

capital. Her rejectionist attitude, I submit, was one of the reasons, along with many others, political and strategic, which led Constantine to abandon Rome and the West altogether. In the East he would set up the Christian capital of his Christian empire: in Serdica-Sofia, in Thessalonikē, or, better still, in a city newly founded, unburdened by traditions and free of conservative opposition—in his own city, Constantinople.

II

CONSTANTINOPLE

Constantine had gone a long way from the Milvian Bridge to the victory on September 18, 324, at Chrysopolis over his co-emperor and rival Licinius.¹ Now he was the sole master of the Empire. Its administration and defense from Mesopotamia to Spain and from Africa to the Rhine and Britain were tightly organized with himself at the center. Unity, concord, was the watchword. His faith, too, had become firm; he *was* a Christian—as he understood it. The wars against Licinius, in retrospect at least, had become crusades against the forces of evil, embodied in the old faith. Christianity and the Church after 324 became solidly anchored in the State. No longer did Constantine view himself as a nearly even-handed ruler over Christians and pagans as he still had done around 320. Even before the final conflict with Licinius he had embarked on a holy war against paganism, and after Chrysopolis he increasingly saw himself as God's instrument, entrusted with the mission of spreading the faith and creating a homogeneous, Christian, and centrally ruled empire—one God, one Christ, "one empire on earth, set right."²

Such an empire required a permanent and Christian capital. It was cumbersome moving emperor, court, ministries, and high command every few weeks or months to another residence—from Trier to Vienne, to Arles, to Milan, to Serdica-Sofia, sometimes in the course of one year—as his predecessors and Constantine himself had done. It was also contrary to his guiding principle of unity. Pleas to rule from the old capital of the world could be of no avail. He had never taken to Rome, and despite his efforts to avoid friction with the ruling traditionalist

group, mutual alienation had progressively grown. It culminated in 326 when at his vicennalia, more provokingly than on earlier occasions, he refused to appear on the Capitol for the solemn celebration and sacrifice to be performed.³ Political and strategic considerations favored a capital in the East, anyhow. During the years of tension with Licinius, 317 to 324, Constantine had ruled from one of the Balkan residences: Thessalonikē, Niš, Sirmium, Siscia, or Serdica-Sofia. But I very much doubt that he ever seriously thought of making any of these landlocked places his permanent capital; his ever-quoted statement, "Serdica is my Rome," means hardly more than "Where I am, is Rome."⁴ Certainly right after his final victory at Chrysopolis his mind was made up. Rather than use one of the older residences in the Balkans, he would lay out a new capital from scratch.

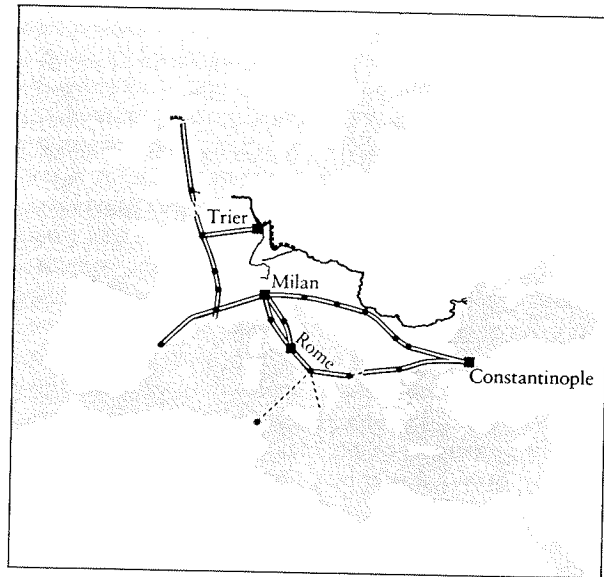
As its place he chose a promontory on the north shore of the Sea of Marmara, near the entrance to the Bosphorus, flanked to the east by a deep inlet, the Golden Horn. South, on the Asian shore, it faced Nicomedia, now Izmit, the favorite residence of Diocletian. A small Greek town, Byzantium, occupied the steep eastward tip of the promontory; founded a millennium before Constantine, it had been enlarged by Septimius Severus in A.D. 196. The site, molded by a number of hills, whether seven or not, was easy to defend. It dominated the Marmara and the straits, both the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus (fig. 35). Communications by land and sea were good. Port facilities could be improved. Two major roads started into Europe: westward the Via Egnatia to Thessalonikē and across northern Greece to Durazzo and Brindisi; northward and far more important by the fourth century the highway to Adrianople, Sofia, Niš, and the Danube provinces beyond, and thence to North Italy, the Rhineland, Gaul, and Britain. Across the Sea of Marmara a corresponding network of roads through Asia Minor linked up southeast with Ankara and Kaisarye in Cappadocia and beyond with Mesopotamia and the ever-threatened Persian frontier, south across the Taurus Mountains with the south coast of Asia Minor and with Syrian Antioch, Palestine, and Egypt, and east with Armenia (fig. 36). The site, then, was a nodal point on the map of the Empire, linking north and south, east and west. Finally, though that hardly weighed in Constantine's decision, it was and still is one of the most beautiful spots on earth.

Work on the new city went rapidly ahead. The *consecratio*, meaning possibly the tracing of the city wall, took place on Sunday, November 8, 324, barely six weeks after the battle at Chrysopolis.⁵ As in November 312, when founding the Roman cathedral, Constantine seems to have been in a hurry. In fact, just as the building of the Lateran was presumably in fulfillment of a vow for the victory at the Milvian Bridge, so

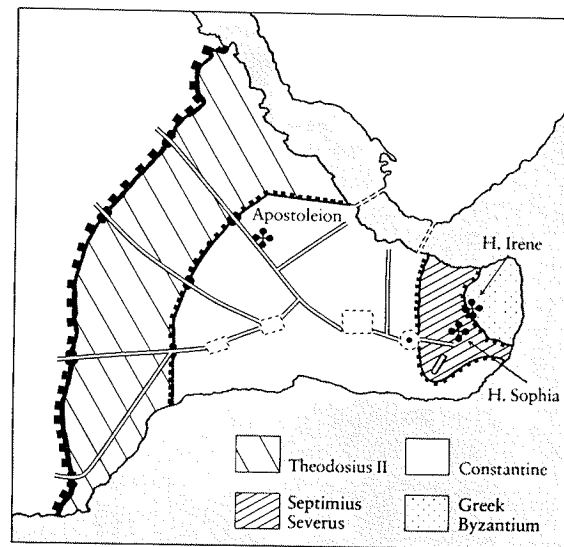
the foundation and naming of Constantinople may well have been an ex-voto for the defeat of Licinius. This at least is suggested by a well-informed contemporary: "*Constantinopolim nuncupavit ob insignis victoriae memoriam. . .*"⁶ That Constantine himself, spear in hand, traced the line of the new walls seems plausible—such *sanctio* or *limitatio* was good old Roman custom, untainted by pagan connotations. So was the reported consultation of astrologers and augurs for a *dies faustus*—to any fourth-century mind except a Christian theologian's it was a matter of common sense; nor did Constantine apparently mind the cooperation of the τελέστης ("astrologer"?) Sopatros and the ιεροφάντης Praetextatus, both well-known pagans. Construction must have been well under way by 326 if around that year ground could be broken for the cathedral.⁷ The city walls appear to have been completed by 328, and this may have marked the *dedicatio*. At the same time a palace, one presumes, was made ready for the emperor, and on May 11, 330, the solemn consecration of the city, presided over by Constantine himself, took place in the new hippodrome; a coin showing the Tychē of the new city enthroned commemorated the occasion. Court and administration a few years before had already begun to establish themselves; a mint had started working by the summer of 326; and beginning in 330 the emperor spent at least a few months every year in his new capital.⁸ By 334,



35. Constantinople, first half of seventeenth century



36. Road map, Roman Empire, Europe



37. Constantinople, showing growth to the fifth century

it seems, the city was mapped out and the most essential structures—the walls, an aqueduct, streets, a palace, and administration buildings—functioned. Construction, to be sure, went on for a long time, and at Constantine's death in 337 only the sketch of a capital, to quote Dagron, existed. Large parts of the map were filled in only over the following century. But *Κωνσταντινούπολις*, Constantine's Own City, had been created.

