

era. At present, the last construction of which traces have been found is a large *insula* of Caracalla's time, on the Via Lata. But this had not been completed and had never been lived in. Why was this the case? Was the enterprise no longer profitable owing to a declining demand for such accommodation? This is the most likely explanation, yet the fourth-century regionary catalogues mention a total of 46,602 *insulae* for the city of Rome. At first sight, this might appear to be an embarrassing contradiction of the archaeologist's evidence, so the question has been raised whether the term *insula*, as used in the catalogues, might have indicated a single apartment. In 1951, Léon Homo advanced the theory that in the fourth century the term *insulae* no longer designated residential blocks, but individual premises for rent.¹⁸

It certainly seems that henceforward the requirements of the Roman population tended towards a type of non-collective dwelling, the *domus*, and there was a notable boom in this sort of building during the fourth century. The term covers a variety of houses, ranging from – to use modern Italian expressions – a modest *casetta* to a sumptuous *palazzo*. Their owners were nearly all nobles, who lived there themselves or leased them. The *Liber Pontificalis* notes that renting could bring in an average income of a pound of gold, or seventy-two *solidi*. As Constantine had filled out the administration and increased the number of senators from 600 to 2000, one may well imagine that such bureaucrats and new members of the élite stepped up the demand for *domus*, both to buy and to rent. Merely by reading the biographical notes of the urban prefects we discover that a proportion of them came from elsewhere in the empire and therefore had to find accommodation in Rome. Thus the African Aradius Rufinus, prefect at the beginning of the fourth century, obtained a house near Caracalla's baths. The *domus*, which regionary catalogues number at 1790, needed more ground space than the *insulae*, or housed fewer people on an equivalent surface area. The development of this type of dwelling was therefore accompanied by the occupation of ground that had not been built on or had been left vacant by the destruction of ancient buildings. Of course, existing structures were also used. This restructuring revealed an attention to decoration: fountains, marble facings and apses indicate the spread of a luxury formerly reserved for imperial residences. Based on the results of excavations, it could be said that in the fourth century Rome went through a phase of embellishment, but this new town planning was not matched by urban expansion. After the first sack of Rome, in 410, many great *domus* were left abandoned.

Transforming the city's image

– THE URBAN HERITAGE: THE CITY AS A MUSEUM –

When the emperor Constantius II visited Rome in 357, he processed through the city following a route which enabled him to admire its architectural riches. It was a chance for Ammianus Marcellinus, in his account of this visit, to paint a picture – biased, of course, but vibrant with admiration – of Rome in the mid-fourth century.¹ When he reached the Forum, Constantius was dazzled by the array of wonders accumulated over the centuries. During his brief stay, he toured the city, marvelling at its monuments, both old and new: the temple of Tarpeian Jupiter 'dominating everything as the sky dominates the earth'; thermal baths 'as big as provinces'; the Flavian amphitheatre, 'whose summit the eye can reach only with difficulty'; the Pantheon and its grandiose cupola; the columns bearing the statues of former emperors; and the temple of Venus and Roma and the Forum of Peace, the Odeon, Pompey's theatre and Domitian's stadium (now the Piazza Navona). He was amazed particularly at the sight of Trajan's Forum, 'a monument unique under all the heavens', which he visited in the company of the Persian prince Hormisdas. Wanting to leave his mark on Rome, he must have reflected a long time before deciding to erect a second obelisk in the Circus Maximus. But the tone of Ammianus' text clearly shows that Constantius, who for the most part had resided at Antioch, felt almost overwhelmed by the city's architectural and historic majesty.

Early in the fifth century, in the years preceding the Goths' first sack of the town, Rome had lost nothing of its ancient splendour, in the opinion of the poet Claudian: plated with bronze, the roofs of the buildings still rivalled the sun's rays in their brilliance. The triumphal arches and monuments of Roman victories were still standing, like the temples the forms of which soared skywards. Everywhere, he says, the

eye was dazzled by the glitter of metals and quivered at the sight of so much gold.²

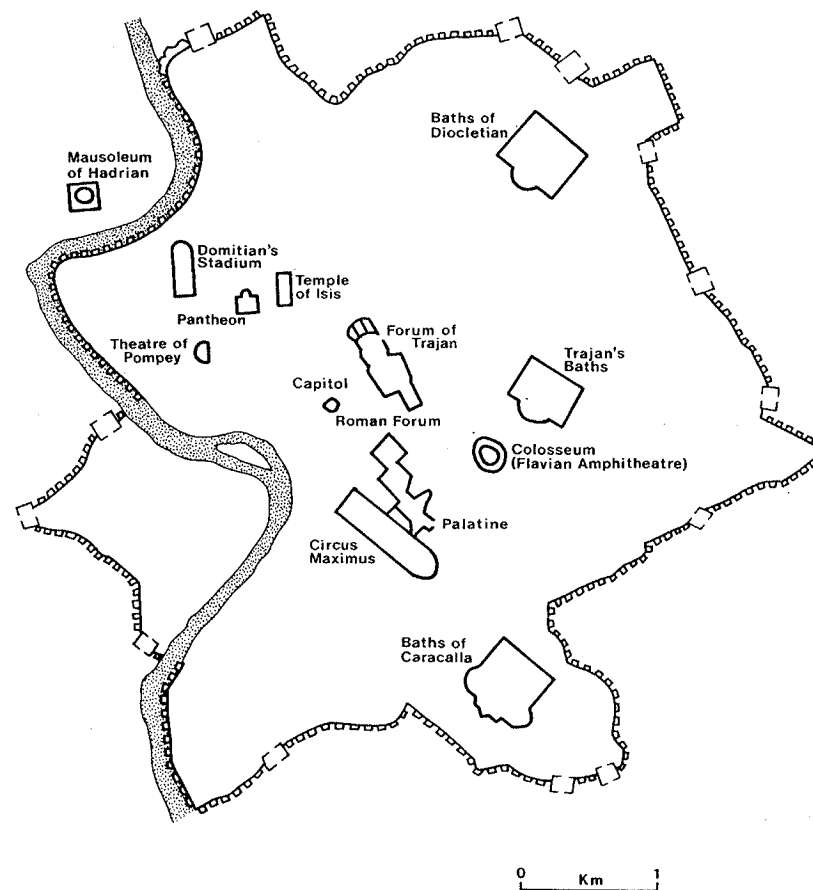
Architectural and epigraphic remains are not the only sources enabling us to picture Rome in late antiquity. In addition, there are the descriptive pieces to be found in literary texts and the regionary catalogues. The latter are little inventories, written in the fourth and fifth centuries and passed down by way of medieval manuscripts, setting out a list of the monuments each contained, district by district. Examples are the *Notitia regionum*, the *Laterculus* of Polemius Silvius and the *Libellus de regionibus urbis Romae*. The latter, known through two manuscript versions, includes the *Curiosum urbis Romae*. First, they tell us that in late antiquity Rome had retained the administrative division into fourteen districts imposed by Augustus. In addition, the *Curiosum* and *Notitia* give a detailed catalogue of the city's buildings and curiosities:

