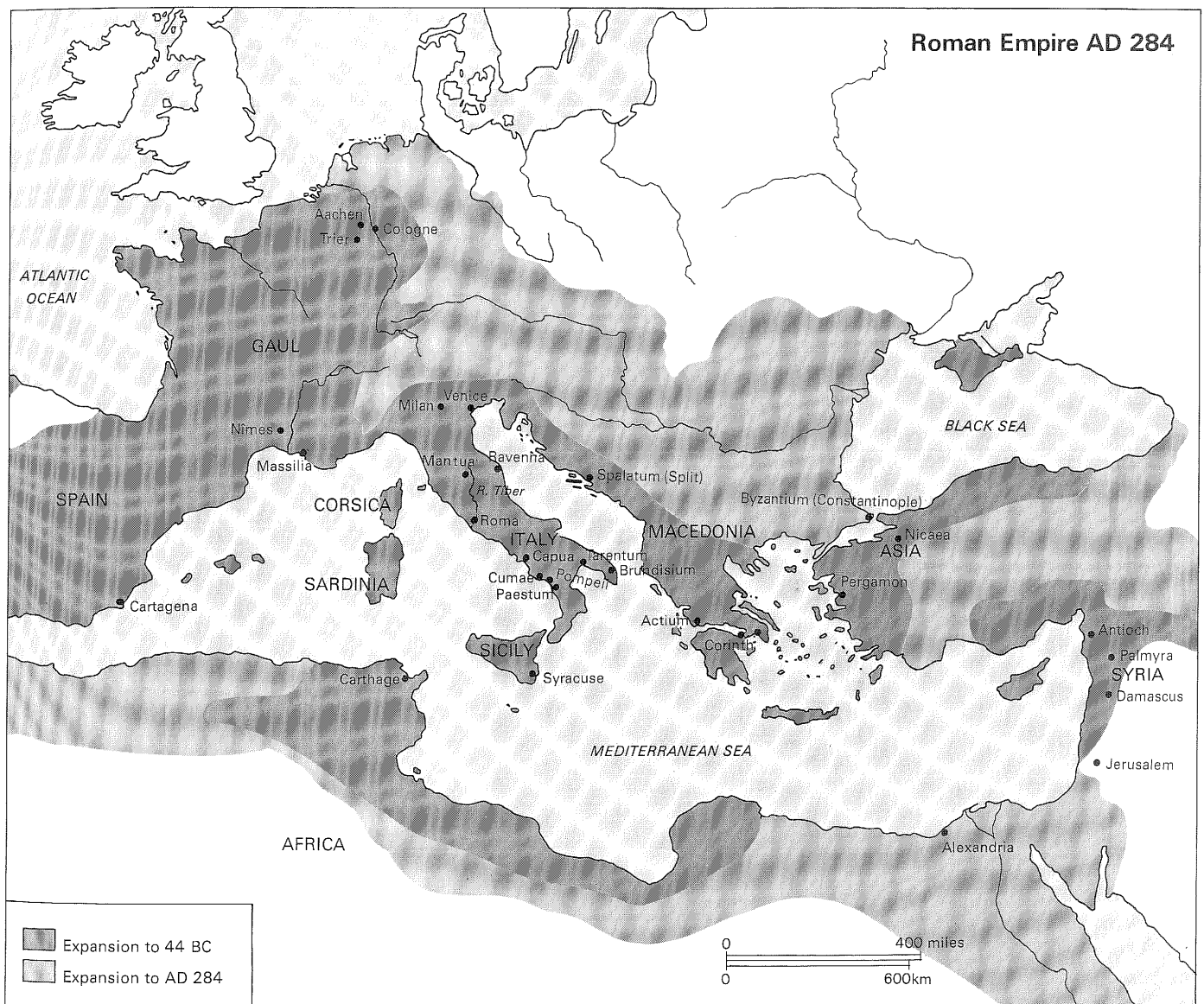


ROME: FROM REPUBLIC TO EMPIRE

Rome's sudden rise to power in the Mediterranean during the third century BC and the wholesale incorporation of artworks as part of the spoils of war resulted in a considerable blurring of the already fluid boundaries between the heritage of Athens, neo-Attic art, and Hellenistic art in general. In general, Roman adoption of Greek artforms parallels her absorption of Greek political entities, beginning with the conquest of Greek Sicily and the sack of Syracuse in 211 BC. Prime examples include the colossal sculptures of Zeus and Herakles by Lysippos at Tarentum, which were carried off in

conquest to the Capitol at Rome in 209 BC as trophies of the Punic Wars against her rival, Carthage. The Roman historian Plutarch describes one such triumphal procession (167 BC) and its rich plunder in his biography of Aemilius Paulus, conqueror of Macedonia: "The first day was just barely sufficient for seeing the statues which had been seized and the paintings, and the colossal images." Corinth was sacked in 146 BC, Athens in 87 BC.

Her definitive victory over Carthage in the Second Punic War (218–201 BC) enabled Rome to turn against Macedonia,



an ally of Carthage, and (with her own allies from both Pergamon and Rhodes) to subdue the heirs of Alexander the Great on battlefields in both Greece and Asia Minor during the early second century (200–189 BC). After an extended period of pro-Roman local rulers in Greek regions, independence gradually gave way to political incorporation by Rome in the form of provinces that would form the eventual empire. For example, in 133 BC, the last Pergamene royal ruler died, willing his kingdom to Rome. The city-state on the Tiber had become the undisputed champion of the entire Mediterranean and heir to the bulk of Alexander's vast empire.

