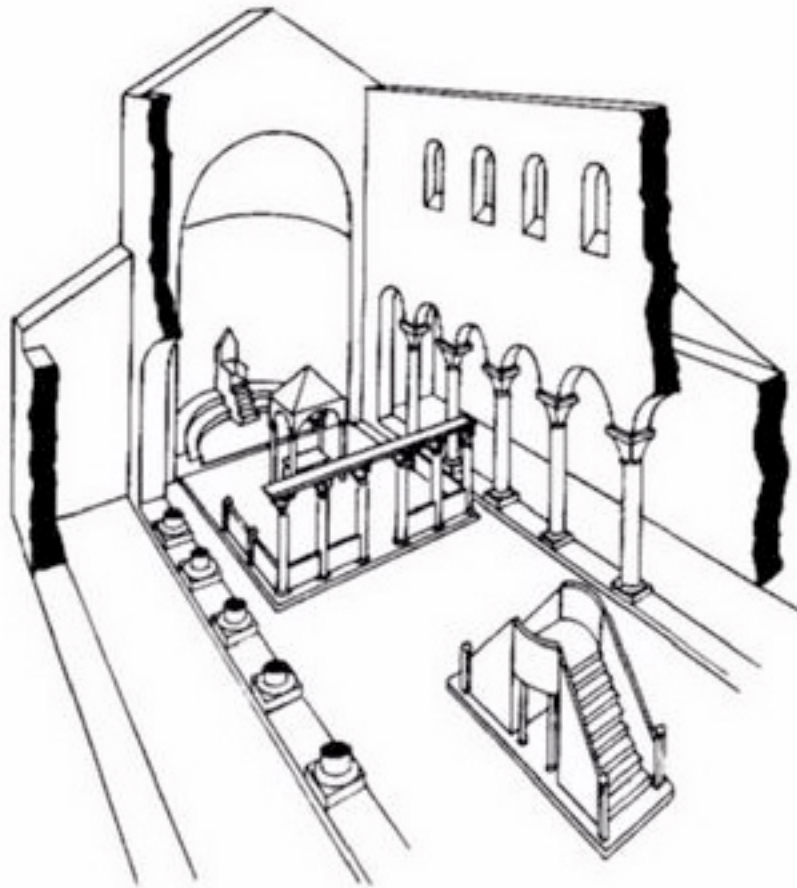