It has been suggested that, notwithstanding the act of foundation in 324, not before 327 or 328 did Constantine decide to make the new city his capital. With all due respect to a great scholar and his interpretation of the numismatic evidence, I remain unconvinced. In 324, Constantinople already was not laid out like any of the dozens of other cities founded by previous or later emperors or by Constantine himself. Nor was it an imperial residence set up within an older town and provided with the imperial paraphernalia—palace, circus, huge *thermae*—such as the tetrarchic capitals Trier, Milan, Thessalonikē, and Nicomedia. Constantinople from the start was mapped out as a *μεγίστη πόλις*, a *Großstadt*. Laid out on a large scale both in overall plan and in detail, it covered roughly three square miles, almost four times the surface of the Severan town. The hippodrome was planned to seat fifty thousand, it seems. Altogether, the city was provided from the outset with the administrative apparatus to function as the capital of the Empire chosen by Constantine. *De facto* it was a new Rome, as later writers called it; *de iure* it was never meant to replace the old one on the Tiber. Rather, it was an alternative capital, a second Rome, equal but not superior to the old Rome, to quote Constantine's dedication decree. To hurt the pride of the old families and the Senate on the Tiber still would not do in 330.⁹

The new city necessarily was laid out within the framework of key elements extant: the site, the Greek town as enlarged by Septimius Severus, and the highways converging toward it from the west, north, and south. Greek Byzantium seems to have been no larger than Topkapu Saray, the sultan's palace compound at the tip of the promontory; but no remains have come to light (fig. 37). Nor are there many traces of the Roman enlargement, though it apparently quadrupled the surface of the Greek town; its protecting wall ran from the Sea of Marmara to a small harbor on the Golden Horn some 400 meters west of Marmara, and midway in the wall a gate (later known as the Old Gate) opened toward the Via Egnatia, into which the highway from the north had merged some 700 meters outside. The principal buildings of the Severan enlargement seem to have occupied the southwest sector: on the expanse in front of the Blue Mosque, Sultan Ahmet, where now Constantine's huge hippodrome is outlined, a first, presumably smaller, hippodrome; adjoining it to the north, the Baths of Zeuxippos, later enlarged by Con-

stantine, small remains of which have been found; and still further north, a short distance south of H. Sophia, a porticoed square, the *tetrastōon*. There also would have been a few administrative buildings and a residence for a local magistrate, the provincial capital being Heraclea.¹⁰ But everything is conjectural.

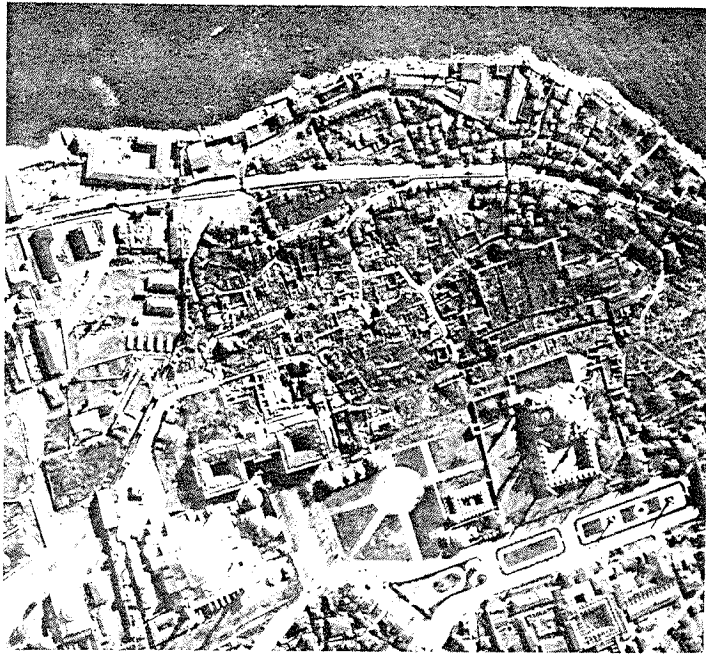
Whatever its layout, the Greco-Roman city became the starting point for Constantine's capital. The wall was pushed forward some 4 kilometers beyond that of Septimius Severus, and it ran a length of roughly 2.5 kilometers from the Sea of Marmara to the Golden Horn. Whether or not this wall already showed the fortification techniques displayed by that of Theodosius II built eighty years later another 4 kilometers further west with towers and *double enceinte*—still one of the great sights of the ancient world—is doubtful (fig. 38). More likely its pattern followed that of the Aurelian Walls of Rome (fig. 2). Inside Constantine's Wall, whatever its design, the old highways, the Egnatia starting from Severus' Old Gate and the north road branching off it, formed the main arteries of the new quarters between Severus's and Constantine's walls, obviously supplemented by transverse and parallel thoroughfares. Water was supplied by an aqueduct, built two hundred years before by Hadrian and perhaps repaired by Constantine. It fed at least the inner city, where the new palace rose; whether a second aqueduct was built by Constantine, as later Byzantine historians have it, remains open. Otherwise cisterns would have provided, as they did after the city was enlarged in the fifth century. Provisioning was secured. Shippers from eastern ports were exempted, as had been those from the West, from the burden of public services, the former with specific reference to their providing for Constantinople. A new harbor was laid out, though it was completed only after Constantine's death. Located on the Marmara coast rather than the Golden Horn, it allowed the heavy-bottomed grain ships from Alexandria to dock; nearby, the "Alexandrian warehouses" were built, to be supplemented later by the *horrea Theodosiana*. Everything was planned on a large scale, with an eye to the distant future, and was rapidly built. Obviously, more often than not construction was shoddy, as pagan and neo-pagan historians maintained. The population, to be sure, was lacking. But, by providing work and requiring services, the presence of the court and administration would attract labor, tradesmen, and hangers-on. To gather families of rank and substance, from Rome or elsewhere in the Empire, Constantine built elegant mansions and provided them with income from estates of the fisc, mostly in Asia Minor. Middle-class homeowners, landlords of tenements, and, one gathers, real-estate speculators would find advantageous the distribution of free bread attached, not to individuals or families, but to property. None of these plans took effect as fast as Constantine may have expected. But by 337, when he



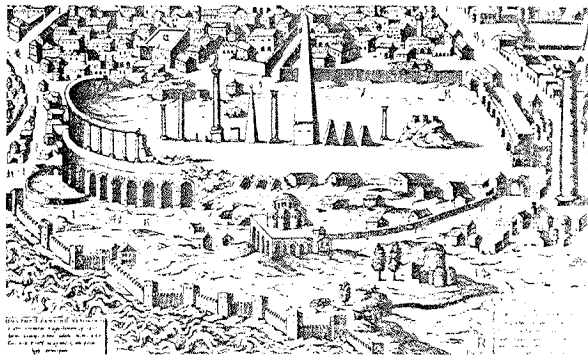
38. Constantinople, Theodosian Walls, early fifth century

died, the population may have been as high as 90,000. Constantine's own city was alive, and it steadily grew.¹¹

The old Greek town, within Constantine's master plan, was a mere anchor point. Inside, it remained untouched; its pagan shrines were left to decay; a Christian community center, close to the Greek Wall, was remodeled and enlarged by Constantine, but we don't know how. Named H. Eirene, Holy Peace, it continued to serve as cathedral until H. Sophia was completed in 360, and for some time afterwards the old H. Eirene and the splendid new H. Sophia jointly functioned as the cathedral. Only in 532, when it burned down in the Nika riot, was the old Eirene replaced by Justinian's church, as it stands, though remodeled in the eighth century.¹² The Roman part of the old town naturally became Constantine's government and palace quarter. Ever since it was laid out in A.D. 196, it had sheltered some of the representative splendor appropriate to such a function: the porticoed *tetrastōon*, a hippodrome, a large bath, some administrative buildings, and a double-storied, porticoed street—the *Regia*—leading from the Severan Old Gate to what became the entrance to Constantine's palace. Constantine's architects beautified, enlarged, or rebuilt on a grander scale these elements.¹³ The porticoes of the *Regia* and the Zeuxippus Bath were filled with statuary, gathered from all over—"Dedicatur Constantinopolis omnium civitatum nuditate," says Jerome. The *tetrastōon*, enlarged, became the Augusteōn, a porticoed square and the focus of the government quarter; at its east



