

ACTA CLASSICA UNIV. SCIENT. DEBRECEN.	XLII.	2006.	p. 127–141.
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THE BASILICA CONSTANTINIANA

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I. Background to the Problematic Issues

It is widely believed that the buildings, which Constantine had constructed, were the early Christian churches that we now call *basilicas*. This assumption, however, is mistaken to some degree. The first degree is that the buildings, which Constantine had constructed only later, became Christian churches; the second degree is that these Christian churches only received the ranking of ‘*basilica*’ from the Renaissance onwards. What has remained constant, however, is the design of the Basilica, which has always been in accordance with the guidelines that were laid down by Vitruvius.¹ What has also caused confusion are misleading connotations in the word itself. A *basilica* is not necessarily a Christian building. Constantine built basilicas for Christians as well as for the standard pagan purposes. One of the basilicas of this kind is the *Basilica Maxentii et Constantini*.² Another problem is that a building, which is called a basilica might not necessarily have the same shape. A case in point is the temple that Constantine dedicated to the son Romulus, which is commonly regarded as a basilica, but which is really only a small circular building.³ At the same time, the basilica as the sign of the veneration, which was due to Romulus.

On account of these misunderstandings and confusions, we need to ask a

¹ *Non minus summam dignitatem et venustatem possunt habere conparationes basilicarum ... cuius proportiones et symmetriae sic sunt constitutae. ... Reliqua spatia inter parastaticarum et columnarum trabes per intercolumnia luminibus sunt relictæ. ... Item tribunal, quod est in ea aede, hemicycli schematis minoris curvatura formatum; ... negotiantes in basilica ne impedirent. ... Quibus insuper transtra cum capreolis columnarum contra corpora et antas et parietes pronai conlocata sustinent unum culmen perpetuae basilicae, alterum a medio supra pronaum aedis. Ita fastigiorum duplex + tectinata dispositio extrinsecus tecti et interioris altae testudinis praestat speciem venustam* (V, 1, 6–10). Cf. I. Nielsen, *Basilika DNP* 2 (1997) 475.

² W. Kuchoff, *Diokletian und die Epoche der Tetrarchie. Das römische Reich zwischen Kriesenbewältigung und Neuaufbau* (284–313 n. Chr.). Frankfurt am Main etc. 2001, 885.

³ W. Kuchoff, op. cit. 884.

number of questions regarding the ancient buildings, which were given the title of ‘basilica’ in the non-Christian era, and also regarding those buildings that were ordered to be constructed by Constantine, and which have been called basilicas.⁴ Buildings that were excavated in Pannonia and other provinces were classified as early Christian because of their apse. Based on this assumption, the baths of the villa of Gorsium,⁵ as well as the baths-complex in Ostia,⁶ were classified as Christian basilicas. The apse is not a Christian discovery, however. Its presence does not even prove that a building is Christian,⁷ let alone a basilica, or even a pagan basilica. The more practical aim of my research is to establish provisional guidelines for deciding whether a basilica was used for Christian or pagan purposes. If we read Langlotz’s and Deichmann’s summary of both non-Christian and Christian basilicas, and consult their illustrations,⁸ we see that apse itself occurs within edifices, which vary considerably in the date of their construction, in their design, and in their location. The modern research often calls all such buildings ‘*basilicas*’. In ancient Greece and Rome, the term ‘basilica’ could be used for either a public hall or a room in a place of residence.⁹ The Romans used the word ‘*basilica*’ for law courts, market-halls, baths, reception rooms in private houses, and the throne room of the emperor’s place.¹⁰ The wide range of significance that the word had in ancient times has

⁴ E. Langlotz–Fr. Deichmann, *Basilica*. In: *Reallexikon der Antike und Christentum* I. 1950 1225–1259. For an earlier summary of the problem see: A. Mau, *Basilica*. RE Stuttgart, III. 1899 83–96; 93–94. It is in a complex with other public constructions, such as pedestrian ways and baths. There are private houses, in particular imperial palaces, for instance, the Flavian Palace, or the villa of Hadrian, which is partly in Tivoli.

⁵ Marosi A., A tács-fövenypusztai ásatás (The Excavation at Tács–Fövenypuszt). Székesfehérvári Szemle 4 (1934) 60–63.

⁶ B. Brenk–P. Pensabene, Christliche Basilika oder christliche „Domus der Tigriniani”? Boreas 21–22 (1998–1999) 271–299.

⁷ In connections with this, I should mention an excavated building of Intercisa, which Zsolt Visy named an early Christian *basilica* (Visy Zs., Intercisa. A római kori Dunaújváros. Kecskemét 1977, 35–36, III. XII). I would not list either this monument, nor the one excavated by Z. Oroszlán, as an early Christian *basilica*. (D. Gáspár, Christianity in Roman Pannonia. An Evaluation of Early Christian Finds and Sites from Hungary. BAR Int. Ser. 1010. Oxford 2002, 12. II. a). I hold to this opinion, despite the fact that Zs. Visy has argued that my conclusions are erroneous ones (Visy Zs., Adatok a pannóniai kereszténység történetéhez (Data to the History of Pannonian Christianity). In: In virtute spiritus. A Szent István Akadémia emlékkönyve Paskai László bíboros tiszteletére. Budapest 2003, 51). It was very unfortunate that the two buildings were discussed together. It is not because of this, however, that the latter building or the former one cannot be taken as Christian.

⁸ E. Langlotz–Fr. Deichmann, op. cit. Abb. 27, 28.

⁹ Th. Lorenz, Überlegung zur Vorgeschichte der frühchristlichen Basilika. Boreas 23/24 (2000) 117–120.