GREEK AND ETRUSCAN SOURCES

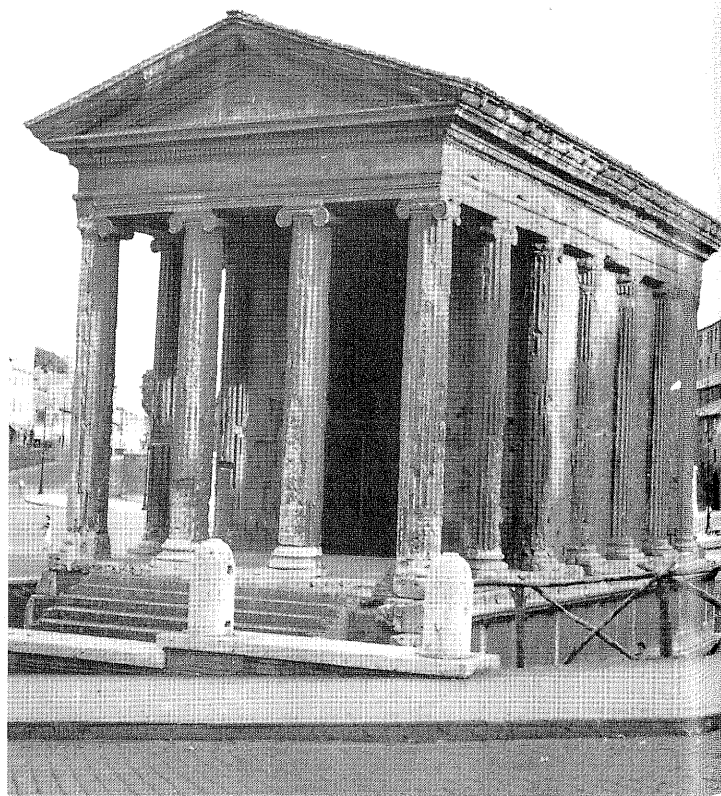
With increasing prosperity, Rome became a center for collectors of Greek art in all media, and conditions approximating the modern art market arose to meet the new collecting demand (whose pervasiveness we discern behind the complaints of some "old Romans" against such interests as decadent extravagance). Scholars debate, therefore, whether or not Roman art is just a later extension of Greek art, based on the emulation of plundered originals. Many of the "surviving" monuments of Greek sculpture are in fact Roman marble copies after lost Greek bronze originals; moreover, our only fragmentary knowledge of the appearance of Greek paintings comes from later Roman versions, such as the Alexander mosaic and the Telephos painting. By adopting and then adapting Greek art for their own purposes, including a religion that renamed the same Olympian gods, Romans continued a cultural dependence already invested in Attic models by the Pergamenes and other contemporary Hellenistic city-states. Hence the uncertainty arises about whether the named Greek artists who carved the *Laocoön* (Fig. 2.49) were actually on site in Rome as late as the first century AD, carving within the framework of a collecting boom and a taste for Pergamene figures. The sculpture would otherwise have been a collector's item from a few centuries past, part of the intense Roman taste for both collecting and copying Greek models.

Just as the Greek world succeeded previous cultures on Crete and the mainland, Rome, too, supplanted a major artistic culture in the central Italian peninsula: that of the Etruscans, whose works survive in abundance but without much historical information about the society at large. Roman independence from the Etruscans – and the founding date for the Roman republic under the rule of two elected consuls rather than a king – is traditionally dated as early as 509 BC, though the two clashed for supremacy in Italy well into the third century until Rome finally consolidated power. In addition, Greek art became extremely important to the Etruscans from the late sixth century BC. Though the Etruscans were territorial rivals of Greek colonies, many of the finest extant painted Greek vases owe their survival to having been placed in Etruscan tombs. Hence Rome, like many other city-states of the Hellenistic era,

took her chief inspiration directly from the Greek heritage as well as indirectly from her local rival, Etruria.

TEMPLE OF FORTUNA VIRILIS A measure of the dependency on Greek and Etruscan precedents as well as the innovative potential of early Roman architecture can be seen in one of the oldest surviving temples in Rome itself, the Temple of "Fortuna Virilis," whose original dedication is unknown (Fig. 2.50). Built on a sturdy platform with an overhanging portico, a formula borrowed from the Etruscans, this temple is approached by a single front flight of steps. Such an arrangement enforces axial frontality rather than imparting the overall continuity of a Greek temple. Its base, or *podium*, assures height relative to the temple's surroundings, while slender attached columns with Ionian capitals incorporate the emphasis on height and elegance seen in much contemporary Greek architecture. However, the *cella* structure is firmly enclosed behind its porch and within its screen of attached columns, asserting the visible solidity, even the permanence, of the temple building. Even in its modest dimensions, the Temple of "Fortuna Virilis" imparts some of the solidity and control that would characterize much of the Roman contribution to ancient art.