39. Constantinople, aerial view as of 1918. Right foreground, hippodrome and Blue Mosque (Sultan Ahmet); left, the palace site; further left, H. Sophia; far left, H. Eirene



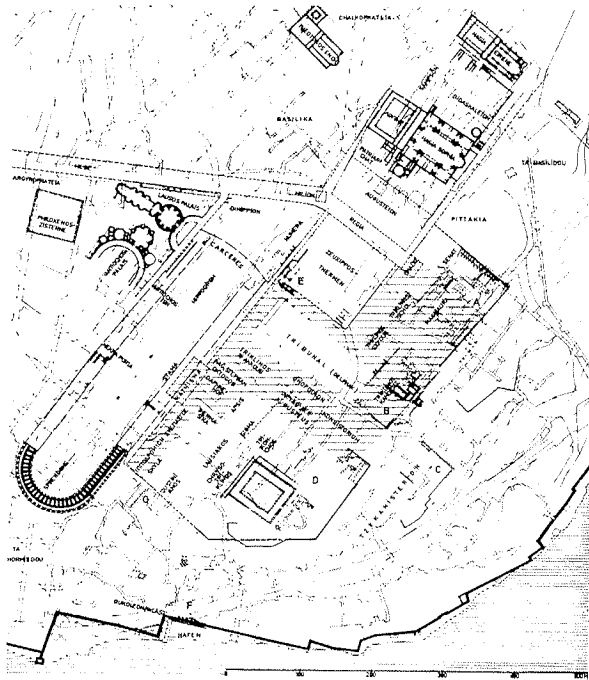
40. Constantinople, hippodrome in fifteenth century(?), engraving, 1580



41. Constantinople, hippodrome, obelisk, base showing emperor enthroned in *kathisma*

end rose the Senate House, preceded by a colonnaded porch and embellished with statues and reliefs, inside and out. But all this is known only from literary sources and hence is conjectural in detail. The only Constantinian structure in that zone to survive is the circus, the hippodrome (fig. 39). Its outline marked out in front of the Blue Mosque runs close to 450 meters in length and 120 meters in width, three-quarters the size of the Circus Maximus in Rome. At the curved end, the *sphendonē*, the arcaded substructures still rise 20 meters high from the slope; and while the Egyptian obelisk on the *spina* was planted only under Theodosius I, two generations after Constantine's death, and the second obelisk later still, it was he who set up on the *spina* a row of ancient statuary and the serpent tripod from Delphi. An engraving of late sixteenth-century date, based, it seems, on a fifteenth-century drawing, shows further remains in place: more objects on the *spina*; the *carceres* whence the competing chariots started at the right, the northeastern end; and opposite, rising from the substructures and enveloping the curved wall of the *sphendonē*, a freestanding trabeated colonnade (fig. 40). Halfway down the length of the racecourse, accessible from and part of the palace, rose the imperial box, the *kathisma*, where Constantine on May 11, 330, presided over the inauguration ceremonies for his new city, enthroned as was Theodosius sixty years later (fig. 41).¹⁴

Apparently, within Constantine's building program the hippodrome received first priority, together with the construction of the city walls. Not only was a circus, a hippodrome, integral to any imperial residence, starting with the Circus Maximus in Rome at the foot of the palaces on the Palatine, but since tetrarchic times a circus had gained new importance, for it was the place where the emperor encountered and showed himself to the mass of his subjects, the people. The meeting between the god emperor and the people, then, was a religious and State action. Constantine, while modifying the pagan elements of the ritual, nonetheless retained the act proper. The hippodrome, being the site of the emperor's epiphany, was the most important part of the palace quarter to be completed. Other buildings of the palace compound are known only from descriptions, and they need not have been completed much before, if by the time of, Constantine's death: the Daphnē palace with the audience hall, the Magnaura, and the Banqueting Hall of the Nineteen Couches. Only the overall site of Constantine's palace is known; of the structures, only later additions of fifth- and sixth-century and later date have come to light on the south slope of the hill. The Constantinian core seems to have extended from the *kathisma* east and north to the end of the *Regia*, near the Augusteōn Square (fig. 42).¹⁵ There, the palace entrance rose, sheltering the Bronze Gate. Above, a panel painting depicted Constantine with the Chi-Rho, Christ's monogram, whether on his helmet or on a



42. Constantinople, hippodrome and palace site, fourth century, plan

standard, and accompanied by his sons; spear in hand he pierced, so Eusebius interprets the picture, the Enemy in the guise of a sea monster; the picture may well be reflected in late fourth-century coins (fig. 43). Still, as the composition first appeared over the gate of Constantine's palace, the enemy may well have been mortal—the defeated Licinius—as was customary in late Roman numismatic iconography.¹⁶

A short distance north of the Augusteōn and south of the old Eirene church, Constantine laid out the new cathedral, later dedicated to Holy Wisdom, H. Sophia, and replaced in 532 by Justinian's grand structure. To this day, the domes of Justinian's building and at a short distance of H. Eirene, likewise rebuilt by him, dominate the eastward hill of the city (fig. 44). Constantine's H. Sophia, to be sure, was different in plan. But, like Justinian's, it would have risen over its surroundings. Like the hippodrome it was an integral part of the government area and almost an appendage to the adjoining imperial residence. Indeed, as did the imperial box at the hippodrome, it linked up with the palace by corridors and stairs to facilitate the emperor's solemn appearances. The situation of both emperor and Church had changed since, fourteen years before, the

