

## **INTRODUCTION**

Hello Everyone , this is DM, and welcome to my audio guided tour to the Roman Forum. Ideally, this audio tour picks up where my Colosseum Audio Tour left off, however you are welcome to begin here, without touring the Colosseum. This audio walking tour in and around the Roman Forum is designed to be experienced in real time. That is, without pausing. However, depending on the crowds and queues, you are welcome to take it at your own pace, and pause to enjoy the experience.

Let's begin our tour at the Arch of Constantine on the southwest side of the Colosseum. It's that big marble arch in front of the umbrella pines on the hill, just southwest of the Colosseum.

## **THE ARCH OF CONSTANTINE**

This is one of the most well-preserved ancient Roman monuments in the city. The arch commemorates the victory of the Roman Emperor Constantine I in the Battle of Milvian Bridge in 312 AD. But, before we talk about the Arch itself, let's review why Emperor Constantine I, also known as Constantine the Great, was significant in Roman history.

Constantine was Roman Emperor from 306-337 AD. He was a transformative Emperor who shaped the course of Roman history by his adoption of Christianity, his military victories, and the establishment of Constantinople.

In 312 AD, Constantine fought the pivotal Battle of Milvian Bridge against Maxentius for control of the Roman Empire. According to legend, before the battle, Constantine had a vision of a Christian symbol in the sky and heard the words "In this sign, you shall conquer." This symbol is thought to be the Greek letters, Chi-Rho, the first two letters of the Greek word for Christ.

Inspired by this vision, Constantine ordered his soldiers to paint the Chi-Rho on their shields and banners, leading to his victory over Maxentius. This victory secured Constantine's position as the sole ruler of the Western Roman Empire.

With Constantine's conversion to Christianity, he issued the Edict of Milan in 313 AD and granted religious tolerance to Christians, effectively ending their persecution in the empire and allowing Christianity to flourish. This decision laid the groundwork for the eventual establishment of Christianity as the state religion under later emperors, and significantly impacted the religious landscape of Rome and the entire Western world.

Additionally, Constantine made Byzantium (modern-day Istanbul) the new capital of the Roman Empire, renaming it Constantinople. This strategic move transformed the city into a new center of power in the Eastern Roman Empire (Byzantine Empire). Constantinople's strategic location at the crossroads of Europe and Asia ensured its continued significance for centuries, serving as the political, cultural, and economic hub of the Byzantine Empire.

Later, Constantine consolidated power in AD 324, and he became the sole ruler of both the Eastern and Western Roman Empires. However, in an effort to manage the vast territories more effectively, upon his death in 337 AD he divided the empire, leaving it to his three sons. This division led to a significant shift in the dynamics of the Roman Empire, with the Western Roman Empire facing multiple challenges and eventually declining, while the Eastern Roman Empire (Byzantine Empire) continued to thrive for nearly another thousand years.

Ok, let me get back on track here with our tour...

This Arch commemorates that victory at Milvian Bridge over his rival Maxentius for control of the Roman Empire. The arch stands as a symbol of the emperor's military and political success, as well as the triumph of Christianity in the Roman Empire.

The arch is adorned with various relief panels that depict scenes from the life of Emperor Constantine, as well as scenes from earlier emperors like Trajan, Hadrian, and Marcus Aurelius. Many of the reliefs were repurposed from earlier monuments, so although the Arc is dedicated to Constantine the Great, most of the carvings and carved reliefs have nothing to do with him.

Now turn away from the Arc and the Colosseum and find the stone lined street leading uphill between the cypress trees (on the left) and the temple hill (on the right).

### **VIA SACRA**

This is the Via Sacra, the "Sacred Way." It stretched from here all the way to the base of Capitoline Hill, there in the distance. It was ancient Rome's "Main Street," the main drag in town. At its heyday, Rome was home to a million people from all walks of life. Imagine walking through here 2000 years ago, a foreigner, gawking at the toga-clad Romans shopping at markets stalls, bargaining with merchants wheeling portable carts, and hanging out at the main square, listening to orators, senators, and the everyday chatter of people.

