

## Chapter 6

### I. EARLY CHRISTIAN ITALY: THE INWARD ORIENTATION OF THE CHURCH

- A. The Advent of Constantine: The First Christian Emperor
  - 1. By the late 2nd century the Pax Romana began to falter due to internal and external conflicts.
  - 2. By the mid-3rd century Rome began to lose its political primacy.
    - a. The emperors rarely resided there, preferring more strategically located cities such as Milan, Trier, Nicomedia (modern Izmit, Turkey), and Salonika in northern Greece.
    - b. Rome acquired some of its most magnificent buildings in terms of scale, technique, and decoration.
      - i. Baths of Caracalla
      - ii. Baths of Diocletian
  - 3. Emperor Diocletian, who had proposed a four-man executive system for the empire, retired in 305 to Spalato, or the "little palace," on the Dalmatian coast.
    - a. The palace was organized like a military castrum on a cross-axis inside a nearly perfect square set of walls.
    - b. The predominantly defensive appearance of Diocletian's palace set the precedent for the fortified castles of medieval Europe.
  - 4. Diocletian's abdication ushered in a decade of dynastic infighting, with violent succession disputes.
    - a. In the northern capital of Trier, in southwestern Germany, Constantine erected new city walls, one of the largest bath complexes outside of Rome, and, adjacent to the stadium, an imperial palace with a formidable basilica.
    - b. Constantine's chief rival, Maxentius (r. 306–312), began a quite different style of basilica in Rome (one of the grandest vaulted concrete structures in the world), restored the Senate house and the Temple of Venus and Rome, built a new hippodrome attached to his palace on the Via Appia, and erected an impressive rotunda, the Mausoleum of Maxentius.
  - 5. The rivalry between Constantine and Maxentius culminated with the Battle of the Milvian Bridge outside of Rome in 312.
    - a. Constantine prevailed and attributed his victory to his sympathy for the Christian religion.
    - b. As a pro-Christian interloper, Constantine alienated the Roman senatorial class, which nonetheless rewarded him with the Arch of Constantine, next to the Colosseum.
    - c. Constantine built Rome's first imperially sponsored church, St. John's in the Lateran.
      - i. The architects avoided typological associations with pagan temples, and chose the basilica meeting hall type for the new church.
      - ii. The layout of the Lateran, which required ample space for gathering and moving in procession, followed a five-aisle longitudinal plan.
    - d. The emperor also donated the palace next to it to the bishop of Rome.
    - e. In 326, Constantine sponsored the most important church in Christendom, Old St. Peter's.
    - f. Constantine completed the basilica begun by Maxentius.

- B. Rome after Constantine: The Last Classical Buildings
  - 1. After Constantine's departure from Rome in 326, the city slowly yielded power to the Church.
    - a. The early Christian basilicas of the 5th century constituted the final works achieved with the classical traditions of ancient Roman architecture.
  - 2. Between the two sackings of Rome (Vandals and Ostrogoths) the popes took the place of the emperors as the prime source of patronage.
    - a. They sponsored several new churches:
      - i. Santa Sabina
      - ii. Santa Maria Maggiore
      - iii. Santo Stefano Rotondo
    - b. They used a particularly refined classical style, a statement of Rome's ability to survive with dignity.
  - 3. The devastation of Italy continued throughout the 6th century.
    - a. During the chaos, the popes transformed some of the great imperial monuments of the city, including the Senate house and the Pantheon, into shelters for the church and its institutions.
- C. Milan on the Eve of the Gothic Advance
  - 1. As the most important crossroads city in the middle of the plains of northern Italy's Po valley, Milan replaced Rome for most of the 4th century as the capital of the western empire.
  - 2. Waves of invaders devastated Milan in the early 5th century, erasing most of its Roman fabric.
  - 3. When the barbarians began to infiltrate Italy as settlers, mercenaries, and eventually rulers, the new power of bishops dominated the Italian cities.
    - a. Milan's bishop, St. Ambrose (ca. 338–397) made his base in the recently built cathedral of Santa Tecla.
    - b. Ambrose sponsored the construction of three large churches on the outskirts of Milan:
      - i. Sant'Ambrogio
      - ii. Basilica Apostolorum
      - iii. San Simpliciano
    - c. Ambrose's imperial rivals created the most impressive early Christian church, now called San Lorenzo, in Milan.
  - 4. Milan's success as a Christian capital was brief. The early Christian churches of Milan, however, survived relatively unharmed.

## II. BYZANTIUM: THE DOME AS AN ACT OF FAITH

After Constantine began his great churches in Rome, he transferred his political capital east to Byzantium.

