

ART & ARCHITECTURE

ROME  
and the  
VATICAN CITY

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With contributions by Jürgen Sorges

*h.f.*fullmann

## The Eternal City: its Origins in Legend and History

As with all cities whose origins are shrouded in obscurity, many myths have grown up around the founding of Rome. Aeneas, who fled with his father Anchises and his son Ascanius from the burning city of Troy to the coast of Latium, where he married the king's daughter, was revered as the ancestor of the Romans. One of his descendants was Numitor, king of Alba Longa, whose daughter Rhea Silvia was impregnated by Mars the god of war and bore him the twins Romulus and Remus. Her uncle Amulius, who claimed the

throne for himself, set the twins adrift in a basket on the Tiber after their birth, but Providence saved them. A she-wolf suckled the brothers until they were rescued by the herdsman Faustulus. As young men they avenged their deposed grandfather and, fulfilling the prophecy of an oracle, founded a city on the Palatine Hill – the city of Rome. They quarreled because Remus ignored the sacred boundary or *pomerium* drawn around the city by his brother, and sacrilegiously crossed it; Romulus killed him for this transgression. A settlement grew up, but now the Romans needed women to give them children and so they abducted the Sabine women, daughters of a

neighboring tribe in the nearby mountains; the Sabines declared war on them. Through the treachery of Tarpeia, daughter of the Roman officer commanding the citadel, the Sabines managed to take the stronghold. The war was brought to a happy conclusion only by the courageous intervention of the Sabine women, who flung themselves between the combatants – their husbands on one side, their fathers and brothers on the other. In resolution of the conflict, the Sabines settled on the Quirinal Hill, the two tribes were united, and

*Johann Heinrich Wilhelm Tischbein, Goethe in the Campagna, 1787, oil on canvas, 164 × 206 cm, Städtisches Kunstinstitut, Frankfurt*





# Rome and the Vatican in a Nutshell



## Location

- Capital of the Republic of Italy and the Comune di Roma province
- Situated in central Italy, on the plain of the Campagna Romana, and at the foot of the volcanic hills of the Latium region
- Height above sea level: 13 m (43 feet) at the bend of the Tiber – 138 m (453 feet) at Monte Mario
- Built on both sides of the Tiber, which flows into the Tyrrhenian Sea at Ostia some 20 km (12.4 m) away

## Area

- City of Rome: 209 km<sup>2</sup>
- Comune di Roma, with 35 outer city quarters and six suburbs: 1508 km<sup>2</sup>

## Climate and best time to travel

- Mediterranean climate with mild winters and hot summers
- Ideal time to travel: early summer and October, when the days are sunny but not too hot
- Particularly crowded at Easter
- August is the traditional vacation month in Italy, very hot with many stores and restaurants closed

## Population

- Number of inhabitants in 1991: 2.77 million
- Strong demographic growth since Rome

became the capital of Italy, particularly because of immigration from the southern provinces

- 1951 the number of inhabitants in the historic city center has dropped from 424,400 to 150,000

## Local government

- Civic administration: a mayor with a residence in the Palazzo dei Senatori on the Capitol, an upper house of 14 city councilors, a town council of 80 members

## State officials

- State president, with a residence in the Palazzo Quirinale
- Parliament of deputies (sitting in the Palazzo Montecitorio)
- Senate (sitting in the Palazzo Madama)

## Economy

- The service sector (tourism, radio, television, publicity, and fashion) employs 1.1 million workers, i.e. nearly 80%
- 250,000 are employed in administration and management, with banks, stock brokers, and insurance companies steadily growing in importance
- Only about one-fifth of the population is employed in industry, though new companies are increasingly setting up in the outer



## Palazzo dei Conservatori

The Roman *scholae* (guilds) had their official and judicial guildhall on the lower floor of the old 14th-century palace on the right-hand side of the Piazza del Campidoglio, while the “conservators” had their official rooms on the upper floor. As a result of the growing importance of this supervisory architectural body and its care of monuments in the 15th century, the palace, which was converted around 1520, adopted as its name the Palazzo dei Conservatori, a reference to the Conservators. Michelangelo Buonarroti intended to renovate the front

wing of this building, and the work was carried out to his plans by Giacomo della Porta in 1564–1568. The façade is impressive with its colossal Corinthian design, a form seen here for the first time in a secular Roman Renaissance building. Corinthian pilasters link the two floors of the façade. On the ground floor of the building, it opens into a portico with a flat entablature resting on Ionic columns, which echo the half-columns on the back wall. The upper floor is divided up by windows, which are framed by columns and surmounted by a segmented gable. A balustrade runs around the high entablature, with ancient statues in each of the axes of the colossal pilasters.