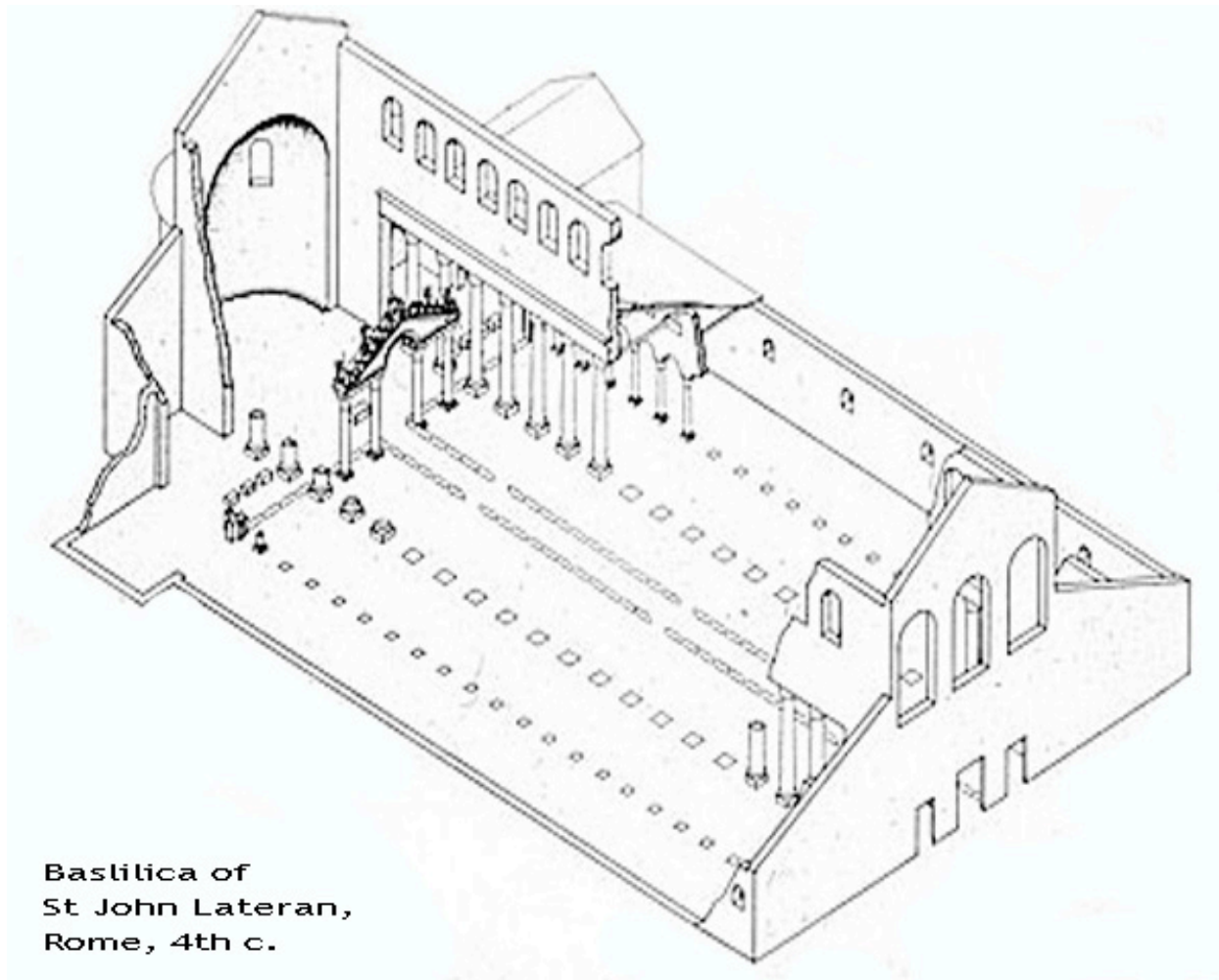