2.50 Temple of "Fortuna Virilis," (Temple of Portunus), Rome, late second century BC.



Roman Republican Portraits

Portraiture as the lifelike representation of features, rather than idealized or generalized images, such as the portraits of Alexander the Great, had already flourished in the Hellenistic world, especially in Athens, and not only for political rulers but also for renowned philosophers. Greek artists usually made full-length portraits rather than busts, using the body gestures of the sitter for rhetorical purposes to convey his role. However, Roman portraitists, beginning as early as the second century BC, went further in emphasizing the distinctive imperfections of individual likeness (especially the wrinkles of age in their aristocratic sitters), in order to convey a suggestion of venerable seriousness. Through such means, they identified their patrons with prized republican virtues of severity, gravity, and constancy. These same Roman aristocratic patrons also displayed the wax death masks of their ancestors in their homes, as well as at public sacrifices. Some were even worn like masks in funeral ceremonies as a measure of respect and as models for the younger members of the family.

From such customs the preference for bust portraits, carved in marble, emerged as a principal Roman republican artform, exemplified by a life-sized first-century group, *Patrician Carrying Two Portrait Heads* (Fig. 2.51). The toga of the standing figure indicates that he was a Roman citizen, obviously wealthy to be able to afford such a portrait. Yet his features and those of his ancestors do not disguise his age – quite the contrary, they emphasize it, and the details of his gaunt baldness. This, too, is a “role portrait,” despite its particularities, for this patrician enacts his veneration for distinguished family ancestors (whose number he will join shortly and in turn be recalled through this portrait). Such aristocrats, or patricians, formed the backbone of Roman republican rule, as they were the principal members of the Roman Senate and the guardians of the economic and political well-being of their vast networks of client-followers.

Portraiture remained a staple of Roman imperial art, providing a surrogate presence of the emperor in the provinces, a long-term consequence of the veneration of ancestor portrait images. While later portraits of Roman emperors almost invariably involved an idealizing quality, chiefly youthfulness, the distinctively individual features of each ruler remained a key ingredient of the power of these state commissions.



2.51 Patrician with two portrait heads, early first century, AD 15. Marble, lifesize. Capitoline Museum, Rome.



THE EMPIRE OF AUGUSTUS

The enormous expansion of Roman dominions and the resulting wealth that poured into the city as tribute brought dislocation to society and politics during the century after 133 BC. Conflicts between advocates of land and wealth redistribution (*Populares*) and their conservative adversaries in the Senate (*Optimates*) produced an ongoing struggle for control of the Republic, usually punctuated by a strong military leader and temporary dictatorial domination over Senate rule. This state of civil war climaxed with the united efforts of Pompey and Julius Caesar to overthrow the Senatorial tradition, led by Cicero. Eventually, Caesar emerged supreme, again as a reformer, only to be assassinated in turn by a Senatorial conspiracy (44 BC). The eventual resolution of this complete social breakdown was achieved through military victory (31 BC) by Caesar's adopted son, Octavian, later Augustus Caesar, over Caesar's former lieutenant, Antony. With the establishment of the empire under a single leader, Augustus, both the power and culture of Rome were at last consolidated, and the arts flourished.

Symbol of the new empire is the over-lifesized standing figure of Emperor Augustus (Fig. 2.52). The wavy locks and features of this youthful warrior clearly distinguish him as Augustus, here dressed as a commanding general in parade armor with an officer's cloak. He gestures outward in a conventional Roman expression of command (*adlocutio*), with a weapon (perhaps a sword originally) in his left hand. Reliefs on his breastplate signal a surrender, Parthians submitting to Romans; allegories of the solar chariot above and the reclining earth below join flanking personifications of the captured provinces to frame the scene of submission. Comparing this statue of Augustus to the *Doryphoros* of Polykleitos (Fig. 2.24) shows how the new Roman specificity of identity and dress is grafted onto the idealized striding nude figure of the victorious athlete with spear. The martial Augustus can also be seen as the heir to the idealized general portrait of the victorious Alexander. In fact, suggestions of the divine nature of Augustus emerge from the playful Cupid on the support beside his leg. Cupid is the child of Venus, who, as mother of Aeneas, was also credited as the founder of Rome, commemorated in Vergil's contemporary epic, the *Aeneid*. This entire image is a summary of the claims to political power – and to the restoration of world peace – by Augustus with his new, quasi-divine authority.

