

ROME

An Illustrated Guide to Its Monuments & Art

The Roman Forum

From Rome with Love

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Photographed on site · Notes compiled for viewing

The Arch of Titus

Location: On the Via Sacra, at the entrance to the Roman Forum, Rome



The single-bay arch on the Via Sacra; the inscription on this face is the 1821 restoration text, the ancient dedication being on the far side.



Inside: the relief of Titus riding in his four-horse triumphal chariot, crowned by Victory.



The coffered vault, with the apotheosis of Titus — the emperor carried to heaven on an eagle — in the central panel.

Description

The oldest surviving triumphal arch in Rome, raised at the high point of the Via Sacra where it enters the Forum. Domitian built it in memory of his brother, the emperor Titus, and of the Flavian victory in the Jewish War. Inside the single passage, two famous relief panels face each other — the spoils of Jerusalem carried in triumph, and Titus in his chariot — while the vault shows the dead emperor being carried up to the gods.

Inscription & Translation

The ancient dedication, on the east face, reads: “SENATVS POPVLVSQVE ROMANVS DIVO TITO DIVI VESPASIANI F[ILIO] VESPASIANO AVGVSTO.” The inscription on the west face, seen here, is a later one, added when Pope Pius VII had the arch restored in 1821.

“The Senate and People of Rome, to the deified Titus Vespasian Augustus, son of the deified Vespasian.” Calling Titus ‘divine’ (Divo) shows the arch was put up after his death, once he had been formally deified.

Date & Age

Erected about 81–82 AD, soon after Titus’s death in 81, by his brother and successor Domitian; it commemorates the capture of Jerusalem in 70 AD. The marble arch was repaired and partly rebuilt under Pope Pius VII in 1821, which is why some of the stonework looks newer than the rest.

Artist / Creators

Imperial Roman architecture of the Flavian dynasty, built under Domitian; the sculptor is unknown. The reliefs of the spoils of Jerusalem — which include the seven-branched Temple menorah, the silver trumpets and the showbread table — and of the triumph of Titus are among the most celebrated of all Roman reliefs. The 19th-century restoration was directed by the architect Giuseppe Valadier.

Significance

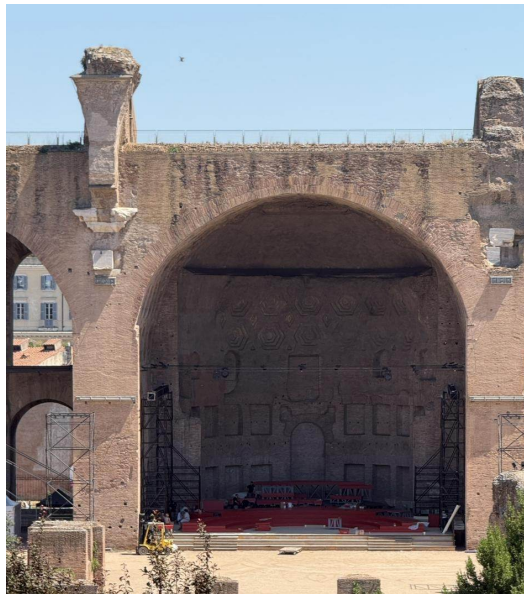
The Arch of Titus is the prototype of the Roman triumphal arch and the direct ancestor of the Arch of Constantine and of later monuments down to the Arc de Triomphe. Its spoils relief is the most important surviving image of the Temple treasures of Jerusalem being carried through Rome, and for that reason the arch holds deep significance in Jewish history as well as Roman.

The Basilica of Maxentius and the Temple of Venus and Rome

Location: At the eastern edge of the Roman Forum, on the Velia, Rome



The Basilica of Maxentius — the three colossal coffered arches of its surviving north aisle.



A single bay close up: the deeply coffered concrete vault, the largest such span in the Forum.



The Colosseum valley: the long brick platform of the Temple of Venus and Rome (left) beside the Colosseum (right).