Some Features of Christian Architecture

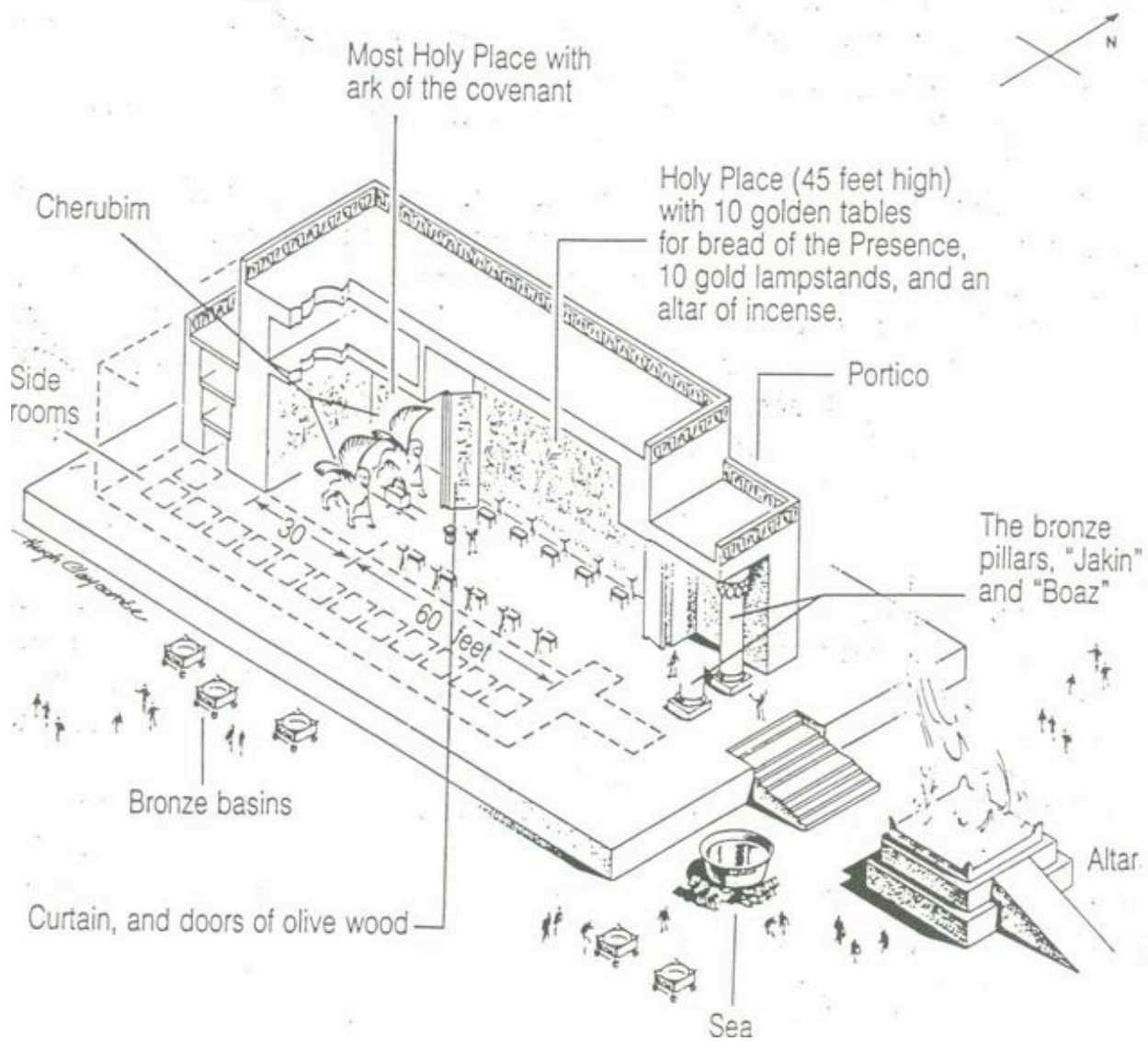


Liturgical layout of a sixth-century Greek basilica

This is the structure more or less presupposed by the Eastern Orthodox typicon (and more or less common to all Christian liturgical traditions, east or west). Note the *ambon*, from which the readers read the scriptures, facing east (facing the altar) in the middle of the church. Sometimes this was linked to the sanctuary by a causeway called the *soleas*; today the *soleas* is simply the step(s) in front of the sanctuary. The bishop's *cathedra* (throne) and the priests' semicircular *synthronon* are behind the altar. (A church with a bishop's official *cathedra* is called a *cathedral*.) At the end of the 4th century, Chrysostom tells us that the clergy entered the church together with the people, and proceeded directly to the throne in the apse; the priest or bishop goes there even today, after the Trisagion. Or, the clergy might have sat on the *soleas* around the *ambon* for the readings. In this early church, the *iconostasis* has not yet developed; the sanctuary is separated from the nave only by a low wall with pillars and an architrave across the top. Icons would have been placed on the architrave and pillars, and a curtain would have veiled the sanctuary. The deacon's doors are on either side of the sanctuary, not in front as today. Synagogues had a similar structure, but were 'oriented' to Jerusalem rather than to the east, and did not have an altar but did have an ark at the Jerusalem end, for storing the Torah scrolls. The reader read from an *ambon* in synagogues as well.