¹⁰ I. Nielsen, op. cit. 474–481. It comes from the Greek word ‘basiliké’, which means ‘ma-

caused many researchers to evaluate the meaning of the word in ancient texts first, then of exploring the range of significances that the word can bear; and lastly of investigating how this multi-functional building has been restricted over time to that of the Christian basilica. Langlotz summarizes the research findings concerning the word's changes on meaning. He says that the earliest significance was '*basilike stoa*' or '*basileios stoa*', a term that meant a regal reception or throne room. This building became familiar in east only during the Hellenic period.¹¹ Not until 2 century BC was the type of building used in the west, and its attribute '*basileios*' bearing the significance 'grandiose, magnificent'.¹² T. Lorenz takes as his point of departure two inscriptions that concern buildings of Constantine. The first is in the Liber Pontificalis: '*eodem tempore Constantinus Augustus fecit basilicam beato Petro Apostolo*'.¹³ The other is an inscription on a mosaic from Castellum Tingitanum, where the same word is used.¹⁴ There is also the title '*basilica Constantiniana*'¹⁵ which was given to the building that later came to be known as San Giovanni in Laterano.¹⁶

I will not list further examples of the confusions that have arisen. The details that I have provided sufficiently illustrate that buildings which were used for a wide number of purposes and had exactly the same design were given the name '*basilica*' and that researchers have followed this usage of the term. At the time these buildings were being named '*basilicas*', it was clear why the term was fit-

jestätisch, königlich, fürstlich, herrlich, großartig (lat. regalis)." She calls the basilica a 'multi-functional building'.

¹¹ E. Langlotz–Fr. Deichmann, op. cit. 1225. More recently, Lorenz has analysed the significance of the word by placing the various buildings side-by side. (Th. Lorenz, op. cit. 113–131). He also mentions that it is questionable whether the word '*basilica*' applies to buildings that we now call basilicas, or whether they were only later called so, it is still uncertain whether or not the *Stoa Basileios* in Athens was called a basilica when it was built.

¹² E. Langlotz–Fr. Deichmann, op. cit. 1226.

¹³ Liber Pontificalis seu de gestis Romanorum Pontificum. Ed. Joannes Vignolius. Romae 1724, p. 91.

¹⁴ Th. Lorenz, op. cit. 113: „aus dem 324 im Fußboden eines schon 1838 freigelegten Kirchengrundrisses in El-Asnam (ehemals Orléansville, Algerien), dem antiken Castellum Tingitanum, wird ebenfalls dieses Wort verwendet."

¹⁵ There is also another building, which is known as the Basilica of Maxentii and Constantini. Maxentius commenced the building, and Constantine completed it. R. Förtsch, B. Constantinians DNP 2 (1997) 470–471: for example B. Nova, B. Maxentii. To avoid erroneous assumptions, I have not dealt with every building that was built by Constantine.

¹⁶ E. Nash, Convenerunt in domum Faustae in Laterano S. Optati Milevitani I, 23. Römische Quartalschrift 71 (1976) 1–21, p. 3. The eastern section of the Caelius was called 'Lateranus'. The word derives from '*Domus Laterani*'. This is a building complex that, in their pomp and splendour, dominated the entire district from the middle of the first through to the end of the fourth centuries. The *iuxta aedes Laterani* refers to the neighbouring buildings. Cf. Th. Lorenz, op. cit. 117.

ting for all buildings that had the required architectural attributes. The term, however, has acquired different connotations in subsequent periods of history.

What I would now like to do is to attempt to dispel some of them, with the proviso that the research which I have done to date only allows me to put forward hypotheses rather than to claim certainties.

II. Symbols in Roman Architecture

H. Drerup makes clear in his contribution that Greek Architecture fixes its eye upon the things of this world while Roman architecture turns its gaze towards the transcendent.¹⁷ His study is important, because it calls our attention to the transcendental sensitivity of Roman art, in particular Roman architecture. An example of this is the role of the door, which, in marking the border between what is within and without, expresses a step into a sacred domain.¹⁸ Also the basilica itself must turn towards the transcendent.

Vitruvius says that the Romans learned how to build basilicas from the Egyptians.¹⁹ These types of building are similar to Egyptian palaces, which have three naves, with a throne facing the entrance of the middle nave. At the entrance itself, there was an *atrium* or *chalcidicum*.²⁰ This was more or less the ground plan for buildings that came to be known as basilicas.

Langlotz mentions one other kind of building which resembles the Egyptian palace. This is Herod's hall in Jerusalem. He says that it was used for commercial purposes.²¹ Just as this kind of building was used for several purposes in

¹⁷ H. Drerup, *Architektur als Symbol. Zur zeitgenössischen Bewertung der römischen Architektur*. Gymnasium 73 (1996) 196: „Griechische Bauten sind gestalthafte und gestaltete Dinge dieser Welt – römische Architektur führt hinaus in die Transzendenz.“ The study elaborates (pp. 181–196) upon the symbolism of different buildings, as the *cloaca maxima*, an *aquaeductus*, bridges, roads and ways, theatres. Another study similarly deals with the symbology of buildings namely theatres and concentric structures, cf. H. Windfeld-Hansen, *Die Grundrißdispositionen der griechischen und römischen Theater bei Vitruvius und geometrische Konstruktionsregeln für antike und altchristliche Zentralbauten*. *Boreas* 23/24 (2000–2001) 133–162.

¹⁸ How Roman architecture reveals its openness to the transcendent is discussed in the article: Doris und Gottfried Gruben, *Die Türe des Pantheon*. *RhM* 104 (1997) 3–74. There about the gates p. 5: „funktional als Grenze zwischen außen und innen, konstruktiv als bewegte ‘Machina’, semantisch als Eintritt in den sakralen Bereich, der zu Größe und künstlerischer Perfektion herausfordert. Die älteste Konstruktions-Beschreibung einer Türe meint symbolisch die Türe zum Licht der Wahrheit: (they quoted Parmenides here).“ Doris und Gottfried Gruben also quoted Drerup's sentence as their motto.

