



Early Christian Architecture

History of Architecture

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Introduction

- There is a clear relationship and interference between the early Christian architecture and the Byzantine architecture.
- The period that is usually described as the “the early Christian architecture” is between 300 A.D. – 600 A.D.
- Constantine was the first Roman emperor to accept Christianity.
- At year 364 A.D. the Roman empire was divided for the first time into two empires, the western (Roman, capital: Rome) and the eastern (Byzantine, capital: Constantinople).
- Rome was invaded by Alaric (Gothic commander) in 410 A.D.
- This style evolved gradually from the styles preceding it, the same way many styles evolve.

Introduction

- Division in politics was strengthened by a division in belief, the western empire was Catholic one, while the eastern was Orthodox.
- Overall, the region was not very rich, and the money under the command of the Christians was not a lot.
- This led to a quick need for places of worship; buildings that can be quickly used or re-used.
- This is why the first buildings came useful were the Roman temples, which were altered after removing all the pagan symbols and appearances.
- Some believe that the early churches were developed out of the Roman house, because the early prayers and assemblies happened there secretly.

Introduction

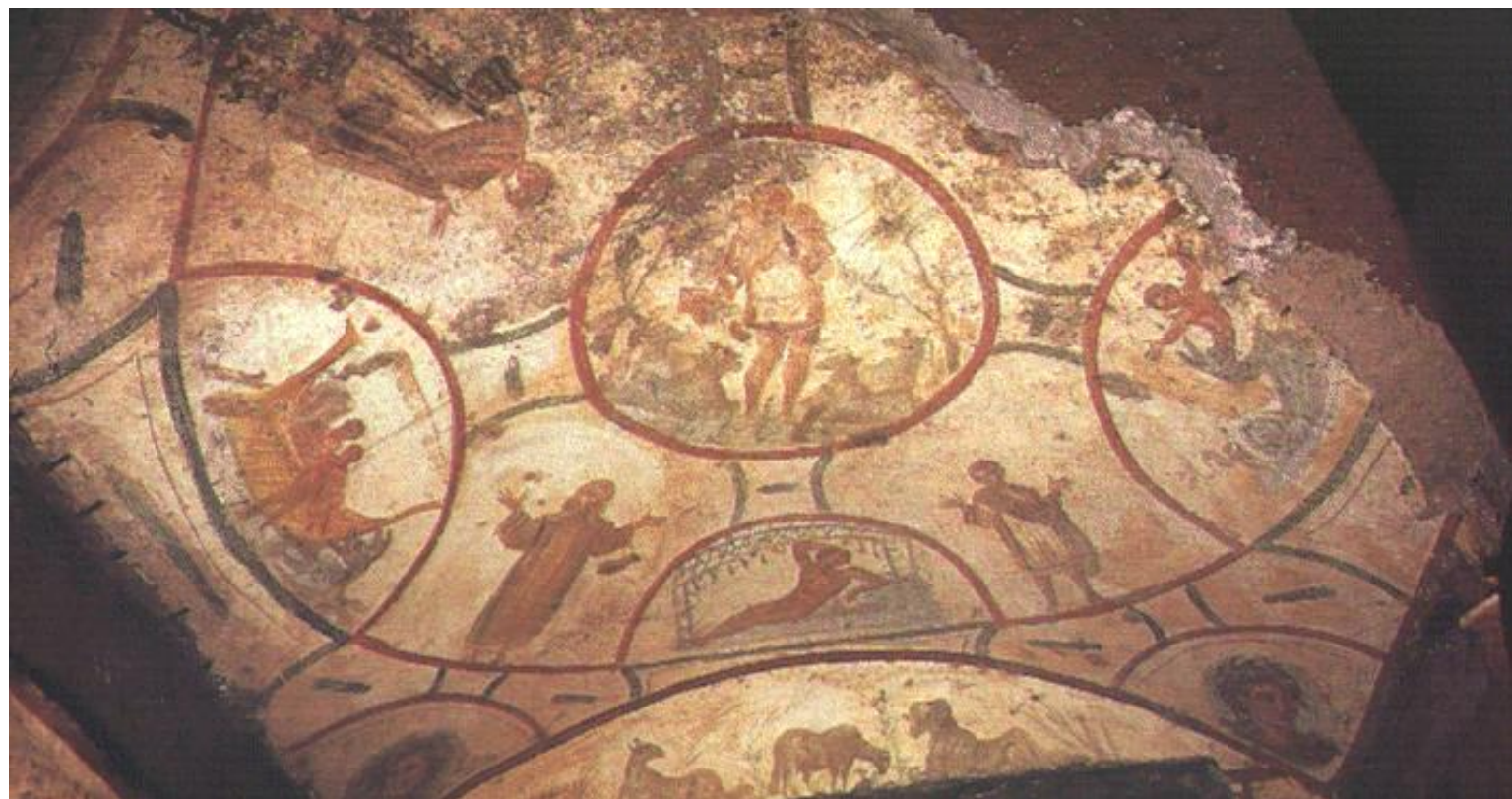


Early Christian Art

- Religion is the main subject of art in this period.
- Christianity was illegal so people used to pray in catacombs.
- Iconography becomes the main mean of communication in art.
- Early Christian art is flat, clear, with no emotions, symbolic, and it usually aims for teaching.
- Drawings are mostly frescos, and quick with low quality.
- Sculptural quality becomes very low, and sculptures are relief and rare.

Early Christian Art

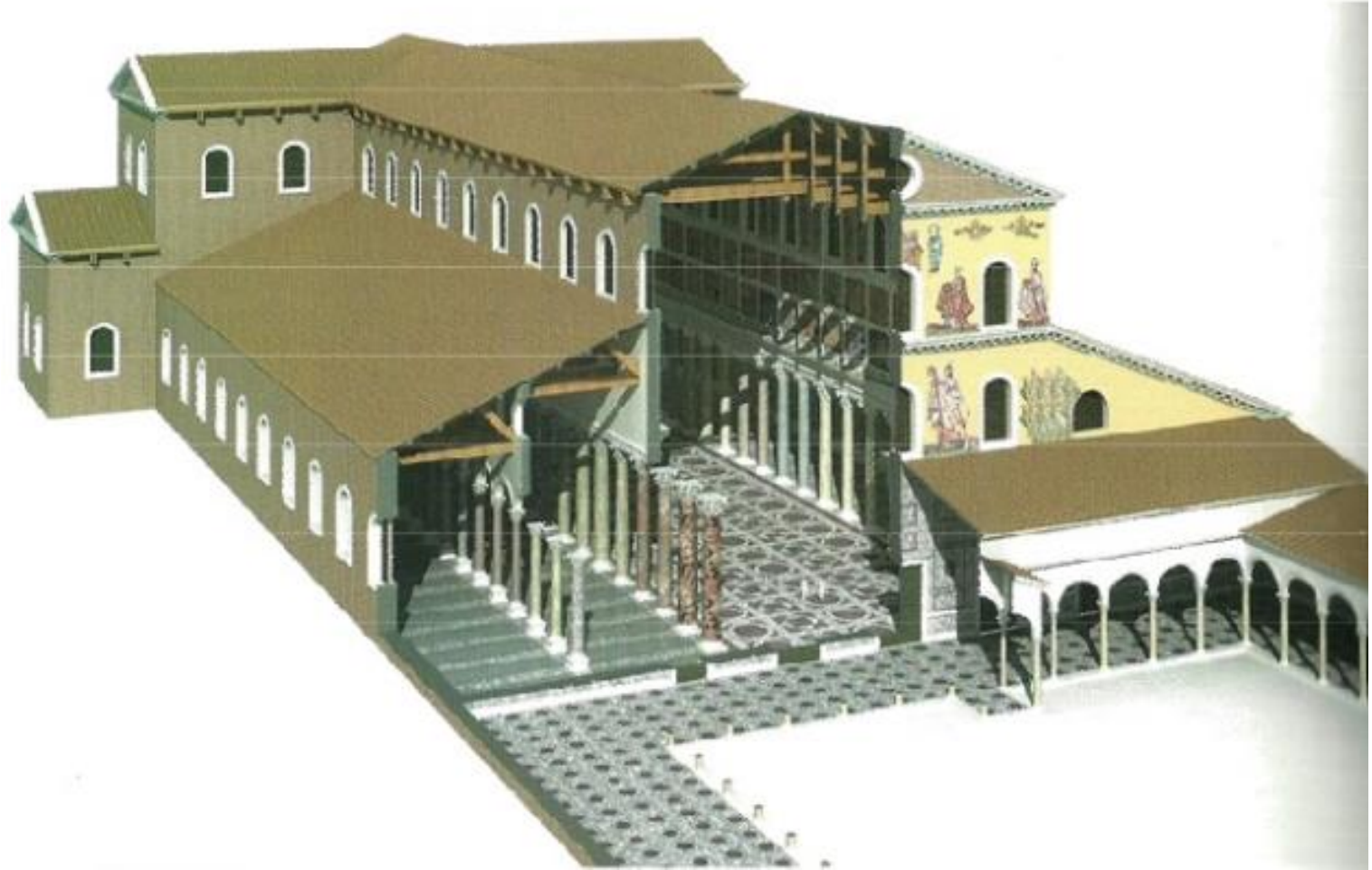
The Good Shepherd, Catacomb of Priscilla



