Rome’s urban topography was a vital expression of the power and authority of the Roman state. In his *Ten Books on Architecture* (c. 25 bc), Vitruvius praises Augustus:

> you cared not only about the common life of all men, and the constitution of the state, but also about the provision of suitable public buildings, so that the state was not only made greater through you by its new provinces, but the majesty of the empire was also expressed through the eminent dignity of its public buildings.

*(De arch. 1. pr. 2)*

Yet a complete understanding of Rome’s urban topography remains elusive. For evidence, we rely on literary sources and archaeology, but texts tend to favour the elite, and the longstanding interest of archaeologists in major public monuments has led to unbalanced excavation efforts. The centre of the ancient city, especially the Forum and Palatine, has been subject to extensive scientific investigation, yet surrounding urban areas have seen less archaeological activity (Map 8.1). Even as attitudes and interests change, the fact that Rome remains a vibrant, living city will always, for the best of reasons, limit the areas in which archaeological investigation can be carried out. Combined, these factors skew our picture of the ancient city: the monumental city centre and major imperial projects are fairly well-known, whereas neighbourhoods on the periphery and ‘minor’ private structures are often extrapolated from limited archaeological and textual data. That said, our knowledge of the ancient city is vast, and this chapter can provide only a lightly sketched overview of Rome’s changing topography from 200 bc to AD 350.
Map 8.1 Plan of Rome in the early fourth century AD.
THE REPUBLICAN CITY

The centre of republican Rome, both physically and politically, was the Forum Romanum (Map 8.2). Situated in the valley between the Capitoline, Palatine and Velia, the Forum was an open, trapezoidal expanse loosely defined by the civic and religious buildings at its borders. Along the north and south sides ran the Basilica Fulvia and Basilica Sempronia, large enclosed structures founded in the early second century BC to house legal, commercial and financial transactions. Along the shorter east and west ends ranged religious buildings and venerable monuments, including the temples of Castor, Vesta, Saturn and Concordia, as well as the Regia and Atrium Vestae. The west end of the Forum was especially dedicated to political use during the Republic and was the site of the Rostra, Comitium and Curia. Scattered throughout the open plaza were numerous honorific statues and modest sacred sites and shrines, some of great antiquity. In addition to its everyday political, legal and commercial uses, the Forum was a desirable locale for prominent funerals and the frequent site of gladiatorial games.

Given the political significance of the Forum Romanum, it comes as little surprise that the neighbouring hills became prime sites for elite housing in the Republic. Remains of several luxurious republican domus have been recovered just east of the Forum on the Velia, while literary and archaeological evidence indicates that the Palatine was a sought-after neighbourhood for politically ambitious aristocrats. Besides their close proximity to the forum, Palatine residents benefited from the hill’s numinous aura, and among its many temples and shrines stood the Hut of Romulus, an iron-age dwelling associated with the revered city founder and preserved with exacting care through the ages (Dion. Hal., Ant. Rom. 1.79.11). The Aventine was especially associated with the plebs, and its religious foundations included cults with plebeian facets, such as Diana Aventina, Ceres and Flora. The urban poor lived in decrepit conditions. Infamous was the Subura, a slum known for its filth, damp, noise and violence located in the valley between the Viminal and Esquiline. ‘Residential’ neighbourhoods differed significantly from those in the west today: even the most elite regions in Rome were ‘mixed-use’ with residences, shops, warehouses, religious dedications and light industry all found within a single area.

1 Chapter 11.
Map 8.2 The Forum Romanum in the second century BC.
Religious observances were seamlessly interwoven with daily life in ancient Rome such that architecture to facilitate worship – sanctuaries, altars and shrines – could be found throughout the city. One of the most important sanctuaries was the Capitoline temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus, Juno and Minerva. Originally dedicated in 509 BC, the Capitolium was rebuilt several times in the Republic and figured prominently in official rituals. There, new consuls offered sacrifice as they took office and triumphal parades concluded with dedications and a sacrifice to Jupiter. Major religious monuments like the Capitolium were usually situated around heavily trafficked public areas such as fora. At the neighbourhood level were smaller sanctuaries and compital altars, and residences often featured personal shrines to the domestic lares (household gods). Foreign cults like those of Isis or Bellona were frequently located outside the pomerium. Likewise tombs were located outside the city, most often in highly visible locations along major roads, because of prohibitions against intramural burial.²