¹⁹ E. Langlotz–Fr. Deichmann, op. cit. 1232, Vitruv. VI, 3, 8 *oecus Aegyptius* is quoted here.

²⁰ I. Nielsen, op. cit. 1997, 474: „Vorhalle?“

²¹ E. Langlotz–Fr. Deichmann, op. cit. 1232.

Rome itself and in Italy; for example, B. Porcia (184 BC), B. Iulia, B. Aemilia (late 1 century BC), B. Ulpia (112 AD) were commercial halls.²² The basilica built in the style of a palace bears most resemblance to the sanctuary where standards were kept in a military fortress.²³ This kind of basilica was used chiefly by the believers of the mystery cults, and they mostly date back to 2–3 centuries AD.²⁴ The most important basilica of this kind is the Basilica Sotterranea.²⁵ It should be emphasized that in the fourth century AD basilicas were built mostly for Aesculapius. It should be mentioned that the basilica was the model for synagogues, as well. These kinds of basilicas are of enormous dimensions.

On account of the wide range of purposes for which basilicas were used, the researchers have questioned which variation might have been the model for the Christian basilica. In answer to this question, Langlotz proposes the imperial throne room. To support his opinion, he cites Isidorus Hispalensis, who says that the basilica is the place where sacrifices are offered to God, the King of everybody.²⁶

Still, regardless of the variety in the types of basilicas, the word itself signifies ‘regal’.²⁷ The *basileia*, as the place of residence of the king of the Island of the Blessed, was a symbol of the golden age.²⁸ Plato writes about the sunken, circular Island of Atlantis in the *Kritias* and *Timaios*.²⁹ The Egyptian priests spoke about such ancient matters to Solon.³⁰ Plato’s description of the Island of Atlantis is the next; at its center stood the palace of the king. This palace was

²² Those who wish to know more about the basilicas that I mention here and elsewhere should consult: R. Förtsch, op. cit. 470–474.

²³ E. Langlotz–Fr. Deichmann, op. cit. 1242. From this perspective, he underlines the importance of the Lambesis sanctuary, Col. 1240. Cf. L. Török, Transfigurations of Hellenism. Aspects of Late Antique Art in Egypt AD 250–700. [Probleme der Ägyptologie, Bd. 23] Leiden–Boston 2005, 139–182.

²⁴ E. Langlotz–Fr. Deichmann, op. cit. 1247: The votive inscriptions within the building reveal the purposes for which the basilica was built. The name of the God to whom the offering was made is given in the inscription.

²⁵ K. Kerényi, A római Porta Maggiore mellett fölfedezett antik bazilika jelentőségéhez. (To the Importance of the Ancient Basilica near Porta Maggiore in Rome). EPhK 49 (1925) 111–125.

²⁶ Isid. Orig. XV, 4, 11: *Basilicae prius vocabantur regum habitacula, unde et nomen habent; nam basileus rex et basilicae regiae habitationes. Nunc autem ideo divina templa basilicae nominantur, quia ibi regi omnium Deo cultus et sacrificia offerentur.*

²⁷ H. G. Liddell–R. Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon with a revised supplement, Sir H. Stuart Jones–R. McKenzie. Oxford 1996, 309: the word means ‘kingship, dominion’.

²⁸ H. Biedermann, Knaurs Lexikon der Symbole. München 1989, 40–41.

²⁹ *Timaios* 25a, c, d; *Critias* 115c–d; 116a (residence of the king); 116d (Poseidon’s temple), 118a (items were told by Solon), 119d (description of the administration). The annotations draw our attention to other details, which have come down to us through other classical authors.

³⁰ Plat. *Tim.* 21e, 22a.

worthy of the temple, which itself was also located here. The baths and the gymnasiums were situated further afield, and then last of all came the buildings of the shopkeepers and merchants.³¹ At the center of the island stood an *oreichalcos* column, on which were inscribed the decrees of the god – in this instance – Poseidon. It is at this site that trials were held.³²

If we compare Plato's description those of the various buildings that went under the name of 'basilica', then we notice that the term embodies all the major aspects of the blissful life of the Golden Age. It is as if the golden age had once more been given an earthly embodiment. This is why all these buildings could be called '*basilica*'. It does not relate to the particulars, but it embraces completely the human life. I therefore suggest that, in the case of the Romans, the basilica, in any function, emblemized the golden age. The sunken Island of Atlantis (the Island of the Blessed) – so to say – rises again by way of the traditions, which are emblemized by the basilica. It is not accidental that the Egyptian priests told the story to Solon, and the ancient world also learned the art of basilica-building from them. In this regard, I would mention the *oreichalcos* column, whose role in the transcendence of the Roman architecture is clearer if we call it an obelisk.³³ Above all else, the obelisks that Augustus ordered to be brought from Egypt and to be placed in the Field of Mars and in the Circus Maximus come to mind.³⁴ Researchers regard these obelisks as one of the components of Augustus' religious program along, with the Pantheon, including the *horologium* and the *ara pacis*, and his own mausoleum.³⁵ Ammianus Marcellinus writes also the large obelisk that Constantine had erected in the Circus Maximus. He says that, although the obelisk was dedicated to the sun god, Constantine did not think that he had committed an act of sacrilege by bringing it to Rome, for he was simply placing it in 'the temple of the world'.³⁶ We must not forget that Constantine was particularly keen to propagate the cult of Sol Invictus.

³¹ Plat. *Crit.* 116a–e, 117a–c.

³² Plat. *Crit.* 119c–d.

