

# Jewish, Early Christian and Byzantine Art



JEWISH: Jewish people trace their origin to the Semitic people called Hebrews. Lived in the land of Canaan... Roman name "Palestine" located along the Mediterranean Sea.

- \* Monotheistic Religion – One God
- \* Jewish people lived in communities spread all throughout the Roman Empire.

\* Used Catacombs for Burial:

\*\* Loculi – held multiple bodies

\*\* Cubicula – For Affluent families... small rooms for each body. Decorated and painted with owners religious beliefs



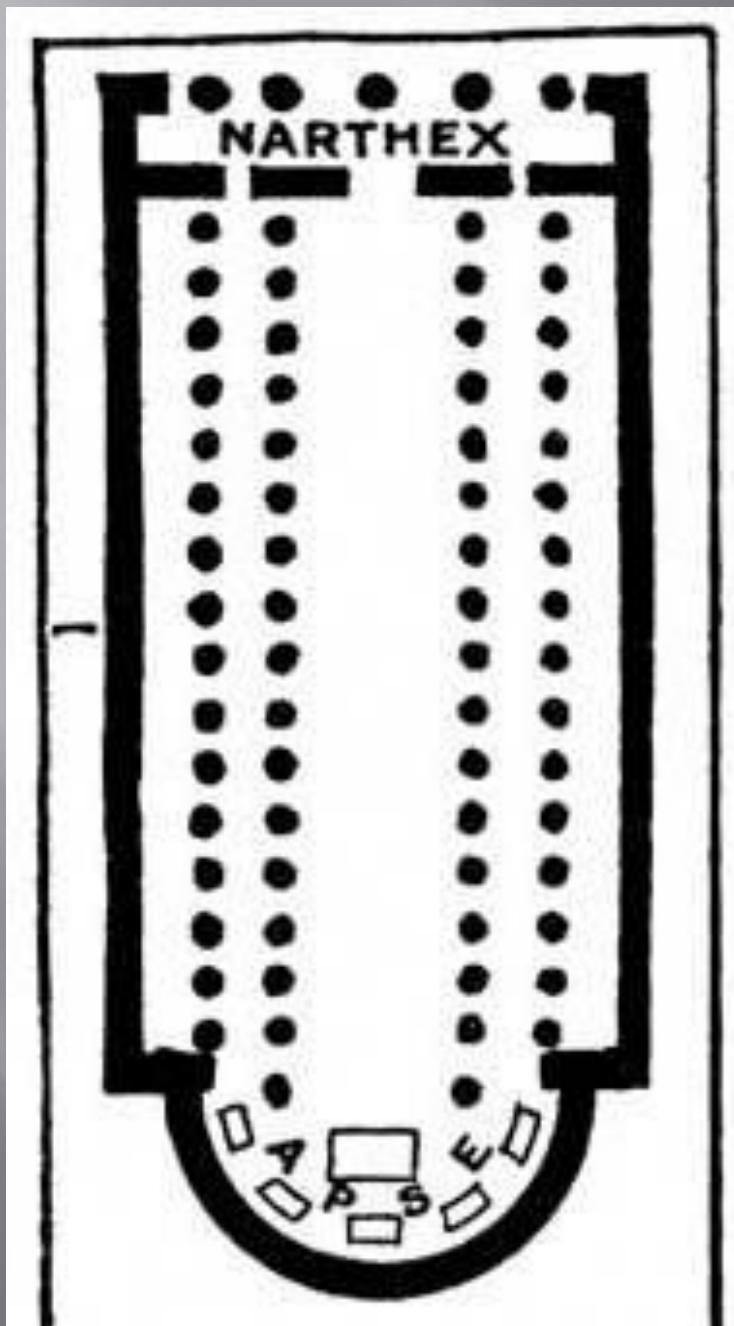
*Menorahs and Ark of the Covenant, wall painting in a Jewish catacomb, Villa Torlonia, Rome, 3rd century*

Jewish Synagogues: Any large room in which people can gather, worship, and study. Contains scrolls of the "Torah" and must be read publicly.

\*\* Early Synagogues were "house-synagogues"



\*\*Wall with niche  
house- synagogue  
Dura-Europas, Syria



The Jewish built other synagogues to model the Roman Basilicas with a central NAVE, an aisle on both sides, and a semicircular APSE in the wall facing Jerusalem. NARTHEX was also possible as a porch or entry way.