Mercantile centres in the Republic were clustered along the Tiber. Between the Forum Romanum and the Tiber were the Forum Boarium and Forum Holitorium (the ‘cattle market’ and ‘vegetable market’, respectively). Substantially rebuilt in the early second century BC, these fora featured facilities for trade and commerce, open space for market days, a harbour (the Portus Tiberinus) and embankments along the river, as well as religious monuments including a number of altars and shrines dedicated to Hercules. Several bridges connected this busy hub with the Trans Tiberim (west bank of the Tiber): the Pons Sublicius was an ancient crossing built up on wooden pilings, while the Pons Aemilius was Rome’s first stone bridge (by 179 BC, perhaps as early as 241 BC). By the mid-first century BC, the Pons Cestius and Pons Fabricius connected the Tiber Island to both banks as well. Further south along the Tiber below the Aventine was the Emporium, a district of warehouses and quays that served as Rome’s most important depot for seaborne trade. Here stood the Porticus Aemilia, an immense warehouse (487 × 60 m) whose scale testifies to the frequency of trade in Rome by the mid-first century BC, while its form – fifty barrel-vaulted bays built of concrete – marks an important development in Roman architectural technology.³

² Chapter 12.
³ The identification of this warehouse as the Porticus Aemilia is debated; for a summary, O. Harmans¸ah, ‘Porticus Aemilia (Emporium)’, in Haselberger et al. 2008, 201–2.
During the Republic, Rome had a central market, or *macellum*, directly north-east of the Forum Romanum.

As their building names suggest, the patrons of important civic structures like the Basilica Sempronia or Pons Fabricius were most often individuals of significant public standing (here, Ti. Sempronius Gracchus and L. Fabricius). Self-interest motivated their generosity, as public works bearing the family name advertised their munificence and helped sway public opinion in the donor’s favour. Alongside public buildings, increasingly luxurious and impressive *domus* were erected as a patron’s home became an important means to express personal power and influence his network of clients. Triumphant generals with political aspirations were soon expected to use manubial spoils to fund public buildings, often temples erected in fulfilment of a vow sworn on the eve of battle. By the late Republic, private patronage by Rome’s political elite had reached monumental proportions as demonstrated by the extravagant theatre erected by Pompey the Great. Rome’s first permanent stone theatre, the Theatrum Pompeii (55 BC) was located on the Campus Martius and boasted a temple dedicated to Venus Victrix atop a spacious *cavea* (c. 11,000 capacity) connected to a large *quadriporticus* filled with greenery and artwork.

In the late Republic splendid architectural works like the Theatre of Pompey existed largely in isolation, oases of grandeur amidst a decaying city that lacked adequate provisions for the regular maintenance of its infrastructure and public buildings. Prior to the reforms of Augustus, Rome’s urban administration was largely the responsibility of censors and aediles, who let contracts for new building and maintenance work. Given their short terms of office (eighteen and twelve months, respectively), the accomplishments of such magistrates were limited. Moreover, practical maintenance, such as road repair and sewer work, brought little prestige and was often overlooked in favour of far more popular and politically profitable ventures, such as commissioning a new building or, for aediles, sponsoring lavish games. As Rome’s population grew to nearly 1 million in the late Republic, the density of her residential areas made water an increasingly important commodity, yet only four aqueducts served the city’s expanding needs (Aqua Appia, 312 BC; Anio Vetus, 272 BC; Aqua Marcia, 144 BC; Aqua Tepula, 125 BC). By the late first century BC, the ill-effects of Rome’s deficient infrastructure and administration were openly apparent: the city had become dangerously derelict, and her crumbling infrastructure was unable to accommodate the load imposed by her tremendous growth.
More was at stake, however, than just safety and upkeep. Rome had come to govern an expanding empire, and the shortcomings of her urban image became a matter of concern for her leading citizens. Rival cities in the Hellenistic east boasted Hippodamian (grid) plans and gracious public amenities absent from Rome. A Macedonian embassy in 182 BC reportedly found Rome’s urban appearance laughable since the city ‘was not yet adorned in either its public or private spaces’ (Livy, History of Rome, 40.5.7). Cicero described Rome’s ‘multi-storeyed houses piled one on top of the other, its narrow alleys and lack of decent streets’ (Leg. agr. 2.35.96). Livy served as an apologist for its haphazard layout, writing that after the Gallic sack of 390 BC ‘Romans, in their haste, were careless about making straight the streets... For this reason... the appearance of the city is like one where the ground has been appropriated by settlers rather than divided [following a plan]’ (Livy, History of Rome, 5.55.5). Rome’s appearance utterly failed to reflect the status and dignity of a world power, and as individuals such as Julius Caesar and Augustus gained unprecedented influence, they sought a remedy.