- A. Constantinople: The First Christian Capital
  - 1. Constantine installed Christianity as the principal religion of the Roman Empire and imposed the major types for its principal cult buildings.
  - 2. His patronage in Trier, Rome, Jerusalem, Antioch, and his new capital of Constantinople established models for three major church types still in use:
    - a. Aisled basilica
    - b. Central-plan memorial church
    - c. Pavilion-like baptistery
  - 3. Constantinople emerged as the last city founded with imperial Roman criteria and the first to have an expressly Christian identity. Constantine put his imprimatur on the city through his palace, hippodrome, palatine church, triumphal plazas, and imperial mausoleum.

- a. Unlike those in Rome, his churches occupied nodal points of the new city.
    - i. The palace church of Hagia Sophia, or the Holy Wisdom of Christ, took the northern flank of the Augusteum Forum, directly adjacent to the palace complex.
    - ii. The Apostoleion was constructed as Constantine's mausoleum and abutted an imperial residence with baths, guardhouses, dining halls, and fountains.
  - b. Constantine's city succeeded beyond all expectations as the new Rome.
4. The change in architectural attitudes from the extroverted colonnaded spaces of imperial Rome to the mysterious, inwardly oriented church halls of the early Christians took root during Constantine's reign.
  5. Constantine commissioned special monuments for holy sites in Palestine, including the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, designed by the same team of designers as the Hagia Sophia.
  6. Constantine's daughter sponsored a burial rotunda in Rome in 340, which became the church of Santa Costanza. It remains one of the best preserved works of the period.

#### B. Hagia Sophia after Constantine

1. Rioters destroyed the Hagia Sophia twice, once in 404 and then again in 532.
2. Justinian's reconstruction of Hagia Sophia responded to a tense political situation.
  - a. He was not considered legitimate by the old imperial family or the aristocracy.
  - b. He and his wife forged a path to legitimacy that included reforming the Roman legal code and constructing forty-eight churches.
3. Two influential works preceded the reconstruction of the Hagia Sophia:
  - a. The church of SS. Sergius and Bacchus established the concept of a domed central space nested inside a larger orthogonal figure.
  - b. The church of Hagia Polyuktos, which no longer exists.
4. The reconstruction of Hagia Sophia served as both a token of expiation for the Nika riot and an expression of personal ambition.
  - a. Some of its design came from the ordinary need for fire safety: the rebuilt church contained a minimum of flammable materials.
  - b. The scientist-designers' highly theoretical approach to structure fostered a colossal experiment.
  - c. Hagia Sophia's complex succession of concave hollows, suspended above the nave with no apparent mass for their support, created an atmosphere of unparalleled drama.
  - d. While the space of the nave of Hagia Sophia appeared unitary, its details showed great discrepancies.
    - i. The proportions are mismatched.
    - ii. Hagia Sophia's profile cannot be reduced to a simple figure made of proportional elements.

#### C. Ravenna: The Byzantine Satellite in Italy

1. During the 5th and 6th centuries, Ravenna underwent a magnificent architectural remake as the empire's capital city in the west, with churches, baptisteries, and mausoleums.
2. A female patron, Galla Placidia, made the first important interventions in imperial Ravenna.

- a. Throughout her career in the new capital, she maintained a palace on the Mese in Constantinople, where she had been born. She also traveled frequently to Rome, where she commissioned mosaics for St. Paul's Outside the Walls and oversaw the design of her family's tomb in Old St. Peter's.
  - b. She built the large three-aisle Basilica of St. John the Evangelist in the new eastern district of Ravenna.
  - c. She also built the church of Santa Croce.
    - i. Its cruciform shape provided one of the first explicit instances of a church plan.
    - ii. It hasn't survived, but the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia has.
  - d. Galla Placidia also sponsored Ravenna's new cathedral and baptistery (now called "orthodox" to distinguish them from the Arian versions built at the end of the 5th century).
    - i. The basilica was a five-aisled structure like the Lateran.
    - ii. The orthodox baptistery had a modest brick shell that concealed an interior space of superb decorative complexity.
3. At the end of the 5th century, a barbarian general, Theodoric (r. 493–526), the king of the Ostrogoths, seized power for himself in Ravenna.
- a. Despite his origins, he carefully imitated the style of Roman religious and funerary architecture.
    - i. The Arian Cathedral, just like the Orthodox Cathedral, was dedicated to the Anastasis, or Christ's resurrection.
    - ii. The Arian Baptistery, though smaller than its Orthodox counterpart, appeared identical.
    - iii. Like Constantine and other rulers, he planned a monumental tomb for himself in 526, the Mausoleum of Theodoric, the only great work in Ravenna built in stone.
    - iv. While the mausoleum matched an overall classical idea, its roof evoked dolmens and megalithic tombs still used by Gothic royalty.
  - 4. During the year of Theodoric's death in 526, Pro-Byzantine propagandists promoted the construction of two great churches in Ravenna as a symbolic rejection of Ostrogoth rule. Work began on:
    - a. Sant'Apollinare in Classe
      - . A three-aisle basilica, close to the design of Santa Sabina in Rome.
    - b. San Vitale
      - . Unlike any church in Italy except San Lorenzo in Milan.
- D. The armies of Justinian repossessed Ravenna from the followers of Theodoric in 540, a few years before the completion of the two churches.