# Early Christianity

Monotheistic Religion – One God, derived from Judaism. Believe in God taking on the Human form, suffering crucifixion (death on cross) and saving believers from sin. After-life in Heaven.

- Christianity was not a recognized religion until 313
- Art of early Christians instructed lay people as well as glorified God.



Syncretism: Assimilated images of other traditions, giving them new meaning.

Orant figures: a standing figure with both arms raised. Used in worship. Can be pagan, Jewish, or Christian

Christian Art borrowed the “Orant” figure and used it during early Christian art work.



“Good Shepherd, Orants, Story of Jonah” painted at the ceiling of Catacomb of Saints Pietro and Marcellino, Rome. 4<sup>th</sup> Century

Christian Cubilica – small rooms, plastered and painted w/ imagery. Partitioned by a central medallion or round ornament and four lunettes. Many figures were “Good Shepherd” before the reign of Constantine I.



*"Edict of Milan" granted freedom to worship whatever god they choose. (Constantine I 313 ce.)*

*\*\* Began building church buildings and baptistries.*

*\*Basilica - Plan Church & Central plan Church*



# IMPERIAL CHRISTIAN ART AND ARCHITECTURE

Christian Church became sophisticated, philosophical, and ethical system incorporated with many of Greek and Roman ideas. Places of worship, great gathering places in honor of God. (Similar to the Acropolis) Christians gained political influence and increased its popularity and increased its splendor and size of architecture

## Basilica Plan Church:

\*Based on “pagan” basilica of Rome.

Narthex – porch or entry hallway

Nave – Central gathering place

Apse – Semicircular space with very high wall. Generally reserved for altar, and pulpit.

Clerestory – row over windows on the upper most wall of the nave above the aisles. Provides light directly into the nave.

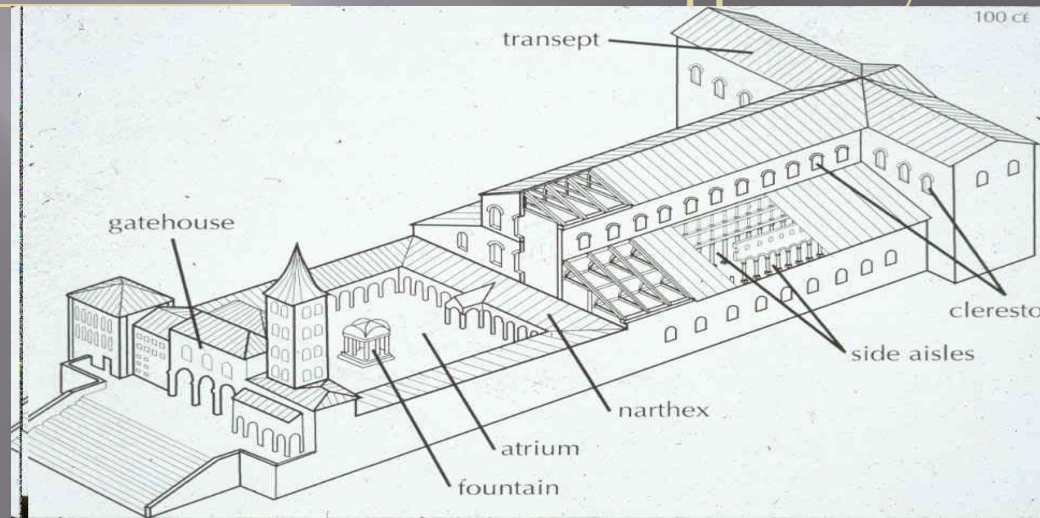
Triforium – Blind wall between the arcade and clerestory, typically had paintings or mosaics of Old Testament or the Gospels.

Old Saint Peter’s Basilica includes a transept and a Nave collonade

Transept – crossed the line of the Apse, projecting a T form. Provided additional space for clergy.

Nave Collonade – row of columns supporting an entablature.

Nave Arcade – row of arches supported by columns.