Julius Caesar took on the role of Rome’s benefactor with vigour and determination in the mid-first century BC. Much like his contemporary Pompey, Caesar looked to public works as a means of self-aggrandizement and political advancement, yet his projects were unmatched in scale and ambition. He replaced the ageing Basilica Sempronia with the Basilica Iulia; paid for the restoration of the Basilica Paulli; began to rebuild the Curia; initiated construction of the Saepta, a voting hall in the Campus Martius renowned for its mile-long portico; added the first permanent seats to the Circus Maximus; and augmented Rome’s civic space with the Forum Iulium. Focused on architectural works that would serve the needs of the people, Caesar’s patronage sought to maximize his standing in the contentious political arena of late republican Rome.

With the Forum Iulium, Caesar introduced what would become a signature urban element in Rome: the imperial forum (Map 8.3). Adjacent to the Forum Romanum, Caesar’s forum (dedicated in 44 BC, but completed under Augustus) rivalled its venerable predecessor in size and grandeur. At its centre was an open rectangular piazza enclosed by colonnaded porticos on three sides. Behind the porticos were tabernae (modest rooms) used primarily for government business. Axially positioned was a temple to Venus Genetrix; its dedication was a direct allusion to Caesar’s familial ancestry (the gens Iulia traced its roots to Aeneas and thus ultimately to Venus) and a deliberate jibe at Pompey’s temple.
MAP 8.3 Plan of the imperial fora in the mid-second century AD.
to Venus Victrix. Connected to the Forum’s south-west corner was the newly rebuilt Curia. With the Forum Iulium Rome had at last gained an orderly civic space for government business: adorned with decorous colonnades and a gracious temple, Caesar’s Forum emulated the Hippodamian fora of eastern Hellenistic cities in its regularity and beauty. Yet the Forum Iulium, like Pompey’s theatre in the Campus Martius, remained a grand monument of personal propaganda isolated within an urban landscape unequal to Rome’s increasing prominence. By all reports, Caesar sensed this deficiency and sought to remedy Rome’s failings. In addition to the numerous structures he had already realized, in 44 BC Caesar began construction of a permanent theatre on the west slope of the Capitoline (Dio Cass. 43.49) and planned a large temple of Mars and a public library for the Campus Martius (Suetonius Caes. 44). Caesar also hoped to straighten the course of the Tiber and thus augment the available land on the Campus (Cic. Att. 13.33a). Alongside these physical changes, Caesar named additional aediles to care for the city and drafted new laws to govern Rome’s urban concerns (the Lex Iulia municipalis, adopted after his death). Left largely unrealized at the time of his murder on 15 March 44 BC, Caesar’s plans ‘to adorn and decorate the city’ (Suetonius Caes. 44.1–2) represent an important step beyond the norms of republican patronage, because his interest extended beyond singular monuments to encompass the health of the city as a whole.

**The Augustan city**

Despite Caesar’s efforts to address Rome’s lack of urban amenities and suitable infrastructure, in 44 BC the city was still deficient and Augustus earned praise for the actions he took to resolve the issue. Around 25 BC, Vitruvius commended Augustus for ‘the provision of suitable public buildings, so that . . . the majesty of the empire was also expressed through the eminent dignity of its public buildings’ and described the emperor’s building programme as ‘large scale’ with ‘edifices that will correspond to the grandeur of our history and be a memorial to future ages’ (De arch. 1.pr.2–3). Writing a century later, Suetonius echoes Vitruvius when he offered one of the most famous descriptions of Augustan Rome’s changing urban fortunes.

[Rome], which was a city not adorned in accordance with the majesty of the empire and which was prone to flooding
and fires, was transformed to such an extent under him [Augustus] that he could justly claim to have found a city of bricks and left it a city of marble. 

(Aug. 28.3)

By the end of his reign Augustus had brought about fundamental changes in Rome’s physical topography and urban infrastructure, substantially improving the appearance and administration of the empire’s capital. He commissioned a wealth of important new monuments,4 and though his efforts could be seen throughout Rome’s diverse neighbourhoods – for instance his restoration of eighty-two ageing temples in 28 BC would have touched upon all areas of the city (Res Gestae 20.4) – his patronage revolved around three primary regions, the Campus Martius, the fora and the Palatine.