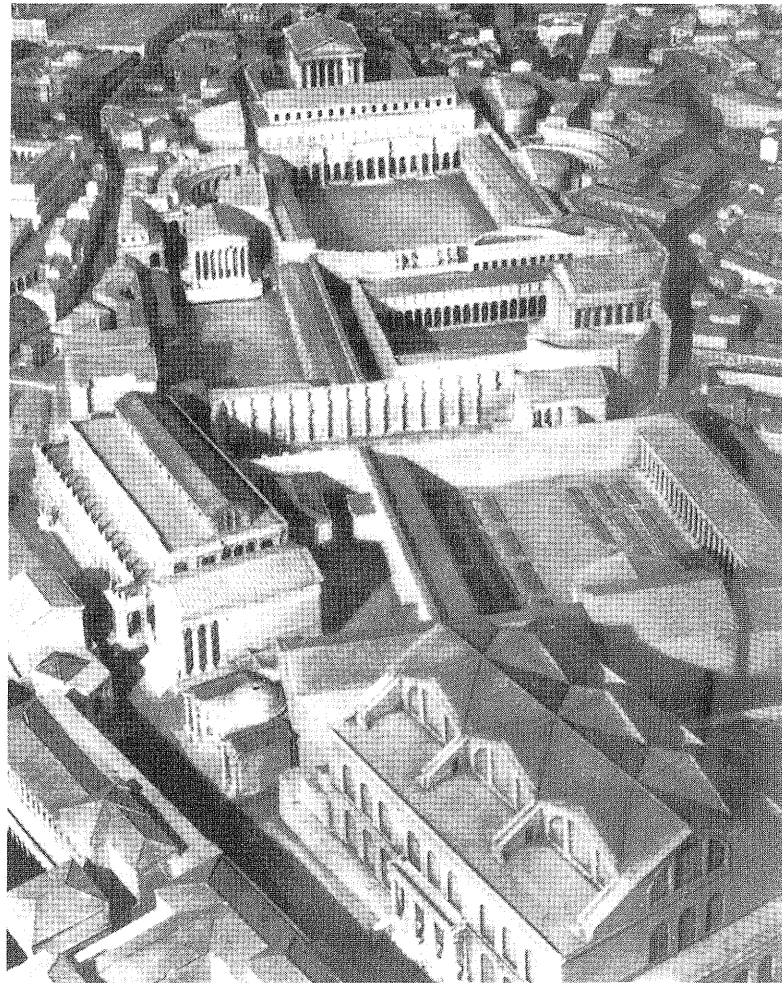
Most surviving Roman art dates from the imperial centuries rather than the preceding republican period, in part due to the gradual increase in wealth and the eventual centralization of power from the time of Augustus onward. Prior to the aggrandizement of the city of Rome as capital of the empire, Romans had already developed their own distinctive grid plan,

based on axial cross-roads for towns, with the civic center, or forum, at the crossing. Under Julius Caesar, the Forum Romanum of Rome became a showpiece for his expanded powers, and he added his own Forum Julium in an adjacent space (Fig. 2.53).

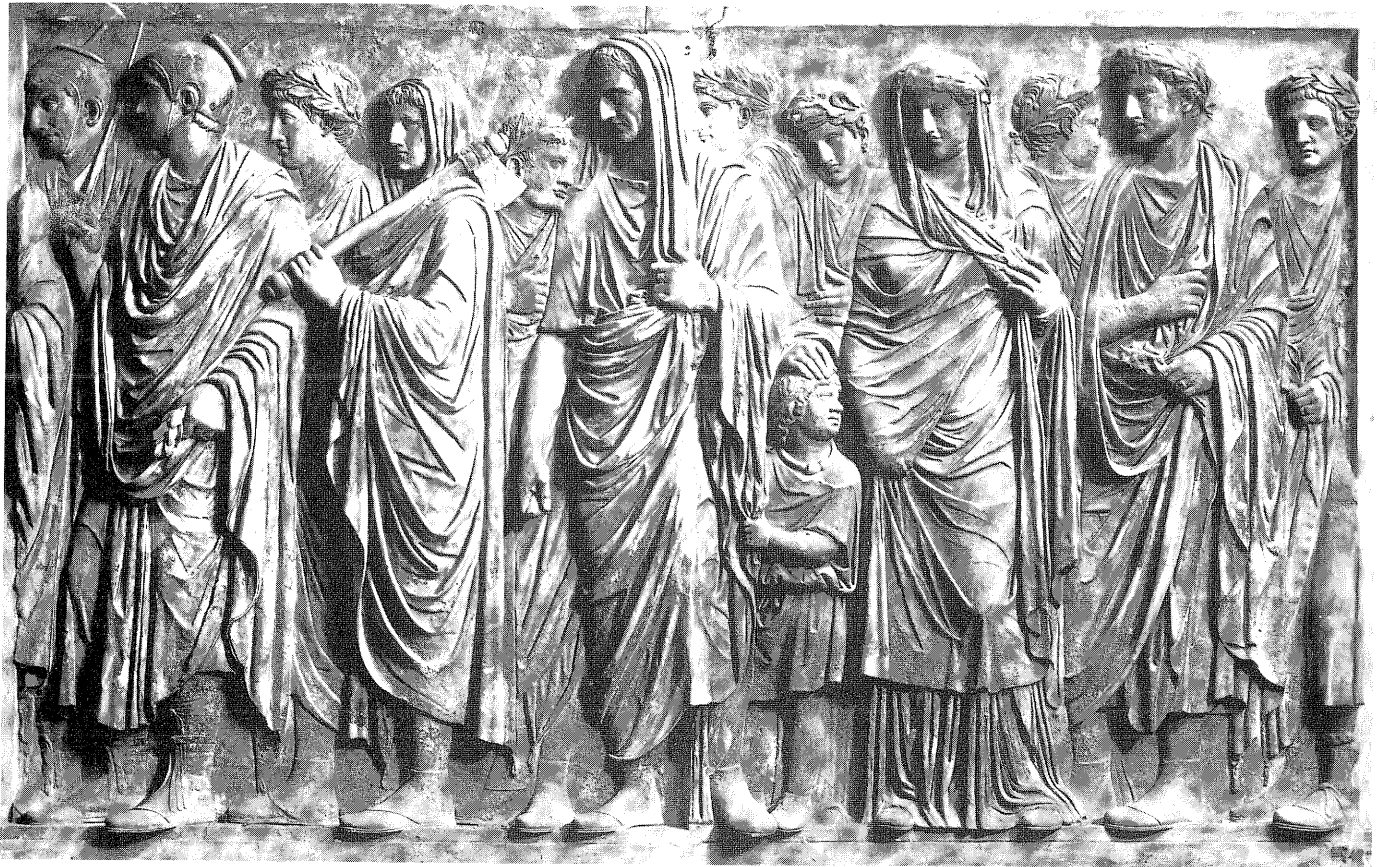
Augustus presented himself with deliberate restraint during his lifetime, though he was deified by his successors. His own record of his deeds as emperor characterizes him as "First Citizen," acting within the constitution to save the Roman state and restore peace to the world. Augustus is reported as having said, privately, that he had found Rome a city of brick and left it a city of marble.

