

## **WHAT IS ANCIENT TOPOGRAPHY?**

As J.W.Goethe visited for the first time Italy, on his way to Rome, he wrote from Verona to a friend that he can't wait to see Rome, for reading Tacitus.

Why Goethe couldn't read Tacitus in Germany?

Because is the direct knowledge of the places where the great events happened that enhances not only the pleasure of historic knowledge but also allows for its in-depth analysis. It's one thing if we read about the battle of Cannes on the works of Livius or Mommsen, but it's different trying to "see" the battle, by visiting the place where it occurred: exactly this kind of interest is the first step of the "topographic research".

**This lesson aims to let you see Rome with the topographer's eye which has to detect, to document and enhance the cultural heritage by its knowledge.**

The word STORIA has the root *\*-id* , originating from "seeing", because the historian was originally the one who see the events occurring around him, who investigated them, who reconstructed them and who narrated them: therefore Herodotus and Thucydides are the historians par excellence.

The topographer is in this sense a pure historian: he employs remote sources –those literary ones- as well as the direct documentation belonging to that past which he can see as real, he can touch and he can investigate and reconstruct.

Topography plays a key role within the territory management and the relationship of the monuments within environmental and social context, in such a way that the topographical reconstruction may and must influence the city planning, for their safeguard and promotion.

Ancient topography is a discipline born and developed within a wide time span, since the humanistic period in XV sec. as the research begun for the identification of ancient monuments and for reconstructing the shape of the ancient city and its environment as well.

This discipline distinguishes itself from classical archeology which was born instead from antiquarianism and stand out as independent only at the end of XVIII sec. by J.J. Winckelmann.

Studying ancient topography means to use a wide documental background: ancient literary sources, historical sources, cartographical sources, illustrative sources, toponymic sources, archival data and an analytical examination of the monument and of its detection as well as the use of the aerial photography.

## **THE MEANING OF ROME THROUGHOUT THE CENTURIES**

A city is the more direct expression of the social life and it needs to be examined together with its territory, starting from the genesis and development of human aggregation within all its aspects.

The cities may have been developed from a spontaneous nucleus growing up by aggregation or they may have been *ex novo* founded.

Rome is a typical example of spontaneous development and growth, extending on a very uneven terrain, tried to be managed during the centuries –especially during the republican and imperial periods- by means of local strategic plans.

Population of ancient Italy first and that of Rome later, benefited from the extraordinary Greek experience which created within three-four centuries -from VIII to IV sec. b.C.- tens of new cities, properly planned, all along the shore of southern Italy, introducing a new model of civilization.

Rome is certainly the most history-rich city in the world: it poses endlessly as residential settlement since the half of bronze age (1600-1400 b.C.) to the present days. It contains 3500 years of history and it is really impressive the amount and the importance of the still remaining monuments which are still living from centuries and millennia.

Together with the monuments still visible throughout the city, many other artworks are known from written sources, both ancient and medieval, or from the modern archeological sciences. No other city in the world has been so extensively studied, both since modern and ancient times. Roman authors left us plenty of clever research about the origin of their City (far beyond the tale of Romulus and Remus), and since that times they took care about the conservation of the records by their predecessors.

During archeological excavations, especially of sacred places, archaic or republican remains are often found, which were carefully preserved within the most recent city, as for example the *Lapis Niger*, thought to be the grave of Faustulus or Romulus; the new buildings respected the most ancient remains as it happens for Dioscuri Temple which Tiberius left within the Forum he rebuilt, by absorbing the archaic structure.

The Neronian fire -«*quando Urbs per novem dies arsit, neronianis temporibus* (CIL VI, 826)» - «as Rome burned for nine days at Nero's age»- shocked the Romans being aware that such an heritage could never be replaced again.

Development of urban life has generally a negative impact on heritage preservation since the renewal instance tends to eliminate all that is thought to be old and useless.

However the exceptional amount of ancient artworks in Rome, is mainly due to the authority which the name itself of Rome has always had through the centuries: such an authority became often a kind of veneration or even cult.

Since Septimius Severus age, Rome is the sacred city and every emperor as well as barbarian kings, from Honorius to Theodoricus and Otton III, made all they can do in order to preserve the decorum of its monuments.