The southern Campus Martius had been a locus for building in the late Republic, but under Augustus the entire campus was transformed through new building and restoration works. Augustus built the Theatre of Marcellus and a wooden stadium; restored the Via Flaminia, the Theatre of Pompey and two porticos, the Porticus Octavia and Porticus Octaviae; constructed his Mausoleum and its surrounding public gardens; and erected the Horologium, a giant sundial built in conjunction with the Ara Pacis Augustae, an altar erected by the senate to celebrate the peace Augustus brought the empire. Augustus’ works in the Campus Martius were complemented by those of his staunch ally and supporter, Marcus Agrippa, who built the ‘Stoa of Poseidon’ to celebrate his naval victories at Naulochos and Actium; began construction of the Diribitorium and Porticus Vipsania; dedicated the Pantheon; and founded Rome’s first large-scale public bath complex, the Thermae Agrippae. To meet the water demands of the thermae and the adjacent Stagnum Agrippae, Agrippa completed the Aqua Virgo in 19 BC, one of Rome’s first new aqueducts in over 100 years.5 This suite of monuments, known as the monumenta Agrippae (Tacitus, Ann. 15.39), had an axial orientation not seen elsewhere in Rome and lent the Campus Martius an air of Hellenic organization and grandeur. Under Augustus, the Campus Martius had become a ‘spectacle that

4 The exhaustive list of Augustan buildings runs three full pages in Haselberger 2007, 261–3.

5 Two other new aqueducts, the Aqua Iulia and Aqua Alsietina, were opened under Augustus as he recognized the importance of meeting Rome’s growing need for potable water.
one can hardly draw away from’ for there are ‘colonnades all around it in very great numbers, and sacred precincts, and three theatres, and an amphitheatre and very costly temples in close succession to one another, giving you the impression that they are trying...to declare the rest of the city a mere accessory’ (Strabo 5.3.8). No longer characterized by a smattering of republican monuments, the Campus Martius had been vested by Augustus and Agrippa with an unusual, stirring beauty and amenities that rivalled the city itself.

The heart of the city was not lacking for Augustus’ attention either, for there he studiously completed the monuments begun by Caesar and then launched a programme of additions that transformed the Forum Romanum into a celebration of the imperial family. Defining its perimeter were monuments erected or restored by Augustus or his immediate family members: the temples of Concordia Augusta and of Castor; the Curia; the Porticus of Gaius and Lucius in front of the Basilica Paulli; the temple and rostra of Deified Caesar (which initiated the regular practice of dedicating temples to deified rulers); the Basilica Julia; and several honorific arches.

To this, Augustus added Rome’s third forum, the Forum Augusti in 2 BC which was heavily indebted to Caesar’s forum for its design (Fig. 8.3). It too centred on an enclosed rectangular piazza defined by colonnades and had an axial temple, here dedicated to Mars Ultor, ‘Mars the Avenger’, to acknowledge Augustus’ defeat of those responsible for Caesar’s death as well as allude to his recovery of the military standards lost to the Parthians. Complementing the refined architecture and lavish building materials was a sophisticated sculptural programme celebrating the lineage of Augustus and the gens Julia. Like Rome’s two other fora, the Forum Augusti existed primarily to serve jurisprudence and government business, especially matters relating to foreign policy. Just as Augustus transformed Rome’s government from a republic to a principate, his architectural commissions ensured that major loci for civic transactions in Rome – the Forum Romanum, Forum Iulium and Forum Augusti – were ‘Augustan’ spaces that proclaimed the power of Rome’s new emperor.

The third centre of Augustan patronage was the Palatine, where he erected an expansive residential complex at its south-west corner near the Hut of Romulus. Overlooking the Circus Maximus were domus for himself, his wife Livia and Agrippa. While elite domus routinely contained a mix of public and private spaces, Augustus’ own residence was unique in its public components. It featured a prominent entrance graced by symbols of his office, a pair of Greek and Latin
libraries, and a direct connection to the adjacent temple of Apollo Palatinus, dedicated by Augustus in 28 BC. Nearby, Augustus erected a public colonnade, the Portico of Apollo, and renovated the temples of Magna Mater, Victoria and Victoria Virgo. Over the course of his reign, the south-west Palatine became a spectacular assemblage of houses, temples, porticos, libraries and sacred sites worthy of a Hellenistic monarch.