28 libraries, 6 obelisks, 8 bridges, 7 hills, 8 *campi* (level open areas), 11 forums, 10 basilicas, 11 public baths, 19 aqueducts, 29 avenues, 2 citadels, 2 circuses, 2 amphitheatres, 2 colossi, 2 columns decorated with spiral reliefs, 2 markets, 3 theatres, 4 gladiators' schools, 5 venues for sea-fight spectacles, 15 *nymphaea* (sanctuaries for the nymphs), 22 equestrian statues, 80 gold statues of gods, 74 in ivory, 36 marble arches, 37 gates, 423 neighbourhoods and the same number of temples, 46,602 *insulae* (residential blocks, rented premises), 1,790 *domus* (houses), 290 *horrea* (storehouses), 856 baths, 1,352 lakes, 254 bakeries, 46 brothels, 144 public latrines, 2,300 oil sellers.³

The only thing missing from this list is the Tiber's river rats!⁴

— IMPERIAL PALACES —

At the time when Claudian was composing his panegyric of Stilicho, the imperial palaces still raised their lofty silhouettes above the Regia and the Rostra, the platform for public speaking. But they were becoming old and neglected, on the Palatine hill that had given them its name. Indeed, since Maxentius, ruler between 306 and 312, no emperor had chosen to make his ordinary residence there. Even before this the western Tetrarchs had installed themselves in Milan and Trier. In 330 Constantine had founded Constantinople, a new Rome on the Bosphorus, where his successors lived in between their numerous journeys. During late antiquity, therefore, the immense imperial *domus* on the Palatine received only emperors or members of the imperial family who were making a short stay in the city. The most monumental, the Domus Augustana, had been built in Domitian's time; it was never replaced and was used as a temporary residence for emperors in transit until the end of the empire, a fact which Claudian regrets. On the Palatine, he said, power possesses more grandeur, and the masters of the



Map 2.1 Ancient monuments and forums

world could not imagine a more noble dwelling-place. For how long, he asks, invoking the image of the *paterfamilias* in his home, must the *potestas* (power) be thus exiled from its Lares (household gods), and, now appealing to military images, the *imperium* (authority) wander far from its headquarters? He therefore implores the emperor Honorius, on a visit in 404 for his sixth consulship, to settle there. In his view the imperial presence would make the city's laurels grow green once more.⁵

– FORUMS –

Known to be the oldest of the city's forums and endowed with the most ancient remains, the Roman Forum is none the less rich in evidence of late antiquity. Between the reconstruction of the Senate house, shortly after 283, and the erection of the last great monument, the column of Phocas, in 608, it was enriched by many architectural adornments. The *curia*, the usual – but not exclusive – meeting place of the Roman Senate, was destroyed in the great fire that ravaged the western part of the forum in 283, in Carinus' reign. It was almost immediately reconstructed by Diocletian and Maximian, its floor paved with marble tiling, and it is this edifice that can be seen today. The fire also raged in Caesar's Forum, destroying the Julian Basilica, the temple of Saturn and the slave market known as the Graecostadium.

Maxentius had begun a basilica to be named after him on the site of the spice warehouse (*horrea piperataria*), but it was incomplete when he died in 312 at the battle of the Milvian Bridge, and was therefore finished by Constantine. Occupying a large part of the Velia (a northward extension of the Palatine Hill), it was indisputably one of the most imposing monuments of the entire imperial era, both for the area enclosed under its roof (100 x 65 metres) and its height (35 metres for the central aisle, nowadays in ruins). In 1487, the discovery was made in the western apse of pieces of the colossal statue of Constantine which are at present in the courtyard of the Palazzo dei Conservatori on the Capitol. It was most certainly an acrolith: the head (2.60 metres high), arms and legs were sculpted in marble, while the rest of the body was of bronze. Here we have one of the loftiest expressions of fourth-century imperial ideology. In the early empire, the Augustus was a *princeps*, an outstanding citizen endowed with great powers; by the time of Constantine, he had become a *dominus*, an almost inaccessible lord and master, of imposing majesty, who aroused somewhat apprehensive admiration.