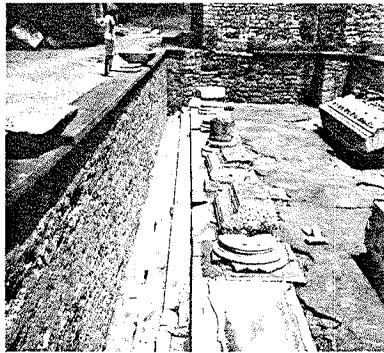


43. Emperor subduing monster, gold solidus, 365–75

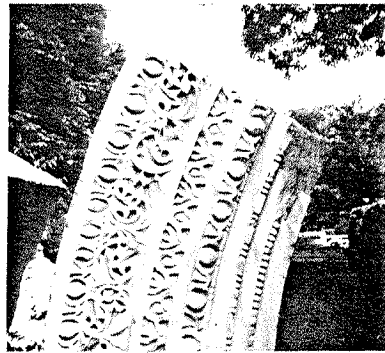


44. Constantinople, view as of ca. 1930. Background, left, H. Eirene and right, H. Sophia

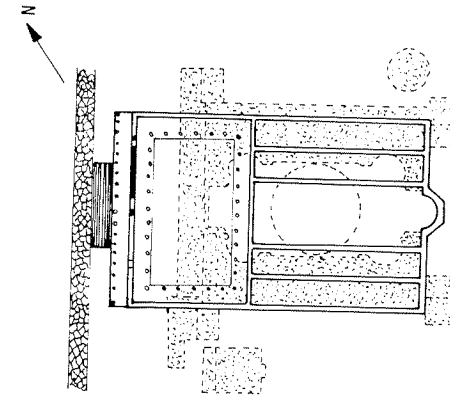
Lateran cathedral was placed at the remotest spot in Rome. Begun, apparently, in 326 or thereabouts—not, as frequently stated, after Constantine's death—H. Sophia was consecrated only in 360. Damaged by fire in 404, it was reconsecrated eleven years later, but it burned to the ground in the Nika riot in 532. In its place, Justinian built his H. Sophia, that marvel of daring imagination and deficient statics which by a sheer miracle still rises aloft. Of the church consecrated in 415, a small section has come to light: a flight of stairs extending in front of the atrium and numbers of fragments belonging to a propylaeum, such as bases *in situ* (fig. 45), capitals, friezes, and segments of arches, coffered vaults, and pediments, all splendidly carved in the spirit of classical art reborn (fig. 46). The church to which they belonged must have been equally sumptuous, and it was huge: the atrium front (and hence, in all likelihood the church further east) measures over 66 meters in width, and, including the depth of the atrium, it cannot well have been shorter than 120 meters. In brief, it would have covered the surface of Justinian's church (fig. 47).¹⁷ Inside, the sources tell us, the nave was flanked by aisles, presumably two on either side, supported by "amazing and miraculous" columns and surmounted by galleries. This plan, I submit, dates back to the early fourth century. Indeed, Constantine himself had financed the construction of just such a basilica—in Jerusalem, the martyrium on Golgotha east of Christ's Sepulchre in the Anastasis Rotunda. Eusebius has left a description, as always open to misinterpretation, and until the excavation, begun some years ago but immediately interrupted, is completed, the few surviving elements can only lead to questionable reconstructions, including those I have attempted in the past. However, we *do* know that, like the fifth-century H. Sophia, it was a basilica, with propylaeum, atrium, nave, four aisles, and galleries, albeit on a small



45. Constantinople, H. Sophia, fifth century, propylaeum, stairs and bases of colonnade



46. Constantinople, H. Sophia, fifth century, propylaeum, arch, detail



47. Constantinople, H. Sophia, fourth-century plan, hypothetical reconstruction overlaid on Justinian's church (stippled)

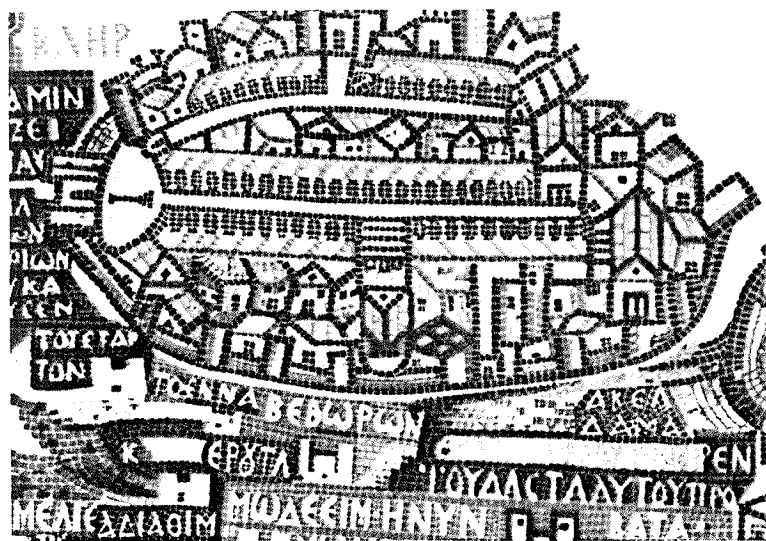
scale when compared with church foundations of Constantine's in Rome and, apparently, in Constantinople. A bread mold of seventh- or eighth-century date and a sixth-century mosaic map at Madaba render, if summarily, the sequence of structures in Jerusalem: a flight of stairs, a colonnaded propylaeum, an atrium, the martyrium-basilica, the rotunda of the Holy Sepulchre (figs. 48 and 50). Begun in 325–26, the structures were consecrated in 335, and it happens that the names and the origin of the two men in charge of construction are known: Zenobius, an architect and presumably a local man; and Eustathios, "presbyter from Constantinople," architect or administrator.¹⁸ In the years from 325 to 335, as Constantinople was just being mapped out, his coming from there to Jerusalem means in all likelihood that he was an imperial emissary. Concomitantly, the pattern of the Jerusalem buildings—flight of stairs, propylaeum, double aisles, and galleries—is a *hapax legomenon* in the Holy Land. In Constantinople it remained common from the early fifth century on, if not before, as witness H. Sophia as rebuilt in 404–15, and from there it spread all over the Aegean coastlands: the Studios church in Constantinople and H. Demetrios in Thessalonikē are just two examples (fig. 49). Hence one may conjecture that the type was developed around 326 at Constantine's court in his new capital, and used in the very same years both by Eustathios at Jerusalem and, on a much grander scale, for the cathedral of Constantinople. This, the first H. Sophia, became the root from which the type spread. In short, I believe that the H. Sophia burned in 532 was actually Constantine's church, albeit repaired and redecorated in the early fifth century. The fire in 404 would have destroyed the roof and damaged the interior, but large parts of the



48. Bread mold, seventh to eighth century, showing Constantine's buildings at Holy Sepulchre, Jerusalem: *from left*, propylaeum(?) basilica, Anastasis Rotunda; *below*, interior of basilica(?) and paving of courtyard



49. Thessalonikē, H. Demetrios, interior



50. Madaba, mosaic map, sixth century, detail showing Jerusalem with colonnaded streets and, *center (upside down)*, churches on Golgotha

structure and certainly the plan would have remained; indeed, the front wall of the atrium behind the propylaeum of 415 may well be Constantine's. Also, a basilica of mammoth proportions such as the one that perished in 532 fits better than anything else the building mania of that colossal egocentric, Constantine.¹⁹

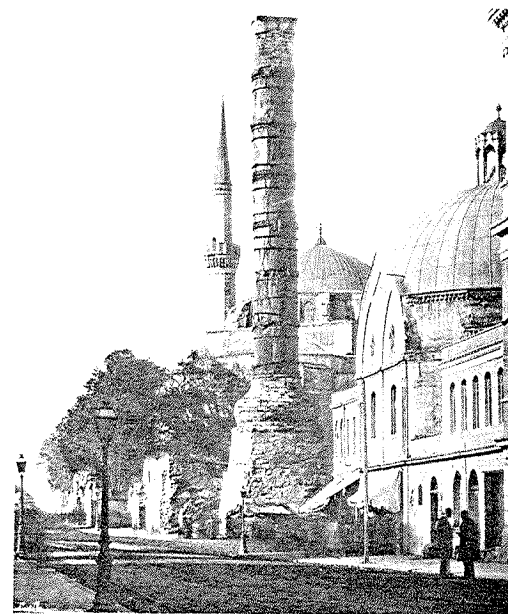
The construction of a church that size would obviously have taken time. But thirty-four years, from 326 to 360, seems excessive. Constantine could get things done in a hurry, as he showed at the Lateran and at St. Peter's in Rome. If work on H. Sophia, the cathedral, went so slowly, it means that he did not give it first priority in the building program for his new city. Other structures were of greater import—the palace, the hippodrome, and his forum and column, all finished by May 330.

The Forum of Constantine certainly was a key element in planning his city (fig. 37). Laid out in front of the Old Gate of the Severan town, it was the kingpin which linked Constantine's government area and palace in the old town to the new residential sectors extending north and west. From the Forum started the main arteries of the new quarters: the ancient Via Egnatia, called, inside Constantine's city walls, the Mese; and, branching off some 700 meters from the Forum, the street leading to the north gate, the Edirne Kapu or Adrianople Gate. At the branching-off point a square, the Philadelphion, sheltered, perhaps on column shafts, the groups of the tetrarchs now in Venice, whatever their place of origin. From the Philadelphion to the Forum the Mese was flanked by colonnaded porticoes, as was its older continuation, the Regia, leading from the Forum to the palace gate: street-colonnades, as for centuries had been customary in Hellenistic and late Roman city planning, witness Djemila in North Africa or, for that matter, Jerusalem as seen on the Madaba mosaic map (fig. 50). Constantine's Forum in his new capital occupied the crest of one of the hills, higher even than that on which rose palace, hippodrome, and H. Sophia. Circular or oval in plan, the Forum was enclosed by double-tiered colonnades and was linked both to the Mese and the Regia by arched passageways.²⁰ In general, then, it recalls circular piazzas as known elsewhere in the Roman East. However, in contradistinction to such other piazzas (that at Gerasa, for instance), Constantine's Forum was focused on a center column; this, Constantine's Column, was its true *raison d'être*. Badly damaged in a fire—hence its name, the Burned Column, the column survives, provided in 1701 with an ungainly socle and base, 2.35 meters above the old forum level (fig. 51). The shaft, roughly 25 meters high, 2.90 meters in diameter, and composed of nine porphyry drums, originally rested with its base on a tall socle, 5 meters high and enclosed in a vaulted and arched *tetrapylon* raised on five steps—a sanctuary, the sources suggest, enclosing an altar for celebrating Mass (fig. 52). Atop the column stood a bronze statue of