ARA PACIS The memorial monument by Augustus to his accomplishments in the city of Rome was the Altar of Augustan Peace, or Ara Pacis (13–9 BC), established by a vote of the Senate and placed in the Field of Mars, god of war, as a site for annual sacrifices to celebrate the end of the civil wars (Fig. 2.54, p.70). Utilizing an earlier Greek altar prototype (emulated expansively in the Pergamon Altar), this

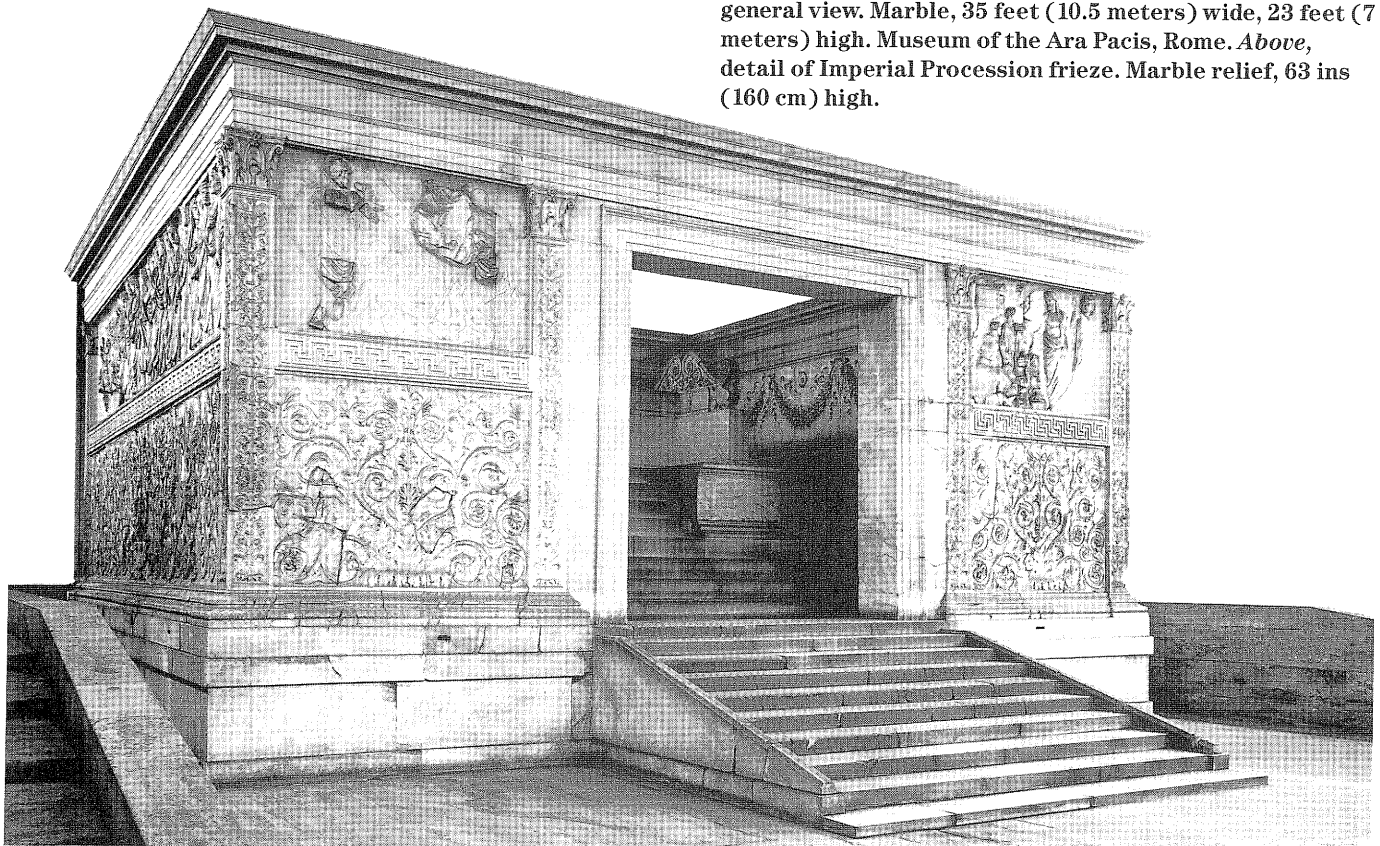
2.53 Roman and Imperial Fora, fourth century AD.
Reconstruction model. Museum of Roman Civilization, Rome.