Back then, the Via Sacra (along with 50,000 miles of roads throughout the Empire) would have been covered with a layer of concrete and interlocked stones to make a smooth surface for walking, horses, carts, and chariots. What you see today is only the road's basalt stone foundation, the other layers have disappeared over time.

### **TICKET & SECURITY CHECKPOINT**

Soon you'll come to a checkpoint where you'll have to pass through a bag check and security and show your entry ticket. Your COLOSSEUM-FORUM-PALATINE HILL combo ticket is all you need. After passing through the security barrier the road splits.

The path to the left leads up to Palatine Hill and the remains of the emperor's palaces. If you have time, it is worthwhile to walk up for a bird's eye view of the Forum and the "new" town of Rome.

Our tour continues on the Via Sacra. Walk up to the next Arc, the Arc of Titus.

## ARCH OF TITUS

**Titus Caesar Vespasianus** reigned as Roman Emperor from AD 79-81, not quite two years. As Emperor, he is remembered as completing the Colosseum in Rome, and as being benevolent in his relief efforts during two disasters, the eruption on Mount Vesuvius in AD 79, and a massive fire in Rome in AD 80.

Before becoming emperor, Titus was a military commander, serving under his father, Emperor Vespasian, in Judea during the First Jewish–Roman War. In AD 70, he besieged and captured Jerusalem, and destroyed the city and the Second Temple.

Later, after Titus' death, this triumphal Arc was constructed, in AD 81, to commemorate his achievement, and now almost 2000 years later, it still stands here today remaining as one of the most iconic and well-preserved monuments from ancient Rome.

Move closer to the arch so you can see the stone carvings and reliefs under the arch.

The arch follows the standard Roman triumphal arch design, featuring a single central archway flanked by two columns on each side. The arch is built using Pentelic marble, a high-quality white marble from Greece. The intricate stone carvings, known as reliefs, show scenes from the Roman triumph after the Jewish War, including the spoils taken from the Second Temple in Jerusalem. Notice the Roman soldiers carrying the sacred Menorah and other treasures from the temple, as well as scenes of captives and conquered territories.

The Romans were known to show mercy and benevolence to those they conquered. Throughout the Empire, Roman subjects were allowed to carry on with their normal life, as long as they showed allegiance to the empire by paying taxes to Rome, and worshiping the emperor as a god. For most, this was no problem because pagans worshipped many gods, the emperor was just one more. But for the Jews of Israel, who believed in only one true God, it was a problem.

Hence, Titus' army sacked Jerusalem, destroyed the Temple on the mount in Jerusalem, and brought 50,000 Jews back to Rome as slaves. This brutal destruction of Jerusalem caused Jews to abandon their homeland and scatter throughout the world. Today, we know this as ***the Diaspora***.

Beyond the arch, you'll find one of Rome's many public drinking fountains. This one, shaped like a big nose, is known as a *Nasone* in Italian. Go ahead, get a sip or fill your water bottle. The city is known for its numerous fountains which provide clean, potable water from the local aqueduct system. Many of the fountains have a small hole on the top. So, when bending over to get a drink, plug the outlet with your finger, and a stream of water spurts out of the hole, making it easier to get a sip.

BTW, the local Romans have a joke – When a young man wants to take his girlfriend on a cheap date, they say he is taking her to the *Nasone*.

## **A VIEW OF THE FORUM FROM THE ARCH OF TITUS**

You'll have to use your imagination to piece together this dilapidated rubble-littered valley and turn it into a shiny glittering Forum of the Roman times. In its heyday, this was the center of Rome. The hill straight ahead in the distance, with the bell tower, is Capitoline Hill. The hill to your left, with the umbrella pine trees, is Palatine Hill. The rectangular valley, stretching from the Colosseum, behind you, to the Capitoline Hill in front, is the Roman Forum. The Via Sacra, is the "Main Street" running through the forum.

