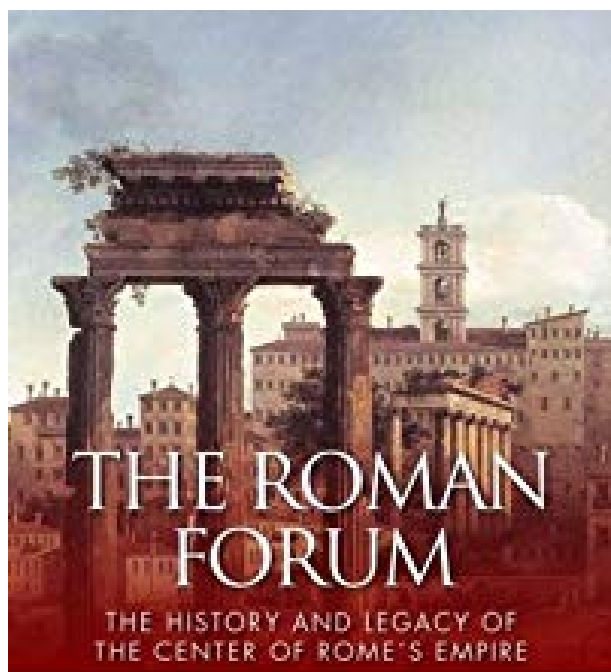


The Roman Forum: The History and Legacy of the Center of Rome's Empire



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*Includes pictures. *Includes ancient descriptions of the Forum. *Includes footnotes for further reading. "A circular trench was dug around what is now the Comitium, and in this were deposited first-fruits of all things the use of which was sanctioned by custom as good and by nature as necessary; and finally, every man brought a small portion of the soil of his native land, and these were cast in among the first-fruits and mingled with them. They call this trench, as they do the heavens, by the name of 'mundus' ['the world']. Then, taking this as a center, they marked out the city in a circle round it." - Plutarch The Roman Empire is the most famous in history, and the center of the far-reaching empire's activities were located in the Forum, a low area between the Capitoline and Palatine hills in Rome.

The topography held a great deal of significance for Romans, and consequently so many layers of myth were laid on top of the landscape and buildings that it is difficult to separate legend from actual historical fact. As a low-lying area near the Tiber river, the Forum was subject to much flooding, and even into the 20th century, the Forum area could flood upwards of over 40 feet above sea level. This would factor significantly in the imagination of Romans, who later ascribed the flooding with saving the city's founders, Romulus and Remus, from execution. However, in the 8th and 7th centuries B.C., this did not make for a good area for construction. Previous generations of excavators have concluded that in the beginning, there were wattle and daub huts in the Forum, as indicated by remains of organic food material, fragments of daub, and evidence of post holes dug in the ground for these structures. However, a recent environmental study has shown that such structures

could not survive the flooding that was endemic to the Forum, suggesting that it took a few hundred years (during the period of the Roman kings) for the Romans to move up to 20,000 square meters of earth in order to reclaim land in the Forum, and a gravel pavement was placed on top of the landfill. If true, this project shows a high degree of organization and central planning. What is clear is that for well over a thousand years, the Forum was the scene of intense construction, as well as social, political, and commercial activity, making the Forum a boon for the study of Roman history, even though some buildings in the Forum are of such importance that they cannot be disassembled in order to discover the older layers underneath and thus find more evidence about the origins of this area. Ultimately, the Forum transformed from being a backwater used for grazing livestock into the religious and political center of Roman life, and it has long been an inspiration for subsequent generations, influencing the Renaissance, Romanticism, and even Fascism. Of course, it was just as important to generations of Romans, who witnessed everything from political meetings to military triumphal processions, funeral orations, and festival celebrations by the most famous Roman leaders, like Caesar and Augustus. *The Roman Forum: The History and Legacy of the Center of Rome's Empire* comprehensively covers the history and evolution of Rome's heart. Along with a bibliography and pictures, you will learn about the Forum like you never have before, in no time at all.