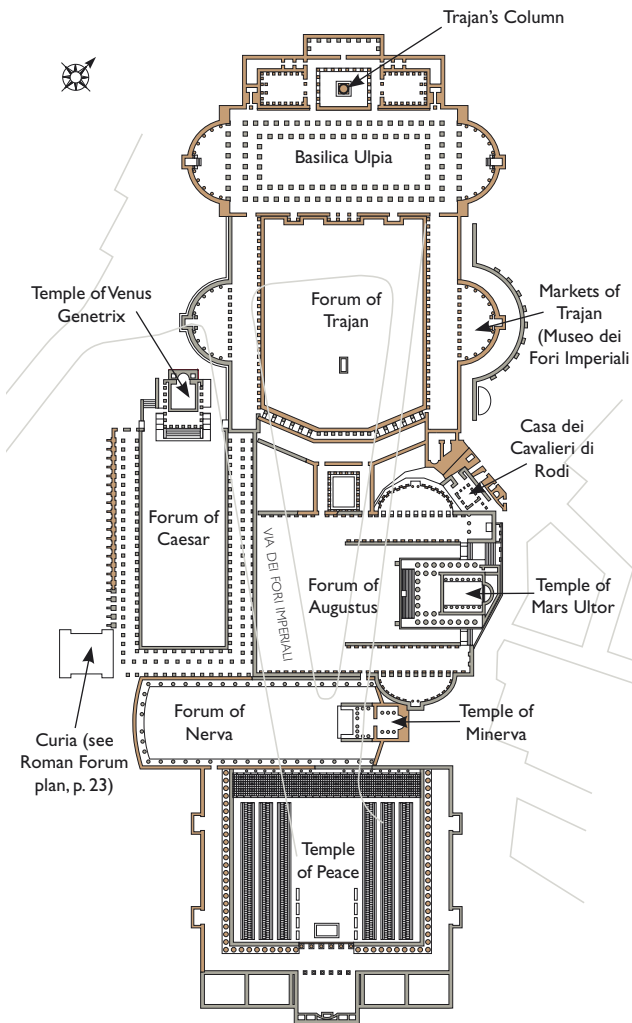


THE IMPERIAL FORA  
(RECONSTRUCTION OF THE SITE)



nearer the Column of Trajan, fragments of its colossal grey granite columns, some of the largest ever found in Rome.

### Forum of Caesar

The first of the Imperial Fora (inaugurated in 46 BC) was centred round the **Temple of Venus Genetrix**, the most important building erected in the city by Julius Caesar, who claimed descent from the goddess. The temple's high base remains and three of its fluted Corinthian columns have been re-erected. The forum itself was an open piazza surrounded on three sides by two rows of columns raised on three steps and paved in white marble. Well below the level of the temple the three steps of the southwestern colonnade can clearly be seen, and most of the columns are still standing. Excavations in 1998–2006 found tombs of the 10th century BC here as well as various strata of a medieval district of the city. Via di San Pietro in Carcere descends to the church of San Giuseppe dei Falegnami, beneath which is the **Mamertine Prison** (map p. 23; open 9–5), a dank underground space where St Peter and St Paul were believed to have been imprisoned before their martyrdom.

### Forum of Nerva and Temple of Peace

Begun by Domitian, this forum was completed after his assassination by his successor Nerva, whose brief rule of less than two years (AD 96–98) was nevertheless marked by enlightened and humanitarian government. All that remains of the forum itself are a few cracked marble slabs. Ruins of a temple, perhaps dedicated to Minerva, can be seen across Via dei Fori Imperiali. More remnants of the medieval city, recently unearthed, can also be seen here. Beside a length of lovely mottled marble used for a column is a fragment of the perimeter wall of the **Temple of Peace** (later called the Forum of Peace). By another similar column can be seen remains of its pavement. This was built in AD 71–75 by Vespasian, with the spoils of the Jewish War, to commemorate the end of the civil war which followed the death of Nero. Instead of a piazza, it had a large garden decorated with six low brick walls, on the top of which water constantly flowed along little marble channels beside which flower pots apparently contained 'Gallic' roses. The walls have been partly reconstructed and beside them you can see a few fragments of the marble channels. At the end are rows of pots with plants above stacks of column lengths found during the excavations. Towards the Roman Forum can be seen a long base with steps which was part of the surrounding portico which incorporated the temple itself.

