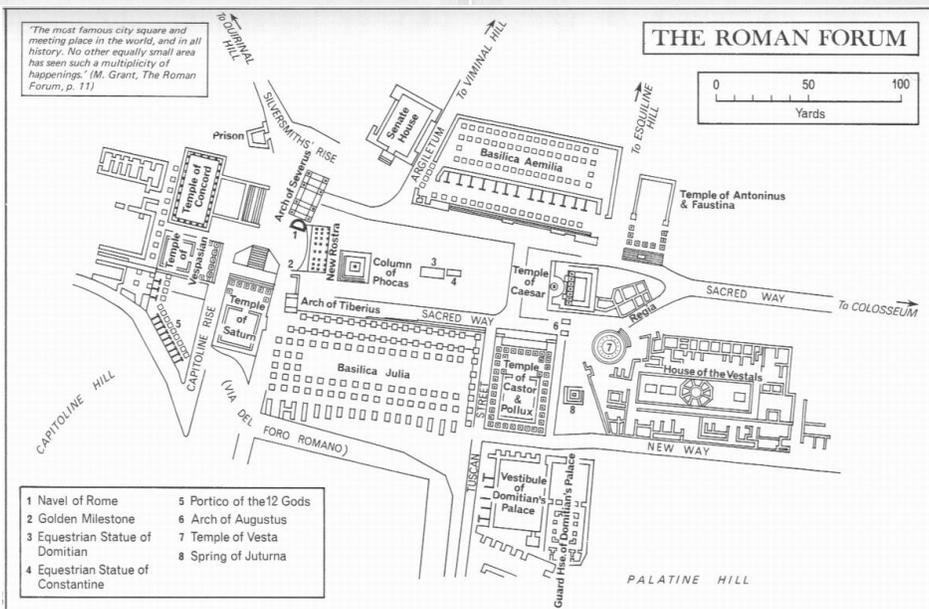
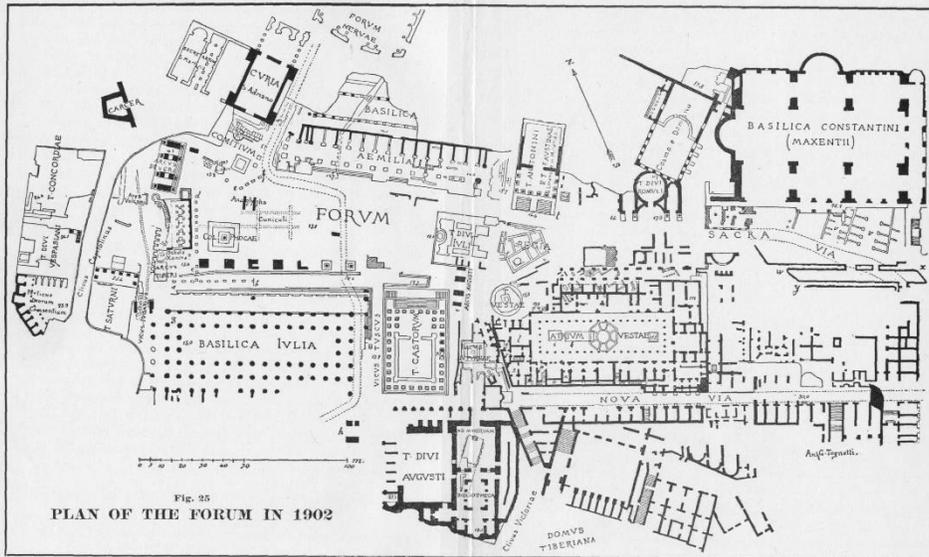
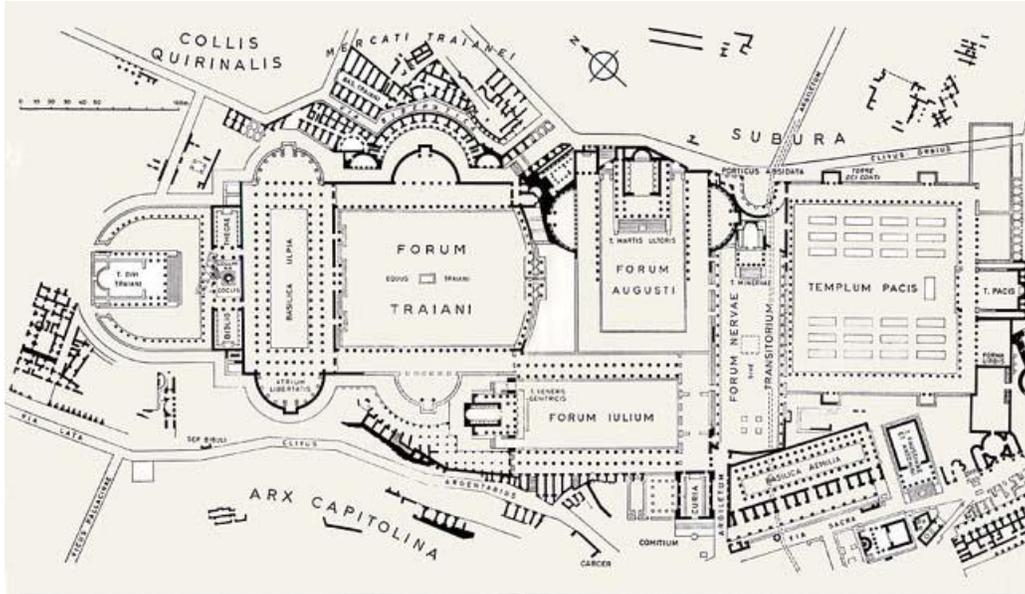


