial estate out of town: on the shoulder of the Vatican Hill where it sloped down toward the Gardens of Nero. And there is a good chance that, like the Lateran cathedral or the funerary halls at S. Lorenzo or S. Agnese, it stood amidst trees and vineyards. Contrary to other funerary

23. S. Costanza, interior, as of 1538/39, Francisco D'Ollanda, Escurial

24. St. Peter's, reconstruction, as of ca. 330
halls, however, the shrine of Saint Peter did not rise outside, in a catacomb, as did the shrines of Saint Lawrence or Saint Agnes. Instead it was made the very focus of the basilica and hence forced a new plan on the emperor’s architects. Begun between 319 and 322, and completed by 329, it was placed on a large terrace created by filling in the pagan necropolis and the small Christian cult center therein (fig. 24); only the upper part of the niche, Saint Peter’s memorial, remained above the floor level of Constantine’s basilica. This, of course, has long since given way to the present great church, New St. Peter’s. But Constantine’s structure is known in nearly every detail from the remains excavated and from descriptions, paintings, and drawings done before and during its destruction. A drawing by Heemskerck (fig. 25), done while large parts of the basilica had given way already to New St. Peter’s, provides at least a faint idea of the colossal size of the structure. Like the Lateran cathedral, St. Peter’s was laid out with a nave and doubled aisles, all resting on columns pilfered from older buildings. But unlike the plan of the Lateran church, a transept was interposed between the apse and nave. A long, tall structure, though lower than the nave, it sheltered on the borderline of the apse the shrine of the Apostle, surmounted by a baldacchino flanked by openings, the whole on twisted marble columns with vine scrolls donated by the emperor; some survive, reused in the present church, where guides still point them out, wrongly of course, as having come from Sol-
omon’s Temple. An atriurn extended in front, and in it stood the pigna, a huge pine cone of bronze under a canopy, all parts pilfered from older structures. Towering over the atriurn, the façade of the church, slightly altered in the thirteenth century, and its nave walls with their many large windows, presented again the simple planes of the exterior as contrasted with the grandeur of the interior that mark Constantinian church building. The vast size of the structure, larger than any of the other funerary halls and quite a bit larger than the cathedral at the Lateran, shows that large crowds of local Christians and pilgrims were counted on to fill the huge space. As at S. Lorenzo, in order to shelter the pilgrims, a portico of Constantinian date or slightly later ran all the way to the nearest access from the city, the Aelian Bridge near the Mausoleum of Hadrian. To Constantine, it seems, St. Peter’s was the most important pilgrimage church, and next to the Lateran cathedral, the outstanding Christian building among those in and near Rome. The furnishings in gold and silver and the endowment donated by him to St. Peter’s easily compete with those provided for the cathedral at the Lateran.

Compressed into twenty or twenty-five years, this building activity is impressive enough as a sheer feat of labor organization, providing materials from near and far—bricks, timber, marble—and pushing the work to completion. Its true significance, however, resides in the consistency of the underlying program. The first Christian emperor and his family intended to erect in the capital the buildings needed by the Christian community of the town and the court, and to provide them lavishly with resplendent furnishings and the means for their maintenance: a cathedral with its baptistery and the bishop’s residence and offices; a palace church for the empress dowager and the resident court; five or six covered cemeteries located on different roads out of town, all linked to venerated spots: the cult center of the Apostles on the Appian Way, and the graves of the great martyrs, Saint Peter, Saint Lawrence, Saint Agnes, and the deacons Marcellinus and Peter; finally, imperial mausolea linked to two of these structures—one designed, in all likelihood, for Constantine himself, and later ceded to his mother, Helena; the other, S. Costanza, for the princess Constantina.