## THE PANTHEON & PIAZZA NAVONA

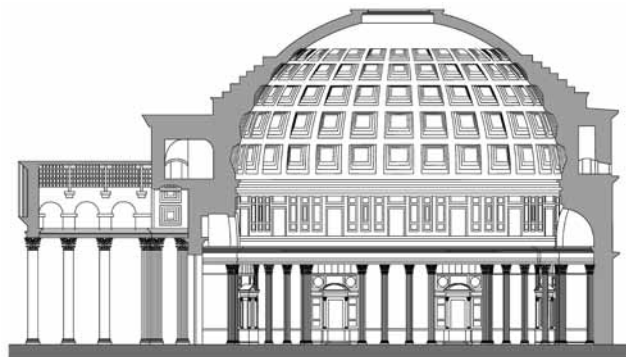
### The Pantheon

Map p. 222, B2. Open 8.30–7.30, Sun 9–6, holidays 9–1.

Of all the ancient Roman buildings left in the city it is the Pantheon which has survived the best and it is one of its most remarkable buildings not only in Rome but in all the ancient world. The pediment proudly states that 'Marcus Agrippa, son of Lucius, consul for the third time, had [this building] made': Agrippa's third consulate coincided with Augustus' victory over Antony and Cleopatra at Actium (31 BC) where Agrippa had been commander of the fleet (in fact, having married Augustus' only child Julia, he was considered Augustus' obvious successor, until he predeceased him). However, we now know that the entire building was rebuilt by the emperor Hadrian in AD 118–125: it is thought that Hadrian himself was responsible for its extraordinary design, but he generously chose to keep the original inscription.

In the pronaos you can experience what it must have been like to approach an ancient Roman temple: the scale reduces the human fig-

Marcus Agrippa is graciously acknowledged as having built the Pantheon, but it is a later building that survives today, reconstructed by Hadrian in AD 118–125.



Cross-section of the Pantheon clearly showing its proportions and the vast expanse of the dome, which fills exactly half the interior space.

ure to insignificance. The eight huge monolithic granite columns still stand here as they were built, with the eight others behind disposed in four rows so as to form three aisles leading to the entrance.

The famous dome is totally hidden from the outside, and its impact in the interior is unforgettable. An extraordinarily pleasing sense of proportion prevails, produced by the fact that the height and diameter of the building are the same: 43.3m. The use of light from the opening in the roof displays the genius of the architect, and the intricate design of the coffers is mainly responsible for the effect of space and light (they were probably once ornamented with gilded bronze rosettes). The diameter of the dome, the largest masonry vault ever built, exceeds by more than one metre that of the dome of St Peter's. Its span, which contains no brick arches or vaults, begins at the level of the highest cornice seen on the outside of the building, rather than, as it appears in the interior, at the top of the attic stage. It is supported by a cylindrical wall six metres thick.

More than half of the original coloured marble panels on the walls are still in place and the decoration includes Corinthian columns of yellow marble, porphyry or granite and an entablature with a beautiful cornice. The floor, though restored, retains its original design. The plan of the building was unique since the rectangular pronaos (a feature normally reserved for the entrance to a rectangular temple) precedes a domed rotunda—this was achieved by the addition between the two of an area as wide as the pronaos and as high as the cylindrical wall.



Detail from the *Ludovisi Throne* showing a flute girl.

the first owner of the palace, and they celebrate his marriage to Caterina Sforza in 1477: their wedding presents including plates, ewers and candlesticks are shown displayed on a sideboard in front of a tapestry covered with wild flowers.

The most famous piece in the collection is undoubtedly the *Ludovisi Throne*, one of the most controversial works of art in Rome. It was found at the end of the 19th century in the Villa Ludovisi. It is unique in form and size, and the subjects depicted are difficult to interpret: some scholars suggest it is a forgery, while others believe it to be a Greek original of the 5th century BC. The central relief is thought to represent the birth of Aphrodite as she rises from the sea, supported by two figures representing the Seasons. On one of the sides a naked flute girl is shown sitting on a folded cushion playing a double pipe.