Last but not least was Trajan's Forum, built between AD 107 and 113 on an area of 300 x 185 metres. Intact, it astounded Constantius II during his visit in 357. In the centre was an equestrian statue of Trajan, apparently

wonderful since Constantius was seized with the desire to have a similar one made in his own likeness.

We must not forget the many public buildings that housed offices and surrounded the forums. Foremost amongst these offices were the prefecture of the city, located near the temple of Tellus, and that of the *annona*. The density of these public buildings in the heart of Rome imposed considerable restrictions on the availability of land for new construction, especially for the large churches of Constantinian and post-Constantinian periods, many of which had to be erected in peripheral sites.

– TEMPLES –

In 404, Claudian mentions the temple of Jupiter Tonans ('the Thunderer') and says that the statues standing on the rooftops of the temples seemed to be dancing amid the clouds. St Jerome, his contemporary, did not see them from the same viewpoint. After leaving Rome for good in 385, he wrote that the same rooftops were inhabited only by owls.⁶ The adornments of the city, the temples were also the homes of Rome's traditional gods and, in the eyes of Christians, who were increasingly numerous in the city during the fourth century, were material evidence of idolatry. Where Claudian is happy to see the signs of Rome's continuity and grandeur still intact, Jerome scoffs at the tottering remains of superstition. Here, then, we have two versions that are biased, and we probably have to imagine a reality that lay somewhere in between. Rome's temples remained in use throughout the fourth century, and, although they were closed by Theodosius at the beginning of the 390s, they continued to be a respected ornament of the city. As public buildings, they were protected by the urban prefect from depredations, in accordance with imperial directives; but their stones and columns were a great temptation to people to remove and use them in the construction of new buildings. In the end the law permitted this practice for those which could no longer be restored, so that in the fifth century many of their columns were to be found in Christian basilicas.

– PUBLIC BATHS –

Each region possessed modest bathing establishments, but one could also go to the big public baths built by the emperors, such as those of Caracalla, in the south of the city, of Diocletian, in the north, and of Constantine, on the Quirinal hill. Shortly before 433, the prefect of the city saved the last from ruin thanks to a subsidy from the Senate.⁷ They were dependent for their water supply on the aqueducts, which were still carefully supervised and maintained. They were cut off only in time of war in the sixth century, but were later restored.

Until that war the baths remained, as they had always been, centres of hygiene and sociability. It was possible to do gymnastics there, have a massage, relax in the warm room, sweat in the hot room and revive oneself in the cold room. In addition, there were the pleasures of conversation and reading, as the baths generally had a library. This style of living managed to survive only with extreme difficulty after the ravages of the sixth century. Moreover, the Roman population was now greatly diminished. Designed to meet the needs of several hundred thousand inhabitants, the imperial baths were no longer suitable when the number fell to a few tens of thousands.

– CIRCUSES AND AMPHITHEATRES –

The fires of 217 and 250 had not affected the majesty of the Flavian amphitheatre, better known as the Colosseum, the biggest in the Roman world. It was struck by lightning in 320, and seismic activity in 429, 443 and 486 caused some damage, but that was promptly repaired. An outstanding focal point for urban society, no monument in Rome was more cherished by the prefects of the city. In 438 Paulus had the *podium* (balcony), entrance and *cavea* (auditorium) restored. Most probably after the earthquake of 443, Lampadius had the arena, *podium* and gates renewed and the tiers of seating repaired. The arena was again restored in 470 by Severus, and in 484 by Venantius.⁸

Gladiatorial fights were held there until the early fifth century, but *venationes* (wild animal hunts) continued to be presented thereafter. Nets four metres high were firmly placed round the arena in order to protect the spectators from the animals – after all, were not the front rows occupied by the *clarissimi*, Rome's senatorial élite? The last show that we know of from the documentary sources – a letter from the Ostrogothic King Theodoric to the consul Maximus – was presented there in 523.

To the south of the Palatine, the Circus Maximus remained the public venue which, in Rome, allowed the largest number of the population to assemble: it could hold around 120,000 people, a capacity which few modern football stadia can equal. This building, which was regularly maintained, fulfilled a central function in the rituals of imperial ideology. Thus all cities that became imperial residences, such as Trier or Constantinople, received a vast circus. This was a fundamental element of the palatial complex; it was the conduit between the ruler and the citizens, the place where he could display himself to the people. In Rome the last circus was built by Maxentius, between 306 and 312, in the neighbourhood of his great villa on the Appian Way.

– ARCHES –

The Roman Forum had four triumphal arches, from one end of the Via Sacra to the other. That of Augustus has vanished, leaving those of Titus, Septimius Severus and Constantine. Titus' had been erected to commemorate his triumph in the war against the Jews (AD 66–70).

Constantine's arch was dedicated on 25 July 315, at the time of the emperor's tenth jubilee celebrations. Its height of twenty-five metres made it, as far as we know, the most imposing triumphal arch in the Roman world. It is possible, though not yet proved, that it was built by adding to an earlier arch that may have been on the site. There were probably no longer enough workshops in Rome able to cope with such a large order in three years, therefore the bas-reliefs adorning this arch are a real assortment of sculptures lifted from other monuments and new ones executed between 312 and 315. Indeed, there are reliefs from the times of Hadrian, Commodus and Constantine himself, which makes this arch, to use archaeologist Filippo Coarelli's words, a veritable 'museum of official Roman sculpture' of the imperial era.⁹

