

PLAN OF THE BASILICA OF CONSTANTINE AND ITS VICINITY.



VIEW OF THE TORTICO. EAST FRONT.

THE BASILICA OF CONSTANTINE.

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The most impressive ruin in Rome is surely the three immense arches of the so-called Basilica of Constantine (Plate I), a name given to it by Nibby in 1828, on the strength of a silver denarius, found in a piece of the fallen roof, inscribed *MAXENTIVS Pius Felix AVGustus*. Prior to this date it was known as the Temple of Peace. It stands upon an artificial platform, a building out of the Velia ridge, 7,000 yards square. This grand edifice fronted towards the east (The Colosseum), three of the arches of the portico still remaining (Plate II). The interior consists of a nave and side aisles; the nave, 274 feet long by 84 feet wide, was spanned by a noble cross-groined vault 152 feet high. Facing into it are the three arches 80 feet span, and 95 feet high on the north side, only the piers of the south arches exist; the aisles, running through these arches, are 60 feet wide. Against the piers of the nave were Corinthian fluted columns of pavonazzetto marble, the third one of the right side now stands in front of Sta. Maria Maggiore, placed there by Paul V. in 1613, to support the bronze statue of the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception (Plate III). The capital is beautifully executed and far superior to anything of the time of Constantine. Sangallo used one of the bases for St. Peter's, and another was expropriated for the pedestal of the statue of Alexander Farnese in the Palazzo dei Conservatori. In the thickness of the wall of the north-east angle is a spiral (Newel) staircase leading up on to the roof, fifty-four steps of a similar staircase exist in the north-west angle; a huge fragment of this staircase lies on the marble pavement at the rear of SS. Cosma and Damiano.

After defeating Maxentius, October 27th, 312, Flavius Valerius Constantine turned this edifice into a Basilica, or Court of Justice, as no more Pagan temples were required, he cut down the windows along the south side and turned them into doorways, erecting a portico with four red porphyry columns and a flight of steps down to the Clivus Sacra Via (Plate IV); he removed the straight wall at the north side of the central arch and inserted a hemicycle tribunal pierced with niches for statues. In the centre is the imperial throne, with corbels sculptured with victories which sustained a florid cornice on which the assessors of the court could be seated; the marble base which supported the lattice railing off the tribunal remains *in situ*. Then he filled up the windows of the north side in the other two arches. Next he built up from the street, Vicus Sandularis, at the west end a tribunal, under which is a crypt 41 feet west to east, and $54\frac{1}{2}$ feet north to south, in which was placed a colossal marble statue of Constantine, the head and other fragments found in 1490 are now preserved in the court of the Palazzo dei Conservatori on the Capitoline hill (Plate V). The south side and the nave were thrown down probably by the earthquake of 1349. Granaries and smitheries were removed in 1878-80. During 1904-5 parts of the marble pavement, with fragments of stucco ornamentation and portions of the coffers of the vaulting have been uncovered. After these alterations of Constantine, from whichever portico it was entered, it presents to view a nave with a tribunal at the end and an aisle on each side.

The Vindobon Chronicle says Domitian built "eight courts of spice warehouses where is now the Basilica of Constantine and the Forum of Vespasian." Remains of these warehouses were uncovered under the south front of the Basilica in 1899-1900. They had been gutted in the fire of 192. *Herodian*, 1, 14. *Dion Cassius*, 72, 24.

"Besides the entire work, which was magnificently constructed, the Temple of the city (SS. Cosma and Damiano), and the Basilica, consecrated by the Fathers (the Senate), to the merits of the Flavii." Aurelius Victor, *De Caesaribus*, XL. 26.



COLUMN NOW IN FRONT OF ST. MARIA MAGGIORE.



BASILICA OF CONSTANTINE. SOUTH FRONT.

The Notitia (not later than 334 A.D.) mentions "Basilicam Constantinianem" as in the fourth region. The *Curiosum Urbis* (after 357) does not mention it, without it is intended in the notice "Basilicam Novam et Pauli." I believe that refers to the new Basilica of Paulus Æmilius rebuilt by Maxentius after the fire of 283.

If we remove the alterations of Constantine's time, this edifice has nothing in common with a basilica, and we may ask why Maxentius wanted a new Basilica when there were three close by in the Forum Romanum, Æmilia, Julia and Opimia. I believe the old topographers were correct and that in this grand ruin we really have remains of the Temple of Peace. "In the sixth consulship of Vespasian and the fourth of Titus, the Temple of Peace was dedicated." A.D. 75. *Dion Cassius*, 66, 15. "One of the finest works the world has ever beheld." (*Pliny*, 36, 24.) "Near the Forum Romanum." (*Suetonius Vespasian*, 9.) "One of the most beautiful and magnificent edifices in all the city." *Herodian*, 1, 45.

