Several cities and individual churches in the Middle Ages were associated with the idea of representing or incorporating Jerusalem in one manner or another. This widely attested phenomenon occurred in a large range of variants, depending on the ‘type’ of Jerusalem represented and the way in which the representation was made concrete. In this contribution, I aim to discuss one of the earliest, and perhaps one of the most notable cases of ‘being’ Jerusalem outside Jerusalem. The church leaders of Rome may have had very specific reasons for appropriating the significance of the historical Jerusalem as the ancient capital of the Roman Empire. Moreover, they may have utilized very specific instruments in order for this claim to materialize. It was rooted in the idea that Christian Rome had been founded directly from Jerusalem by the mission of the apostles Peter and Paul. Rome was, in the words of Jennifer O’Reilly: ‘the western extremity of their evangelizing mission from the biblical centre of the earth at Jerusalem and became the new centre from which their papal successors continued the apostolic mission to the ends of the earth’. The existence of the apostles’ tombs, reinforced by the recollections of numerous Christian martyrs, was the fundamental factor in making Rome into the new spiritual capital of the Christian world. This claim urged Christian Rome to establish new terms for its relationship with what qualified, perhaps, as ‘the ideological centre of the Christian empire’ in Jerusalem. It has been argued that the Roman Church did so by a literal transfer of the significance of earthly Jerusalem to Rome, and hence by making Jerusalem superfluous. Hartmann Grisar’s 1899 essay ‘Antiche basiliche di Roma imitanti i santuarii di Gerusalemme e Betlemme’ contained stimulating ideas and observations, which have largely been reproduced by later scholarship, often, however, without critical evaluation of the evidence.
In the following pages, the visual and material means employed to link Jerusalem or ideas of Jerusalem to the physical city of Rome in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages will be examined. Buildings, topography, iconography and liturgy in Christian Rome comprised various images and reflections of Jerusalem. The investigation will concentrate on the most conspicuous and consistent examples of references to the earthly Jerusalem, which represent a variety of ‘media’, including relics, visual representations, locations and ceremonies. These quotations or allusions may also refer to the Heavenly Jerusalem, but this level of interpretation needs no inclusion in the present argument. The discussion starts in Constantinian times and ends in the period of the overwhelming increase of ideas about, and memories of, Jerusalem produced all over Western Europe as a result of the Crusades. For obvious reasons, the Roman Church which is itself called ‘Jerusalem’, Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, will claim a central role in the ensuing discussion.

The Earliest Relic from the Holy Land?

The building programme of the emperor Constantine, ruling over the city of Rome from 312 until his death in 337, included the first all-embracing project of architectural and urbanistic Christianization of the ancient capital.5 The new, public buildings for Christian worship were destined for different functional categories: the urban cathedral of the Lateran, the memorial basilica of St Peter’s on the Vatican hill and funerary basilicas on the Christian cemeteries outside the walls. One of Constantine’s foundations, however, was exceptional in all respects. It was a church (basilica) installed in an existing building, the Sessorian palace, and it was allocated to the veneration of a relic brought from afar, a fragment of the wooden cross on which Jesus of Nazareth had been crucified (Fig. 6.1).6 Both the reuse of an older building and the cultic focus on a translated relic are unique in Constantine’s building activities in favour of the Christian Church, including his projects in the Holy Land and the new capital of Constantinople. The Roman editor of the early sixth century, who made use of original archival documents concerning Constantine’s church foundations to compile the Liber Pontificalis, the book with the biographies of the Roman

5 Recent overview: Brandenburg 2004.
6 LP 34 c. 22: ‘Eodem tempore fecit Constantinus Augustus basilicam in palatio Sessoriano, ubi etiam de ligno sanctæ Crucis domini nostri Iesu Christi in auro et gemmis conclusit, ubi et nomen ecclesiae dedicavit, quæ cognominatur usque in hodiernum diem Hierusalem […]’