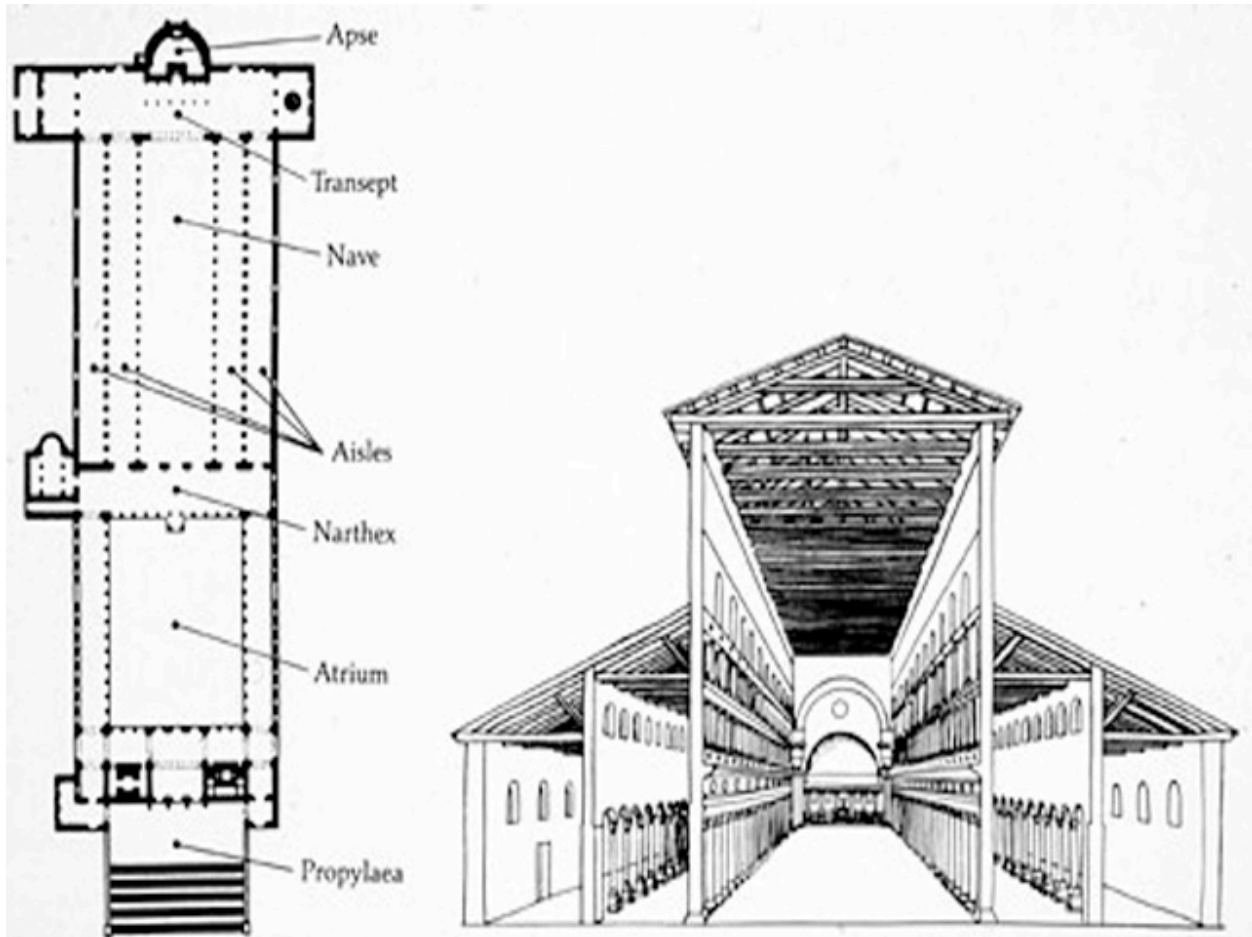


The *basilica* (the name means 'royal building') was originally a civic market place or public hall, and a speaker's platform was usually located in the middle of one of the long walls so that a maximum of people could gather around it to hear. The church found it desirable to move the focus to the far end and to emphasize the dimension of movement (always eastward) in the congregation's liturgical-architectural experience, despite the fact that the acoustics were made more complicated.



A reconstructed view of the Temple in Jerusalem shows the same three-part structure as the church. Note that the altar of sacrifice is outside, and even the altar of incense is in the Outer Court, not the Holy Place or the Holy of Holies. This was not simply because the sacrifice of animals required open air. Jewish thought recognized that the Temple was only an image, not the reality of God's house, and that the sacrifices were symbolic and were not the reality itself of what they symbolized.

Note also that the direction of movement in the Jewish Temple was from east to west (the Lord comes down to his earthly house from the east); whereas in a Christian temple we move from west to east (we go up to the Lord's heavenly house from the west).