### III. GUPTA INDIA: ROCK-CUT ARCHITECTURE AND THE ART OF SUBTRACTION

Indian temple builders from the 1st to the 8th centuries carved into stone cliffs or out of piled rocks, making an art of subtraction. The tradition of rock-cut works reached its zenith during the Gupta period in the 4th and 5th centuries.

- A. The Stones of the Gupta Dynasty: From Caves to Piles
  - 1. The ancient empire of the Mauryan dynasty fell apart in the early 2nd century BCE, and India reverted to feudal fragmentation. Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism remained nonhierarchical, permitting a multiplicity of divinities and varied strains of dogma.
  - 2. Buddhism, which tended to appeal to the wealthier patrons, produced the earliest architectural prototypes, later reworked for Hindu and Jain buildings. The best preserved examples remained those carved in the cliffs.

- a. The Ghats, hills formed from horizontal shelves of stone in the central western regions of India near Mumbai, served as the site for many of the great rock-cut works.
  - b. The caves at Bhaja, about 100 km (60 miles) southeast of Mumbai, were among the earliest Indian rock-cut temples, carved during the mid-1st century BCE.
  - c. The largest and most ornate of the early rock-cut chaitya halls was built around 120 CE at Karli, not far from Bhaja.
3. Contemporary with Constantine's taking of Rome, the Gupta dynasty in India attempted to restore the empire of the Mauryans of several centuries earlier. During the Gupta period of the 4th and 5th centuries the same carving techniques used at Karli appeared in the production of free-standing temples.
  4. The Gupta dynasty left most architectural patronage to the high-ranking members of the court.
    - a. To his sacred Buddhist shrine at Sanchi, just a few meters south of the Great Stupa, Gupta designers around the year 400 added a small square temple with a colonnaded porch, now known as Temple 17.
      - i. Built of mortarless ashlar blocks, it is almost as if a rock-cut temple had been extracted from the cliff and transported to the site.
    - b. The Gupta court also sponsored caves, quite similar in format to Temple 17, on a cliff only 3 miles from Sanchi, known as Udayagiri.
  5. A rival clan to the Gupta dynasty sponsored many of the twenty-nine caverns for Buddhist monasteries at the cliffs of Ajanta, Maharashtra, in the 5th century.

#### B. Post-Gupta Dravidian Temples

1. The Huns, who invaded in 467, and their allies actively discouraged Buddhism, allowing other cults to absorb the style of Buddhist temples.
2. At the Chalukya dynasty's first capital city in Aihole, they built over seventy temples using a wide range of styles. The works show the evolution of rock-cut temples to constructed ones. The Durga Temple, built in the mid-7th century, remains the most sophisticated.
3. The Dravidian temple architecture of southern India, much like its northern counterpart, appeared inherently sculptural, developed from rock-cut caverns into mounded piles.
  - a. The seventeen temples at Mahabalipuram, begun in the 7th century by the Pallava dynasty in the region of Tamil Nadu, India's southeastern tip, illustrated the transition from monolithic works carved out of single boulders found in situ to masonry structures built of joined stones.
    - i. The Pandava *ratha* (the term for festival carts used all over India for religious processions) at Mahabalipuram lacked wheels but included five monolithic buildings and a few out-scaled animals.
    - ii. The so-called shore temples at Mahabalipuram were built around 720. Situated a twenty-minute walk from the Pandava ratha, they were among the first structural temples built in durable materials in this region.
  - b. Most of the Mahabalipuram temples were carved from single stones but looked like they had been built from pieces, imitating the structure of wooden precedents.
4. The Chalukya commissioned the largest of all the rock-cut temples during the 760s at Ellora, an area of cliffs in the same region as Ajanta.

- a. One of dozens of shrines, the Kailasanatha temple demonstrated the evolution from cave to freestanding masonry architecture.
- b. The designers sliced a rectangular parkara out of the hillside and then whittled down the remaining stone into four monumental figures and a few subsidiary chapels and freestanding columns.