Description

Two colossal late-Roman buildings stand where the Forum meets the Colosseum valley. The Basilica of Maxentius — the largest building in the Forum — was a vast law court and civic hall whose surviving north aisle still rises in three giant coffered vaults. Beside it stretched the Temple of Venus and Rome, the largest temple in the ancient city, designed by the emperor Hadrian. Both reached their final form in the age of Maxentius and Constantine, the rivals who fought at the Milvian Bridge.

Inscription & Translation

No inscription features in these views. The basilica's western apse once held a colossal seated statue of Constantine, about 12 metres tall — its marble head, hand and foot now survive in the Capitoline Museums.

The neighbouring Temple of Venus and Rome was dedicated to two goddesses at once: Venus Felix ('Venus the Bringer of Good Fortune'), facing the Colosseum, and Roma Aeterna ('Eternal Rome'), facing the Forum — a pairing that turns the city's name, ROMA, into AMOR, 'love.'

Date & Age

The Temple of Venus and Rome was designed by Hadrian, consecrated in 121 AD and finished around 135–141. The basilica was begun by Maxentius about 306–308 AD and completed by Constantine by about 313, after his victory at the Milvian Bridge in 312. The temple was damaged by fire in 307 and rebuilt by Maxentius, who replaced its wooden roof with the concrete coffered vaults whose remains survive.

Artist / Creators

The temple was designed by the emperor Hadrian himself — unusually for a Roman building, the architect is named. The basilica is the work of the emperors Maxentius and Constantine; built of brick-faced concrete, its three groin vaults rose about 39 metres on four great piers, lit by huge windows and lined with marble. Its deeply coffered vaults, modelled on the Pantheon's dome, would

later inspire Renaissance architects.

Significance

The Basilica of Maxentius shows Roman concrete engineering at its most ambitious — vast vaulted spaces that pointed the way to the great churches of later ages; Bramante and others studied it when designing the new St. Peter's. Together, the two buildings frame the moment when the pagan classical city gave way to the Christian empire: the basilica was the last great secular hall raised in the Forum, and Constantine, who completed it, would soon make Christianity the empire's favoured faith.

The Roman Forum

Location: Between the Palatine and Capitoline hills, Rome



Looking west: the Arch of Septimius Severus and the Curia at the foot of the Capitoline, the columns of the Temple of Castor and Pollux (left) and the Temple of Antoninus and Faustina (right).



The central Forum: the House of the Vestals with its garden pools, the Temple of Antoninus and Faustina, and the round Temple of Romulus.



Looking east toward the Colosseum: the Basilica of Maxentius (left), the bell tower of Santa Francesca Romana on the Temple of Venus and Rome, and the Arch of Titus (right).

Description

For more than a thousand years this valley between the Palatine and Capitoline hills was the heart of Rome — its marketplace, law courts, senate house and temples, and the stage for triumphs, funerals and public life. From the Palatine above, the whole sweep comes into view: a dense field of temples, basilicas, arches and columns. These three views read the Forum from west to east, naming the chief landmarks as they appear.

Inscription & Translation

No single inscription — this is the open Forum. The landmarks to pick out, west to east, include the Arch of Septimius Severus, the Curia (Senate house), the columns of the Temples of Castor and Pollux and of Antoninus and Faustina, the House of the Vestals, the round Temple of Romulus, the Basilica of Maxentius and the Arch of Titus.

The Latin word forum simply meant an open public square. This one, the Forum Romanum, was so central that it needed no other name — it was ‘the Forum,’ the model from which every other takes its name.

Date & Age

The Forum grew from a drained marsh into Rome’s civic centre from about the 7th century BC, and stayed in use through the Republic and Empire — well over a thousand years. The structures in view range from the Republican period to late antiquity: the Temple of Antoninus and Faustina (141 AD), the Arch of Septimius Severus (203 AD), the Basilica of Maxentius (about 313 AD), and — the very last monument raised here — the Column of Phocas (608 AD).

Artist / Creators

A long succession of Romans built here across the centuries — kings, Republican magistrates and emperors alike. The individual temples, arches and halls are looked at more closely in the panels that

follow.