Though largely invisible, Augustus’ administrative reforms are just as important as his architectural patronage. In 7 BC, Augustus replaced the existing administrative system with a new organization based on fourteen regions, each subdivided into many vicus (neighbourhoods). The Augustan system effectively extended the official definition of the city beyond the pomerium and Servian Wall to encompass previously unrecognized areas like the Campus Martius, Trans Tiberim and Emporium. In addition, Augustus introduced curatorial boards staffed with a bureaucracy of experts and funded by the state that were responsible for the upkeep of Rome’s essential infrastructure, such as roads, water and sewer systems, public buildings and the Tiber embankments. Augustus also established Rome’s first standing fire brigade, the Cohortes Vigilum (c. AD 6), a corps of 7,000 freedmen based in seven barracks throughout the city.

Just as significant as what Augustus built in Rome was his decision not to build a new circuit of defensive walls. By the time of Augustus, the Servian Wall had fallen into disrepair and had lost its functional capacity. Dionysius of Halicarnassus reports that ‘the wall is hard to find because of the buildings surrounding it in many places’ (4.13.5). Moreover, the city had expanded appreciably in the intervening centuries and now extended far beyond the line of the fourth-century BC wall. Augustus’ decision not to commission a new defensive circuit, and the public’s acceptance of this choice, is an appreciable measure of his success at instilling peace after decades of military violence, and in fostering the widespread belief that adopting an imperial system would maintain that peace indefinitely. The decision to forego a defensive wall made Rome a highly unusual city in the ancient world, an ‘open city’ defended by ‘the belief that it is not walls that protect men, but men that protect walls’ (Strabo 5.3.7).7

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6 Chapter 10.
7 The concept of Augustan Rome as an ‘open city’ originates with Frézouls 1987, and has been taken up by Haselberger 2007 among others.
With the changes introduced by Augustus, Rome had become worthy of her status as an imperial capital. No longer a deficient city that left her residents shamefaced and visiting ambassadors in mocking laughter, Augustan Rome gleamed with new monuments and attractions: the Campus Martius rose up as a new city to rival the old in architectural majesty; three fora set a suitable stage for government business; new aqueducts fed her neighbourhoods with water; her streets were safer from fire and flood; public buildings no longer languished in disrepair but were maintained by dedicated curatorial boards; and, boldly confident in the peace inaugurated by Augustus, Rome stood as an ‘open city’. In light of such profound changes, Suetonius’ famous assertion that Augustus ‘found a city of bricks and left it a city of marble’ (Aug. 28.3) seems unjust in its understatement.

Imperial Rome

Among the profound shifts the Principate brought to Rome was a new perception of who was responsible for the city and its monuments. In the Republic, commissions were sponsored by the politically ambitious and the burden of upkeep shared by the patrons of major buildings and magistrates with limited capabilities. Now emperors were expected to lavish the city with architectural benefactions as well as see to the proper maintenance of existing monuments and infrastructure. Emperors embraced this task with different levels of ardour. Some, like Augustus and Vespasian, demonstrated a keen awareness of the political and economic advantages of architectural patronage, while others such as Tiberius or the Antonine emperors, to judge from their lacklustre building records in Rome, regarded such munificence as an obligation to be cursorily addressed. Imperial patronage encompassed a range of building types. Some were religious or political in motivation, like temples or fora, while others were geared to please Rome’s fickle populace, such as amphitheatres, porticos and other venues for entertainment and leisure pursuits. Large public bath complexes were an especial imperial benefaction, and after Agrippa set the fashion, new thermae were erected by Nero, Titus, Trajan, Commodus, Caracalla, Decius, Diocletian and Constantine. Emperors also funded less glamorous projects, such as new aqueducts and harbour works. Though imperial benefactions were clustered in the centre of the city and Campus Martius, by the early fourth
century AD imperial monuments could be found throughout the city
and accounted for at least a fifth of Rome’s area.8

Following imperial patronage, the second leading cause of change
in Rome’s urban topography over the empire was growth. Over three
centuries of imperial leadership, Rome became ever larger and denser.
While many neighbourhoods retained their republican character – gov-
ernment in the fora, mercantile activities by the Tiber and state religion
on the Capitoline – their supporting architectural infrastructure was
often enhanced. As the empire grew, Rome required new facilities
for an expanding bureaucracy and the many new residents attracted to
the capital. Existing neighbourhoods increased in density and a num-
ber of new residential areas developed as the city expanded outward.
Unchanged, however, was the mixed character of Rome’s urban fabric,
which blended housing, religious monuments, commercial structures
and imperially commissioned public buildings.