## Fontana del Tritone

Shortly after the completion of the Palazzo Barberini, Bernini created the Fontana del Tritone (Triton Fountain) for Urban VIII on the Piazza Barberini in 1642. Four dolphins standing on their heads, with the family

coat of arms visible between them, form the base of the monument, which has no other architectural structure. Their tails support an enormous scallop shell in which Triton, a sea god with a human torso and a fish's tail, is seated. He is holding a conch shell in his raised hands, blowing it to send a jet of water high into the air.



## The Palazzo Barberini

Pope Urban VIII (pontificate 1623–1644), who was one of the most enthusiastic builders in Baroque Rome and employed the two leading architects of the day, Borromini and Bernini, acquired a palace with a *vigna* (vineyard) from Duke Alessandro Sforza in 1625. Carlo Maderno began converting this palazzo into a residence for the Barberini family, and after his death Bernini took over supervision of the work with the collaboration of Borromini (until 1633). The plans as a whole are ascribed mainly to Maderno, who chose an unusual ground plan because of the building's situation and the large

### The North Façade with the Benediction Loggia

The architect Domenico Fontana had already set a vestibule before the northern transept on the Piazza di S. Giovanni in Laterano as early as 1586–1589; it was commissioned by Pope Sixtus V and consists of a two-story arcade with paintings inside. The pope would give his traditional blessing on Ascension Day from the loggia. Inside the vestibule is a bronze statue of Henry IV of France by Nicolas Cordier, made in 1608. Because Henry made generous donations to

the chapter, all the heads of state of France have been made honorary canons of the basilica ever since.

### Filipo Gagliardi (Died 1659), Interior of the Old Lateran Basilica, S. Martino ai Monti Fresco

Emperor Constantine adorned the first monumental Christian church in Rome with gold, silver, and mosaics. It was a four-aisled columned basilica with transepts and apse. Along the entire width of the nave was an almost square atrium, to serve as a place of meditation and purification. Fifteen columns of Numidian marble separated the broad central nave from the narrower side aisles, and each of the broad arches had to span a gap of 4 m (13 feet). A triumphal arch on high pillars marked the border between the nave and the transept with the altar in the center. In the apse behind this the pope's chair stood on a raised dais. The nave and aisles were not vaulted, and the roof timbers were uncovered, as is evident from the fresco in S. Martino ai Monti, which has an illustration of the old church building.



**Peter (30-67):** 64 Persecution of the Christians in Rome under Nero; 67 crucifixion of Peter on the Vatican Hill and his burial in Ager Vaticanus (below).



**Callistus I (217-222):** Lays great stress on exceptional status of the bishops of Rome and so creates the "idea of the papacy."

**Miltiades (311-314):** 313 Edict of Milan under Constantine proclaims principle of tolerance and so ensures complete religious freedom for Christians.

**Damasus I (366-384):** Demands doctrinal authority for the bishops of Rome with reference to their succession to Peter; as a consequence the papacy gradually develops.

**Siricius (384-399):** 391 Christianity becomes the state religion in the Roman empire and the bishop of Rome is acknowledged as the supreme authority in the Church.



**Leo I, The Great (440-461):** 445 Emperor Valentinian III recognizes the primacy of the bishops of Rome in the Western world, making Leo I the first real pope (above).



S. Giovanni in Laterano (after 313)  
Old St. Peter's (under Silvester I, 3rd century; left)  
S. Marco (under Marcus 336)  
S. Costanza (1st half of 4th century)  
S. Pudenziana, has oldest figurative mosaic in its apse (Siricius)  
S. Paolo fuori le Mura (end 4th century)



SS. Cosma e Damiano  
with a mosaic in the apse  
(526; above)

S. Sabina with one of the oldest depiction of the crucifixion of Christ on its wooden door (Celestine I)

S. Maria Maggiore (Sixtus III, 432-440)

S. Stefano Rotondo (Hilarus, 461-468 / Simplicius, 468-483)

Mosaic on the triumphal arch in S. Lorenzo fuori le Mura (Pelagius II, 579-590)

## 900-1000

**Sergius III (904-911):** 910 Benedictine Abbey at Cluny founded; the "time of the immoral popes" begins, as they come under the influence of their mistresses.