*(“Old Saint Peter’s Basilica” – 394’ long and 210’ wide)*

*(Church of Santa Sabina interior, Sabina, Rome c. 422-432.) Shows "nave arcade"*



*(Church of Santa Sabina, Sabina, Rome c. 422-432.)*

\*\*\* Mosaics and paintings in Churches were intended to instruct the congregation, “glorify God” through their splendor, and to make churches symbolic embodiments of Heavenly Jerusalem that awaits.

Works of Imperial Christian Art began to reflect a renewed interest in the earlier “classic Roman style”.



*Parting of Lot and Abraham,  
mosaic in the nave arcade,  
Church of Santa Maria Maggiore,  
Rome  
Approx. 4'11" x 6'8"*

## Central Plan Church:

The *Tholos* (small round building) is an ancient building with a central plan that served as a model for Christian builders as mausoleums, and baptisteries. The earliest surviving example is the “Mausoleum of Constantina” the daughter of Constantine I. Generally used as funerary churches or Martyr Churches to honor those that had great influence in Christianity.

(Church of Santa Costanza “Mausoleum of Constantina”, Rome c. 338 – 350)



## IMPERIAL CHRISTIAN SCULPTURE:

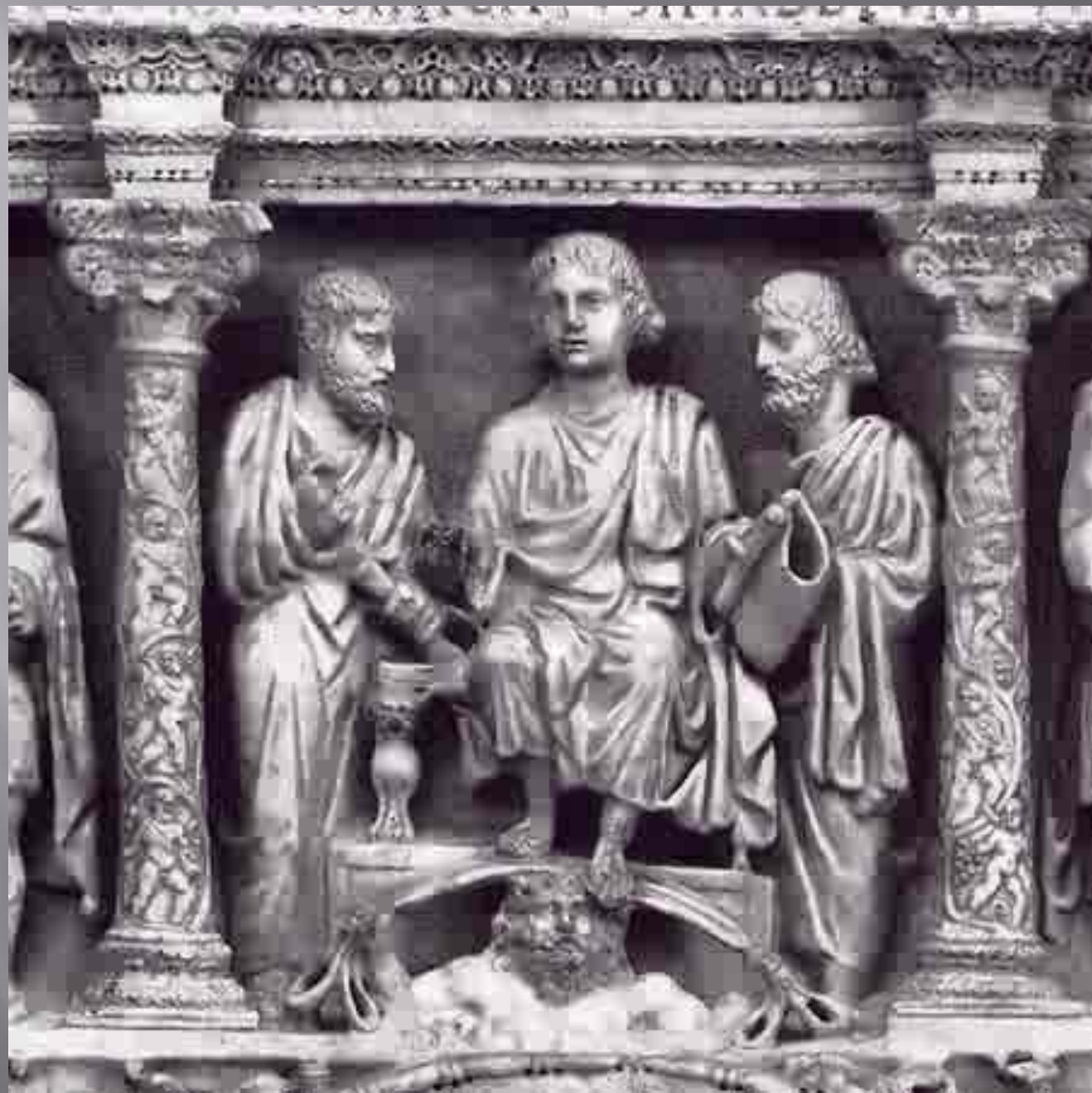
Christians adapted Roman sculptural forms and created commemorative ivory *diptychs*.