Moses Providing Water to the Twelve Tribes



Architectural Character



St. Peter, Rome (imaginative view)

Architectural Character

- The early Christian architecture is a term usually used to describe the architecture of the western Roman empire or what was left of it.
- The architecture of the eastern part at the same period is called Byzantine architecture.
- The early Christian architecture was a gradual development of the Roman style, after “Christianizing” it.
- Later this style will develop into the Romanesque architecture.
- Early churches were modified Roman Basilicas, and this is why they are called “Basilican churches”.
- This is why the basic building type in this architecture (the church) will be heavily affected by the Roman architecture.

Architectural Character

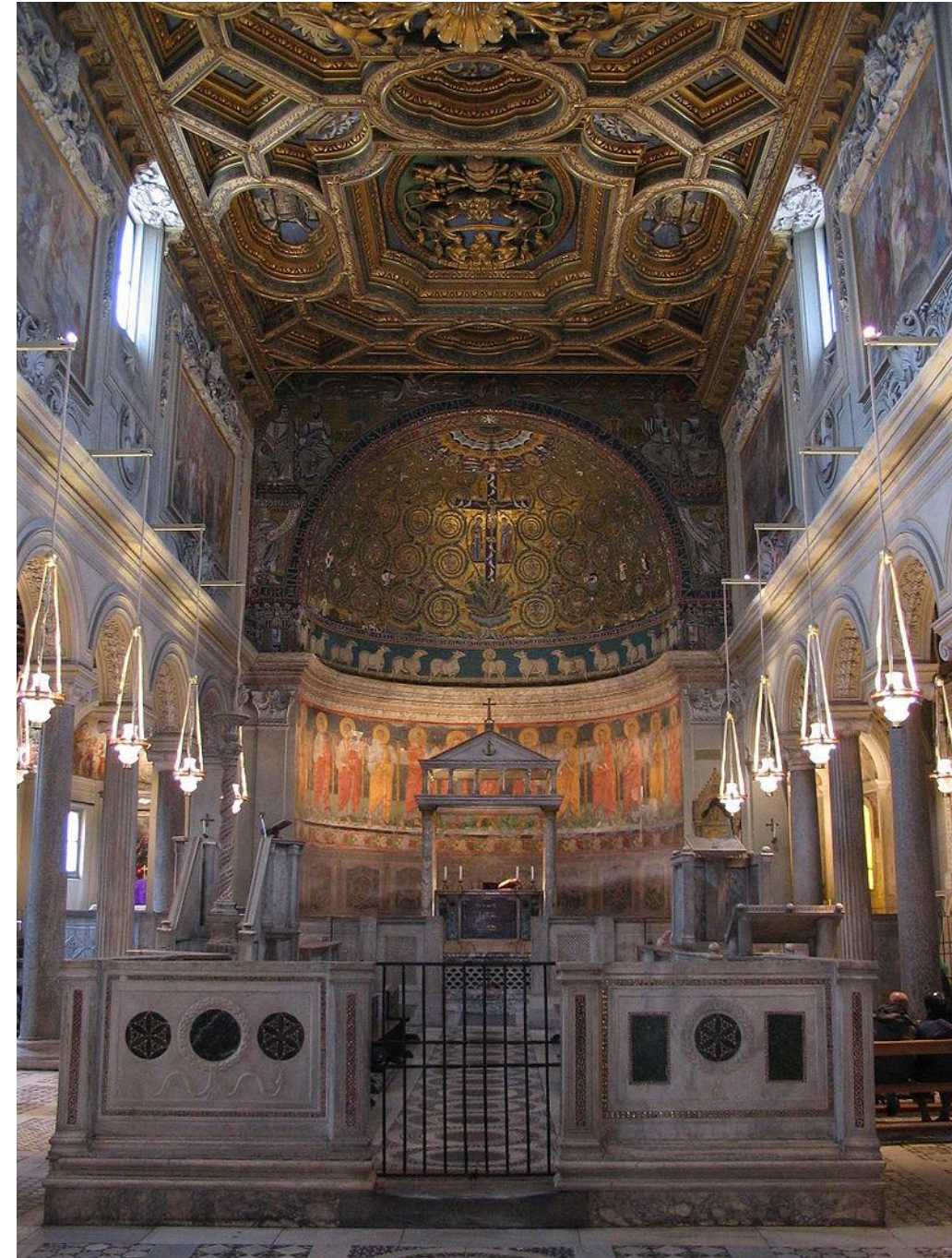
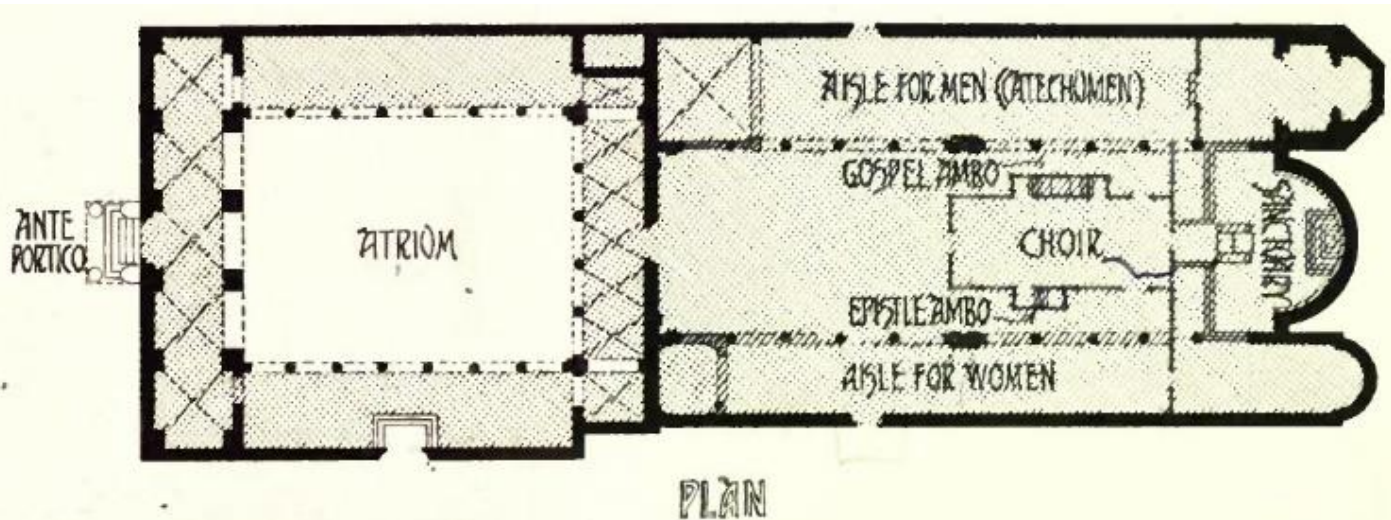
- The Basilican churches had a nave and several aisles, sometimes four.
- The columns were Roman, and spaced close to each other, connected with semi-circular arches and crowned with an entablature.
- The roofs were made of wood, which made the early ceilings flat.
- Many churches also had a forecourt surrounded by arcades.
- The Roman elements of the buildings were reused (Naves, Apses, Altars).
- They used glass mosaic for the interior decoration.