³³ We should not forget that either the whole obelisk or the top of the obelisk, was coated in metal. – K. Jansen-Winkel, *Obelisk DNP* 8 (2000) 1081–1082.

³⁴ Amm. Marc. XVII, 4, 12.

³⁵ H. E. Stier, *Augustusfriede und römische Klassik*. ANRW II, 2, 3–54. W. Speyer, *Das Verhältnis des Augustus zur Religion*. ANRW II, 16, 1777–1805; J.-F. Oudet, *Le Panthéon de Rome à la lumière de l'équinoxe*. In: *Readings in Archaeoastronomy*. Warsaw 1992, 25–51; E. Buchner, *Die Sonnenuhr des Augustus*. Mainz 1982 (Nachdruck aus RhM. 1976).

³⁶ Amm. Marc. XVII, 4, 13: *Verum Constantinus id parvi ducens, avulsam hanc molem sedibus suis, nihilque committere in religionem recte existimans, si ablatum uno templo miraculum Romae sacraret, id est in templo mundi totius, iacere diu perpessus est, dum translationi pararentur utilia.*

I will emphasize several main points. According to Romans, basilicas became common in the age of the emperors, who built them in memory of the Golden Age of Augustus.³⁷ This Golden Age of Augustus in which ‘the time had come’³⁸ has already been thoroughly studied. The basilica continues to retain its original significance and function as a regal residence and imperial throne room. As such, it has later become a Christian church, handing over the place to the God, the King of all of us, as Isidorus Hispalensis writes. This change influences the ground plan of the basilica in that it permanently becomes longitudinal. The apse, however, preserves the circular shape of the Island of the Blessed. In this respect, we should consider the transcendental elements in Roman architecture. Rome was what is generally regarded as the pagan temple of the world, and also the center of the world. Even today – accepted or not accepted – Rome is the centre of the world, namely *Roma aeterna*, which in all likelihood arose from Constantine’s architectural and administrative achievements. The erection of obelisks is particularly significant because it connects the ages of Augustus and Constantine.³⁹

III. The buildings of Constantine and the *Basilica Constantiniana*

I shall not list the basilicas that were built under Constantine.⁴⁰ However, the most important is the *Basilica Constantiniana*, which is located within the walls of the city of Rome. Since the apse was very prominent in the basilicas of Constantine, and since all the edifices of Constantine were automatically

³⁷ The second golden age, see Verg. *Aen.* VI. 791–795: *hic vir, hic est, tibi quem promitti saepius audis, / Augustus Caesar, diui genus, aurea condet / saecula qui rursus Latio regnata per arua / Saturno quondam, super et Garamantas et Indos / proferet imperium*, Cf. K. Kerényi, Vergilius, a megváltó ezredik év költője. (Virgil, Poet of the Redeeming 2000th Year). EphK 54 (1930) 145–154.

³⁸ Verg. *Ec.* IV. 4. Egypt and the Roman Empire competed for the restoring the golden age. On one side stood Anthony and Cleopatra, and on the other Octavius. Cf. L. Kákósy, Az egyiptomi aranykor-mítoszok történeti fejlődése és társadalmi vonatkozása. (Historic Development and Social Relations of Egyptian Golden Age Myths. AntTan 14 (1967) 1–16, esp. 14. L. Kákósy, Urzeitmythen und Historiographie im alten Ägypten. (Neue Beiträge zur Geschichte der alten Welt. I.). Berlin 1964, 61 ff.

³⁹ The ideal figure for both of them was Romulus, the ancestor who, with the meditations of the celestial augurium, was given the right to found the city of Rome and the Roman Empire. (Liv. I, 7, 1: *Priori Remo augurium venisse fertur, sex volutres; iamque nuntiatio augurio cum duplex numerus Romulo se ostendit, ...*). Constantine called his first son Romulus.

⁴⁰ I would underline once more that I am chiefly dealing in this article with buildings that have connection with Christianity. And I am not dealing with all of his buildings. By ‘related to Christianity’, I mean those buildings that were built for Christian use, but were not churches.

thought to be Christian churches, it became widely accepted – at least in Hungary – that every building possessing an apse and dating to the fourth century was a Christian temple, specifically a basilica. But this is a very questionable assumption, as we have demonstrated.

We first need to ask whether the basilicas of Constantine began as Christian buildings or did the pagan emperor order the building of basilicas for Christians to express the recognition of Christianity. We also need to ask the following questions: What function did these buildings originally serve? When were they transformed into churches? What purposes did the different parts of these churches serve? Can we explain their earlier functions in terms of the ‘Lettner’ of the Middle Ages?

Let us look closely at the *Basilica Constantiniana*.⁴¹ The history of the Basilica Constantiniana in the ancient period was suggested rather, than proved. The basilica must have been consecrated in 312 or 318, since November 9 fell on a Sunday in both these years during the papacy of Pope Silvester. Baronius stated November 9 is the date of consecration, but he made no mention of the year. The temple was then renamed Basilica Salvatoris.⁴² An inscription of a dedication also exists, however, which dates to 428 and which, according to the suggestion, would correspond to time in which the apse was repaired. The difficulty, however, is that the dates do not match up with the historical events to which they refer. Maxentius had his base in Rome until he was defeated by Constantine in October 28, 312. Constantine could not possibly have constructed any building before this date,⁴³ and therefore 9 November 312, must be ruled out as the date of consecration. Furthermore, Christianity was at this time *religio illicita* throughout the Empire.⁴⁴ We cannot be sure about 318, either, for the consecration of the basilica could not have occurred during the papacy of Silvester, unless it was merely a matter of the standard pagan ritual of dedi-

⁴¹ For details concerning the excavations and the history of the church, see *Corpus Basilicarum Christianarum Romae* = CBChR V, 1977. pp. 1–92.