When the Roman empire expired, Rome still remained as the sacred city, object of admiration by the other populations, the eternal city, i.e. out of the time.

A document of 1162 by the Roman senate which recommend the preservation of the Trajan column in order to make it lasting *integra et incorrupta dum mundus durat* – intact and uncorrupted until the end of the world.

This feeling towards monuments kept on until nowadays, from Petrarca to Raphael, but it is still valid for us to be said to our administrators: “Why should we complain about the Goths and Vandals and other perfidious enemies of the latin name, if those who should defend those poor Roman ruins as fathers and tutors, have been instead the ones who studied in every way to destroy them?”.

There are thousands of drawings, prints and paintings –both Italian and foreign- reproducing the monuments of ancient Rome. As a general example, just think about the impressive representations glorifying the “Romanity” engraved made by Piranesi.

The fascination of Rome towards strangers, antiquity academicians, cultured people, artists and poets became bigger and bigger between XVIII and XIX sec. They came to Rome as pilgrims because, as Winckelmann said, this city is the “masterclass of the world”, or as Goethe said, “is the capital of the world”.

At the beginning of the XIX century the antiquity researches, including the architectural restoration and the urban promotion, started to be scientifically organized

The little, freshly established, Italy at the end of XIX century, was able to build the Roman forum park and the Palatine park, as well as the archeological walk with the Caracalla thermal baths, and modernized, within the metropolitan area, the ancient Ostia and the Villa Adriana.

Of course, not everything made in Rome as it became the capital of Italy was a model of behaviour; on the contrary it is famous the mess conducted within the historical centre during the Umbertinian age concerning a new driveability. Many whole quarters were demolished as well as wide archeological areas aiming to renew the buildings and let more spaces to the modern residential areas.

As the Italian State installed in Rome, it wanted of course to give the city a worthy profile of a capital, but it was not understood how much it could earn from the promotion of its monuments, so they worked towards the new, allowing the urban speculation to spread out.

However, the wide devastations made at that time and those during the Fascist regime, served to let understand that preserving the historical documents and remains is so far more modern than destroying them.

It was finally understood the need to preserve the historical-topographic asset as a global cultural heritage. Today Romans are strongly convinced about the untouchability of Rome’s historical centre because it is the depository of an exceptional historical documentation due to the different ages that it represents.

The concept of preserving historical centres is a typical product of the contemporary culture which broadened the protection of a single monument of particular artistic value to the whole context which the building is inserted in.

In this way, the whole Rome historic centre –all that is enclosed within Aurelian walls- was completely bound by the town planning of 1962.

When we overlook on the Roman Forum and enjoy all that art and history jubilation made of temples, churches, triumphal arches and imperial palaces sunk within the green, we are induced to think that this exhibition has always been there. But this is not true: the Roman Forum was revalued only at the beginning of XIX century and since then was digged up, studied, restored and arranged by many generations of scholars, archaeologists, architects, botanists which devoted their action to render it more and more magnificent and even now its appearance and its knowledge are still in progress to preserve such exceptional historical piece to the future generations.

## **IMPERIAL FORA**

Close to the end of Republican age, the Roman Forum, the central nucleus of the public life, appeared to be unsuitable for the city became the metropolis of the whole Mediterranean; so various Emperors decided to build northwards, other fora.

**FORUM OF CAESAR, the most ancient: 54-46 b.C.**

**FORUM OF AUGUSTUS: 31-2 b.C.**

**FORUM OF VESPASIAN: 69-75 a.C.**

**FORUM OF NERVA: 97 a.C.**

**FORUM OF TRAJAN: 107-112 a.C.**

A sequence of arcades squares, basilicas and temples devoted to the social life and at the same time to the celebration of the *Princeps*.

**Trajan's Column:** it was built in 113 a.C. to celebrate the conquest of Dacia (present Rumania and Moldavia) which represented the maximum expansion of the Empire. It is a masterpiece of Roman sculpture. Once painted with vivid colours and clearly visible by the two flanking libraries and the Basilica Ulpia. The scenes unfold continuously; inside the shaft, a spiral staircase of 185 steps provides access to a viewing platform at the top where, from 1587, a bronze figure of St. Peter dominates instead of a Trajan's statue.