<https://www.history.com/topics/ancient-rome/roman-forum>

Humorous animated Video about history of Roman Empire.



Giovanni Battista Piranesi, *Vaccino, from the capitol, with the Arch of Septimus Severus in the foreground left, Temple of Vespasian right, and the Colosseum in the distance (Veduta di Campo Vaccino)*, c. 1775, etching (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

This valley was filled with white marbled buildings covered with gleaming bronze roofs. Each building had a purpose, such as the treasury, temples honoring gods, senate house, residences, public buildings, and public meeting places. This entire valley is known as the Roman Forum, but often our mental image references togacled Romans, lounging around an outdoor public square, or perhaps listening to an orator standing on a rostrum. The area where this occurred was known as the Forum Square. You can see it in the distance, beyond the three columns, and to the left of the large arch below Capitoline Hill. It is an elevated area lined with stubs of columns.

## **BASILICA OF CONSTANTINE**

Now head down the hill to the right of the Arch of Titus. Be sure to watch your step on these ankle-breaking cobblestones! When you reach the first path to the right, take it up to the vast Basilica of Maxentius.

We have already heard about Maxentius, the emperor whom Constantine defeated at the Battle of the Milvian Bridge outside Rome. He began constructing this basilica in 307, but after his defeat Constantine took over its construction and – of course – named it after himself!

This building was a law court and an impressive one at that: its central open area, or nave, was 115 feet high, that's 4 stories higher than the ceiling of Santa Maria Maggiore on Esquiline Hill. And the arches you still see on the opposite side of the building are 80 feet high. There would have been an identical set of these massive arches on the opposite side of the building from where you entered.

Imagine that the lower half of these walls would have been covered with marble while the upper half was stuccoed. The floor would have been paved with marble in a pattern of yellow, green, and purple.

Now go stand at the gate in front of the white church, to your right, and look back down the length of the basilica. You are looking the length of a football field to the opposite end of the building. On that side, there would have been a semi-circular apse, or niche, with a 30-foot-high seated statue of Constantine. From here, this massive statue conveyed the power of the emperor as he literally oversaw all the goings-on in this building. This statue with its 8-foot-high head had a remote expression, giving visitors a sense the emperor was far above them and unreachable, a far cry from the accessible republic the Romans had enjoyed a few centuries before.

You may recognize the design of this building. That is because many Christian churches are constructed in this basilican style. With the rise of Christianity during the time of Constantine, Christians no longer needed to worship secretly to avoid religious persecution. They could now worship in buildings designated for this purpose. Christians adopted the basilica plan for their churches so that worshipers and converts could congregate in a style of building that they already knew and felt comfortable in.

Apart from the Hagia Sophia built in present-day Istanbul a couple of centuries after this one, buildings with vaults on the scale that you see here would not be built for another 700 years. The construction of massive buildings like this one would not have been possible without the Romans' mastery of concrete construction. From the 100s BC the Romans used a mortar mixed with lime and a crushed volcanic rock called pozzolana found near Naples and Rome, which allowed the Romans to build on the overwhelming scale you see here.

Today many of Christendom's most important churches are constructed in the basilica plan, which comprises a central nave, two aisles, and an apse, as you see in this building. The most notable example is St. Peter's Basilica. In fact, its architect was so greatly inspired by this Basilica of Constantine that he made the arches of St. Peter's the same width as those you see here – 67 feet.

## TEMPLE OF ROMULUS

Now head back down where you came from and turn right when you get to the main path. After heading down the hill past the trees, you will come to a circular building on your right with a large door and purple columns.

This is the Temple of Romulus. Although it has the founder of Rome's name, it is believed to be dedicated to a different Romulus, the son of Maxentius who died in boyhood. Notice this temple's two most distinctive features: its ancient bronze doors and purple porphyry columns.

Porphyry is a very rare stone, although you will see it often around Rome. There is only one porphyry quarry in the world, in the Eastern desert of Egypt. Its rarity makes this stone worth more than gold! Porphyry is very dense and therefore difficult to carve, making objects carved of this material even more precious and rare.