Architectural Character

- In addition to temples, houses were used for worship, as were baths, halls and even houses.
- Baptisteries were usually attached to the church then became a separate building.
- Walls were constructed according to the same Roman methods: rubble or concrete walls covered with plaster and mosaic.
- Windows were usually small.
- Roofs were made of wood, flat or sloped if the span was large.
- Columns were mainly Roman, and mostly, for important buildings, they were taken from abandoned buildings, because the early Christian builders were not good craftsmen.

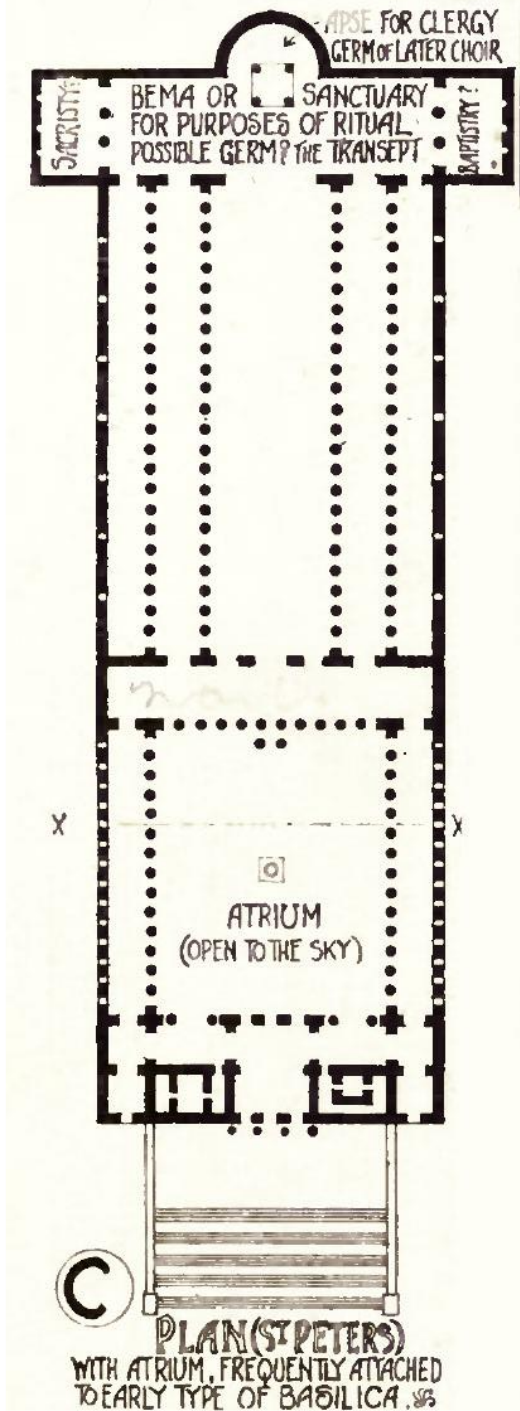
Examples (Churches)

- S. Clemente, Rome:
- One of the examples of 3-aisled churches.
- Built in the 5th century and rebuilt in the 11th.