– COLUMNS AND STATUES –

In its *piazze* Rome had a number of statues in stone, metal or mixed media. Whereas those of deities were to be found in temples or their grounds, those of mere men were offered to the daily view of passers-by either in the open spaces or in the large public buildings. They certainly included statues of emperors. The one considered to be the finest stood in Trajan's Forum, and was an equestrian statue of its founder; but the emperors were not the only ones to have their statue erected. Prefects of the city were often presented with one by the emperor, the Senate or towns and guilds of which they were patrons. For instance, the prefect Orfitus was offered statues by the five guilds of which he was a patron, and these were placed in front of his house.¹⁰ It appears to have been an honour much prized by *clarissimi*, rewarding the beneficent acts they had performed and, according to Ammianus in one of his caustic asides, sought after by those who had performed none. Many orators also received the honour of a statue; for the most part, these were grouped around the libraries in Trajan's Forum. Today, only the bases are preserved in their original locations, while surviving works of sculpture are housed in museums. So we have to imagine Rome, above all in its monumental centre, bristling with statues of various sizes, standing on the roofs of temples, on columns and pedestals carved with dedicatory inscriptions. The favourite place for these ornaments, the Forum, must have resembled a veritable museum of sculpture in the round, if not an incredible hotch-potch.

If we read the inscriptions on numerous statue pedestals, as well as texts such as the *Relationes* of Symmachus, we realise that the urban prefects erected and moved many statues. Such statues were manifestations of loyalty towards emperors and faithfulness to traditional Roman values: for men, just as much as monuments, were regarded as the ornaments of the city. The prefect of 334–5, Anicius Paulinus Iunior, had a statue of Constantine put up in the Forum.¹¹ Shortly before his death, the latter suggested to the Senate the erection of a statue of the current prefect, Aradius Valerius Proculus Populonium.¹² A few years later, the prefect Fabius Titianus had statues transferred to the Roman Forum.¹³ In the middle of the fourth century, Orfitus installed statues in the Aventine thermal baths, and had those of Constantius and Julian placed in the Forum.

All these statues formed a remarkable historical and artistic heritage, and they were therefore placed under the supervision of prefectural dignitaries, the *centurio rerum nitentium* (centurion with responsibility for beautiful things) and, chiefly, the *curator statuarum* (curator of statues). Nevertheless, the city lost a number of its statues between the fourth and sixth centuries. In the first place, Constantine had many of them removed to adorn his new capital at Constantinople: then in 455 the Vandals had filled an entire ship with them; finally many of the gods' statues were destroyed by radical Christians who could not abide the sight of what in their view were idols.

– OBELISKS –

Egyptian, or Egyptian-style, obelisks formed an original adornment to the city. Fifth-century Romans were able to see some half-dozen of these prismatic needles rising to the sky, and they still adorn some Roman *piazze*. Ammianus Marcellinus, the greatest Latin language historian of the fourth century, mentions several. The earliest had been installed in Rome by Augustus after the annexation of Egypt following his victory at Actium (31 BC). The only one remaining in place, and also one of the earliest erected in Rome, is the obelisk that today stands in St Peter's Square. It was put up by Caligula near the circus he had had built on the site of the Vatican. It was neither demolished nor transferred like its fellows. Two were to be found on the *euripus* (a low wall dividing the circus lengthways) of the Circus Maximus, at the foot of the Domus Augustana on the Palatine. If we are to believe Pliny the Elder, the first, dating from Pharaoh Seti I, was placed at the east of the track on Augustus' orders. Three centuries later, the circus was enlarged eastwards by Constantine, and his son Constantius II had the second placed there. The history of this obelisk, described by Ammianus Marcellinus after his account of Constantius II's visit to Rome in 357, is worth repeating.¹⁴ It was one of the tallest obelisks in Rome in 357,

standing 32.15 metres high. Erected at Aswan by Tuthmosis III (in the fifteenth century BC), it had later been moved to Egyptian Thebes (modern Luxor). Constantine wanted to have it erected in the circus of his new capital, Constantinople, but in 337 the emperor died while the obelisk still lay in the docks of Alexandria. Constantius II, visiting Rome from 28 April to 29 May 357, was dumbfounded by the city's architectural magnificence. He was anxious to add his own piece of stone to those of his predecessors, and therefore had the obelisk brought to Rome. It came up the Tiber on a boat, was placed in the Villa of Severus on the Aventine, and was then taken to Rome through the Ostian Gate over a land route of some 4.5 kilometres. Finally, it was set up on the *euripus* of the Circus Maximus, to match that of Augustus. On the four surfaces of its granite base six Latin lines were carved. It was surmounted by a bronze globe and a gold leaf, but these were struck by lightning and replaced by a bronze figure bearing a torch. Augustus' obelisk, still standing in the fifth century according to the *Notitia*, today graces the Piazza del Popolo. As for that of Constantius, it appears to have been knocked down early in the fifth century. Did it fall victim to vandalism by the Goths, who took the city in 410? But if so why did they leave Augustus' obelisk in place? Perhaps destruction by Christian fanatics is to blame. That is the theory of some historians, such as Rodolfo Lanciani, but it is debatable. In any case, the obelisk stands today in front of the Basilica di S Giovanni in Laterano.

Between the fourth and sixth centuries, two obelisks also adorned Augustus' mausoleum, near the Tiber, in the north of the city, and are mentioned by Cassiodorus. One now stands in Piazza del Quirinale, the other in the Piazza del' Esquilino, behind Sta Maria Maggiore. We may also note those on the Esquiline, put up in the second half of the first century, in imitation of Heliopolis, and mentioned by the *Curiosum*. The one in the gardens of Sallust on the Pincio is referred to for the first time by Ammianus in the fourth century;¹⁵ today it stands in front of the church of the Trinità dei Monti, at the top of the Spanish Steps.