### **Trajan's forum:**

The Trajan's Column leads to Trajan's forum, the last and most wide among the Imperial Fora, designed by the architect Apollodorus of Damascus and completed during Hadrian's age. The Forum had a large square decorated in the middle by a statue of the Emperor enclosed by colonnades on the three sides and on the fourth by the Basilica Ulpia, facing the Quirinal Hill. The

interior is divided in five naves and two passages leading, on the back side of the Basilica, to a colonnated courtyard flanked by the Greek and Roman libraries and dominated by the Trajan's Column.

**Trajan's Market:** it is a large complex of Roman buildings made of bricks by Apollodorus of Damascus, which is separated from the Forum by a wall of peperino (i.e. brown, volcanic rock) and a paved street. The façade bends into a big hemicycle close on both sides by two apsis. On the lower part, there are eleven *tabernae* made of bricks with doors of travertine surmounted by small arch-windows. The rectangular "big hall", once used for the social activities and today housing the Museum of the Imperial Fora, is accessible by a staircase.

**Caesar's Forum:** it is the most ancient forum placed at the end of Capitoline Hill with an equestrian statue of the emperor. Its construction began in 46 b.C. funded by the spoils of the Gaul campaign and it was ended by Augustus. It has a rectangular square closed on the northern side by the Temple of Venus Genetrix (3 columns) from who Caesar claimed to descend.

**Augustus' Forum:** the Temple of Mars Ultor established on its centre, made by a podium of tuff covered by marble and surrounded by eight columns on each side which housed the statues of Mars and Venus as well as the emblems of the Roman regions returned to Augustus from Parthians in 20 b.C. It was the place in which the most important decisions were took: here the Senate decided upon war and gave triumphs; in this place the victorious generals setted down their emblems.

Once abandoned, the forum of Augustus was used as open-air mine; around the X century a convent and a church devoted to St. Basil settled there. Thereafter, the " House of the knights of Rhodes" , built in XV century for the wish of cardinal Pietro Barbo and later headquarter of equestrian order of "Knights of St. John of Jerusalem".

**Forum of Nerva:** its construction was started by Emperor Domitian before the year 85 AD, but officially completed and opened by his successor, Nerva, in 97 AD, hence its official name. The Forum of Nerva is also known as Transitional Forum, because it worked as an access way, between the residential district Subura and the Roman Forum. The so-called "colonnacce" (bad columns), are the ruins of the Minerva Temple, and for this reason the Forum is also called Minerva Forum.

**Forum of Peace:** built in 75 a. C. by Vespasian and locked by the Temple of Peace, it served to celebrate Vespasian's sacking of Jerusalem during the Jewish-Roman Wars and to collect the treasure of the war campaign by the victorius Roman Army (among them , the *menorah*, the seven-harmed candelabra from the Jerusalem Temple). The Temple of Peace was restored by Septimius Severus after a fire damage in 192.

**Sts. Cosmas and Damian:** in VI sec. Theoderic and his daughter Amalasunta, offered some ancient statues -probably belonging to the Library of the Temple of Peace and to the Temple of Divine Romulus- to Felix IV who built a sacred place devoted to the holy physican brothers Cosmas and Damian. The interior was rebuilt around 1632; more recent (1947) is the entrance of the church, opened on Via dei Fori Imperiali. The glass window overlooks on the Temple of Divine Romulus

which served as the hall of the Basilica until 1800s. The interior mosaics date back to VI-VII century.

**St. Frances of Rome:** it has a very elegant bell tower. The church was built in IX century and widened in the second half of the next, as it was dedicated to the Virgin and called New St. Mary in order to distinguish it from the Ancient Church of Saint Mary, next to it within the Roman Forum. In 1425, Frances of Rome founded the Olivetan Oblates of Mary, a confraternity of pious women, under the authority of the Olivetan monks and when she died she was buried therein.

## **THE ROMAN FORUM**

Within Roman culture, the Forum was the official meeting point of all citizens from the whole areas of the Republic first, and from the Empire later: they gathered there to take part or to simply as onlookers over the political, administrative and economical affairs involving the community. The Roman Forum was of course the most important which was the centre of the world known at that time. During more than thousand years, the Roman Forum witnessed for unique historical events and it was decorated with exceptional beautiful monuments that we can admire still nowadays.