**John XII (955-964):** Otto I, first Holy Roman Emperor, renews the Church State and secures the emperor's right in the election of the pope.

**Gregory V (996-999):** Appointed first German pope by his cousin, Otto III, and in return crowns Otto emperor (below).



S. Bartolomeo under  
Benedict VII, 977 (left).



## 1000-1100

**Leo IX (1049-1054):** Combats the sale of offices and marriage for priests; 1054 first Great Schism in the Church, the final split between the Eastern and the Western Churches.

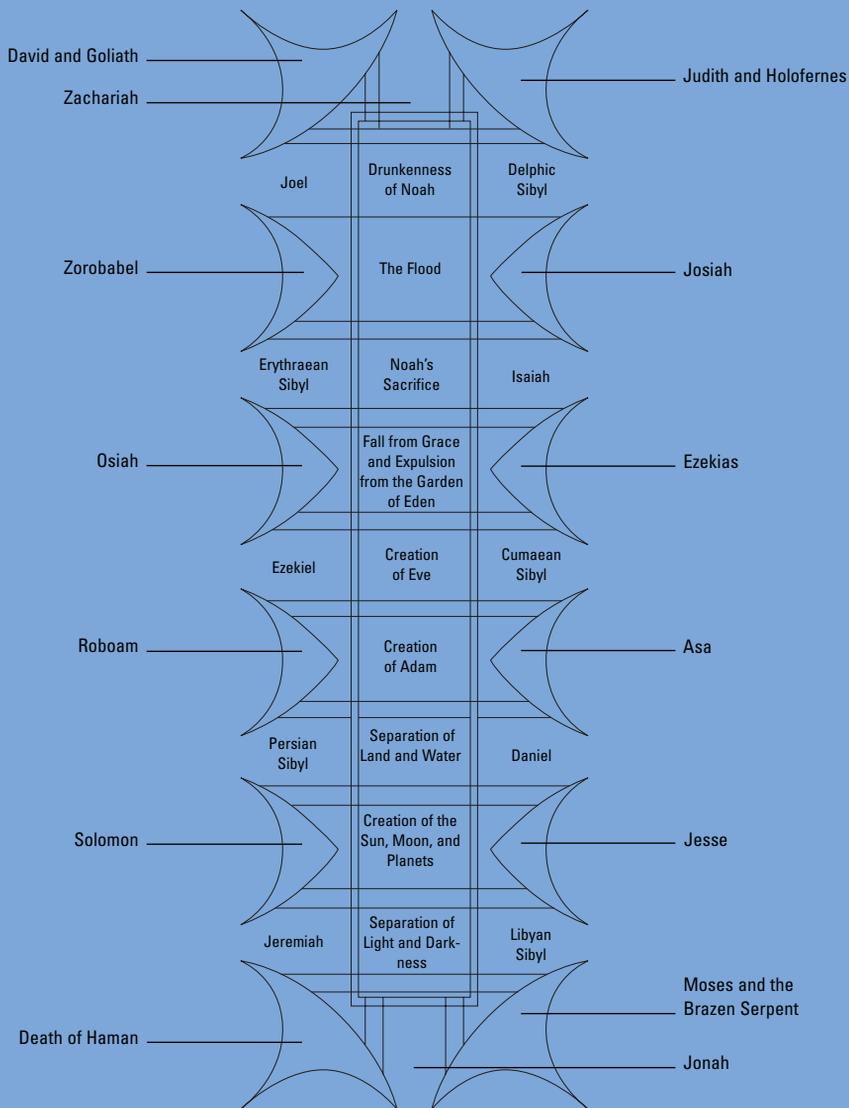
**Nicholas II (1059-1061):** 1059 Lateran Synod transfers the election of the popes to the cardinals.

**Gregory VII (1073-1085):** 1075 Formulates the rights of the pope (*Dictatus Papae*); forbids lay investiture and the sale of offices and insists on celibacy; start of the investiture conflict with Henry IV, over whether the secular ruler may appoint bishops and abbots; 1077 Rome plundered by the Normans; retreat of Henry IV and the pope banished.