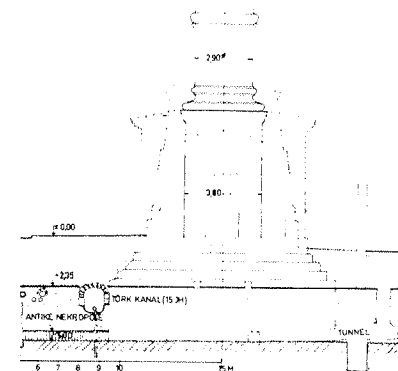
Constantine, transformed, so the sources say, from one of Helios by substituting Constantine's head for that of the god; nonetheless, the Sun God's seven rays still radiated from the emperor's head. His left hand held a lance, his right a globe, surmounted in all likelihood by a Tychē—the latter a symbol of the city's good fortune rather than a goddess. A small representation of column and statue as hallmark of Constantinople appears on the *Tabula Peutingeriana*, a reliable thirteenth-century copy of a second-century map as revised in the fifth century—in its main features it coincides with the descriptions given by early Byzantine sources, except that under the hands of the copyists the globe has turned into a wreath (fig. 53). The resemblance to figures of Helios on both third-century and still later Constantinian coins—rays, lance, globe, and all—is obvious (fig. 54).²¹

What the new quarters beyond the Forum of Constantine looked like remains, to all practical intent, unknown. The mansions, provided for wealthy settlers, may have resembled those of fifth- and sixth-century date known from Antioch. Whether they were loosely scattered or built close to one another is conjectural. Middle- and lower-class housing presumably was left to private initiative (read, more often than not, building speculation): multifamily dwellings, two and more stories high; single-family houses; hovels of all descriptions; or mansions with rent-producing shops along the street. How much of such diversified housing had gone up by the time Constantine died remains an open question. It grew rapidly in the century from 350 to 450. But as early as the second half of the fourth century, numerous estates of great gentlemen spread in the suburbs outside Constantine's Wall, presumably interspersed with middle-class housing, and by 412 these suburbs had become so heavily populated as to require the construction, ca. 1.5 kilometers further west, of the new Theodosian Wall. The inner city, covering the surface of the Greek, Roman, and Constantinian town, was so overbuilt as to need zoning regulations by 450, forbidding housing more than ten stories high. Under Constantine that day was still far off. His "sketch of a city" at best outlined the map of the future, tracing streets and building lots and preparing or providing essential utilitarian construction. To be sure, Constantine apparently also planned to satisfy the spiritual needs of a Christian population, expected to grow rapidly, by founding churches as the need arose. In the early thirties he commissioned fifty Bibles to be written for churches to be built in his new city—obviously as a reserve. But Eusebius is suspiciously vague in naming any church begun or completed by 335 or 337 which he could have seen when in Constantinople—except one.²²

In fact, only one church was both begun and completed by Constantine in his very own city: his mausoleum church, the Holy Apostles. Planted



51. Constantinople, Column of Constantine as of ca. 1880–90



52. Constantinople, Column of Constantine, socle, reconstruction



53. Constantinopolis, personified, with Constantine's Column, *Tabula Peutingeriana*, detail

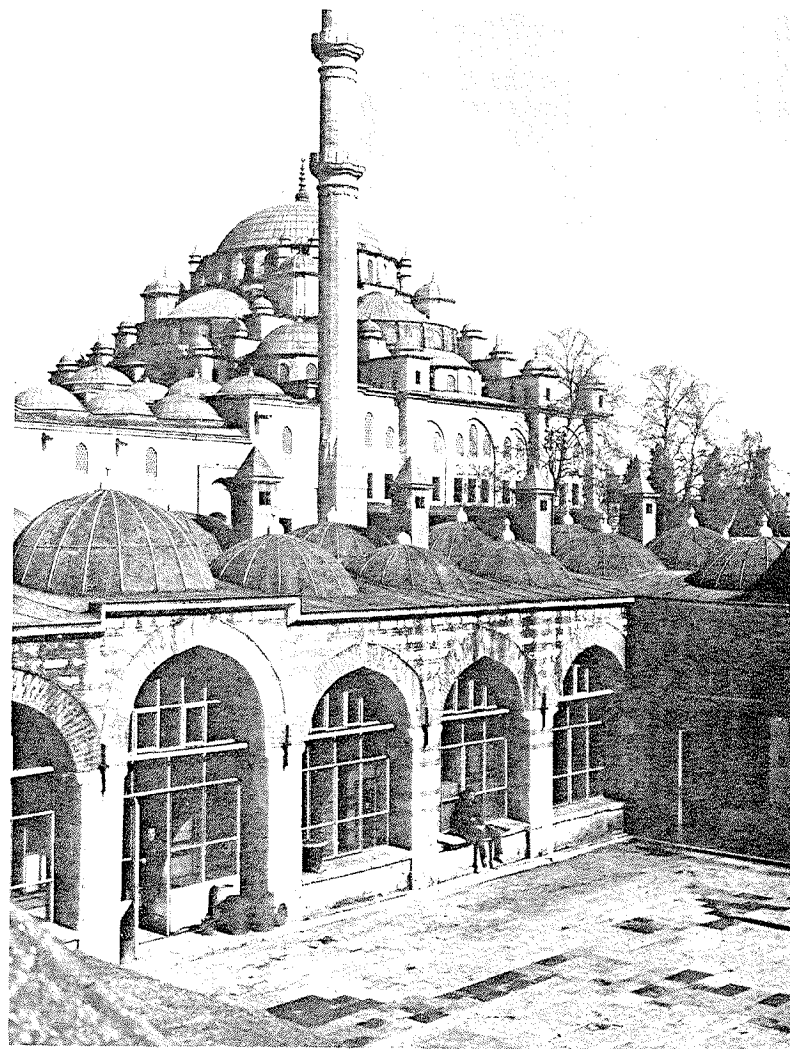


54. Helios, coin

on the highest point of the area inside the Constantinian Walls (fig. 37) and close to them near the Adrianople Gate, it was complete when the emperor was buried inside it in May or June 337, Eusebius apparently being an eye witness. Justinian replaced it by a new structure; consecrated in 550, it was remodeled several times over in the following centuries—S. Marco in Venice and a number of miniatures in Byzantine manuscripts seem to reflect it as it stood in the twelfth century. Between 1461 and 1473 it gave way to a mosque, the Fatih of Mehmet II; remodeled so thoroughly, from 1761 to 1771, as to amount to a rebuilding on a monumental scale, the Fatih to this day dominates the city and its skyline, as presumably did the Apostle church of Justinian and, earlier, that of Constantine (fig. 55).²³ In fact, by the site chosen Constantine's mausoleum church already made unusual claims. Rising inside the city walls at the farthest point from the palace, it defied both the ancient Roman taboo against burial within the city limits and the recent tetrarchic custom of placing the emperor's mausoleum inside the palace precinct, as witness Spalato or Thessalonikē. Only one example of a sitting similar to Constantine's comes readily to mind: the mausoleum of Augustus in Rome, erected outside the "Servian" city but enclosed by and close to the later Aurelian Walls, far from the palaces on the Palatine.