Foro Romano - Roman Forum

Between the Colosseum and Piazza del Campidoglio.

Every day: 8:30 am to one hour before sunset





The Roman Forum was where religious and public life in ancient Rome took place. The Forum is, along with the [Colosseum](#), the greatest sign of the splendour of the Roman Empire that can be seen today. After the fall of the Empire, the Roman Forum was forgotten and little by little it was buried under the earth. Although in the 16th century the existence and location of the Forum was already known, **it was not until the 20th century that excavations were carried out.** Interestingly, the place where the Forum was built was originally a marshy area. In the 6th century B.C. **the area was drained by means of the Cloaca Maxima**, one of the first sewer systems in the world.

Points of interest

Besides the great number of temples that are in the forum (Saturn, Venus, Romulus, Vesta, etc.), it is worth paying special attention to the following points of interest:

- **Via Sacra:** The main street in ancient Rome which linked the [Piazza del Campidoglio](#) with the Colosseum.
- **Arch of Titus:** A triumphal arch that commemorates Rome's victory over Jerusalem. It was built after the death of the emperor Titus.
- **Arch of Septimius Severus:** An arch erected in the year 203 A.D. to commemorate the third anniversary of Septimius Severus as the emperor.
- **Temple of Antoninus and Faustina:** Built in the 2nd century, the Temple of Antoninus and Faustina sets itself apart as the best preserved temple in the Roman Forum.
- **Basilica of Maxentius and Constantine:** Though now mostly destroyed, its size suggests that this was one of the most important buildings of the Roman Forum.
- **The Curia:** In this building the Senate met to make administrative decisions and about the Roman government.
- **Column of Phocas:** Erected in the year 608 A.D. in honour of the emperor of Byzantium, this column, which is over 13 meters high, is one of the few that have remained standing since being built.

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One could find just about every sort of person in the forum—from criminals and hustlers to politicians and prostitutes. His summary reminds us that in the city of Rome the Forum Romanum was the key political, ritual, and civic center. Located in a valley separating the Capitoline and Palatine Hills, the Forum developed from the earliest times and remained in use after the city's eventual decline; during that span of time the forum witnessed the growth and eventual contraction of the city and her empire. The archaeological remains of the Forum Romanum itself continue to provide important insights into the phases and processes associated with urbanism and monumentality in ancient Rome.