2.52 Augustus of Prima Porta, early first century AD.
Marble, 80 ins (203 cm) high. Vatican Museums, Rome.



2.54a Altar of Peace ("Ara Pacis"), Rome, 13–9 BC. *Below*, general view. Marble, 35 feet (10.5 meters) wide, 23 feet (7 meters) high. Museum of the Ara Pacis, Rome. *Above*, detail of Imperial Procession frieze. Marble relief, 63 ins (160 cm) high.



modest yet fully decorated temple exterior uses sculpted relief to promote a vision of pure civic harmony. Floral scroll ornament on a lower level suggests the fecundity of earthly peace, while panels with figures above allude to the city. Next to the entrance appear Rome's founding myths with the twins Romulus and Remus and the god Mars on one side and Aeneas, alleged ancestor and prototype of Augustus and his family, sacrificing on the other. Along both sides of the temple, moving toward the entrance, appears a procession frieze with representatives of the Senate and the populace of Rome. While this ritual file might – probably intentionally – recall the Parthenon in Athens, the Roman procession is not a general and recurring urban event; rather, with the inclusion of the specific figure of the emperor himself, head veiled in piety, the frieze records the founding act of sacrifice for this very edifice. Augustus as the new Aeneas is shown sacrificing at the climax of the procession (damaged; not illustrated); his dress remains consonant with that of his companions, again asserting his role as citizen rather than ruler. Here the Roman interest in portraiture and the specifics even of toga drapery imposes upon the striving for a classical dignity and restraint of figure movement. The effect of the entire ensemble is to suggest that the specifics of the Augustan era embody a new Golden Age of piety, peace, and prosperity.

More elaborate private creations became an important

part of Roman luxury arts, including gems. One remarkable gem, a cameo (Fig. 2.55), commemorates the reign of Augustus in completely different terms, presumably with the emphasis on the divinity accorded him after his death. Documents record that Augustus had his own signet ring carved by a Greek gem-cutter named Dioscurides, who may well have produced this work. Some of the triumphal elements on the breastplate of the statue of Augustus reappear here, as Roman soldiers erect a trophy pole with captured barbarian armor and prisoners (who resemble the Pergamene Gauls down to their neck torques) in the lower zone, while allegories fill the top. However, seated amid the allegories, Augustus himself appears as a new Jupiter, with an idealized body redolent of the Pheidias cult statue, flanked by the personification of Rome. A wreath crown above the head of Augustus is held by the figure of Oikoumene, the civilized Hellenic world, above the allegories of both earth and sea. At the left a youth in a toga stands in a chariot with winged Victory; presumably this is Tiberius, successor to Augustus as emperor, and the probable client for this imperial gem.

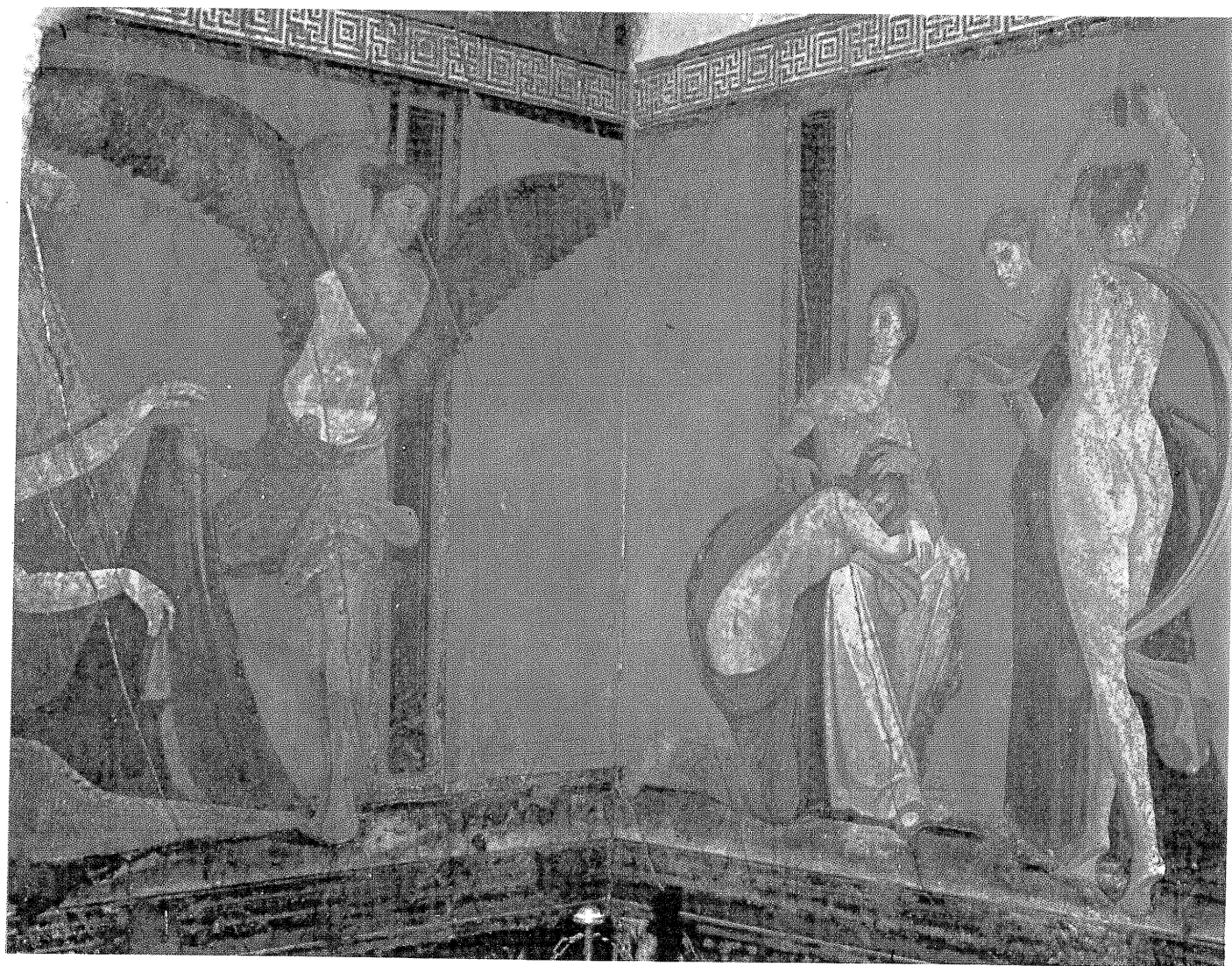
2.55 *Gemma Augustea*, early first century AD. Onyx cameo, 7½ × 9 ins (19 × 23 cm). Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.