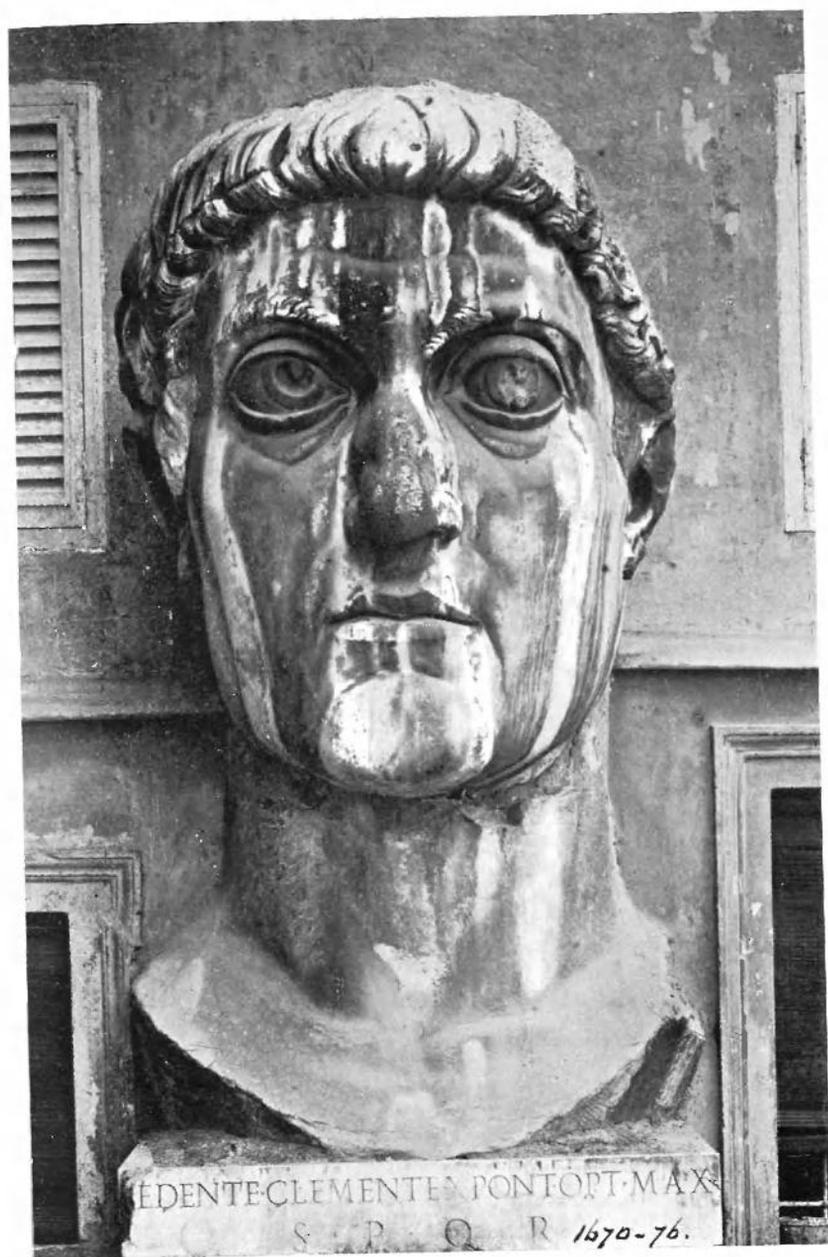
"The Fire (A.D. 192) not only consumed the Temple and the whole circle of buildings about it, but communicated itself to most of the finest structures in the city; and among the rest the Temple of Vesta was burnt." *Herodian*, 1, 45. Aulus Gellius speaks of a public library attached to the Temple, which was also burnt, 5, 21, 9. 16, 8, 2. This is the hall at the south-west end, reached by a door to the left of the west tribunal.

The Temple was probably restored by Septimius Severus as Trebellius Pollio speaks of it in the time of Victoria, A.D. 268, he wrote in the fourth century. Procopius de Bello Gothico, 4, 13, writes: "The ancient Temple of Peace which had been thunder-stricken." This is the last historical notice that we have of it, 526-34.

Maxentius, who did so much to revive the old Pagan beliefs and buildings, evidently restored the Temple of Peace, which was really a museum. *Josephus*, B.J. 7, 5, 7. *Pliny*, 34, 19. 35, 36. After Constantine's changes it was still often called the Temple of Peace. Pollio, *Triginta Tyranni*, 30, 31, 2. The *Mirabilia* calls it the Temple of Peace and Latona, and the Anonymus

Magliabecchianus speaks of the Temple of Peace as between S. Cosmo and S. Maria Nova (S. Francesca), and this exactly describes its situation. Latona was the mother of Apollo and Diana, but Latona here is probably derived from the Arco del Latrone under the north-west corner of the Basilica, a short tunnel in the Vicus Sandularius leading into the Carinae.

Entering the Basilica of Constantine from the east portico, it is evident that from this edifice Michael Angelo obtained his model for St. Peter's.



COLOSSAL HEAD OF CONSTANTINE IN THE COURT OF THE CONSERVATORI.