Earliest history: from necropolis to civic space

Situated astride the Tiber river, the site of Rome is noted for its low hills that are separated by deeply cut valleys. The hilltops became the focus of settlement beginning in the Early Iron Age; the development of the settlement continued during the first millennium BCE, with the traditional Roman account holding that the city herself was founded in 753 BCE

The traditional foundation narrative holds that one of the first acts of Romulus, the city's eponymous founder, was to establish a fortification wall around the Palatine Hill, the site of his new settlement. The Capitoline Hill, opposite the Palatine, emerged as the city's citadel (arx) and site of the poliadic cult of Jupiter Optimus Maximus, among others (poliadic: the chief civic cult of an ancient city, derived from the Greek word "polis").

Iron Age populations had used the marshy valley separating the Palatine and Capitoline hills as a necropolis (a large ancient cemetery), but the burgeoning settlement of archaic Rome had need of communal space and the valley was repurposed from a necropolis to a usable space. This required several transformations, both of human activity and the natural environment. Burial activity had to be transferred elsewhere; for this reason the main necropolis site shifted to the far side of the Esquiline Hill.

Addressing the problems of seasonal rains and flooding proved more challenging—the valley required a landfill project as well as the construction of a drainage canal to manage standing water. Since the Tiber river tended to leave its banks regularly, the valley was prone to significant flooding, as a low saddle of land known as the Velabrum connects the forum valley to the riverine zone

This major investment in the creation of civic space and the organization of labor also provides important information about the socio-economic structure of early Rome (Livy 1.59.9). The drainage canal eventually came to have a vaulted covering and was known as the **Cloaca Maxima** or "Great Drain." One of the clear outcomes of these civic investments was the creation of a usable space that came to be a civic focus for activities in many spheres, especially political and sacred functions.

Temples and sacred buildings

From the Early Republican period the forum space saw the construction of key temples. One of the most prominent early temples is the **Temple of Saturn** (often considered the earliest of the temples in the Forum Romanum), the first iteration of which dates c. 498 B.C.E. The temple was dedicated to **Saturn, the god of agriculture**, and housed the state treasury. The temple was rebuilt in 42 B.C.E. and again after 283 C.E. Another early Republican temple is the Temple of the Castors (a.k.a. Temple of Castor and Pollux) that was completed in 484 B.C.E. and was dedicated to the Gemini who had aided the Romans at the Battle of Lake Regillus in 496 B.C.E. The temple had several construction phases. The Sacra Via passed along the forum square en route to the Capitoline Hill and the temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus. This sacred route was used for certain state-level ceremonies, especially the celebration of the victory ritual known as the Roman triumph.

Two other early, sacred buildings are important to note. These are **the Regia or "king's house"** and the **Temple of Vesta**, both located on the downward slope of the Palatine Hill near the point where it reaches the edge of the Forum Romanum proper. Both of these sacred buildings are quite ancient and had many building phases, making it difficult to refine the chronology of the earliest phases. The **Regia served as a ceremonial home for the king**—later passing into the ownership of the pontifex maximus (principal state-level priesthood) once the kings had been expelled—and consisted of an irregularly planned suite of rooms surrounding a courtyard. The sixth century B.C.E. phase was decorated with painted plaques of architectural terracotta, clearly indicating both elite function and investment. Across the way was the **Temple of Vesta, focused on the maternal elements of the archaic state as well as safeguarding the cult of Vesta and the sacred, eternal hearth flame of the Roman people**. Both the Regia and the Temple of Vesta developed from crude structures in earlier phases to stone-built architecture in later phases. The Severan family carried out the final significant restoration of the Temple of Vesta in 191 C.E.

Meeting spaces

Important meeting spaces for political bodies emerged at the northwest side of the forum, namely a pair of complexes known as the **Curia and Comitium**. The **Curia served as the council house for the Roman Senate**, although the Senate could convene in any inaugurated space (i.e. a space ritually demarcated by Roman priests). The Curia emerged perhaps in the seventh century B.C.E., although little is known about its earliest phases. The surviving Curia is an imperial rebuilding of the Late Republican phase known as the Curia Julia, since Julius Caesar was its architectural patron. The **Comitium was a tiered space that lay in front of the Curia that served as an open-air meeting space for public assemblies**. Little of the Comitium remains today but it was a key architectural complex for political and sacred events during the time of the Roman Republic.