Roman emperors loved to use porphyry on their temples, palaces, and public buildings because of its rarity and its purple color, the color of royalty. Building with porphyry also displayed that the emperors controlled Egypt, an empire that had endured for thousands of years but finally succumbed to Roman rule. Roman emperors would often show off with their construction materials like this; different colored marbles came from different parts of the empire, and those who viewed these buildings were meant to contemplate and be in awe of the far-flung power of Rome.

The other notable features of this temple are its bronze doors. These doors, which came from another Roman building, are original from the 200s AD, making them 1800 years old! Their automatic lock is still in perfect working order, too. The Romans really built things to last, didn't they?

## TEMPLE OF ANTONINUS PIUS AND FAUSTINA

Keep heading down the path until you reach a large temple with a long flight of steps on your right-hand side. This is the temple of Antoninus Pius and Faustina. It is one of the best-preserved temples in all of Rome because it was later turned into a Christian church.

In the mid-100s AD, the Senate dedicated this temple to the memory of Faustina, wife of Emperor Antoninus Pius, after her death. Its Corinthian columns in green, grey, and white-veined Greek marble are monolithic, which means they are carved from one solid piece of marble. This is especially impressive considering the Romans had to ship these columns across the sea from Greece.

By the 1100s, this building became the church of San Lorenzo to commemorate the trial of St. Lawrence, which was thought to have taken place in this temple before his martyrdom in 258 AD. You will often see St. Lawrence depicted as how he was martyred and burned alive on a gridiron. According to tradition, while he was burning, Lawrence joked, "Turn me over; I'm done on this side." This quip made him the patron saint of cooks and chefs.

The church façade you see today is Baroque, dating from the 1600s. But notice where the ancient temple's steps end and the 17th-century church façade begins. By the 1600s, when the church was constructed, the ancient steps and a part of the temple's columns were covered by sediment. This shows how much earth had built up in this area over the centuries. We will talk about why later.

## **TEMPLE VESTA**

Now turn around and loop around the green space in front of you to the complex directly opposite the Temple of Antoninus Pius and Faustina. You will come to the ruins of a circular temple, the Temple of Vesta. Here, you are standing at the most sacred spot in Rome. This temple honors Vesta, the goddess of the hearth. The sacred flame which burned inside the temple symbolized the fires that burned in every Roman's home. The Ancient Romans prided themselves on their family values, venerating their parents, grandparents, and ancestors with small statues in sacred shrines inside their homes. This temple represented those family values on a large scale. The Romans believed that as long as this sacred flame burned, Rome would stand. It symbolized the perpetuity of the Roman state. Romans were terrified that if it went out, the Roman state would come to an end. The important task of guarding this flame and keeping it lit was left to the Vestal Virgins.

## **VESTAL VIRGINS**

The Vestals were the virgin priestesses of Vesta. Six of them served the goddess at one time. The emperor himself selected the priestesses from patrician, or upper-class, families as girls between the ages of 6 and 10. After she was chosen, a Vestal lived in the House of the Vestals, which we will be looking at shortly, for 30 years. The first 10 years she learned her duties, the next 10 years she performed them, and the last 10 year she taught novices. In addition to keeping the flame alight, the Vestals brought water from a sacred spring, cooked sacred food, and polished the ritual silverware in their duties as ceremonial homemakers. During these 30 years, as their name implies, they were bound by the vow of chastity, but after their service ended, they were given a huge dowry and were free to return to the world and marry.

The Romans honored and revered the Vestals, who even had their own box seats opposite the emperor in the Colosseum. While it was a great honor to be a Vestal, there were serious consequences for not fulfilling a priestess's duties. For instance, if she let the sacred fire go out, the priestess was whipped by the emperor. If she broke her vow of chastity, she was given a loaf of bread and a lamp, and buried alive around what is today the Termini Station, and the man was publicly flogged to death in the Forum. Many Vestals and their lovers suffered these fates.