⁴² *Caesare Baronio Sorano*, *Martyrologium Romanum*. Coloniae Agrippinae 1603, 709–710: 9th Nov. *Dedicatio Basilica Salvatoris. Variis nominibus eadem Basilica dicta reperitur: siquidem in registro S. Gregorij lib. II. cap. I. appellatur Basilica Iulii. haec etenim ibi scripta leguntur: Acclamatum est in Lateranis in Basilica Iulii ab omni clero etc. Non tamen existimo a Iulio Papa ita dictam: nam duas illum erexisse Basilicas, alteram iuxta Forum, via Flaminia alteram, tradit liber de Rom. Pont. Vetus enim urbis monumentum erat Basilica Iulii, cuius meminit Plin. lib. 5. epist. 11. ... Is (sc. Hieronymus Iunior) ... in epistola ad Cardinales S. R. E. haec inter alia scribit: Lateranensis ecclesia, sicut Salvatoris est insignita vocabulo, qui nimirum est caput omnium electorum, ita mater, et quidam apex et vertex omnium per Orbem Ecclesiarum. ...*

⁴³ It was not necessary, since Maxentius was his brother-in-law and, at the start, their relationship was untroubled. The relationship only turned antagonistic later on. *W. Kuchoff*, op.cit. 882–913.

⁴⁴ But Galerius published his edict in his part of the Empire in 311.

cation and not of Christian consecration.⁴⁵ What has never been questioned is whether or not the basilica was built by Constantine.⁴⁶ This is why it bears the name Basilica Constantiniana. In the period of the Republic, basilicas bore either the name of the person by whom they were built or that of the person to whom they were dedicated. In this case, just as in the period of the Republic, the linguistic practice was to attach the name of the builder as an adjective. On the basis of the evidence we have listed, therefore, there are no grounds for claiming that the building was a Christian church,⁴⁷ or even to say with any confidence that it was used for Christian purposes. A letter written by Pope Hadrian I exists, which contains the following remark: „*basilica Salvatoris domini nostri Iesu Christi, quondam Constantiniana*”.⁴⁸ The word 'quondam' shows that both the *Basilica Constantiniana*, and the *Basilica Salvatoris* were only a

⁴⁵ CBChR V. p. 90. It is worth noting that, in Ernest Nash's opinion, 318 is a possible date for the consecration, since Constantine first disbanded the *equites singulares* and then began building on the site of the camp immediately after he had defeated Maxentius. (*E. Nash*, op. cit. 3)

⁴⁶ For details concerning the donations to the 'temple' and the *fastigium* (the description of the *fastigium* and the mention of seven altars cause the problem): S. Sylvester papa, Prolegomena. PL Vol. 8, 803 A–C: *Hujus temporibus fecit Constantinus Augustus basilicas istas, quas et ornavit. Basilicam Constantinianam, ubi posuit dona ista: fastigium argenteum, habens in fronte Salvatorem sedentem in sella, quinque pedum, pensantem libras 120 (310); et duodecim apostolos, habentes singulos quinos pedes, pensantes libras 90, cum coronis ex argento purissimo. Item a tergo respicientem in abside Salvatorem, sedentem in throno in pedibus quinque, ex argento purissimo, pensantem libras 140; et angelos quatuor ex argento in quinis pedibus, qui pensant singuli libras 115, cum gemmis Alabandenis; fastigium ipsum pensat libras duo millia 25; coronas quatuor ex auro purissimo, cum delphinis viginti, pensantes singulas [0803B] libras 15; pharum ex auro purissimo, cum delphinis quingentis (quindecim), cum catena, qui pensant libras 25; cameram basilicae ex auro, pensantem in longum et in latum libras 50; Altaria septem ex argento purissimo, pensantia libras ducentas; patenas aureas septem, pensantes singulas libras triginta. Patenas argenteas sexdecim, pensantes singulas libras tringinta (tres); scyphos ex auro purissimo septem, pensantes singulos libras decem; scyphum singularem ex metallo, corallo ornatum, et undique de gemmis prasinis et hyacinthinis, auro interclusum ex omni parte, qui pensat libras viginti et uncias tres; scyphos argenteos viginti, pensantes singulos libras quindecim; amas ex auro purissimo duas, pensantes singulas libras quinquaginta, portantes singulas [0803C] medimnos tres; amas argenteas 20, pensantes singulas libras 10, portantes singulas medimnos singulos; calices minores aureos purissimos 40, pensantes singulos libras singulas; calices minores ministeriales quingentos, pensantes singulos libras duas. Cf. Th. Klauser, Die konstantinischen Altäre der Lateranbasilika. Römische Quartalschrift 43 (1935) 179–186. The article essentially says the following: All the textual evidence from the early Christian period supports the opinion that Christian churches had only one altar. The problem can be solved by proposing that altars were placed at the entrance to receive offerings. This practice, however, could only have begun in the fifth century. In regard to the *fastigium*, the writers of the CBChR believe that the description reflected the situation as it stood in the sixth century. Vol. V. passim.*

⁴⁷ By 'Christian temple', I mean a building in which mass was regularly said.

⁴⁸ MGH Epistulae Merovingici et Karoli, Tom V. Aevi 3. (Berolini apud Weidmannos 1899) p. 15/36–37. The text also reveals that a council was held here in 791.

historical fact for the eighth-century writer.