### **What does the Roman Forum means**

Originally, the word “*forum*” in the Roman culture, meant that space surrounding an house or a grave; later, this word indicated the centre of the social life because it was the place where most of the public, political, administrative and economical activities occurred.

Every Roman settlement had one, but the most famous remains the one in Rome between piazza Venezia and the Colosseum, which is indeed known as the “Roman Forum” *par excellence*, crossed by the Via dei Fori Imperiali, made in 1931-33. Since this archaeological area, by itself very large, broadens through the Palatinus, the Campidoglio and it is also linked to the Colosseum area as well as to Costantinus Arch, it can be considered as the most wide and important archaeological site in the world. However, with “Roman Forum” it is normally meant the central part between Campidoglio, Palatino and Quirinale –not far from the Tiber harbour- where since ancient times (VII b.C.) settled the commercial activities of Forum Boario (i.e. of the cattle market) and of Forum Olitorio (the herbal market).

Later, thanks to emperors as Augustus or Trajanus, other forums were built until the whole area was filled, especially the left side of the Via dei Fori Imperiali when going towards Colosseum. The most ancient part of the Forum, belonging to età regia e repubblicana, was the one on the right side, below the Campidoglio.

### **Short overview on Forum excavations**

**1756:** the first real investigations on the Trajanus’ Forum were carried out by J.J. Winckelmann which rediscovered the big columns made by egyptian granite under the southern façade of the present Palazzo Valentini , which were attributed to the temple of Trajans the Divine.

**1812 - 1814:** by venture of French government started the excavations of Trajans' Forum and of the Basilica Ulpia

**1800 - 1823:** Pope Pius VII ordered to ensure the big containment perimetral wall around the excavations area, on whose sides were placed some of the incomplete marble sculptures recovered during the works.

**1909:** the town planning intends a long arterial road to be built between Piazza Venezia and the Colosseum without considering the chance to build an archaeological park. The Via dei Monti, later Via dell'Impero, was born within a context where archaeology plays a minor role, as demonstrated by the velocity of the intervention and by the will to build on both sides of the street, monumental palaces for the sake of the imperial regime. Only from 90's the problems concerned with this area, were faced with a different point of view.

### **From the swamp to the Basilicas**

The history of the Roman Forum starts with reclamation of the area which was partially dominated by swamp, by building one of the first urban works of ancient Rome: the *Cloaca maxima*, a big water drainage system. The procedure was successfully accomplished; later, only a small lake remained, the *lacus Curtius*, which by now is pointed out by a little monument because it's totally disappeared.

Every public and sacred building of Republican Rome crowded within the Roman Forum area. It was crossed, on the way to Colosseum, by the *Via Sacra* and sprinkled by some of the most ancient Roman temples as the sanctuaries of Saturn and of the Dioscuri.

Progressively, the Forum turned from a market place to the centre of political affairs: the small shops were moved to marginal areas and replaced with several basilicas (not to be confused with those christian ones!).

In the basilicas were held trial and legal deed, in addition to general meetings, but the destination of such buildings was rather diverse: on some stairs of the Basilica Julia's colonnade, it is possible to see the engraving of *tabulae lusoriae*, a real game tables for dies, marbles and so on, which attracted the layabout people.

The most ancient basilica is the basilica Aemilia, founded at the beginning of II century and many times reconstructed and decorated. The ruins which are nowadays to admire (on the right from the entrance of Via dei Fori Imperiali), date back to the Augustinian restoration.

### **The "Basilicas war" in the Roman Forum**

At the end of III but mostly in the II century b.C., Rome acquired the features of the political and economical capital from a mediterranean empire.

Such features materialized especially in the architectural works promoted by the Roman *nobilitas* who, being imperialistic and prone to autocelebration, expended all their conspicuous familiar endowments into the political competition concerning the Roman Forum. The financial sources and the wide availability of slavery manpower from the conquest of Hellenic kingdoms, the inspiration towards Greek architectural characters and the application of new building techniques (as for

example the *opus caementicium*), conferred to the square the typical features of the *agorà* from Hellenic metropolis.