## **HOUSE OF VESTAL VIRGINS**

Now let us make our way inside the House of the Vestal Virgins. We go up a couple of steps to the left of the temple and enter a spacious courtyard with a rose garden. Around the perimeter of the courtyard, you will notice statue bases and statues honoring dutiful Vestals that date from the 200s AD on. A two-storied portico would have surrounded this courtyard. You can see the remains of many of the rooms off this portico, including a dining room, kitchen, and mill. Imagine being a Vestal Virgin and being able to escape to this serene and secluded haven after a hard day of work around the Forum.

Let's put it all in historical context and talk about...

## **THE FALL OF ROME AND THE SCAVENGERS OF THE MIDDLE AGES**

At the height of the Roman Empire, during Trajan's reign in the early 100s, the empire comprised 54 million people from Scotland to Africa, and from Spain to Iraq. Roman territory was so large that the Romans simply called the Mediterranean Sea *Mare Nostrum*, "Our Sea."

However, by the time of Constantine, whose Arch we looked at earlier, the Roman Empire in the west was dying. Constant wars and overspending had led to significant money shortages, and oppressive taxation and inflation had widened the gap between rich and poor. The empire had overextended itself; Romans were unable to communicate quickly enough to manage all their vast holdings. They struggled to gather enough troops and resources to defend their frontiers. In addition, there was often civil war, which plunged the empire into chaos – more than 20 men took the throne in the span of only 75 years, usually after the murder of their predecessor.

The Western part of the empire was suffering from repeated invasions and had grown weak compared to the East, where spices and other exports virtually guaranteed its wealth and stability. Upon Emperor Theodosius I's death in 395, Rome split into the Eastern and Western Roman Empires. After attacks on the city of Rome by the "barbarian" Visigoths in 410 and the Vandals in 455, the Western Roman Empire fell completely in 476 AD, when the Germanic chieftain Odoacer deposed the last Emperor of the Western Roman Empire, Romulus Augustulus. It seems fitting that the emperor who saw the end of Rome was named after the mythical man, Romulus, who founded the city. The East, always richer and stronger, continued as the Byzantine Empire for almost another 1,000 years until 1453.

After the western empire's fall, Rome became a backwater. Nowhere was this more visible than in the Roman Forum, which the Romans – especially the Catholic Church – plundered and despoiled. Today, the elaborate Roman churches we visit with their exotically-colored marble are decorated with the spoils of these ancient Roman monuments.

It may seem astonishing that the people of the Middle Ages could so freely pillage these monuments without remorse, but we need to look at it from their perspective. After the fall of Rome, citizens were focused simply on survival in this newly-chaotic world, not preserving these now-irrelevant monuments. Furthermore, these ancient buildings were "pagan," built by people who worshipped non-Christian gods. Therefore, they were considered taboo, haunted by the evil powers of the pagan gods, and deserved to be pillaged and destroyed.

The pockmarks and damage the buildings in the Roman Forum exhibit today manifest this irreverence the people of the Middle Ages had for the ancient and pagan. For instance, look behind you at the Temple of Antoninus Pius and Faustina. Do you see deep angled grooves on the upper part of the columns? In the Middle Ages, Romans wanted to use these beautiful Corinthian columns on a local church so they attempted to pull the columns down with ropes. Although they did not succeed, you can witness the damage they left behind.

After the fall of Rome no one kept the Tiber River's persistent flood waters from inundating it. Over the centuries, sediments built up until most of these imposing ancient monuments were covered by earth. By the Middle Ages, this area was no longer known as the forum but as the *Campo Vaccino*, or "Field of the Cows," because shepherds used it as grazing land for their cattle. The nearby Capitoline Hill was known as *Monte Caprino*, or "Goat Mountain," for the same reason. A barber opened up his shop under one of the tallest arches, the only one poking above ground – the Arch of Septimius Severus.

Ok, let's get back to our tour...