The obelisk now in the Piazza Navona is a special case: it does not, in fact, belong to the pharaonic era. Domitian had it sculpted and then transported from Egypt to adorn the temple of Isis in Rome. In 309, following the death of his son Romulus, Maxentius had a sanctuary and circus built at one of his villas and dedicated to his son's memory. On this occasion he had the obelisk from the temple of Isis transferred to the *spina* of the new circus situated on the Via Appia. An obelisk was still to be seen on the Campus Martius, another in the Varianus Circus and a further three whose date of import to Rome is unknown. The one on the Campus Martius, built on a base of red granite, had been used as the *gnomon*, or pointer, for the enormous sundial described by

Pliny the Elder. It could have functioned accurately for only some twenty years, but later it remained in position, and, indeed, is mentioned in the *Curiosum*. If we are to believe the manuscript of the itinerary of Einsiedeln, dated between 638 and 852, it was still standing, and would therefore have been the only one, with that of the Vatican, not to have been torn down during the fifth and sixth centuries.

It is thus evident that the majority of the obelisks adorned the *spina*¹⁶ of circuses, amplifying their monumental nature. Their presence reveals the Egyptomania of the early empire, whereas only one was sent from Egypt to Rome during late antiquity. Rather than interpreting this as some sort of hypothetical decline in terms of financial means, or the fact that Egypt had gone out of fashion, I see the erection of this last obelisk as an effort to perpetuate an aesthetic tradition and an extravagant element, as eccentric as it was conspicuous, of imperial benefaction.

One last question remains: these obelisks' destruction. The sources make it certain that the obelisks were not all demolished at the same time. Must the Goths in 410 and the Vandals in 455 be incriminated? Did responsibility lie at the door of radical Christians, hostile to circus games? None of these hypotheses can be ruled out. At a time when historians believed that the Roman empire's collapse was an apocalyptic event, it was tempting to blame that for their destruction. Indeed, barbarian ravages and Christianity were at one time suggested as causes of the 'fall' of Rome. Such acts of deliberate destruction are not improbable, but it must be remembered that in late antiquity Rome also experienced earthquakes that might well have toppled these slender-based monuments, which the popes later re-erected in the *piazze* of Baroque Rome.

– CHRISTIAN INNOVATIONS –

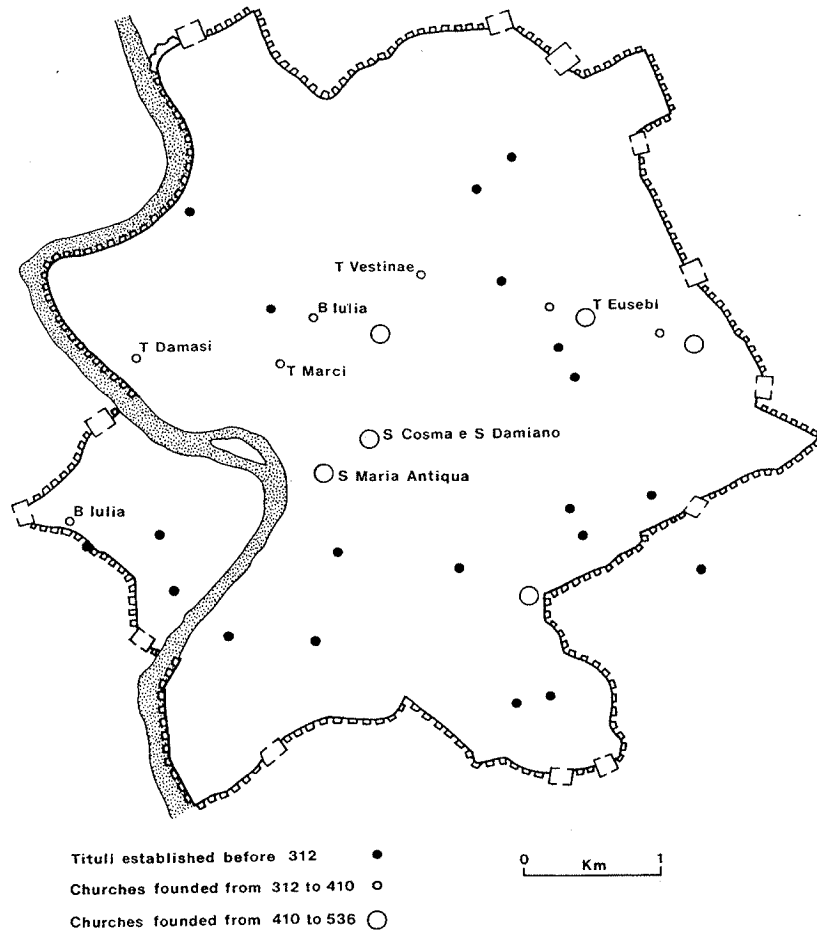
Until the fourth century Christian communities in Rome had not had specific buildings, called churches or basilicas, available for their religious assemblies. They were regularly received in houses which ordinary citizens placed at their disposal. Their legal name, *tituli*, indicates that these were private properties, and therein lies the great difference from official religion which, subsidised by the state, was housed in public buildings. There were some twenty *tituli* in Rome at the beginning of the fourth century, the earliest being located within the ancient Servian walls. They were scattered throughout the districts, primarily on the fringes of densely populated and aristocratic quarters – hence there were none in the populous Velabrian and Suburan areas. This distribution shows that there was no specifically Christian quarter in Rome, and also means there was no ostentatious

architectural sign of the existence of Christianity in Rome before Constantine's building campaigns.

