***The Basilica of Maxentius***

Three huge barrel-vaulted areas are the only remains of the Basilica of Maxentius, one of the finest building in imperial Rome. Visitors to the Forum in antiquity could see it shining from afar, for its roof was once covered with gilded tiles. However, they were removed in the 7the century and re-used in the building of Old St. Peter’s. Maxentius begun work on the basilica between A.D. 306 and 310, on the site of a large Flavian complex with storerooms and other utilitarian buildings, It was completed later, under his adversary Constantine, who made considerable modifications to the original plan by turning the man axis 90 degrees and moving the entrance from the eastern to the southern side. The measurements of the two-aisled basilica illustrate its imposing extent: the central section alone was 80m long, 25mwide and 35m high.

On its western side, the central area of the Basilica of Maxentius opened into an apse where the remains of a colossal seated statue of Constantine were found; they are now in the courtyard of the Palazzo dei Conservatori. Its size and the principle of its construction, with its mighty groined vaulting, derive from the architecture of the Baths, the central areas of which were also described as basilicas. The magnificent vaulting rested on eight Corinthian marble columns, 14.5m high, only one of which has been preserved. Pope Paul V had it erected in the square in front of S. Maria Maggiore in 1613. The side aisles were lower, and each was divided into three sections, with barrel vaulting ornamented by panels. On its northern side, the central area ended in an apse was marked off by a barrier consisting of columns and grilles, and was used as a law court. Opposite, on the southern side., the entrance built under Constantine led from the Via Sacra up a flight of steps to a portico with four porphyry columns.