## TEMPLE OF JULIUS CAESAR

Go back on the path, turn to your left, and go down some wide steps. Turn right, and you will see a line of people entering the remains of this monument. Enter yourself if you would like. You may see flowers and coins on a mound of earth there. Any idea to whom this monument is dedicated? It is a god, but not one you might expect. This is a temple dedicated to Julius Caesar.

Julius Caesar is probably the best known of all Romans. His name has been transmitted into later European history as Kaiser and Czar and incorporated into the western calendar as the month of July. He was a great Roman general, best known for his campaign in Gaul in present-day France. In a civil war, he eliminated his enemies and assumed dictatorial powers. Romans had long been in fear of a dictatorship, and Caesar's behavior did not help, as he appeared in public on a throne and always dressed in a triumphal robe.

Although he was popular with the masses because he showered wealth on them, the senate saw their power slipping away and hatched an assassination plot. They stabbed him 23 times on the Ides of March (March 15<sup>th</sup>) in 44 BC. Afterwards, Julius Caesar's body was brought to this spot and it was probably cremated where the metal roof is today. At the same time, his will was read by Mark Antony (cue Shakespeare's "Friends, Romans, Countrymen, lend me your ears" speech). When Caesar's body was burned here, his adoring fans threw anything at hand on the fire, requiring the fire department to come and put it out. Later, Augustus dedicated this temple to his great-uncle and adopted father.

Caesar was the first Roman to become a god. Let's think about why: Augustus, the first emperor, was trying to assert his power and legitimacy. If he could claim he was related to a god, that would certainly make a case for his legitimacy. After Caesar, every Roman emperor (who was liked) was deified in the same way.

Anyway, those flowers you see? Here Caesar's admirers commemorate the supposed site of the cremation of his body in the Forum with these gifts.

## THE CURIA – SENATE HOUSE

Now turn left and skirt the forum until you reach a large brick building at the end of the path. You probably will not be able to enter, since the building is usually not open to the public.

This building is the Senate House, the most important political building in the Forum. Since the birth of the republic, this was the site of Rome's official center of government. The present building, reconstructed several times, dates from the 280s. It is so well-preserved because in 630 (yesterday by Roman time) it was converted into the church of Sant'Adriano. In the 1930s, it was restored to the form it had in the 200s.

Imagine this building's originally being covered with marble on its bottom half and stucco on the top. The impressive doors are copies of the originals, which were removed by Pope Alexander VII in the 1600s to the Church of St. John Lateran where you can still see them today – they are main entrance to the basilica. This is an example of the famous "plunder" of the ancient buildings in the forum.)

Inside, three broad marble-faced steps provided seats for 300 senators. Here they would give speeches, debate policy, and create the laws of the land. Still today many of our laws come from those set down by the senators in this building.

Rome prided itself on being a republic. In the 600s, early in the city's history, its people threw out the king and established rule by elected representatives. Each Roman citizen was free to speak his mind and have a say in public policy. Even when emperors became the supreme rulers, the Senate was a power to be reckoned with.

(Note that although Julius Caesar was assassinated in the “Senate,” it wasn’t here – the Senate was temporarily meeting across town at present-day Largo di Torre Argentina.)

## **THE ROSTRUM**

Now look to the left of the nearby Arch of Septimius Severus. There you will find a low brick wall. This was the Rostrum, or orators’ tribune. It was a raised platform, 10 feet high and 80 feet long, decorated with statues, columns, and prows of ships (or rostra).

Nowhere was Roman freedom of speech more apparent than here. From this platform, Rome’s orators tried to sway public opinion. Here Mark Antony offered Caesar the crown of kingship which Caesar publicly (and hypocritically) refused, instead becoming dictator privately. Here Cicero – a contemporary of Caesar’s – railed against the corruption and decadence that came with the city’s newfound wealth. Cicero paid the price: Mark Antony had him executed and his head and hands nailed to the Rostrum.