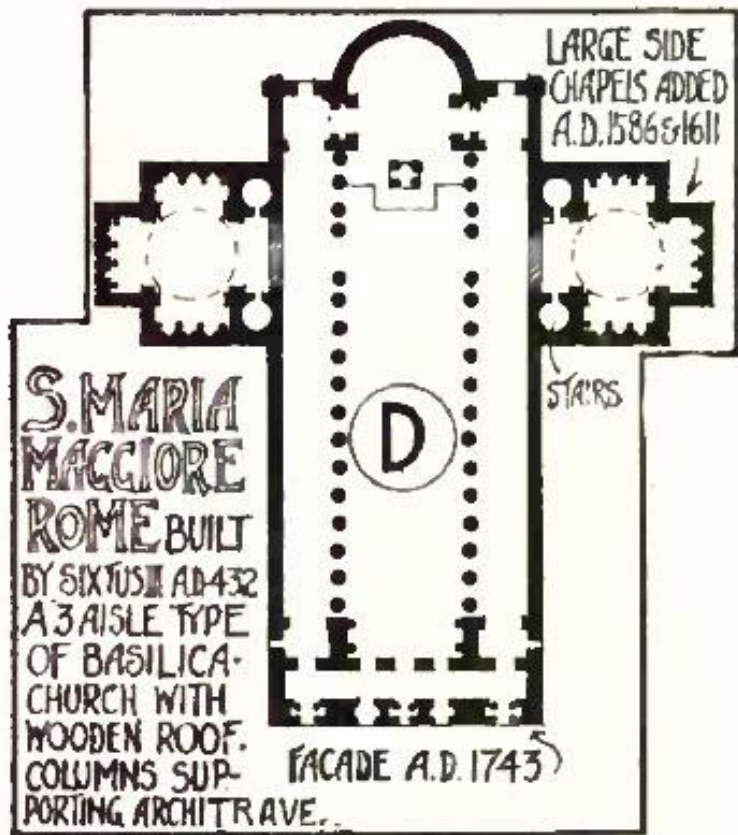
Examples (Churches)

- S. Peter, Rome:
- It is **not** the same St. Peter today, since it is destroyed.
- One of the 5-aisled churches.



Examples (Churches)

- S. Maria Maggiore, Rome:



Examples (Churches)

- S. Apollinare Nuovo, Ravenna:



Examples (Baptisteries)

- Baptistry is another religious building, where the rituals of baptism were held.
- It started as an attachment to the forecourt but later it became a separate building.
- It adopted the form of the Roman tomb as a model.
- They changed the Roman tomb a bit, by transforming the interior columns from decorative columns to structural ones.

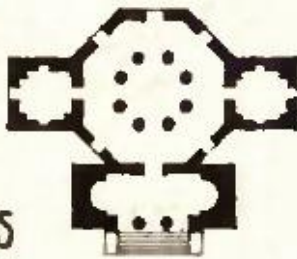
Examples (Baptisteries)

- Baptistry of S. Constantine, Rome:



BAPTISTERY OF CONSTANTINE ROME.

4TH C^{AD}. ROOF SUPPORTED BY
A SCREEN OF EIGHT COLUMNS
TWO STOREYS IN HEIGHT
THE BAPTISTRY IS NOW
ATTACHED TO ST JOHN LATERAN