During the empire, official business related to governance, legal
matters, banking and commerce continued to be transacted in the
Forum Romanum and imperial fora, which were augmented by three
additional fora (Fig. 8.3). Vespasian built the Templum Pacis (AD 75),
which differed notably from the fora erected by Caesar and Augustus.
Though the Templum Pacis served – just as earlier fora had – as a venue
for personal propaganda, specifically as a reminder of the peace Vespasian
had restored to the empire, it did not serve government business.
Instead, its porticos displayed art objects and spoils from Vespasian’s mil-
itary campaigns and its rectilinear piazza was filled with orderly rows of
greenery and water works – in all, a pleasurable respite from the rigours
of Rome’s dense urban fabric. Built into one side of the quadrripoticus
was a temple dedicated to Pax (Peace), but its subdued appearance was
utterly unlike the visually dominant temples of Venus Genetrix and
Mars Ultor. A few decades later, Domitian began the Forum Transito-
rarium (dedicated in AD 97 by his successor Nerva), which was essentially
an aggrandized passage for the Argiletum, a major thoroughfare leading
from the Quirinal to the Forum Romanum, with an axial temple dedi-
cated to Domitian’s patron goddess Minerva at one end. The largest and
most luxurious of the imperial fora was the Forum of Trajan, which was
designed by Apollodorus (c. AD 112) and considered one of Rome’s most
beautiful buildings for centuries to come (e.g. Amm. Marc. 16.10.15,

8 Given the serious lacunae in our knowledge of the ancient city, the area covered by
imperial commissions is best considered an educated estimate rather than a precise
figure.
writing c. AD 390). Twice as large as the Forum of Augustus, the Forum of Trajan had the familiar open piazza framed by colonnaded porticoes but instead of an axial temple it featured the spacious Basilica Ulpia, dual Greek and Latin libraries, and the Column of Trajan, a 128-foot honorific column carved with relief sculpture commemorating Trajan’s military victories in Dacia. After Trajan’s death in AD 117, his ashes were interred in the base of the column and an axial temple erected to Deified Trajan. The imperial fora were unique to Rome. Other Roman cities might have a forum that emulated the Forum Romanum in its function and architectural components, but only Rome, as the capital of the empire and home of the emperor, had the need and the imperial patrons to support a magisterial complex of six fora. Rome was a world capital, and the emperors ensured it had the physical resources to support that role.

In the Principate, Rome’s mercantile facilities such as ports, warehouses and docks continued to be clustered along the Tiber, and the Emporium remained the city’s epicentre for trade. Improvements to the harbour at the mouth of the Tiber sponsored by Claudius and Trajan increased the ease of shipping. Though the republican macellum near the Forum Romanum was supplanted by the Templum Pacis, two other central markets were built: the Macellum Liviae (early first century AD) on the Esquiline, and Nero’s Macellum Magnum on the Caelian (AD 59). Most Romans conducted their daily shopping locally, and at the neighbourhood level commerce was carried out primarily in small tabernae (shops or stalls) that lined the streets.

In Rome’s residential areas, the elite continued to favour hilltops for their domus and proximity to the city centre remained a prized commodity. In the first century AD, the Caelian became popular with Rome’s elite and the Aventine emerged as an increasingly fashionable locale. Horti, expansive villas with lush gardens, were located at the periphery of the city, and large areas of the Esquiline, Pincian and Trans Tiberim were given over to these exclusive estates. Those at the opposite end of the social spectrum lived in slums like the Subura or in dense housing on the slopes of the Esquiline, Oppian and Viminal. During the Principate, the Trans Tiberim region grew into a vital neighbourhood especially popular with foreign residents and Jews (most of the eleven known synagogues are located in this region). Throughout Rome insulae, large multi-storey apartment buildings, sprung up

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9 For the ongoing debate concerning the layout and components of the Forum of Trajan, especially the site of the temple to Divine Trajan, see Claridge 2007.
to house the swelling population. Typically built as rental properties by wealthy landlords, *insulae* were especially prevalent in the valleys between hills and in lower-class neighbourhoods like the Trans Tiberim. Though many *insulae* were certainly well-built, literary tradition holds them to be overcrowded, damp, rickety, structurally suspect firetraps.