2.56 Ixion Room, House of the Vettii, Pompeii, AD 63–79. Frescoes.

2.57 *Dionysiac (Bacchic) Mystery Cult*, Villa of the Mysteries, Pompeii, ca. 50 BC. Frescoes, 63¾ ins (162 cm) high.



ROMAN DOMESTIC ART

Such gems, as well as the growing importance of collecting Greek artworks, point to the unprecedented importance of the private sector as an aspect of Roman art production and consumption. Nowhere is this private world of luxury more evident than in the preserved whole resort city of Pompeii, near modern Naples, buried by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in AD 79. Its vast urban complex includes the basic elements of any standard Roman city, such as a central forum (here unified by a perimeter colonnade), temples, public baths, and *amphitheater* for public spectacles. Yet the homes of all kinds preserved at Pompeii suggest the importance of the private living unit as a special preserve for wealthy Romans away from the official grandeur of their public buildings. A set of rooms are arranged around an open, roofless central courtyard, or *atrium*, providing a focal, private space. Sometimes a Greek columnar *peristyle* (including at times a second storey) and a garden enhanced the luxury and space of the buildings surrounding the pool-cistern of the atrium.

Decoration of the domestic interior included both wall paintings and floor mosaics. Paintings were made directly on the walls as well as on panels. They not only included figural scenes, such as that of Herakles and Telephos (Fig. 2.47), but also elaborate decorative schemes. These ranged from illusionistic scenery of buildings and landscapes, which seem to dissolve the walls in fastidious geometrical intricacies of either repeated patterns or delicate inventive caprices, to deceptive depictions of still-life objects or even fictive spaces or gardens. An elaborate example of the range of such wall decorations appears in the House of the Vettii at Pompeii (Fig. 2.56). Here the full vocabulary of wall decoration appears: mythological scenes of fully-modeled figures, perhaps directly copied or at least modeled upon famous Greek pictures; simulated marble inlay; fine decorative garlands, scrolls, and borders; and illusionistic window frames giving way to views of elaborate, open, multi-storeyed buildings.

Beyond their opulent display of wealth and status or

sophisticated reference to Greek knowledge and culture, some paintings clearly remained private and personal images of great religious significance. One series of wall paintings, at the Pompeii "Villa of the Mysteries," seems to reveal the most intimate and spiritual aspects of one of the numerous mystery cults that abounded in the ancient world (Fig. 2.57). The subject of this life-sized set of figures is an initiation, including a ritual flagellation, of a woman into an unknown sect, presumably connected with Dionysus (Roman: Bacchus), god of wine and ecstasy, who appears reclining on the breast of his beloved Ariadne at the center of the composition. The frieze ensemble includes both mortal women, including the initiate and a nude dancing bacchic *maenad*, at the sides, with gods, especially the nature gods of Bacchus and Pan, and satyrs, at the front. Owing to the secret aspects of a mystery cult, the meaning of these scenes cannot be fully explained. Scholars also debate whether this imagery derives from a famous Greek prototype or else was painted by a talented Greek painter for a Roman, presumably female, patron.

IMPERIAL GRANDEUR

At the time of the destruction of Pompeii at the end of the first century, the classicizing imperial art formulated by Augustus, as well as the rule established for his Julian dynasty, was giving way to a new taste for the colossal in public art, in the service of an aggrandized imperial rule under a new family dynasty, the Flavians, founded by Emperor Vespasian after the suicide of Nero (AD 68). A fire (AD 64) during the reign of Nero had cleared vast tracts of the city of Rome, and the city rose again on a new scale, coordinated by a system of building codes and zoning laws.

THE COLOSSEUM Grandest of all the Flavian buildings, even in its ruinous modern condition (it was used as a stone quarry by centuries of Renaissance Roman architects) is the huge amphitheater, aptly nicknamed the "Colosseum" (Fig. 2.58) though the source of the name was