Significance

The Roman Forum was the symbolic centre of the Roman world — where elections were held, laws proclaimed, gods worshipped, the dead eulogised (Julius Caesar among them) and victories paraded. Within the city, all roads led here: the Golden Milestone that measured the empire's distances stood in this square. To look down on it from the Palatine is to see the civic heart of an empire laid bare.

The Roman Forum: Temples and Monuments

Location: Along the Via Sacra, the Roman Forum, Rome



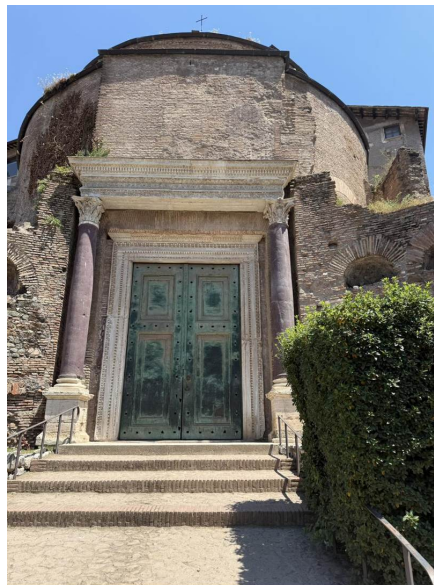
The Arch of Septimius Severus (203 AD) — a triple arch for the Parthian victories; the inscription's fourth line still shows where the murdered Geta's name was erased.



The three surviving columns of the Temple of Castor and Pollux, first vowed after a legendary cavalry victory in 484 BC.



The Temple of Antoninus and Faustina (141 AD), its columns later enclosing the church of San Lorenzo in Miranda; the architrave reads DIVO ANTONINO ET DIVAE FAVSTINAE EX S C.



The round Temple of Romulus, built by Maxentius about 307 AD for his young son — with its original bronze doors, whose lock still works.

Description

A closer look at some of the individual buildings that crowd the Forum floor. At the west end stands the triple Arch of Septimius Severus; nearby rise the three slender columns of the Temple of Castor and Pollux. Along the Via Sacra are the great columns of the Temple of Antoninus and Faustina — later turned into a church — and the round Temple of Romulus, which still keeps its original bronze doors. Among these monuments once stood the altar where Julius Caesar was cremated.

Inscription & Translation

A plaque by the Temple of Caesar records the historian Appian's account of Caesar's cremation on this spot in 44 BC. After Appian (Civil Wars II.148), it reads: "...deposero la spoglia di Cesare nel Foro... vi accumularono sopra tavole, sedili e quanto altro legname era lì... accesero il fuoco e tutto il popolo assistette al rogo durante la notte. In quel luogo venne eretta dapprima un'ara, ora vi è il tempio dello stesso Cesare, nel quale egli è onorato come un dio."

"...they laid Caesar's body in the Forum... and heaped upon it tables, benches and what other wood was there... they lit the fire, and all the people stood by the pyre through the night. On that spot an altar was first raised; now there stands the temple of Caesar himself, in which he is honoured as a god."

Date & Age

These buildings span eight centuries of the Forum's life. The Temple of Castor and Pollux was first vowed in 484 BC (the surviving columns belong to a rebuilding dedicated in 6 AD); the Temple of Antoninus and Faustina dates to 141 AD; the Arch of Septimius Severus to 203 AD; and the round Temple of Romulus to about 307 AD.

Artist / Creators

Their builders range across the centuries: the Temple of Antoninus and Faustina was raised by the emperor Antoninus Pius for his deified wife; the Arch of Septimius Severus by the Senate for the Severan emperors; the Temple of Romulus by Maxentius. Several survived by being turned into churches — which is why the Temple of Antoninus and Faustina wears a Baroque facade between its ancient columns, and the Temple of Romulus still keeps its 1,700-year-old bronze doors.

Significance

Together these monuments show how the Forum gathered layer upon layer of memory. Victories were carved in marble, gods and deified emperors were housed in temples, and the most charged spot of all was the altar where, in 44 BC, the Roman people cremated the murdered Julius Caesar and where his temple later rose. That so many survive at all is largely thanks to the early Church, which adopted them — turning pagan temples into chapels and so sparing them the quarrying that consumed most of ancient Rome.