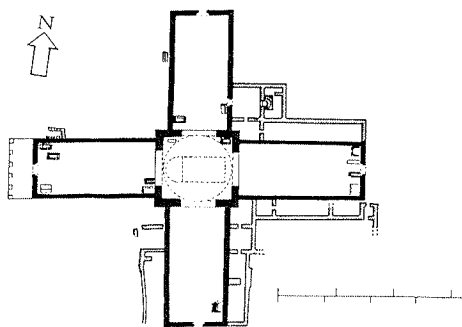
Eusebius' *Life of Constantine* appears to be the only source from which to envisage Constantine's church and the surrounding buildings.²⁴ The church, from his account, rose within a large courtyard, enveloped by colonnaded porticoes, to which were attached exedrae, fountains and guardhouses, large thermae, and imperial living quarters, οἶκοι βασιλικοί. Whether many of these appendages by 337 were still in the planning stage, as is likely, matters little. The thermae, the Κωνσταντινιάναι, apparently were built only after 345.²⁵ The church, though, was ready for Constantine's funeral in 337.²⁶ A reference in a poem by Gregory of Nazianz to its cross shape, presumably with arms of equal or nearly equal length, is corroborated by filiations of the plan; the late fourth-century Apostle church in Milan, now incorporated in the Romanesque church of S. Nazaro (see below, fig. 71), a nearly contemporary church excavated at Antioch-Kaoussié, and a fifth-century church at Gerasa in Jordan are but a few examples (figs. 56 and 57). Whether in Constantine's Apostle church the arms were aisleless as at Antioch or divided into nave and aisles as at Gerasa remains open. Eusebius only says that the church was "of indescribable height," that the walls inside were sheathed with colored marble, and that the ceilings were coffered and gilded.²⁷ Outside, the roof shone with gilded bronze tiles, and a δωμάτιον, "a little house," enclosed by bronze grills rose, Eusebius says, from the roof. If so, it would presumably have surmounted the crossing.

But, given the notorious imprecision of Eusebius' architectural descriptions, one wonders whether by chance this δωμάτιον or another one rose inside in the center of the church over the catafalque: an οἶκος, as later writers seem to refer to it, a canopy inside the enclosed altar site and flanked by twelve "sacred στήλαι" commemorating the apostles—cenotaphs, honorific pillars, inscribed plaques, whatever the meaning—

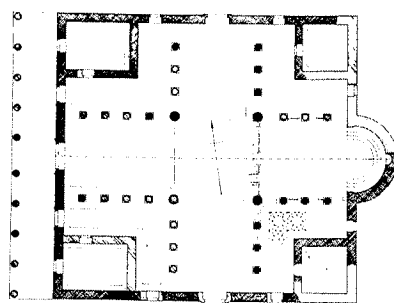


55. Constantinople, Fatih mosque from the northwest

on either side.²⁸ Moreover, Eusebius says, Constantine had arranged for Mass to be celebrated near or over his tomb. Thus, to quote verbatim, “this thrice-blessed soul is glorified jointly with the greetings addressed to the apostles and it is a place of gathering for God’s People and worthy of divine service and the celebration of Mass.” The arrangements willed by Constantine were, to put it mildly, extraordinary. To orthodox Christians they were shocking; so much so that in 359 his son Constantius had the sarcophagus removed, first to H. Akakios. Later it was brought to the mausoleum rotunda which Constantius began to build, attached to yet separate from the Holy Apostles.²⁹



56. Antioch-Kaoussié, St. Babylas, plan



57. Gerasa, Church of the Apostles, Prophets, and Martyrs, 464–65, plan

The palace where Constantine resided and the hippodrome where he appeared to his subjects, the Forum where on the column his statue rose high over the city, the Apostle church and his catafalque—all mark the city as his: *Κωνσταντινούπολις*, the *πόλις ἐπώνυμος*, the second Rome, alternate capital of the world, with the hallmarks pertaining to the one on the Tiber—seven hills, if hard to list; palace and hippodrome, as on and below the Palatine; Forum and column, like Trajan’s; an imperial mausoleum within the walls, like that of Augustus, Rome’s second founder. Yet, to Constantine his very own city was neither the dream of an egomaniac nor an *imitatio Romae* pure and simple. She was, I submit, an ex-voto offering to Christ, who had given him victory over Licinius and with it the rule over the Empire. What he saw in the city “on which on God’s behest I have bestowed forever my own name” interlocks with his thanksgiving to Christ and with his many-faceted understanding at that point in his life of Christianity, his place within it, and his special relation qua emperor to Christ.³⁰

Clearly, Constantine’s city was not the Christian capital Eusebius would have liked to see. The cult of traditional pagan deities, their shrines and

festivals, to be sure, Constantine seems to have left in the old city to decay slowly, not admitting them to the new city quarters. Zeus, Hera, and the rest of Olympus were dead, after all. A shrine of the Tychē—not a deity, she—was allowed to survive, or was even newly built; so allegedly was one of Rhea of immemorable age, but her statue was changed into the figure of an *orans*, although these are stories told by a latter-day neo-pagan antiquarian.³¹ Certainly, the statues of the old gods and their mementos collected from all over were set up by Constantine—neither out of reverence nor, as Eusebius has it, for ridicule³²—they just belonged to the decor of any late antique city and certainly to that of the second Rome.³³ On the other hand, Eusebius’s tale of Constantine’s placing “in the forum”—his own?—groups of the Good Shepherd and of Daniel and the lions smacks of Christian reinterpretation. The painting over the palace gate, Constantine piercing an enemy, likewise could have referred to his victory over Licinius, rather than *the Enemy*, though the second meaning may have been subintended. More clearly than elsewhere, the embarrassment of Eusebius in trying to present Constantinople as the Christian capital which he would have liked it to be becomes obvious in the intentional vagueness of his references to churches built by the emperor in his capital. “The city that bears his name he caused to shine with many sanctuaries and with very large martyrs’ shrines and with the most beautiful houses both in the suburbs and within. . . .” is a statement so general as to amount to an evasion: either the churches were barely begun, like H. Sophia; or they were insignificant shrines and community centers, like H. Eirene, remodeled under Constantine; or they were in the planning stage. By the time Eusebius last visited Constantinople, presumably at the time of Constantine’s funeral in 337, apparently no church was completed, except the Apostle church.³⁴

No ordinary Christian capital, then, this Constantine’s Very Own City—for that it was, first and foremost. One only need view the places where and the monuments in which Constantine reveals himself to his subjects on the Bosphorus. From the palace, to paraphrase Eusebius—at the eastern tip of Constantinople, one ought to remember—he comes forth at sunrise to let shine, as if simultaneously with the light of the sky, the rays of his generosity on all who approach him, just as the sun, Helios, sheds on all the globe the radiance of his glow. His epiphany as Helios comes to the fore with even greater force both in his portrait statue atop the column in his Forum and in the rites established by himself for the consecration of the city in the hippodrome on May 11, 330, and continued into the sixth century.³⁵ Descending the winding stairs from his apartments and enthroned in the *kathisma*, the imperial box, Constantine presided over the games, greeted by the ritual acclamations of the crowd. In a variation on the age-old custom of carrying on a char-

iot in the religious procession opening the circus games the statue of the emperor among those of the gods,³⁶ a gilded wooden statue of Constantine rode into the arena, flanked by soldiers in parade uniform carrying candles. Rather than an ordinary portrait, however, the statue was a copy of that on the column, Constantine as Helios. After making the round of the arena, the chariot stopped opposite the *kathisma* and, so Constantine willed, the then ruling emperor was to make *proskynesis* before the image. The ritual continued far into the sixth century—*καὶ νῦν*, says Malalas³⁷—revealing Constantine as on May 11, 330, he had revealed himself to his subjects: in the guise of the Sun God, riding on the sun chariot and carrying in his hand the Tychē of Constantinople as the divine founder of the city on which at Christ's behest he had bestowed his own name—a strange contradiction, indeed.