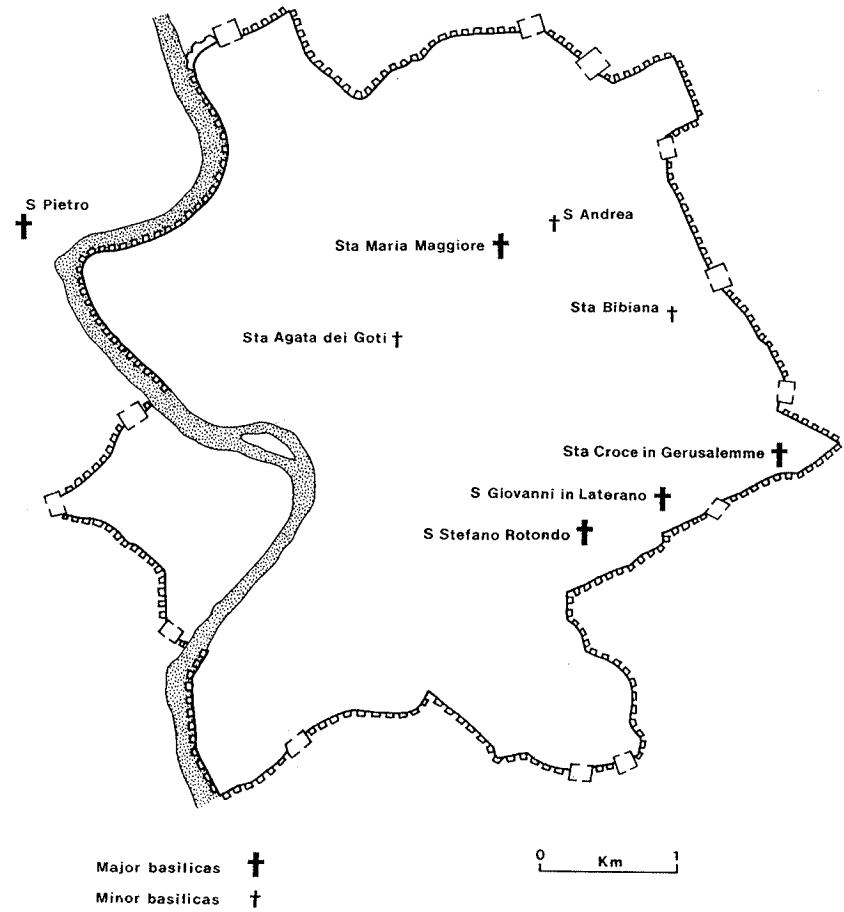
– CONSTANTINE'S BUILDING PROJECTS –

In 311 Maxentius began handing back to the Christians the possessions that had been confiscated from them. Two years later, the so-called 'Edict of Milan' gave permission for Christian worship, inaugurating for the Church a period of peace that was to alter the city's ecclesiastical – and, indeed, religious – geography profoundly. In that year a council took place in Rome, under the presidency of Bishop Miltiades. It was held in the *domus Faustae*, at the Lateran, and a wish was expressed that the synodal court should possess its own meeting-place. Then, at his own expense, Constantine had a Basilica built for the Church of Rome. Started before 324, this, the Lateran basilica, was built in the south-east of the city, on an imperial domain, on the site of the barracks of the *equites singulares* and the *schola curatorum* which was destroyed. The great size of Constantine's Lateran Basilica broke away from the modesty of previous Christian edifices. Constructed on a basilican plan with five aisles, it measured 100 x 55 metres, thus equalling in size Maxentius' basilica in the forum. As its walls had been clad with yellow marble, it was given the name *basilica aurea* (the golden basilica). It was flanked by a baptistery, then a palace which later became the bishop's residence and seat of his administration. The first episcopal church, today it remains Rome's cathedral, under the name of S Giovanni in Laterano. The Roman cathedral's situation away from the centre is connected with its origins; as Constantine could not undertake large-scale monumental building in the city centre, he had to see his plans materialise on a readily available space, an imperial property where there was a barracks whose cavalry unit, which had supported Maxentius, had been disbanded after his defeat in 312. With the Lateran, the Roman church had at its disposal for the first time a place that enabled many of the faithful to assemble, which was not without liturgical consequences. Moreover, this first Christian complex received donations from the emperor, ensuring an annual revenue of 4390 *solidi* for the basilica and 10,234 for the baptistery. The latter was richly ornamented; if we are to believe the figures quoted in the *Liber Pontificalis*, three tons of silver and three and a half quintals (100 kilograms) of gold were used for this purpose.

The second of Constantine's great building projects was the basilica raised on the site of St Peter's tomb on the Vatican Hill. It was built near Caligula's circus, which was apparently abandoned, and cut into a pre-existing burial site. At the time, this extra-urban space was planted with trees and vines. Commenced between 319 and 322, it was fully completed in 329, though work continued on it after Constantine's death. Extensive



Map 2.2 Christian churches



Map 2.3 Christian basilicas

excavations on the site of St Peter's tomb revealed that already in the third century it had been the object of several successive reworkings. Peter's *memoria* (shrine), also called his 'trophy', was a small edifice of porphyry and precious materials capped, at the time when the basilica was built, by a little baldaquin of six wreathed columns in white marble, and its walls covered with a protective coating. Not far from this original structure stood the altar, with the gold cross presented to the basilica by Constantine and his mother, Helena. St Peter's basilica was larger than that of the Lateran (122 x 66 metres), but less well endowed, with 3708 *solidi* per annum. In addition, two or three suburban churches seem attributable to Constantine, including a shrine to St Paul and the basilica of St Laurence (S Lorenzo fuori le Mura). In the same period, Constantine's mother, Helena, had a wing of her Sessorian palace, situated in the south-east of the city, transformed into a Christian basilica named *Hierusalem* (Sta Croce in Gerusalemme). An apse was added, and colonnades divided the basilican lay-out into three aisles.