The real revolutionary event, demonstrating the selfcelebrative attitude of the Roman nobility, was the development of the basilicas all around the square. The historical sources reported exactly the foundation dates of the most ancient basilicas, within the Roman Forum, during the II century b.C.

In 184 b.C. Cato built the Basilica Porcia on the western side of the *Comitium*; in 179 .b. C on the northern side of the Forum was constructed the Basilica Fulvia – Aemilia (known during imperial age as Basilica Aemilii – Paulli); in 169 b. C. On the southern side, the Basilica Sempronia and finally in 121 b. C., on the north-western side, the Basilica Opimia. Then, in 54 b.C. Caesar started to build on the southern side, the great Basilica Julia which extended over the previously Basilica Sempronia.

The construction of such new buildings took place behind the various *tabernae* which during the 3rd century surrounded and closing the Forum square in those places which were occupied by several private *atria*.

Such basilicas were hence the result of an evolutive process which involved *atria* and *tabernae*. At the beginning, they were some separated spaces intended to house during bad weather, all those civil and political activities normally carried out open-air within the Forum and *atria* .

These new buildings definitely ratified the public character of the Forum by erasing all those private *atria*, *domus* and *tabernae*.

Indeed, due to such functional and spatial rearrangement, from this time until Sullan age, all the political and judicial activities traditionally occurring in the Comitium, moved to the Forum.

1) According to Vitruvius (V,I), the Roman Forensic Basilica should be placed on the edge of the Fora (where it is normally found), in the most sunny areas in order for negotiators to go there during the winter *sine molestia tempestatum*. Its main feature is then to be a covered extension of public squares where justice was administered. A connection between Roman Basilicas and *stoà basileios* (portico of Athen's king) has been proposed. The name should come from the Greek adjective *basileios*, substantivized in his feminine form: *basilikè*. The frequency and importance of colonnades, as known during the Republican Rome earlier than the first basilicas, suggest an evolutive transition from these two kind of buildings.

2) Fuchs believes that the reason for the Roman administration to build within few years (184 – 170 b.C) three new basilicas in proximity of the Forum cannot be due to a new sudden demand for justice but most likely determined by economical requirements. After the Punic war, Rome undertook on one side a considerable trade with overseas countries and on the other it looked for an abundance of movable assets for investments. The hypothesis concerning the first basilicas involving money circulation and business relationships, is supported both from the phrase “*negotiatores*”, the businessmen mentioned by Vitruvius, and from the evidence that the three old famous basilicas in Rome were in close proximity of banks (or exchange offices) and according to their position they were even assigned to specific banks (*Septem Tabernae*, *Tabernae Veteres e Tabernae Novae*).



## **Basilica Aemilia**

Located on the north-eastern side of the Roman Forum behind the *Tabernae novae*, is the only survivor among the Republican Basilicas (the Porcia, the most ancient one, as well as the Sempronia and Opimia are completely disappeared) and its appearance reflects the various restorations it underwent.

Together with Augustus Forum and the lately built Temple of Peace by Vespasian, the Basilica Aemilia is included by Plinius among the greatest wonders of every time and place (Plinius Nat. 36.102).

It was erected in 179 BC by [censor Marcus Fulvius Nobilior](#) with the name of [Basilica Fulvia](#). After the latter's death, his colleague [Marcus Aemilius Lepidus](#) completed it, and it was frequently restored and redecorated by the members of the Aemilian gens, giving the basilica its current name.

According to some scholars, the Basilica Aemilia from 179 a.C. was only a remake of the earlier "authentic" one, mentioned by Plautus in his comedies and corresponding to the *Atrium regium* of Livius' works. The first basilica located on the same site, was strictly connected to *Forum Piscarium – Macellum*. Its construction took place under the censorship of Emilius in 179 b.C. which rendered it a "family monument" celebrating their royal ancestry and characterized by a strong ideological significance due to their claimed membership with the king Numa.

*Tabernae* and *Aula* were part of the same architectural unit since this time, while the interior structure made by three naves paved typical from II century b.C., was not present in this ancient age.