*Diptychs*: two panels of equal size, decorated with paint or relief sculpture. These sculpture show different narrative stories of the Gospel.

The art shows a return to “classical roots” through drapery, architectural detail, and decorative framing.



Resurrection and Angel with Two Marys at the Tomb,  
panel of diptych, Ivory 14 ½ x 5 3/8”  
astello Sforzesco, Milan



Monumental stone sculpture examples can be seen in sarcophagi.

The Sarcophagus of Junius Bassus is an example of elaborately carved work. This piece shows different sculptures of Christ with references to the pagan past. The middle shows Christ with his foot on the head of Aeolus, the god of the wind... This symbolizes that Christ is seated above the skies in heaven, where he is dispensing the laws to Moses.

This type of imagery that ties the Old Testament in with Gospels of the New Testament is seen in Early Christian art as well and is known as *Typological*.



Sarcophagus of Junius Bassus, marble 4' x 8' Vatican, Rome



# BYZANTINE

- ▣ The **Byzantine Empire** or **Eastern Roman Empire** was the continuation of the Roman Empire during the Middle Ages centered on the capital of Constantinople, and ruled by Emperors in direct succession to the ancient Roman Emperors. It was known to its inhabitants as Romania. Byzantine Empire is traced to the split of Roman Empire and Constantine's change of capital to Constantinople (formerly Byzantium). The Empire preserved Romano - Hellenistic traditions, but chose Greek as official language. Religion was Orthodox, separate from Roman Catholic of the Western Empire.

# Architecture

Byzantine's grandest building and one of the supreme accomplishments of world architecture; its steel-less structure is about 270 feet long and 240 feet wide. The dome is 108 feet in diameter, and its crown rises 180 feet above the ground. In scale, Hagia Sophia is like the Pantheon, the Baths of Caracalla, and the Basilica of Constantine.

However, the building's present external aspects are much changed from the original appearance; the first dome collapsed in 558 and was replaced by the present one, greater in height and stability. Huge buttresses were added to the Justinianic design, and four Turkish **minarets** were constructed after the Ottoman conquest of 1453, when Hagia Sophia became an Islamic **mosque**.

**Anthemius of Tralles and Isidorus of Miletus**  
Hagia Sophia,  
Constantinople (Istanbul), Turkey, ca 532-537



Even though the walls and floors are lavishly decorated with colored stones from around the world, what distinguishes the Hagia Sophia from the interiors of Roman buildings is the mystical quality of the light that floods the interior.

# Architecture

The canopy-like dome that also dominates the inside of the church rides on a halo of light from windows in the dome's base. The forty windows create the illusion that the dome is resting on the light that comes through them--like a "floating dome of heaven."

Huge wall piers to the north, half-domes to the east and west, and smaller domes covering columned niches give a curving flow to the design.

The "walls" in Hagia Sophia indicate that the architects sought Roman monumentality as an effect, but did not design according to Roman principles

The use of brick instead of concrete was a further departure from Roman practice and characterized Byzantine architecture as a distinctive style.



## Architecture

The architects were ahead of their time in that they used pendentives to transfer the weight from the dome to the piers beneath, rather to the walls. In this, the space beneath the dome was unobstructed and allowed room for windows in the walls, which created the illusion of the suspended dome.

Additionally, the fusion of two independent architectural traditions [the vertically oriented central-plan building and the horizontally oriented basilica] was previously unseen, and was the successful conclusion to centuries of experimentation.