One all too readily thinks of Constantine as a builder primarily of churches. But a Roman emperor had other obligations as well. He was expected by tradition to place his stamp on public architecture, temples, basilicas, baths, and other civic buildings set up primarily in his capital. Naturally, Constantine shunned temples. But otherwise he did not evade his obligations as a builder of public monumental structures. Though fewer than his churches, his secular buildings in Rome were impressive enough. On the Roman Forum he took over and completed the structures begun by Maxentius, imparting to them his name. In the Basilica Nova, whose walls and vaults were probably in place when Constantine marched into Rome, he finished the decoration and placed his colossal statue into the apse at the short, eastern end. Likewise, he changed the plan by adding on the long sides an apse to the north and an entrance porch to the south; the shift of axis made the flank facing the Forum and the imperial palaces on the Palatine Hill into the main façade; obviously the structure then became the Basilica Constantini. Nearby, he completed and dedicated in his name the audience hall and offices of the city prefect, now the church of SS. Cosma e Damiano. An equestrian statue was set up in his honor somewhere on the Forum; it has long since disappeared, but was still known to eighth-century visitors. On the southern slope of the Quirinal, nowadays covered by the Rospigliosi Palace, he built the baths that bore his name, the largest in Rome next to those of Caracalla and Diocletian; their towering ruins were still seen in the sixteenth century. On the Forum Boarium, the old cattle market near the Tiber, at least one monument appears to date from his reign: the Janus Quadrifrons, a huge four-sided arch, of massive brickmasonry covered with marble plaques, its ninety-six niches designed to hold statues (fig. 26). The best-known monument of Constantine’s day in Rome is the triumphal arch in his name near the Colosseum and across the Ostian Way (fig. 27). Dedicated by the Senate in 315 and decorated with reliefs pilfered for the most part from the Arches of Trajan and Hadrian, it
proclaims Constantine as having won the empire by the guidance of the Godhead, *instinctu divinitatis*.

The intentional vagueness of the inscription reflects the uneasy interplay of the political, social, and religious forces in Constantine’s Rome. It was evidently designed to show due deference to the Christian leanings of the emperor and to the new factor within the body politic, the Church and the large Christian congregation in Rome, and at the same time to save the conscience of the pagan element. The great Roman families that dominated the Senate were after all overwhelmingly pagan. They prevailed in the municipal administration and were prominent in the civil service. They were the defenders of the Roman tradition, of the city’s glorious past, of her culture, of her old gods. If the emperor adhered to the new Christian God, that was his private affair. It was bad enough that he promoted the Church, that he gave preference to Christians at court. In Rome and beyond, as far as it was in their power, the old families in the Senate were going to place a limit on the spread of the new religion. This is the situation reflected in Constantine’s church-building policy.
and in the limitations set upon his program of visibly Christianizing Rome. Just as the Senate appears to have respected the emperor’s religious preferences, though without making any real concessions, so Constantine seems to have been intent on sparing pagan feelings while promoting the new faith. With that double aim in mind, he made the churches founded in Rome as large and splendid as possible, lavishly furnished and richly endowed so as to present a new image of Christianity. However, all the shimmering brilliance of marble revetment and marble floors, gilded vaults, lighting fixtures, and altar vessels were reserved for the eyes of the faithful and sympathizers assembled inside—the congregation, the leaders of the Church, the Christian members of the imperial family. Seen from outside, these churches were remarkably plain. Moreover, all were built on imperial estates on the edge of the city in the greenbelt, far from the populated quarters whence the bulk of the congregation would come. Clearly there were practical reasons for choosing such sites: it was imperial land; space was available; and building was less costly than it would have been in the residential quarters. But political expediency counted as well. Close to the city walls and hidden among other palace buildings, the new churches were hardly visible to Rome’s casual visitor. They might more easily have noted the covered cemeteries rising on imperial estates in the countryside around the city: that of SS. Marcellino e Pietro on the estate of Helena on the Via Labicana; that of S. Lorenzo, rising in the villa formerly of Lucius Verus, the Verano; that on the estate of Constantina on the Nomentana, where the martyr Agnes rested; that in Nero’s Gardens across the Tiber, where Saint