Between 432 and 440 Valentinianus III donated a silver *fastigium* to the basilica to replace one which had been donated by Constantine but which had been plundered. The existence of this original *fastigium* was used to support the claim that the building was used as a Christian temple at an early period. *Fastigia*, however, were not only used by Christians. Since Suetonius speaks of one in his biography of Caligula, they must also have been found on pagan basilicas.⁴⁹ For this reason, the fastigium cannot be taken as conclusive evidence that the basilica was a Christian church at the time that Constantine donated it.⁵⁰ Also, at the time of the Vandal attack in Rome, Leo I donated several objects, and repainted the apse again. The phrase '*cameram fecit*'⁵¹ shows that he built something between 455 and 461. Under Pope Hormisdas the '*arcum argenteum ante altare*' was built between 514–523.⁵² This was likewise seen as a momentous event. The arch in front of the altar (it is not equal with the arch of triumph at the end of the apse) emphasizes the division of the building into different zones, which must have been necessary for some reason.

In regard to the building and consecration of the basilica, we need to return to the inscription, which was found in the apse when it was excavated.⁵³ Flavius Felix and his wife, Padusia had the inscription erected. This inscription tells us that Flavius Felix and Padusia had built (*fecerunt*) the apse at their own expense to absolve their votive offering. Flavius was *consul ordinarius*, *patricius* and *magister utriusque militiae*. Flavius Felix was *consul ordinarius* in 428, his complete name being Flavius Constantius Felix.⁵⁴ There is also a dyptich in

⁴⁹ Suet. *Cal.* 37: *Quin et nummos non mediocris summae e fastigio basilicae Iuliae per aliquot dies sparsit in plebem.*

⁵⁰ *Liber Pontificalis*, pars prior. *Gestarum pontificum Romanorum*. MGH. Ed. *Th. Mommsen*. Berolini apud Weidmannos 1898. I. 52/10–17. A 'Salvator' statue also appears in the description, which as donation has been attributed to Constantine. It is certain, however, that it could only have been carved after the consecration, which did not occur during the reign of Constantine, as I have demonstrated. It was already there in the sixth century, when the *Liber Pontificalis* was assembled.

⁵¹ *Liber Pontificalis* I. 105/3.

⁵² *Liber Pontificalis* I. 130/13.

⁵³ *Corpus Basilicarum Christianarum Romae* V. p. 10; Also Hermann Dessau writes: *Romae olim in basilicae Lateranensis abside* ... The inscription – according to his opinion – must have been erected between 428 and 430. ILS 1293: Fl. Felix v. c. *magister utriusque militiae, patricius et cons. ord. et Padusia eius incl. femina, voti compotes de proprio fecerunt*. This inscription is also published in ILCV Ed. *E. Diehl*. Berlin 1925–1928. *J. Moreau* 1961, 68. H. Josi excavated the nave and the castrum between 1934 and 1938. The newer excavations were organized by R. Krautheimer and S. Corbett in 1957–1958. They are the authors of the *Corpus Basilicarum Christianarum Romae*.

⁵⁴ *Otto Seeck*, Flavius Felix. RE Stuttgart VI, 2167/12. There is also another inscription: – ILCV

ivory, which also dates from the year of his consulate (428).⁵⁵ It has been suspected that Felix and Padusia had the apse repainted, the inscription attested to this change.⁵⁶ This opinion, however, can be rebutted on linguistic grounds. Would ‘*facio*’ be used in connection with painting? On other inscriptions ‘*facio*’ is always used in connection with buildings.⁵⁷

On the basis of the analogies I would make the claim that it is not only a question of painting but also of building. The consecration of the basilica came after this. Thus, the inscription and the title ‘*Salvator*’ must date to the fifth century. In addition, during the excavations undertaken between 1934 and 1938,⁵⁸ it became clear that the nave of the temple was built on the site of a military fortress.⁵⁹ This fortress was called *Castra Nova Equitum Singulariorum*.⁶⁰ The *equites singulares* were stationed here. What is important to note is that inscriptions, which have been found in the fortress, refer to Diocletianus and Maximianus.⁶¹ This fact makes certain that only an emperor could have ordered it to be built.⁶²

72 = CIL XIV 2824: + / *Felix v. i. / ex consule ord. / servus vest. pro/*⁵ *continuis beneficiis vestris / optulit*. This inscription can refer to two consuls: Flavius Constantius Felix, the *consul ordinarius* in 428, and Flavius Felix, who was consul in 511. Cf. J. R. Martindale, *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*. Vol. II. A. D. 395–527. Cambridge–London, etc., p. 475. Desau suggests that ‘*vest*’ is an abbreviation for ‘*servus vester*’. sc. sanctorum – ILS 1295. In this later period, much greater caution is required regarding the consularship as an institution and the executive powers of the consul: Richard W. Burgess, *Consuls and consular dating in the Later Roman Empire*. Phoenix 43 (1989) 143–157, esp. 143, 156. This concerns the visits of the emperors in Rome, which were not very frequent: Constantinus 312–313, 315, 326. II. Constantius 357 (and not in 353). Theodosius 389.

⁵⁵ ILS 1298. 1: *Fl. Felicis v. c. com ac. mag. 2: utrq. mil. patr. et cos. ord.* = CIL XIII 10032, 1: *Fl(avii) Felicis v(iri) c(larissimi) com(itis) ac mag(istri) utr(ius)q(ue) mil(itiae) patr(icii) et co(n)s(ulis) ord(inarii)*.

⁵⁶ *Corpus Basilicarum Christianarum Romae* V, p. 10.

⁵⁷ In non-Christian and earlier pagan (third century) inscriptions ‘*extruxit*’ is used for building.

⁵⁸ For details concerning the earlier excavations, see E. Josi, *Notize. Scoperte nella basilica Costantiniana al Laterano*. *Rivista di archeologia cristiana* Roma 11 (1934) 335.

⁵⁹ *Corpus Basilicarum Christianarum Romae* V, fig. 11: plan of the fortress.