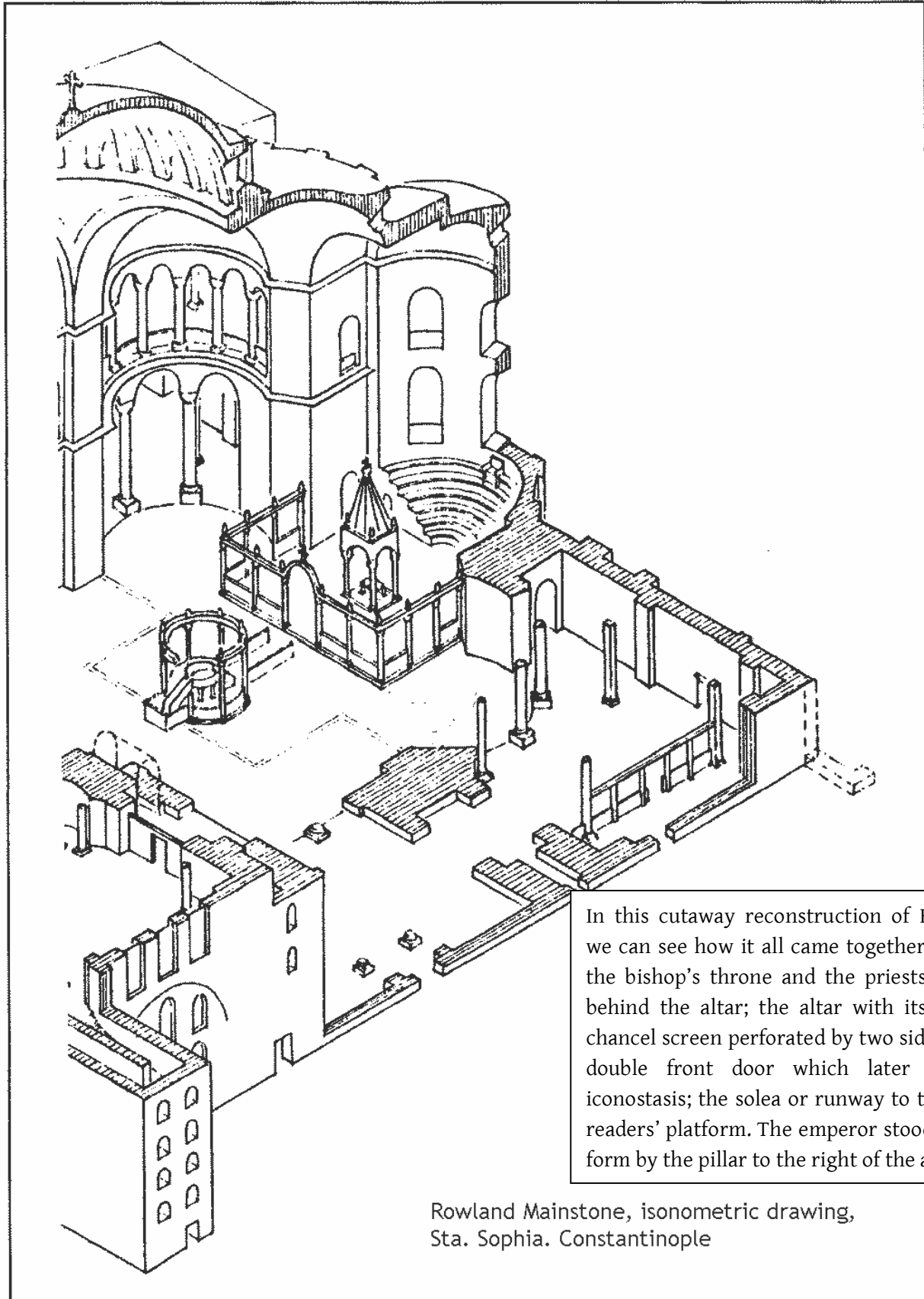


The drawing above shows St Peter's Church in Rome, in its earlier, Constantinian form. It gives a good sense of how a worshipper would have experienced the space upon entering the building. This is effectively how we still build churches today. It is often remarked that a pagan temple is a house for the god (this is true also of the Jewish Temple), whereas a Christian temple is a meeting-place for the community. It would be more correct, though, to say that the Christian temple is God's true house, into which the community has been invited, and where it eats and drinks at God's table.

Missing in this picture, of course, is the ambon.

In the picture of Saint Clement's in Rome at the right, the ambon is located to the left side. The clergy would have sat in the soleas, and the people gathered around.





In this cutaway reconstruction of Hagia Sophia, we can see how it all came together— bema with the bishop's throne and the priests' synthronon behind the altar; the altar with its canopy; the chancel screen perforated by two side doors and a double front door which later became our iconostasis; the solea or runway to the ambon, or readers' platform. The emperor stood on the platform by the pillar to the right of the ambon.

Rowland Mainstone, isometric drawing, Sta. Sophia. Constantinople