The basilicas of the Constantinian period have something in common: they were constructed according to the canons of imperial architecture then in force for civil basilicas and palatine *aulae* (audience chambers), with a few adaptations such as apses. The new amount of room available to Christians allowed the development of a more solemn liturgy, in more spacious and grandiose surroundings for the increased number of faithful. Rituals and processions certainly took their inspiration from palatine ceremonials.

THE FLOWERING OF THE CHURCHES:

— FROM JULIUS TO LEO THE GREAT (337–440) —

Between 312 and 410 at least eight churches were founded in Rome, among them five titular churches, bringing the *tituli*, just before the sack of Rome, to their final number of twenty-five. Former *tituli* were reorganised. Popes Julius (337–52) and Liberius (352–66) were keen builders. Julius had five basilicas built, three outside Rome and two within the walls. On the Esquiline, Liberius had a large basilica constructed which became one of the great places for the city's Christians to assemble. With these new buildings, the Roman church now had at its disposal premises at the centre of the ancient city.

The pontificate of Damasus (366–84) was a high point in the organisation of the Roman church. He undertook numerous works of restoration and embellishment in existing buildings, and had the suburban tombs of the martyrs refurbished, with magnificently carved inscriptions in verse added. Thus he contributed to the development of the cult of martyrs in Rome, making the city an important centre for pilgrimages. His successors, Siricius

and Anastasius, carried on his work, increasing the density of churches within Rome, in the middle of residential quarters. In 386, the emperors ordered the prefect of the city to divert a road in order to allow a more monumental construction of the basilica of S Paolo fuori le Mura,¹⁷ begun at the end of Damasus' pontificate, and completed during that of Siricius (384–99). The new structure exalted the apostle of the gentiles to the point of placing him on an equal footing with Peter.

Bishops were not the only ones to order building work. Flavius Macrobius Longinianus, prefect from 401 to 402, who made a name for himself by restoring the city's walls, had a baptistery built near the church of Anastasius in the Velabrum.¹⁸ After the Gothic sack in 410, few churches were founded. The bishops dedicated themselves chiefly to rebuilding and embellishment, adding marble, mosaics and enamels to the interiors. Celestine (422–32) had Pope Julius' basilica of Sta Maria in Trastevere restored. At his own expense, he endowed the brand-new church of Sta Sabina with carved wooden doors and mosaics, and had its walls clad with marble *opus sectile*. The *titulus* of the Apostles, on the Esquiline, was restored with the help of the imperial family; as it contained St Peter's chains, it received the name St Peter-in-Chains (S Pietro in Vincoli). Among other works, Sixtus III (432–40) rebuilt the Lateran baptistery, and the Liberian basilica, which he dedicated to the Virgin (known today as Sta Maria Maggiore). It was the first time that a bishop had financed out of his own pocket the building of a church of this size (72 x 32 metres). He did it in the old style, using Ionic columns and covering the vault of the apse with mosaic. From the second third of the fifth century, works of public benefaction declined and the construction of Christian edifices became the prerogative of the papacy.

It must be added that church architecture began also to diverge from the basilican lay-out. For instance, Sta Costanza, built in the mid-fourth century, and S Stefano Rotondo, copied from the Anastasis of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem at the end of the fifth century, were both constructed on a circular plan.¹⁹

— FROM LEO TO GREGORY (440–604) —

The aspect of Christian Rome altered a little during the sixth century. The basilica of S Lorenzo fuori le Mura was enlarged, and churches were embellished with mosaics. Few new churches were built, but among them, on the Caelian hill, Sto Stefano Rotondo, erected by Simplicius (468–83), was given an original circular lay-out. Hilarus flanked S Lorenzo fuori le Mura with a baptistery complete with baths, an open-air pool and two libraries, one Greek and the other Latin: we can see from this example that

Christianity had not swept away the Roman art of living. St Paul's (S Paolo fuori le Mura), St Laurence's (S Lorenzo fuori le Mura) and St Peter's were the three great extramural sanctuaries, around which grew residential quarters. In 480 a church dedicated to St Andrew, Peter's brother, was built in the former villa of the prefect Junius Bassus, which had become property of the Goth Valila, who had bequeathed it to the Church of Rome. Such plundering of existing structures was quite common. A number of churches constructed in Rome during the fourth and fifth centuries reused columns, capitals and entablatures taken from temples that had become unrestorable. Among the most spectacular examples are the forty-two columns of green marble in the Lateran basilica, the twenty-four Corinthian columns of Sta Sabina and the twenty Doric columns of S Pietro in Vincoli.

The great innovation of the sixth century was the installation of two churches in the Roman Forum: hitherto no church had been introduced into the old monumental centre of the city. Now, two centuries after the building of the Constantinian edifices on the city's periphery, its heart had been reached. Bishop Felix IV (526–30) created the churches of SS Cosmas e Damiano and Sta Maria Antiqua from two abandoned secular buildings. Situated on the Via Sacra, the first received a splendid mosaic on the *cul-de-four* vault of its apse, which can still be admired; Felix himself is represented (albeit heavily restored) on the left, offering a model of the building to the saints. Under Gregory the Great (590–604) alterations were made to the interior arrangement of St Peter's basilica. Four of the six baldaquin columns were moved and the floor raised to form a platform over the saint's tomb. Henceforward Mass would be celebrated over rather than in front of the tomb. An opening – *fenestella* – was fitted on the west side to give access to the relics.