**Urban II (1088-1099):** 1096 First Crusade, which ends with the conquest of Jerusalem (right).



Fresco in the Mary Oratory in  
S. Pudenziana (1080)  
Frescoes with the legend of  
St. Clement in S. Clemente  
(11th century; left)



# A Small Paradise – the Vatican Gardens

by Jürgen Sorges

March 12, 1514. To celebrate the consecration and enthronement of the new pope, Leo X de Medici, King Emanuele of Portugal sent a particularly weighty gift. Moreover, it was very much alive. The Vatican court watched in amazement as an *archibestia* arrived, a primeval beast that had not been seen in Rome since the time of the Caesars. It was a live elephant named Annone after the Carthaginian general Hanno, and from that day on it lived in a stable on the edge of the Vatican Gardens. These gardens adjoined the new cathedral of St. Peter's, that was then under construction, and the new buildings of the Vatican papal palace. The mighty Leonine Wall, built in the 9th century, protected the grounds from the gaze of the curious. But in 1514 there was not much for the curious to see. The greater part of the Vatican Gardens was really a vegetable garden used to supply the papal kitchens. The narrow paths led between vegetable and herb beds and fruit trees.

In time, however, the Vatican Gardens were turned into an extensive park with countless decorative architectural pieces, enticing visitors to stroll and linger. Five centuries earlier the grounds, with their enclosing walls and watch-towers, had no buildings. Only the plane trees and pines of the *bosco*, the wood, that are still impressive today, dominated the scene. In those days it was common to call this the *selva*, the jungle. Hidden in the ground beneath the wild vegetation slumbered the remains of the

circuses of Nero and Caligula, the foundations of Roman villas of the 2nd century A.D., and part of the Ager Vaticanus with many early Christian and heathen graves. In the early 16th century the terrain offered ideal conditions, not only for Annone and his keeper, and gradually a complete zoo was built up here amid the cultivated gardens. By 1516 the pope had already received another present, a live Indian rhinoceros. This species was completely unknown in Europe, and the German artist Albrecht Dürer had to use his imagination for a copperplate engraving he made in 1515 that has since become famous.

The jungle behind St. Peter's rapidly became a magic wood. The newly discovered world was regularly shown to courtiers, cardinals, and diplomats from America, Africa, and Asia in theatrical presentations. Artificial stands were built in the Cortile del Belvedere, the biggest inner courtyard in the Vatican Palace, for the spectators to applaud the taming of these utterly foreign creatures. Annone was a spectacular sensation, and he cost the papal court, eager for amusement, a considerable sum in upkeep. The satirist Pietro Aretino calculated that the elephantine eating machine, which he conceded was extremely intelligent, ate 100 ducats a year in food. His keeper, Giambattista Branconi, a confidant of Raphael, bore the prestigious title "elephant tutor." Annone's features can still be seen today in the Vatican

# Glossary

**Aedicule** (Latin *aedicula*, “small house or temple”): Two columns, pillars, or pilasters framing a portal, window, or niche and bearing an entablature and a triangular or segmented gable.

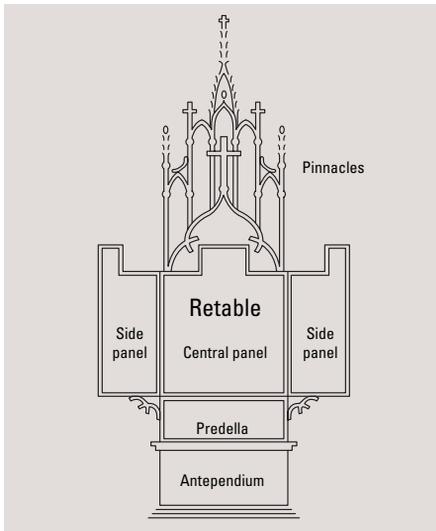
**Alabastron** (Gk.): Small Greek ointment container, originally made of alabaster, later also of clay or bronze; in shape long or spherical with a narrow neck.

**Allegory** (Greek *allegoria*, from *allegorein*, “to depict differently”): In art history, the representation of concepts or ideas through images, usually in the form of symbols or personifications. During the Renaissance, particularly in Italy, much use was made of mythological allegory based on writings of classical antiquity. Allegory also flourished in Baroque painting, often in a political context, one of the leading exponents being the Flemish artist Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640).