One of the two colossal heads here, called the *Ludovisi Juno*, three times life size, was taken by Winckelmann to be a Greek work, and Goethe had a cast made of it for his residence in Rome (see p. 52). In fact it represents Antonia, mother of the emperor Claudius. The other colossal head is, indeed, a Greek original of 470 BC.

Off the loggia, the largest room on this floor displays a splendid huge sarcophagus (3rd century AD) with a battle scene, in excellent condition. Dramatically displayed is the head of a dead Amazon (2nd century AD). The *Galatian committing Suicide* formed part of the same group as the famous *Dying Gaul*, now in the Musei Capitolini (see p. 16). This was made at the time of Julius Caesar from an original Greek bronze. In the adjacent room is a two-figure group of a *Satyr and nymph* (Bernini is thought to have carved the head of the satyr). The *Torch-bearer* was created by Algardi using an original antique torso—but here for once he fails to interpret the balanced Classical spirit.

#### ***A lovely work by Caravaggio***

A few steps from Palazzo Altemps is the church of **Sant'Agostino** (map. p. 222, B1; open 7.45–12 & 4–7.30), dedicated to St Augustine, author of the *Confessions*, whose mother, St Monica, is buried here at the east end. In the first north chapel is the *Madonna of Loreto* (1604; light), one of Caravaggio's most beautiful paintings. The graceful figure of the Madonna appears at the door of her house to show the blessing Child to two kneeling peasant-pilgrims. Caravaggio's detractors were very critical of the peasants' dirty feet when the painting was first exhibited on this altar, but today it appeals to us perhaps above all because of its extraordinary sense of humanity, and for the poignancy in Mary's burden, suggesting the sorrows she was to endure.

Five prophets on the nave pilasters were painted in 1855 to accompany the splendid *Prophet Isaiah*, frescoed on the third pillar on the north side by Raphael (here clearly influenced by Michelangelo's frescoes on the Sistine ceiling) as part of a funerary monument which included the lovely marble statue of the *Madonna and Child with St Anne* by Andrea Sansovino. Andrea's pupil, Jacopo Sansovino carved the greatly venerated statue of the so-called *Madonna del Parto* (1521) at the west end of the church, the object of innumerable votive offerings from expectant or grateful mothers.

## St Peter's Square

*Map p. 219, C2 (Piazza San Pietro).*

It was Bernini who provided the magnificent setting for the basilica: a huge, circular piazza formed by a quadruple row of Doric columns. This welcoming space is often filled with people who come to see the pope or attend the celebrations which accompany the Christian calendar (papal audiences are sometimes held here, and on Sundays at midday the pope recites the *Angelus* from a window in the Vatican buildings which can be seen towering up above the piazza to the right). Bernini found the obelisk already here (it came from Alexandria, but used to decorate a Roman circus), and he adapted the two lovely fountains to complete the symmetry of the central space.

## ST PETER'S BASILICA

*Map p. 219, B2. Open April–Sept 7–7; Oct–March 7–6. Entrance on the right side of St Peter's Square, where there is a security check so there can be queues (it is usually possible to enter the basilica directly from the Vatican Museums so that you avoid this queue; see p. 151).*

St Peter's basilica is the most important Roman Catholic church in the world, and the one that all visitors to Rome feel they should visit, following in the steps of pilgrims of past centuries. The first church was begun by Constantine and consecrated in 326: although it was a magnificent huge building it was only half the size of the present St Peter's. It survived right up until the middle of the 15th century when it was decided that it should be rebuilt, though this proved a long and complicated task which progressed slowly over the following centuries, and with many alterations to its plan, while the dilapidated old basilica was left standing. Important architects who became involved at one time or another included Leon Battista Alberti, Donato Bramante, Raphael, Antonio da Sangallo the Younger, Michelangelo, Carlo Maderno, and Bernini.

The present appearance of the basilica dates from the 17th century although its most splendid feature, its dome, was designed by Michelangelo in the previous century. Even if this is not visible from the façade, it is one of the most conspicuous features of Rome's skyline, and can be seen from many miles outside the city.

Detail of one of Bernini's two celebrated semicircular travertine colonnades in St Peter's Square, topped by statues of saints and martyrs.