This Rostrum has some seedy history, too: it was famously profaned by Emperor Augustus’s sensual daughter Julia who used it at night for her notorious encounters. Despairing of her incorrigible ways, Augustus eventually exiled her to an island off the west coast of Italy.

## **ARCH OF SEPTIMIUS SEVERUS**

If the Rostrum represents the voices of Roman democracy, the imposing Arch of Septimius Severus to its right represents the unquestioned power of the later Empire. Even if you’ve never seen this arch before, it probably looks familiar. It was the prototype for the Arch of Constantine we see at the beginning of our tour and the later Arc de Triomphe in Paris.

This six-story-high arch, which is still faced entirely with marble, was erected by the African-born Septimius Severus in 203 AD in honor of the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his reign.

The arch was dedicated by the senate and people to Severus and his sons Caracalla and Geta in memory of their military victories, mostly in Parthia, which is present-day Iran. You can see relief carvings of the two Parthian campaigns inside the largest arch. Near ground level are soldiers marching captured barbarians back to Rome for a victory parade. These reliefs demonstrate how Rome’s economy was becoming based more and more on slave power and foreign booty instead of on domestic production. So even though you are looking at a scene of victory here, you are also looking at a sign of the Roman Empire’s decay.

But look back at that inscription at the top of the arch. Do you see the many small holes in the stone? There’s a story behind that.

Septimius Severus made his two sons co-emperors, which never worked out too well in Ancient Rome. Caracalla (who infamously contemplated making his horse a consul) killed Geta in 212, 9 years after this arch was completed, so that he could rule the empire single-handedly. He then marked out Geta’s name on this arch and added words praising himself and his father. Those holes you see were made for the original letters Caracalla erased.

## TEMPLE OF SATURN

Now turn around and circle the grassy open forum area to head towards the Capitoline Hill. Where the path turns right past the forum, look up to see the 8 Ionic columns of the front porch of the Temple of Saturn up the hill above you. This is one of the oldest temples in the Forum, dating from as early as 498 BC. It is dedicated to Saturn, the mystical god-king of Italy.

There is still some mystery about this ancient deity, whose name suggests he was the god of sowing but who is sometimes also associated with Kronos of Greek mythology. Kronos was a Titan, the father of Zeus, Hades, and many other prominent Greek (and therefore Roman) gods.

The most important day of festivities in the Roman year was the “Saturnalia,” a festival dedicated to Saturn during which temporary freedom was given to slaves and presents were exchanged. This festival was always celebrated on December 17 and later came to be associated with New Year’s Day and Christmas.

The Temple of Saturn was important in ancient times for a very valuable reason: it was the state treasury, where gold and silver ingots and coins – the booty collected by conquering generals – were kept. The treasure was in a room east of the narrow stairway; the holes for the lock are still visible today.

## COLUMN OF PHOCAS

Now turn around and look back over the open, grassy forum to the Column of Phocas, a fluted Corinthian column. Not only is this a conspicuously tall feature of the Forum, but it is the last of the Forum’s monuments, erected here in 608 AD. The Byzantine Empire (also known as the Eastern Roman Empire) erected this column, which was taken from an imperial Roman building, to commemorate the pagan Pantheon’s becoming a Christian church.

It is rather sad to view this column because it symbolizes the fall of Rome and the abandonment of The Forum, its once-grand city center. After the fall of Rome, the city went from one million to less than 10,000 people. Centuries went past, and silt, dirt, decay, and livestock descended upon this valley. By the late Middle Ages, The Column of Phocas was barley sticking above the ground. Then in the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, a renewed interest in history and even tourism kicked in, which promoted excavation and restoration in this valley, and around Rome.

## OUTRO

So, although we must use our imagination to envision what this valley looked like in Roman times, I trust you have gotten a glimpse of the opulence and grandeur of the Eternal City!

Thanks for sticking with me today! I hope you’ve enjoyed our walk through the Roman Forum. A special thanks go to Molly Silver and Wayne Jacobson for helping me put together this audio walking tour. *Arrivederci!*