Equally strange is what is known of the ceremonies at the column on the Forum, surmounted by the bronze colossus of Helios bearing Constantine's features. On an altar inside the tetrapylon which enclosed socle and base of the column, Mass was celebrated, lamps were lit, incense was burned, and prayers and supplications were offered "to Constantine's image on the column . . . as if to God to avert disasters," or so an outraged Photius interpreted the report of Philostorgius, who as late as the turn of the fourth century witnessed the ritual. Seen through the eyes of a ninth-century patriarch, the rites were outrageous indeed. Popular superstition and emotion, seventy years after Constantine, had swamped the liturgical elements of a regular service; to the Christian masses, the founder of their city had become its tutelary divinity. "The goings-on at the catafalque and at the column," as a fifth-century eyewitness called them, continued for a long time, and as late as 533, when an earthquake shook Constantinople, the people streamed to the Forum, "with supplications and prayers and watching through the night."³⁸ No regular service is mentioned; rather it was by then an aliturgical *statio*, a gathering of the faithful without benefit of clergy. On the other hand, in the late twenties or in 330, the Christian consecration service for the city may well have taken place at the foot of the column. Theophanes expressly states that the column marked "the very spot where Constantine ordered the city to be built," as indeed it is there that the new quarters were hinged to the old sectors; Malalas refers to the celebration of Mass at the consecration ceremonies while describing Forum and column in his periegesis through the city. Finally, an eighth-century text, if it can be trusted, tells of the statue being placed atop the column accompanied by a service, the priest offering a prayer and the people chanting the Kyrie.³⁹

Constantine certainly meant his statue to rise high over his capital, shining forth to his people like Helios. For centuries Hellenistic rulers and Roman emperors had usurped for their portraits on coins the radiat-

ing crown of the Sun God, and for a generation or more prior to Constantine the Invincible Sun, *Sol Invictus*, had been the Roman emperor's Divine Companion, his heavenly protector and double. Thus, emperor and Sun God appear on coins, profiles overlapping; they are, as Kantorowicz phrased it, interchangeable magnitudes. Far into Constantine's time solar imagery permeates official rhetoric and coinage: as late as 313 the Sun God appears as the Divine Companion of Constantine in the traditional double portrait (fig. 31). By himself the god is not dropped from Constantine's coins before 325 (fig. 54), and in the late twenties or the thirties in a well-known inscription the citizens of Termessos in Asia Minor still address Constantine as the New Helios, the New Sun.⁴⁰ Of course, if we imagine ἥλιος written lowercase, the pagan connotation disappears. The Sun remained an interchangeable likeness, a *τύπος* of the Christian as it had been of the pagan Roman emperor, and Eusebius never ceases to shower on Constantine the features and epithets proper to the sun: from his palace he issues forth like the sun at dawn; at Nicaea he enters, "a heavenly messenger of the Lord, shining as with rays of light, glowing with the fiery radiance of a purple robe and adorned with the gleaming transparency of precious stones"; and, in Heaven after death, he is "resplendent in a brilliant garment of light."⁴¹ Who could help thinking of the shining glory of the Lord?

However, the trouble lay right there. Constantine felt no qualms about manifesting himself as Helios. More orthodox Christians would bridle at the idea; not so much or not only for its pagan, but for its Christian implications. Had not the features of the Sun God ever since the third century been fused into the figure of Christ? He was the New Sun, addressed just as Constantine had been by the citizens of Termessos; He was the Sun of Justice, the Sun of Salvation, the Rising Sun, the One from the East.⁴² He rose in the chariot of Helios, seven rays shooting from his halo, as in a mosaic on the vault of a small mausoleum below St. Peter's in Rome, buried when the foundations of the basilica were laid around 322 (fig. 58).⁴³ This very merger of Helios into Christ would have made scandalous, I suspect, to strict Christians the epiphany of Constantine as Helios and the celebration of Christian services at the column. Eusebius in his rhetorical imagery had gone to the very limit in bestowing on Constantine the attributes of the Sun. The further equation with Helios and implicitly with Christ went beyond what he considered possible for a Christian. Hence, I suggest, his silence regarding column, statue, and services and the obvious disapproval of late fourth- and fifth-century writers.

Within Constantine's understanding of Christianity, on the other hand, his own epiphany as Helios and the implied link to Christ seem in no way extraordinary. Nor did he apparently feel disturbed by the provi-

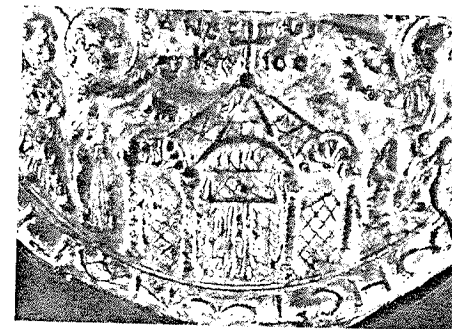
sions he had made for his burial in the Apostle church: his catafalque's being flanked by the twelve *σπήλαια*, quasi-images of the disciples, to whom he thus implicitly claimed superior rank; his commanding Mass to be celebrated forever over or near his sarcophagus; the gathering of the faithful to worship at his mortal remains; and the buildings planned or erected around his burial church—the precinct laid out to hold large crowds, the baths for the convenience of those come from afar, and the palace, presumably for visits by future emperors. All was designed to make his resting place the center of continued veneration and the goal of pilgrimages. Contemporaries, as well as later generations, could hardly fail to think of another sepulchre which he had had his architects lay out a decade before: Christ's on Golgotha. There, too, the tomb was surmounted by a canopy, an *οἶκος* or *δωμάτιον*, supported by twelve columns arranged in pairs (fig. 59); there, too, it was enclosed, if not under Constantine, then shortly later, in a commemorative structure, the Anastasis Rotunda, as its focus and *raison d'être*; and there, too, provision had been made for continued veneration and for pilgrimages.⁴⁴

Constantine's portraiture in the guise of Helios, the consecration ceremonies of Constantinople in the hippodrome and the services at his column, the arrangements he willed for his burial place in the Apostle church—all seem today odd ways for the first Christian emperor to manifest himself to the people whom he wanted to lead to Christ. Starting with Eusebius and continuing to this day, theologians and historians have tried desperately to explain away what they considered embarrassing. The placing of the tomb and its veneration have been defended as reconcilable with Christian custom: Constantine merely wanted to share in the prayers addressed to the apostles; he saw himself as one of them and their leader.⁴⁵ Or else both the situation in the Apostle church and the Helios-Constantine statue have been interpreted as survivals of paganism, harmless in themselves: the apostles with their leader revived the Thirteen Gods venerated in Lycia, and thus guaranteed Constantine's place among the gods;⁴⁶ or Constantine by family tradition and early religious experience was so firmly rooted in the sun cult that he felt quite natural his continued veneration of and identification with the Sun God, "symbol of the dynasty," even after his conversion.⁴⁷ The ceremonies in the hippodrome have been interpreted as but a reversion to the ruler cult. Rarely has the resemblance between Constantine's own and Christ's burial places and his resulting claim, first pointed out by Heisenberg⁴⁸ (and branded as a monstrosity),⁴⁹ been carried to its conclusion: that Constantine viewed himself as an earthly manifestation of Christ, comparable to Him, albeit within the limits of the *condition humaine*.

Certainly this is contrary to Christian belief as commonly understood and shocking to many in their picture of the first Christian emperor. To



58. Rome, St. Peter's, Mausoleum of Julii, mosaic showing Christ as Helios



59. Ampulla, detail showing canopy over Holy Sepulchre



60. Constantine's consecration coin, showing him rising to heaven

Constantine it in no way deviated from Christianity. He was by 330 a firm Christian, profoundly religious and deeply conscious of his mission as a Christian emperor to lead the world to God. But precisely because he was the first Christian emperor, his Christianity was bound to have a note of its own. The place held within a Christian universe by a Christian emperor was crucial. An emperor by definition was a god. Constantine, deeply imbued with the responsibilities and prerogatives of his imperial position and mission, was not yet ready to abdicate his inherent divinity in favor of a "by the grace of God," as would the next generation on the throne, born and brought up as Christians. He had to fit his godhead as best he could into a scheme of the universe in which only the One God could exist.⁵⁰ This was possible for him within the framework of political theologies both inherited and developed by court theologians such as Eusebius: the concept, deeply rooted in the Hellenistic tradition, of the ruler and the god being linked to one another in a particular and personal interaction. The god had taken his abode in the king; or the Invincible Sun, *Sol Invictus*, and the emperor were interchangeable magnitudes, the god being the emperor's double and heavenly protector. Just so, one suspects, Constantine would have seen Christ not only as the ruler of all mankind, but also as his very own godhead. To Him he stood in a highly personal relationship, almost as his pagan panegyrist twenty years before had phrased it, "The Divine Mind who to you alone deigns to reveal himself." Christ was, as it were, another *comes divinus* who guided all his steps—"quod duce te mundus surrexit in astra triumphans // hanc Constantinus victor tibi condidit aulam"—so the inscription on the triumphal arch of Old St. Peter's.⁵¹ Constantine was the *φίλος θεοῦ*, the favorite—this rather than the friend—of God, singled out and taken personally under His wing. Concomitantly, he would have seen himself as an earthly double of Christ, tied to and responsible to Him in an intimate personal relationship.