⁶⁰ J. B. Cambell, *Equites singulares* DNP 4 (1998) 37–38; A. Brunt, C. Fabricius Tuscus and Augustus Dilectus. *ZPE* 13 (1974) 161–185. A *Castra Nova* had been built by Septimius Severus.

⁶¹ A. Ferrua, *Nuove iscrizioni degli Equites Singulares*. *Epigraphica* 13 (1951) 96–141, esp. 141, nr. 120: „...le due basi siano state erette in onore di Massimiano e di Diocleziano degli equites singulares, ...”. The inscriptions can be dated from the interval 297–298.

⁶² Cf. *Founding cities on the area of once legionary fortresses: territorum legionis and prata legionis* – Mócsy A., *A prata legionis kérdése* (Zu den prata legionis). *Dissertationes archaeologicae ex Instituto Archaeologico Universitatis de Rolando Eötvös nominatae* 6, 1964, 87–94. A. Mócsy, *Zu den prata legionis*. In: *Studien zu den Militärgrenzen Roms*. Köln 1967, 211–214; A. Mócsy, *Das Problem der militärischen Territorien im Donauraum*. *ActaAntHung* 20 (1972) 133–168. Cf. Kovács P., *Katonai territoriumok* (Military territoria). In: *Vicus és Castellum*

The writers of the CBChR had already expressed their doubts about the basilica and also its consecration. They thought that the basilica was not a Christian one, and it is unlikely that the Pope Silvester consecrated it. They did emphasize, however, that the basilica, as it was during the reign of Constantine could only hypothetically be reconstructed.⁶³ One of their arguments is that, since the *Liber Pontificalis* was compiled in the sixth century, *Liber Pontificalis* reflects the historical circumstances of that century. These comments give witness to the fact that the writers of the *Corpus* thought that the building probably was not a church in the reign of Constantine I. Richard Krautheimer states that Constantine's buildings are memorial sites where Christian prayed and sang together, but where mass was not said regularly.⁶⁴

IV. Conclusions

A memorial or a memorial basilica, for a ruler who thinks in a pagan way, is no more than a reception hall or a throne room that has been dedicated to the memory of a martyr. In the case of the Lateran Basilica, this was a place where the Roman bishop decided upon cases,⁶⁵ and also where he could receive a growing number of believers, and where he could also teach. If a basilica was the type of building that was fit for an emperor, the bishop of the secular

kapcsolata az Alsó-pannoniai limes mentén. *Studia Classica*. Piliscsaba 1999, 107–113; Zsidi P., Die Frage des 'militärischen Territoriums' In: Die norisch-pannonischen Städte und das römische Heer im Lichte der neuerten archäologischen Forschungen. II. Internationale Konferenz über norisch-pannonische Städte. Aquincum Nostrum II. 3. Budapest 2005, 168–172. Other questions concern the possession. Who possessed this area? It is a widespread opinion that Constantine has given the area first to his wife, Fausta, later, however, to Melchiadus, bishop of Rome – *S. Sylvester papa*, Prolegomena. PL Vol. 8, 803 D: *Basilicam Constantinianam. Haec alias Lateranensis appellatur, ideo quod Constantino fundatore in monte Coelio in amplissimis aedibus Laterani aedificata sit: quas aedes Constantinus primum Faustae Augustae, ac deinde Melchiadi papae cesserat. Nam concilium illud, quod in causa Caeciliani sub Melchiade celebratum esse supra diximus, in Laterano in domo Faustae habitum fuit. Vide Baronium anno 312 numero octavo et sequentibus. Item anno 324.* For details see Nash, op. cit. 1–21. The author – who deals with the possessions and owners – is of the opinion that Fausta, the emperor's wife has had house or anything else in this region, but a Christian woman whom was called Fausta, really owned a part of this region.

⁶³ CBChR V. fig 15: Ruins of the Roman period, which came to light; CBChR V. fig. 78: The reconstructed building. – I would underline that plan published by Deichmann (*E. Langlotz–Fr. Deichmann*, op. cit. 1225–1259.) shows the plan from the Middle Ages. The transept does not come from the Roman time.

⁶⁴ R. Krautheimer, *Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture*. London 1965, 34.

⁶⁵ The apse was built into the building where the bishop of Rome, Miltiades held the council because of the quarrelling Donatists, and where decision in this affair was said – *E. Nash*, op. cit. 8.

sphere, then it was also the type of building that was appropriate for a bishop, who governed the affairs of the church. What I would propose, therefore, is that, as far as Constantine was concerned (at least in the early part of his reign), the Lateran basilica was only a throne room of the imperial palace.⁶⁶ It was not a Christian church but a building that served as a document of proof that Christianity had received official recognition. It represented Christianity's legitimacy, and also served as a symbol of its transcendental outlook. From this point forward, Christians could partake in the restored Golden Age, and their bishop was now the recognized ruler of the city of Rome.

I shall now turn to an analysis of the role of the basilica during the period when Constantine ruled alone (324–337). Constantine was the ruler of the whole empire, and thus governed pagans and Christians alike. The central goal of his reign was to achieve equilibrium between the various contending forces.⁶⁷ The memorial basilica served this purpose well, since large amounts of people came there to learn, pray, and sing together. It was indeed the place where the ancient classical culture and Christian literary and musical culture could meet.⁶⁸ Singing was well known to the 'pagan' Romans, too; in fact, they used the spoken word even less than the Christians did. The meters of classical poetry, such as the hexameter, however, were different from the rhythm of the psalms, so the Romans still had some things to learn. I believe, therefore, that the basilica under Constantine, because of its size was suitable for the reception of a large number of people. In the basilica, teaching took place, and also on occasion, so did prayer. Many of those present were obviously not Christians. It was only in the fifth and sixth century that these basilicas were rebuilt into churches. The Basilica Constantiniana, however, held a special place as a throne room that was worthy of the Roman bishop, and it announced the religious legitimacy.