In 179 b.C. there was an escalation of construction activity reaching its maximum during the censorship of [Marcus Fulvius Nobilior](#) and [Marcus Aemilius Lepidus](#). They intervened on the northern side of the square, the most important due to its connections with Comitium, the Via Sacra and the commercial sector behind.

They made both restorations of the commercial area (*Forum piscatorium* located inside the wider *Macellum*) and the building of the new basilica, which was constructed in the same site of the ancient one as testified by Plautus. Basilica and Macellum assumed their definitive appearance.

The Basilica Aemilia and Fulvia had its typical planimetric design -without changes- since the beginning; it was organized in naves posed on the half of three colonnades devoted to support the covering (roof). By raising the central nave of one floor, wide windows could be opened on the upper side, ensuring a proper enlightenment.

The building faced southwestwards directly on the square, with the external colonnade which, like an arcade, made the building approachable along the front, eliminating the façade; this latter was followed interiorly by the *tabernae* addressed to the bankers, until the end of ancient age (the typical structure of a "closed" basilica). It is not known how the Basilica Aemilia et Fulvia was closed along the three external sides if by walls or by colonnades. The more debated matter concerns the northern-east side, i.e., the one facing the *Forum-Piscatorium/Macellum*. According to many scholars it should have been conceived like a portico since the tight functional relationship – at least at the beginning- between the Basilica and the *Macellum*. Coming from it, the access to the

Forum was indeed precluded –even if not totally- by the *tabernae argentariae*. This connection between the Basilica and *Macellum* lasted until the dismantlement of this latter during Flavian age, as a consequence of the building of the Temple of Peace and the Transitional Forum. The basilica appeared magnificent thanks to a sumptuous marble equipment (floor and columns). Pliny (Nat. Hist., XXXV, 13) reported that [Marcus Aemilius Lepidus](#), embellished it with bronze *clipei* ("shields"), carrying portraits. This intervention is recalled in a coin from 61 BC by his son, the trivumvir [Marcus Aemilius Lepidus](#). The Basilica Aemilia had an enduring patronage, exerted exclusively by the *Emilii* since 179 b.C. until the imperial age. Such a patronage was of high value and of higher ideological significance. It originated from the self-statement necessities of aristocracy during the II century b.C. The *Emilii* claimed their parentage with Numa, i.e. that king recently related to the *Atrium Regium*. In 179b.C. [Marcus Aemilius Lepidus](#), censor of that year, provided by great prestige and political sensitivity, individuated the advertising potentialities of take possession of the basilica by the *Emilii*. It is of evidence how the building founded by Numa, represented *ex facto* the materialization of that parentage. The basilica (ex *Atrium Regium* by Numa) assumed the meaning of a familial relic.

It was exactly to compensate this mighty “ideological” building that within few years, Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus father of the future tribunes, during the censorship of 169 b.C, bought and destroyed several buildings in the back of *Tabernae veteres* on the southern side of the Forum in order to built another basilica: the Basilica Sempronia, replaced later by Basilica Julia. It was deliberately simmetrically and complementary located respect with Basilica Aemilia, on the other side of the Forum.

### **Basilica Julia (ex Basilica Sempronia)**

The basilica was located on the southern side of the Forum. It was northwards delimited by the Sacra Via while westwards and eastwards by the two main streets leading to the Forum: the *Vicus Jugarius* and the *Vicus Tuscus* respectively.

It replaced the Basilica Sempronia, in 54 b.C. Its construction alongside with the restoration of that on the northern side belong, hence, among the main works of Caesar’s building activity within the I century b. C., together with the new Forum (the *Forum Iulium* having a new orientation of the Roman Curia, evocative of the Senate’s subjection towards the new autocracy.

The Basilica Julia was certainly larger than the Sempronia, since it occupied also that group of shops (*Tabernae Veteres*) which preceded the most ancient building, located *en pendant* to the *Tabernae Novae*, on the other side of the square, in front of the Basilica Aemilia.

The inauguration took place in 46 b.C. , being the basilica still uncomplete, and it was finished under Augustus who named the building after his adoptive father.