J PLAN



K ELEVATION



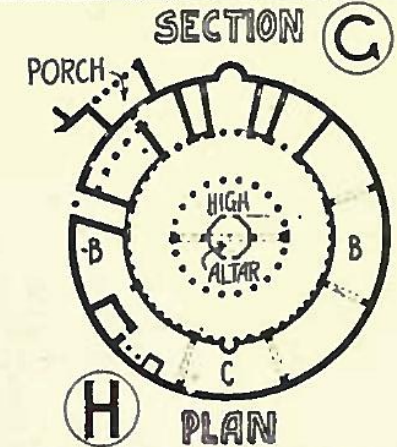
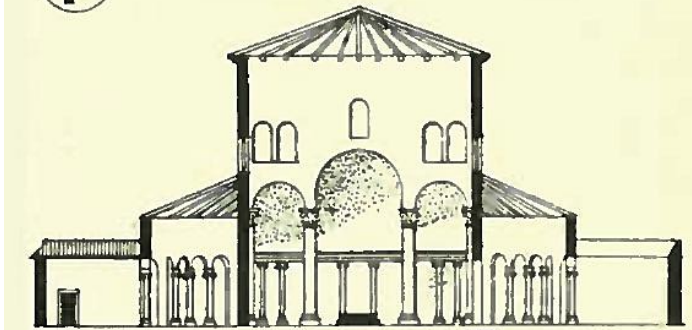
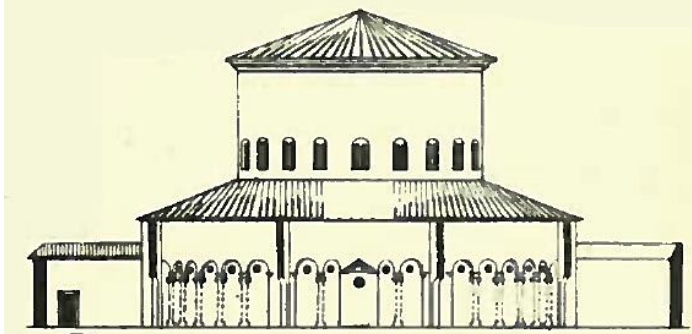
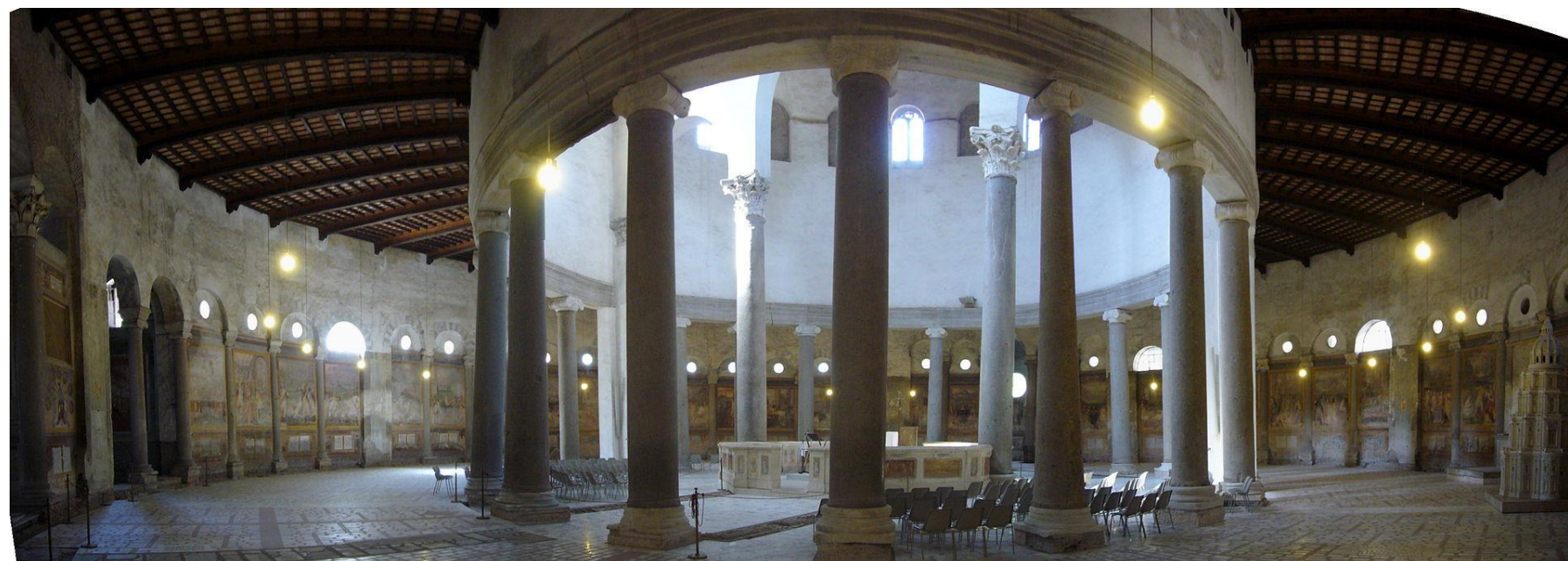
L SECTION

SCALE FOR ELEVATIONS 0 50 100 150 FEET

SCALE FOR PLANS 0 50 100 150 200 FEET

Examples (Baptisteries)

- S. Stefano Rotunda, Rome:



S. STEFANO ROTONDO, ROME BUILT BY SIMPLICIUS AD.470, HAS ROOFS SUPPORTED BY TWO CIRCULAR RINGS OF COLUMNS TAKEN FROM OLDER BUILDINGS, AND BY A WALL ACROSS THE CENTRE SUPPORTED ON COLUMNS

Early Christian Architecture

- Early Christian architecture is the beginning of the Medieval art and architecture of Europe.
- It marks the beginning of shift from the Classical beauty to the Medieval beauty.
- Even though the outcome can be considered a bit poor, but the ideas started here will develop and reshape the architecture of Europe for the next 1000 years.