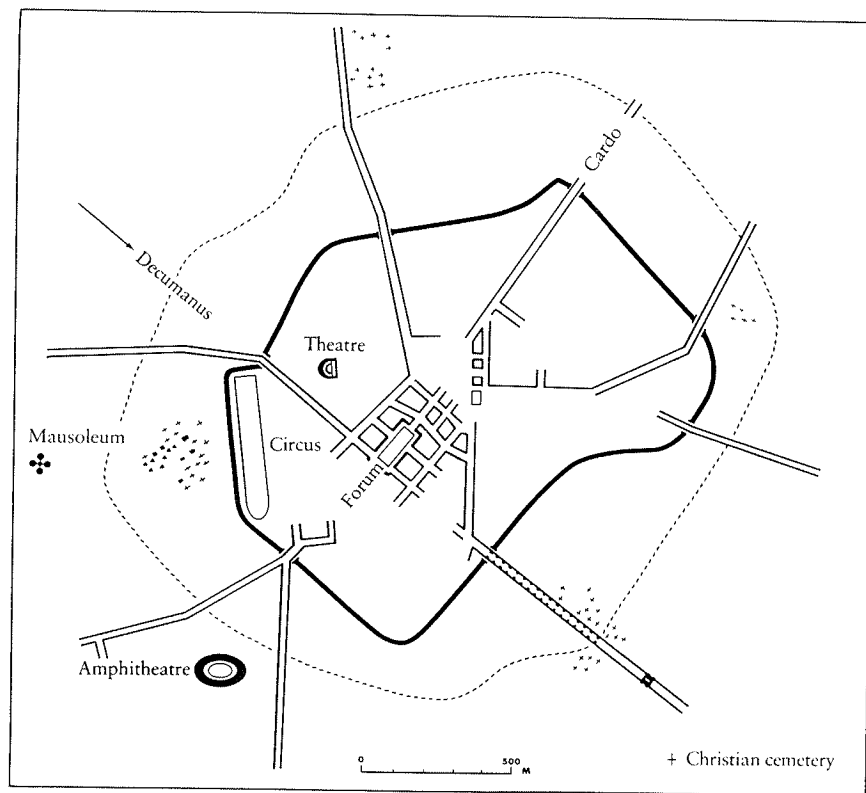
Such views, needless to say, are embedded in the concepts which underlie the political theology of Constantine, as presented by Eusebius and brilliantly interpreted in our time by Baynes, Peterson, and Ladner:⁵² the Christian Empire is but an imitation, a *mimesis*, and concomitantly a forecast of the Heavenly Kingdom. Constantine has been chosen to envisage the image of the kingdom beyond and to shape its reflection on earth.⁵³ Thus he himself is an image of Christ: an image, no more; he angrily rebukes a bishop for flattering him by saying that after death he would rule in Heaven jointly with Christ. That was blasphemy. What he had in mind was far from such *συμβασιλεία*. Christ and he were not interchangeable magnitudes. But they were parallel figures. Christ the Logos ruled in Heaven as the Father's regent, his *ὑπάρχος*. From there He guided the emperor's policies and his every step. Thus divinely guided

from above, Constantine ruled below as a regent, a *ὑπάρχος* of the Godhead with the mission of leading the world to Christianity and thus of creating on earth an imitation of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Being impervious to theological niceties, Constantine never defined the precise relationship. What mattered was that on earth in the context of politics and rulership the first Christian emperor stood for Christ. His epiphany as Helios, the Sun of Salvation, on his column would have appeared to him as natural as the celebration there of Mass; so would the *proskynesis* before a copy of that image in the hippodrome; so would, finally, the placing of his sarcophagus amidst and superior to the apostle *στήλαι*, its continued Christian veneration, and the undeniable resemblance of its arrangements to those of the Sepulchre of Christ in Jerusalem.

Following age-old custom at an emperor's death, a coin was struck in 337 to commemorate Constantine's *consecratio*, his being raised to the gods—strange, it would seem, in the case of the first Christian emperor, but not so much strange as testifying to his not quite having renounced his divinity. Even Eusebius thought it quite normal and described the coin in detail.⁵⁴ The obverse shows Constantine, the toga draped over his head, the Roman gesture traditional when approaching the godhead for sacrifice or prayer and contrary to Christian custom. On the reverse the customary *consecratio* scene is presented in a *re-interpretatio Christiana* (fig. 60). Traditionally the defunct emperor, clad or naked, was shown standing on the sun chariot placed atop the funeral pyre and surrounded by other pagan features.⁵⁵ On Constantine's coin, instead, pyre and all pagan reminiscences are omitted and the emperor, draped in a shroud, on a quadriga gallops heavenward towards the extended hand of God. Inevitably the ascension of Elijah on a fiery chariot comes to mind⁵⁶—of Elijah, who, so Cyril of Jerusalem says, was carried up *as if* to Heaven, rather than ascending there outright as did Christ.⁵⁷ Whatever the defunct Majesty might have wanted to see on his *consecratio* coin, his sons' theological advisers reduced Constantine's claims as stated all too clearly in his burial arrangements to a level defensible by more orthodox Christians. Even so, his privileged position, high above all other mortals, was acknowledged: for who aside from Elijah (and Helios) had been taken up straight as if to Heaven?

No document of Constantine's time appears to speak of his city as the Christian capital as opposed to the old one, Rome. But the monuments do—the three focal points on the map of the city as laid out by Constantine: the palace and the hippodrome, the Forum and Constantine's Column, the Apostle church and his catafalque.



61. Milan ca. 300, with location of imperial mausoleum at S. Vittore al Corpo and cemeteries (stippled)

III

MILAN

The map of Milan in the second half of the fourth century mirrors a conflict of political and religious ideas, just as that of Rome did fifty years before under Constantine, with the difference that in Milan the contenders were Christian factions and bishop versus emperor rather than an emperor turning to Christianity versus a conservative pagan senate.

Until the last decade of the third century, Milan was a respectable county seat, a commercial and administrative center among similar towns all over the Empire (fig. 61).¹ It had its city wall, forum, theatre, well-appointed mansions, warehouses, and, pretty far out, an amphitheater with as many as thirty thousand seats. Maximian Herculus, Diocletian's co-emperor, between 293 and 305 made it his residence. Situated on the crossroads of the great east-west and north-south highways from the Balkans to Gaul and from Africa and Rome to the Alpine passes and the Rhineland, it was strategically located both to counter the increasing threats from the barbarians across the Rhine and the Tweed and to maintain communications between the eastern and western halves of the Empire (fig. 36). Hence, around A.D. 300 the town was enlarged towards the northeast and provided with new walls, a large bath, the *thermae Herculiae*, a circus at the southern edge of town, and a palace located presumably nearby. Outside town, along the road to Rome, the street for a mile's length was flanked by colonnaded porticoes, and, as in Thessalonikē and in other imperial capitals in the East, the colonnades began at a tetrapylon recalling the Arch of Galerius at Thessalonikē or the Janus Quadrifrons in Rome.² Likewise out of town as custom required and