From Republic to Empire

During the 4th & 3rd centuries B.C.E. the **Forum Romanum** certainly continued to develop. One middle Republican development is the continued elaboration of the **Rostra**, the platform from which orators would speak to those assembled in the forum square. This monument would continue to develop over time and took its name from the **prows (rostra) of defeated enemy warships** that were mounted on its façade.

The later 2nd & 1st centuries B.C.E., the **Late Republican period**, witnessed many changes in the city and in the Forum Romanum. The **successes of Rome** and her growing empire during the second and first centuries B.C.E. led to a great deal of **monumental construction in the city**, including in the Forum Romanum itself. It was during this Late Republican phase that **Rome became a metropolitan center**, equipped with the monumental architecture that could compete with—if not eclipse—that of the foreign powers Rome had tamed during the Punic Wars and those against the Hellenistic kingdoms of the eastern Mediterranean. In particular **the Romans established a tradition of constructing monuments commemorating famous men who had achieved great success in military and public careers**. The Roman interest in monumental, commemorative monuments, now referred to as **triumphal arches**, would soon follow.

The Basilica

The second century B.C.E. saw the creation and **introduction of a unique Roman building type, the basilica. The basilica was a columnar hall that often had a multi-purpose use—from law courts to commerce to entertainments**. Roman planners came to prefer them for lining the long sides of open squares, in a way not dissimilar from the Greek stoa.

Imperial period

The advent of the **principate of Augustus (27 B.C.E. – 14 C.E.)** brought about additions and renovations to the Forum Romanum. With the deification of Julius Caesar, Augustus' adoptive father, a **temple dedicated to Caesar's cult** (templum divi Iulii) was constructed on the edge of the forum square. **Augustus** restored existing buildings, completed incomplete projects, and added commemorative projects to **celebrate his own accomplishments** and those of his family members. In this latter group, the Arch of Augustus, a triumphal arch celebrating significant military and diplomatic accomplishments of the emperor.

Augustus also followed Julius Caesar in creating yet another new forum space beyond the Forum Romanum that was named the **Forum of Augustus. (dedicated in 2 B.C.E.)**. These new Imperial Fora in some cases provided additional space and, in turn, shifted attention away from the Forum Romanum.

Coming to power at the end of the second century C.E., the Severan family erected a triple-bay triumphal arch commemorating the victories of emperor **Septimius Severus (193-211 CE)** at the northwest corner of the forum square.

Decline

Declining imperial fortunes led inevitably to urban decay at Rome. After the Severan and Tetrarchic building programs of the third century C.E. and **Constantinian investment in the early 4th century C.E.**, the forum and its environs began to decline and decay. Constantine I officially **relocated the administrative center of the Roman world to Constantinople in 330 C.E.** and **Theodosius I suppressed all "pagan" religions and ordered temples shut permanently in 394 C.E.** These changes, coupled with population decline, spelled the gradual demise of spaces like the Forum Romanum. Roman **monuments were cannibalized** for building materials and open, unused spaces were re-purposed—sometimes as ad hoc dwellings and other times for the deposition of rubbish and fill.

The beauty of the ruins

A major **earthquake in 847 C.E.** wreaked considerable damage on remaining monuments in the forum. During the Middle Ages ancient structures provided reusable buildings materials and foundations, for Medieval structures.

Interpretation

The Forum Romanum, despite being a relatively small space, was **central to the function and identity of the city of Rome** (and the wider Roman empire). The Forum Romanum played a key role in creating **a communal focal point**, one toward which various members of a diverse socio-economic community could gravitate. In that centralized space community rituals that served a larger purpose of group unity could be performed and observed and elites could reinforce social hierarchy through the display of monumental art and architecture. These devices that could create and continually reinforce a **sense of community belonging and also the existing social hierarchy** were of vital importance. Even as the Forum Romanum changed over time, it remained an important space. After a series of emperors chose to build new forum complexes (the Imperial Fora) adjacent to the Forum Romanum, it retained its symbolic importance, especially considering that, as a people, ancient Romans were incredibly loyal to ancestral practices and traditions.