The Palatine remained home to the emperor, whose residence grew over the centuries to encompass almost the entire hilltop. Eschewing Augustus’ *domus* on the south-west Palatine, Tiberius constructed a new palace, the Domus Tiberiana (after AD 14), overlooking the Forum Romanum. After AD 80, Domitian added the Domus Augustana to the southern Palatine. Designed by Rabirius, Domitian’s impressive new residence had suites of monumental public halls, lavish private apartments and spacious gardens. Under the Severan emperors came the last major expansion of the Domus Augustana, which included the Septizodium (AD 203), a monumental three-storey fountain oriented towards the Via Appia. The Palatine residence continued in use through the fourth century with occasional restoration and additions, such as the appealing bath suite erected by Maxentius (c. AD 306–12).

All Roman emperors were expected to bestow architectural largess upon Rome, but some, distinguished by their extraordinary interest in architecture, left an indelible mark on the city’s urban topography. Augustus was one such ruler and Nero was another. After a devastating fire in AD 64 ravaged ten of Rome’s fourteen regions, Nero instituted new building codes intended to limit damage from the frequent fires that continued to plague the city. He also seized a huge tract of land opened by the blaze to the east of the Forum Romanum. There, his architects Severus and Celer built the Domus Aurea, an imperial residence of unprecedented size and magnificence. The main entry from the Forum Romanum proceeded along a mile-long colonnade punctuated by the Colossus of Nero, a 120-foot tall bronze portrait of the emperor (Suetonius *Nero* 31). Much of the usurped land was transformed into a bucolic country landscape in the heart of the city, while the walls of the *domus* itself ‘were overlaid with gold and studded with precious stones and mother of pearl’ (Suetonius *Nero* 31). Such excess was despised by Nero’s contemporaries and the enormous size of the Domus Aurea was an especial affront. Suetonius quotes verses that were written on the city’s walls or spread verbally, saying that: ‘Rome has become a house; citizens, emigrate to Veii! But watch out that the house does not extend

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10 Chapter 9.
that far too’ (Nero 39). Martial’s reaction is more succinct: ‘one house took up the whole city of Rome’ (Liber de Spectaculis 2.4).

Such excess could not be left uncorrected, and after assuming power in AD 69 Vespasian moved to rectify the situation. A number of art objects from the Domus Aurea were put on public display in the Templum Pacis, and in the midst of its expansive pastoral landscape he erected the Flavian Amphitheatre, Rome’s first permanent venue for gladiatorial combats, animal hunts and the other events comprising ludi (games). Better known as the Colosseum (a name deriving from its proximity to Nero’s Colossus), the amphitheatre was begun by Vespasian in AD 72 and completed by his son Titus in AD 80. Dedicated concurrently with the Colosseum in AD 80 were the Baths of Titus, a public bath complex erected atop one wing of Nero’s Domus Aurea. With the Amphitheatre and Baths, Vespasian and Titus courted popular support: not only did they construct two well-received venues for public entertainment and leisure, but by reversing Nero’s excesses and ‘returning’ a substantial part of the city to its residents, they cemented their reputation as populist emperors.

The reign of Hadrian represents a high point for imperial patronage in Rome, for his long, stable rule and deep personal interest in architecture combined to produce a building programme rivalled by few others. His actions included broad, city-wide initiatives such as restoring the pomerium, restructuring the brick industry and personally vetting those who wished to restore a compital shrine. Yet Hadrian is best known for the stunning new monuments he erected. Two religious dedications, the Pantheon and the Temple of Venus and Roma, exemplify the virtuosity that makes Hadrianic architecture so engaging. After Agrippa’s Pantheon was damaged by fire in AD 110, Hadrian rebuilt it with significant structural changes. Drawing upon the Roman architects’ mastery of arcuated forms, the Pantheon’s spectacular concrete dome sheltered an unbroken interior space of stunning expanse.11 In contrast, Hadrian’s Temple of Venus and Roma, the largest temple in Rome, followed Greek precedents and featured a double peristyle of fifty-foot columns (no building in Rome had a larger order), a rectilinear design and walls of hewn stone (opus quadratum) built by Greek masons.

11 Fundamental aspects of the Pantheon have been questioned in recent years. Using brickstamp evidence, Hetland 2007 suggests that Trajan rather than Hadrian began its construction. Davies et al. 1987 question whether the Pantheon’s oft-lauded design represents the architect’s original intention or results from a compromise occasioned by a lack of suitable building materials.
The architectural zenith achieved in Hadrianic Rome depended upon an ideal set of circumstances: Hadrian’s long 21-year reign, the stability of the empire and its full coffers, and the emperor’s avowed interest in architectural design (e.g. Dio Cass. 69.4.1–5).