The building burned shortly after its completion, but was repaired and rededicated in 12 b.C. to the Emperor’s sons: Gaius and Lucius. For a short time it was called the *Basilica Gai et Luci* but it is uncertain if it was finished or not. Surely didn’t Tiberius, for jealousy reasons due to the preference accorded by his grandfather to his sons in law, immortalized by the dedication. In III century a. C. The new basilica within the Forum is a personal project of Augustus’ dynasty. Since then, the Forum will keep the two directions leaded by the two basilicas: the eastern side adapted to Basilica Aemilia, whilst the western to Basilica Julia.

The basilica included a central nave around which unravel two lateral naves and a three-stairs lowered portico added northwards, separated from the remaining building. Due to such an opened

portico, the Basilica Julia represents the first construction opening directly towards the centre of the Forum, the so-called “opened Basilica” respect to the “closed Basilica”, the Basilica Aemilia.

### **The Senate House area**

Going back through the Via Sacra towards the Capitoline Hill, the Senate House (Curia) is found on the right side. It was the place where the Roman Senate met up, the power centre of the Republican Rome.

According to the tradition, the Curia was founded by the king Tullus Hostilius . It was reconstructed by Sulla during his dictatorship (around 80 b.C.). It was Julius Caesar that rebuilt it in its actual location, even if the beautiful brick-façade which is to admire nowadays dates back to Emperor Diocletian that rebuilt it after a fire. Just in front of it there is the Comitium, i.e. the square where meetings took place: earlier, until Caesar’s age, they occurred in Campus Martius.

Below the square’s pavement, there are the most ancient monuments of Rome, among them the shrine of Vulcan (*Volcanal*), for a long time thought to be the Romulus’ grave. Still today it is possible to admire, by descending a stepladder, the oldest known latin inscription, engraved on a VI century b.C. votive stone: *Lapis niger* (latin for "black stone").

### **Arches for celebrating the triumphs of an invincible army.**

The Comitium square is delimited towards Capitoline Hill by the Triumphal Arch of Septimius Severus. A **triumphal arch** is a monumental structure, typical of the Roman culture, in the shape of an [archway](#) with one or more arched passageways, often designed to span a road and often related to ancient religious beliefs.

The Romans were convinced about the need for their army to be purified from the enemy’s blood by passing through the arch, going back on the sacred Roman soil.

From these very old rituals, the triumph became a supporting element of imperial ideology: since Augustus, only the emperors are allowed for celebrating triumph, even if they did not tangibly lead the military campaigns. The ideological and propagandistic content is strogly adviceable also in the magnificent Septimius Severus’ Arch, built in the earlier III century a.C. to celebrate the victories obtained against the Parthians, living in the old Persia. The three archways rest on [piers](#), in front of which are detached [composite columns](#) on [pedestals](#). Winged Victories are carved in relief in the [spandrels](#). A [staircase](#) in the south pier leads to the top of the monument, on which were statues of the emperor and his two sons in a four-horse chariot (*quadriga*), accompanied by soldiers.

### **The Capitoline Hill and Forum square side.**

Beyond the Arch of Septimius Severus, laying on the foot of Capitoline Hill, there are the remains of other relevant buildings as the Temple of Concord, built by Furius Camillus in 367 b.C. to celebrate the reconciliation between the [patricians](#) and [plebeians](#) and restored during Tiberius age; the Temple of Vespasian and the Temple of Saturn, one of the most ancient and venerated temples in Rome; it is the headquarter of *Ærarium Saturni*, i.e. the State Treasury.

The Forum square is a wide space where only few ruins remain, among them stands out the Column of Phocas, the last monument to be erected within the area, dedicated to the n honour of the [Eastern Roman Emperor Phocas](#), in 608 a.C. The short side towards the Capitoline Hill is occupied by the Rostrum Tribune, where the speakers talk to the people gathered in the Comitium. The actual location of Rostrum is due to Julius Caesar who rearranged also the Comitium. The name of Tribune stem from its decorations which were made in 338 b.C. by *Rostrum*, i.e. the rams from the ships' prows which the Romans captured in Anzio. The Rostrum tribune is one of the most significant places of the Roman political life: from there spoke great orators as the Gracchus brothers, and from there too, were exposed the heads of those citizens condemned to death for political reasons, during the dark days of the of proscriptions following the second triumvirate. At the end of 43b. C. Also the Cicero's head would become a macabre decoration of that tribune!