The topography of Rome's Christian buildings was not the fruit of some carefully premeditated strategy. Originally it had been based on the *tituli* which were located in private houses. It was subsequently developed on private properties, belonging at first to the imperial family and wealthy donors, and later to the Church itself. However, we may see a design in certain creations: Damasus' plan was to build a circle of martyrs' tombs around the city. His successors intended to fill in the empty spaces, so that by the end of the fifth century every Roman, no matter where he lived, was sure of finding a church less than 500 metres from his home.²⁰ This density is certainly the most important transformation in the Roman landscape of late antiquity.

– THE MAINTENANCE OF PUBLIC BUILDINGS –

The maintenance of Rome's public buildings in a suitable condition created severe problems in late antiquity, in the first place, of course, because their upkeep and restoration were expensive. Irregular, or even non-existent, maintenance could lead to their dilapidation. In addition, there was the damage caused by frequent fires, either accidental or, in the case of the sackings in the fifth and sixth centuries, deliberate. Earthquakes, some of which are attested by written sources, formed an additional factor in their deterioration. For all these reasons, on the initiative of the prefect of the city, regular maintenance work proved necessary. Thanks to the inscriptions, we know about several campaigns of restoration in the Colosseum, which, as we have seen, was the object of very special concern on the part of the prefects.

The fourth *novella* of the emperor Majorian is a major source for the condition of Rome's public buildings in the fifth century. It was addressed by Majorian, at the start of his reign, on 11 July 458, to the prefect Aemilianus. The document begins with a report: public buildings had been destroyed on the initiative of the urban prefecture itself, and stones had been taken to construct new buildings or rebuild old ones. Even worse, the public officials had authorised ordinary citizens to come and take stones away for their own private use. The *novella's* tone is one of indignation and outraged majesty, with the emperor protesting that he will no longer put up with people altering the city's appearance, above all by destroying great edifices in order to restore small ones. This implies that Rome no longer had enough masonry workshops available to meet the volume of work being carried out. It also shows how useful deteriorated buildings could be as quarries for pre-cut stone. This practice was economical as well, suggesting that funds available were insufficient to have ready-cut stone brought from elsewhere. Yet by 458 the practice was far from new: the emperors Valens, Gratian and Valentinian II had already prohibited it in 376.

Majorian, however, would not allow this pillaging to continue. The aim of his *novella* was to preserve public buildings, temples and other structures. If temples were explicitly referred to, it was probably because they were the first victims of the removals. In theory, they had been closed since the end of the fourth century, and doubtless lack of maintenance had been responsible for some structural damage. In addition, when the city was sacked much destruction had been caused. According to Procopius, in 455 the Vandals had removed half the roofing, which was made of the finest bronze covered with gold, from the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus. To Romans who considered the temples useless Majorian put up the opposing

argument of the traditional splendour of this the most sacred of cities. He therefore prohibited the removal of building materials, which became a crime carrying heavy penalties. If a public official was found guilty of having authorised any such removal, he would henceforward be liable to a fine of fifty pounds of gold. This sum, equal to 3600 *solidi*, was immense, being the equivalent of one-tenth of the annual property income of a senator! This leads one to think that the size of the fine may have been fixed according to the wealth of the magistrates, who must have been of senatorial rank. If subordinate staff, servants, or accountants, were convicted of involvement in a similar affair, they were likely to be beaten and to have their hands amputated.

Even so, Majorian did not decide on an absolute ban. Exceptions could be authorised, provided a strict procedure was followed. This stated that if architectural plans involved the need to demolish an ancient edifice, or if a building proved irreparable, a detailed request for permission to carry out the demolition had to be addressed to the Senate. After much deliberation, the latter would then make a report to the emperor, with whom the final decision rested. Quite apart from its explicit concerns over Rome's decaying fabric, there is no doubt that this law sought to restore a preferential link between Rome and the reigning emperor, a link that had slackened during the fourth and fifth centuries.

CHAPTER 3

The phoenix city: War and invasion in the fifth and sixth centuries

– ROME WITHOUT AN EMPEROR –

It is customary to say that Rome lost its status as capital of the empire when it lost its emperor, at the time of Constantine's creation of Constantinople in the 320s, but that is a schematic view. Because of its prestigious past, its personality, its name conferred upon the empire, Rome could not cease to be a capital. Furthermore, as Gilbert Dragon has shown so eloquently, the creation of Constantinople between 324 and 330 was not effected in opposition to Rome; it was conceived as a second Rome, likely to strengthen the image of the first.¹ In the literary texts of late antiquity, Rome continued to be venerated. Although its population, power and prosperity had indeed diminished, in the view of cultured people it remained *the city*. Certainly, in the late fourth century, Ammianus Marcellinus regarded it as the *Urbs venerabilis*, which had entered old age.² But whatever complaints he may have had against it, he described it as 'mistress and queen' – *domina et regina*. His contemporary Claudian, thought its 'Quirinal majesty' – *maiestas Quirini* – intact, and exalted it as 'mother of kings and leaders' – *mater regum ducumque*.³ Of course, this enthusiasm may be tempered by ascribing it partly to patriotic fervour, but, in the minds of the educated, Rome never lost its individuality and pride of place in the power to arouse emotions. In 440, Valentinian III, who lived at Ravenna, addressed his fifth *novella* to 'the city of Rome, which we quite justifiably revere as the capital of our empire'. This means the imperial residence there did not make Ravenna a capital; that title remained the prerogative of Rome.

In fact, from the end of the third century Rome ceased to be the emperors' principal residence. The last to live there more or less continuously was, technically, a usurper, the *princeps* Maxentius, between 306 and 312. After that date the Augusti were there only in passing, for fairly short stays. In the west, they preferred to live in Milan and Trier, then, from early in the fifth

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BERTRAND LANÇON

TRANSLATED BY ANTONIA NEVILL

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