Lastly, I would like to emphasize that the basilicas built in the fourth century were not yet churches.⁶⁹ It is only in the fifth and sixth centuries that the changes take place not only in respect to the basilica but also in general. The changes in the Christian liturgy that took place between the breaking-of-the-

⁶⁶ In the *Liber Pontificalis* listed gifts do not take issue with my proposal: *Liber Pontificalis* 48, 1–17.

⁶⁷ D. Gáspár, Some Words about the Basilica. In: Mednarodni Znanstveni Simpozij ob 1700 – Letnici Smrti Sv. Viktorina Ptujkega. Zbornik Razprav. Ptuj 2003, 133–145.

⁶⁸ Dobszay L., Mire való a zene? (What is Music Good for?). Magyar Egyházzene 10 (2002–2003) 3–6, esp. 5: „A szöveg az antik ember számára csak akkor volt közösségi érvényű, ha megfelelő zenei formában hangzott el.” (A text for a person living in ancient times was only of communal value if it was presented in the appropriate musical form.) This statement is so true that even the laws of the Twelve Table were written in 'carmina' form.

⁶⁹ If they even were not churches, Christians must have used them.

bread in the second century and the holy mass in the fifth century are not often considered. Consequently, one does not distinguish between the earlier house-churches and the later churches, neither in terms of their function, nor in terms of their consecrated and non-consecrated zones. These distinctions can be very significant, for the church is above all else a liturgical space, not a building. In the Basilica Constantiniana, the first modification, which might date to 428 AD, relates to the apse. The other modification, which came in the sixth century, was made to the arch in front of the altar. It was as if this arch served as a door, which was a step into the sacred domain. It is certain that the sacred zone of the temple lay behind the arch, where the altar was situated. The nave of the church, however, was not a sacred zone but a place used for teaching.⁷⁰ It is also certain that the people in the nave sometimes did not behave appropriately for a church therefore the sacred zone itself was also architecturally protected from secular things. That is why the 'Lettner' was lead in the Middle Ages; I would suggest. It did not shut out the common people but only those who talked among themselves or disturbed the others. The 'Lettner', therefore, did not serve the same purpose as the iconostas.

V. Appendix

Although not directly related to the topic of the basilica, I would also like to make some comments about the *Donatio Constantini*. The letter that Constantine was believed to have written to Pope Silvester concerned his recovery from a serious illness. He had caught leprosy, but had recovered, when Pope Silvester baptized him. In return, the emperor gave to the pope and his successors primacy over the entire Christian church as well as political power over Italy and the northern territories. He also provided them with insignias, and handed over to them the Lateran Palace.

It was Lorenzo Valla, who demonstrated without a doubt that the wording of the donation dated to the eighth century.⁷¹ Therefore from the fifteenth century on, the document has been regarded as a forgery. It is true, that it was not written during the reign of Constantine. We often have to come to terms with the difficulties that an insertion into a text written in an earlier age produces: identi-

⁷⁰ Cf. R. Pillinger, Ephesos under Christian influence [Occasional Papers No. 7]. Berkeley 1999. The other question, which arose in connected with the pulpit. It in the nave very likely has kept the ancient distinction of the consecrated and profane zones.

⁷¹ L. Valla, De falso credita et ementita Constantini donatione. Hrsg. von W. Wetz (Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Quellen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters, Bd. 10) Weimar 1976. I will not deal with this subject in detail, but I will make only a suggestion.

fying its origins, significance, and interpretation can all create problems. We need to look at the text in a different way. In this case, we might regard it as myth. A myth was considered a truth for the Romans: 'A myth for the person who believes in that myth is a revelation of the truth, and regards it as a recognition of the truth, ...'⁷² A myth is true, therefore. Our task is to understand what it wishes to say to us. If we look at the *Donatio Constantini*, the emperor truly suffered from leprosy, it was a spiritual, not a physical form of leprosy. Christianity, in this metaphorical reading, saved him from this spiritual leprosy. We should recall, however, that Constantine's actual baptism into the Christian faith only came later, and also that Pope Silvester did not baptize him. Despite this, the building's façade of the Church of Saint Polyeuctus represented Constantine's baptism by Pope Silvester. The work was completed during the papacy of Hormisdas, when the union between the pope and the emperor was restored. Thus, mosaic celebrates the union of pope and emperor.⁷³ Therefore, not only did they celebrate this union in writing but in a mosaic, as well. Also, considering this event took place in the sixth century, it was of considerable importance. Furthermore, I propose that Constantine the Great became an archetype of unity and for the establishment of equilibrium.⁷⁴ We know that, through his efforts, Christianity became *religio licita*. We also know that he gave privileges to the Christians. In both the text and the representation, baptism signifies these activities. When the emperor offered his hand in peace, there must have been someone to accept it. This acceptance could not be made by anyone other than his contemporary, Pope Silvester. If we look at the narration in this way, we have to say that its content is true. A myth tells of what is essentially true. That is why the donation is true, as well. To say that the text was written down in the eighth century, only means that at this time they feared that the archetype might be forgotten, and thus showed the effort to achieve concord between the temporal and the spiritual powers. Their fears were realized when Lorenzo Valla later declared that the donation was a forgery.

⁷² B. Croce, *Nuovi saggi di estetica*. 2 ed. accresciuta (Saggi filosofici V). Bari 1926, 17.

⁷³ G. Fowden, Constantine, Silvester and the Church of S. Polyeuctus in Constantinople. *JRA* 7 (1994) 274–284.

⁷⁴ The Byzantine court for a very long time looked upon Constantine as a model ruler. It also imitated his methods. Even his vision was appreciated by his successors.