**Altar** (Latin *alta ara*, “raised sacrificial table”): In ancient Greece and Rome, the place set aside for cult acts in the holy area in front of a temple, especially the sacrifice of animals or the offering of libations. In the Christian era, the table on which the mass is celebrated. The high altar usually stands in the apse of a church that faces east; smaller altars are frequently set in the side apses or chapels or in the crypt. The artistic decoration of early Christian altars usually consisted of an antependium related to the saint to whom the church was dedicated. Later altars were elaborately decorated. See Altar retable, Antependium.

**Altarpiece** (Latin *altare* from *altus*, “high,” “raised up”): A painting or sculpture used to decorate an altar. In the early Middle Ages, sculptures or work in precious metal were used to adorn altars; later paintings were introduced. An altarpiece can consist of a single work or multiple panels. A *reredos* is an altarpiece that rises from the ground; a *retable* is an altarpiece that stands on the back of the altar, or on a pedestal behind it. See Altar retable, Antependium.

**Altar retable** (Latin *alta ara*, “raised sacrificial table”



*Altar retable: Gothic altarpiece with a central section and two side panels*

and *retabulum*, “rear wall”): An artistic work set on (or behind) an altar. In the Middle Ages the retable rested on the back part of the altar table, while in the Renaissance and Baroque eras it stood on a substructure behind the altar. In the Middle Ages the retable consisted initially of goldsmith work or relief sculpture; later, paintings also appeared, either a single picture or several panels. In the Late Gothic period the retable was given an architectural frame and extended with side panels. In the Renaissance and the Baroque it consisted of only a central panel. See Altarpiece.

**Ambo** (Greek *ambon*, “rise,” from *ambainein*, *anabainein*, “to climb”): In early Christian and early medieval churches, a podium raised on several steps with a

reading desk from which biblical texts and sermons were read out; an early form of pulpit. A stone ambo placed before a choir screen was usually enclosed by a balustrade. If a church had two ambos, the northerly one, for the Gospel readings, was often more richly decorated, with two flights of steps and an Easter candlestick. The smaller ambo to the south was called the Epistle ambo. In the 14th century the ambos became part of the rood screen or pulpitum that was inserted between the choir and the nave, or were replaced by a pulpit.

**Amphitheater** (Greek *amphitheatron*, from *amphi*, “on both sides, all around” and *theatron*, “theater”): In ancient Rome, a form of open air theater on an elliptical ground plan and with rising tiers of seats; often used for animal baiting and combat between gladiators.

**Amphora** (Lat. *amphora*; Gk. *amphoreus*, “container with a handle on both sides”, from *amphi*, “on both sides”, and *pherein*, “carry”): Bulbous storage container used by the Greeks, with two handles and up to 3 feet (1 m) in height.

**Antependium** (Latin *ante*, “before” and *pendere*, “to hang”): Originally, a cloth hanging down in front of the altar table in a costly and richly decorated material, or painted canvas, leather etc. Later, the name for any kind of altar covering or screen, e.g. textile or wood. See Altarpiece.

**Antiquity** (Latin *antiquus*, “old”): Ancient Greece and Rome. Antiquity begins with the early Greek migration in the second millenium B.C. and ends in the west in A.D. 476 when the Roman emperor Romulus Augustulus was deposed by the Goths (ca. A.D. 475); in the east (Byzantium), antiquity ends in A.D. 529 when the Platonic Academy was closed by Emperor Justinian (reigned 527–565).

**Apocalypse** (Greek *apokalyptein*, “unveil,” “reveal”): The end of the world, notably as described in the Revelation of St. John, the last book in the New Testament. St. John’s vivid account of the violent end of world and of the Last Judgment was often used by artists.

**Apostle** (Greek *apostolos*, “messenger,” “advance fighter”): One of the twelve disciples of Jesus selected



*Antique masonry: Most frequent types of Roman faced concrete building (top to bottom): opus incertum, opus testaceum, and opus reticulatum*

Frontispiece  
*The Arch of Titus and the Forum Romanum*

Note:

Information regarding the location of works in museums and churches as well as concerning opening times are subject to change.

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