In contrast, imperial patronage reached its nadir during the third century AD. Political, military and economic instability created a 65-year ‘crisis’ after the reign of Caracalla ended in AD 217. During this period, Rome saw over twenty different emperors, each dealing with urgent military challenges at the empire’s borders, steep inflation crippling the economy and constant threats to his tenuous hold on imperial power. In such conditions, it is unsurprising that architectural patronage lagged in Rome. Though some significant commissions are known – for instance, the Temple of Sol Invictus Elagabalus (a Syrian sun god) on the Palatine by Elagabalus in AD 221 or the Aventine Baths of Decius c. AD 250 – major imperial building works are rare in the mid-third century AD. The largest public work of the age, the Aurelian Wall (c. AD 271), a 19 km defensive circuit, offers a vivid testament to the unstable conditions at Rome. In an age of civil strife and barbarian incursions, Rome could no longer afford to be the ‘open city’ of Augustus. Moreover, in such tense economic times, Rome could barely afford to build the wall itself, and up to one-sixth of its length comprises reused structures that lay in its path.

Only with the return of strong imperial leadership under the Tetrarchs did Rome witness a brief reversal in the steep decline of its fortunes. After a fire in AD 283 cut a destructive swath through the Forum Romanum and Forum Iulium, Diocletian responded with a programme of restoration and new construction. He repaired the damaged structures and restored functionality to the civic centre of Rome, overhauled the brick industry and together with his co-ruler Maximian embarked upon a steady twenty-year building campaign, which included a magnificent new bath complex on the Quirinal, the Thermae Diocletiani (c. AD 305/6). To celebrate their vicennalia (twenty-year anniversary of rule), Diocletian and Maximian redefined the physical space of the Forum Romanum with brilliant clarity and economy by installing a series of columnar monuments at its perimeter. Following in their footsteps was Maxentius, who built a series of astounding structures just east of the Forum Romanum: he rebuilt Hadrian’s temple of Venus and Roma; erected the Basilica Nova, the largest cross-vaulted space in antiquity; and commissioned a dramatic domed rotunda and audience hall.

Maxentius’ commissions proved to be the last major civic buildings erected in Rome. After Constantine vanquished Maxentius in AD 312,
he displayed little interest in the city. Constantine seldom visited and built even less: a well-received restoration of the Circus Maximus and a bath complex dismissed as ‘not much different from the others’ (Aur. Vict. De Caes. 40.27) were the only non-religious structures he could call his own. The Arch of Constantine and the rededication of Maxentius’ buildings in Constantine’s name were acts of the Roman senate and herald a change in patronage in Rome – in the face of imperial lack of interest in the fourth century AD, Rome’s senators and high-ranking magistrates, especially the urban prefect, became her leading patrons. Though they were wealthy, their resources could never match those of an emperor, and so their building efforts were often on a reduced scale and, like those of their republican ancestors, reflective of the patron’s personal interests.

On 11 May AD 330 Constantine sounded the death knell for Rome as a vital political centre with the dedication of his new imperial capital at Constantinople. Ironically, the path for Rome’s salvation came from Constantine as well: his commissions of Christian churches signalled a new direction for Rome as a capital of Christendom. Under Constantine’s guidance and patronage, Rome’s first monumental Christian church, the Lateran Basilica, was erected on the Caelian as the cathedra for the bishop of Rome (c. AD 313–24). A few years later, Constantine sponsored a martyria church on the site of St Peter’s tomb (now the Vatican; consecrated in AD 333). Built and endowed with imperial resources, the size and grandeur of Constantine’s churches rivalled any imperial commission in the city. To those expecting traditional imperial architectural largess, Constantine’s patronage must have been disorienting, for instead of focusing on the political needs of the capital or the entertainment of its residents, Constantine lavished resources on a religion that, while followed by many, was only decades removed from official imperial proscription. Yet over the coming centuries, as Christianity steadily supplanted traditional Roman beliefs, Constantine’s vision of Rome as a Christian capital would prevail and carry the Eternal City through the next 1,600 years.

**Further Reading**

Stambaugh 1988 remains a useful introduction to Rome’s changing topography and includes a chronological account of building works

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12 For a more traditional account of Constantine as a ‘significant’ architectural patron in the imperial tradition, see Johnson 2006.