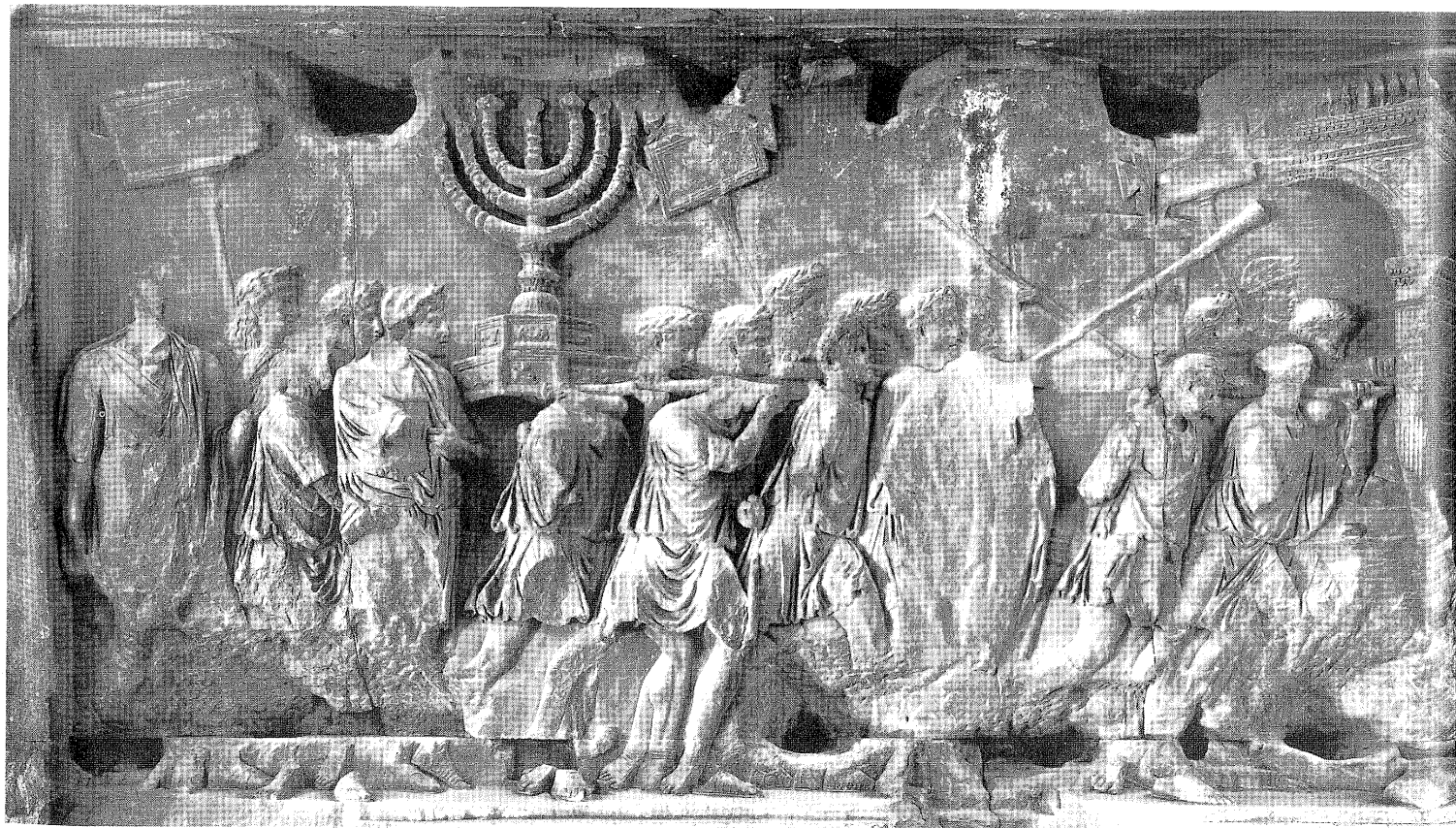
2.58 Flavian Amphitheater ("Colosseum"), AD 72–80.



not the grand scale of this building but the nearby colossus of Nero, a bronze statue some 120 feet (36.5 meters) high! As a symbol of the new public orientation of the emperors, Vespasian destroyed the gardens and lake of Nero's self-indulgent palace, the Golden House, in order to create the site for the Colosseum. Here, entertainment for the expanding population of Rome, already numbering around a million, featured gladiatorial contests, animal combats, and naval battles for some 50,000 spectators. The structural technique of the building represented one of Rome's great contributions to the history of architecture: arched passages and deep, rounded *barrel vaults*, constructed with concrete and brick masonry. These tunnel vaults radiate to facilitate the circulation of men and animals, as well as spectators above. At junctions between barrel vaults, sturdy *groin vaults* permitted concentric rings around each level of the amphitheater. Attached half-columns and limestone facing decorated the exterior of the building, forming an anthology of Greek styles, rising from sturdy Doric through graceful Ionic to ornate foliate *Corinthian* capitals. Henceforth, the structural principles were in place for future colossal structures to embody the power of the empire in Rome as well as its provinces. However, even in its ruined



2.59 Arch of Titus, Rome AD 81. General view. Below, detail of Spoils of Temple of Jerusalem, Rome, AD 81. Marble relief, 79 ins (200 cm) high.



state, the Colosseum remained emblematic of Roman grandeur and in its ruinous condition even came to stand for the fallen splendor of the ancient empire, an inspiration for artists and writers visiting Rome ever afterward.

THE ARCH OF TITUS Near the Colosseum at the head of the Sacred Way (Via Sacra) leading into the Forum, a public monument (Fig. 2.59) celebrates the military victory at Jerusalem in the Jewish Wars (AD 66–70) by Titus, son and brief successor of Vespasian. In form, the massive arch with attached *Composite* (a mixture of Corinthian and Ionic) half-columns and blocky attic storey conforms to the precedent set by the adjacent Colosseum. Although this is the first major permanent monument to military triumphs in Rome, its carved reliefs display the actual events, described by Plutarch and others, of ceremonial triumphal entry into the city with spoils by returning victorious commanders. Crowned with laurels, a lively procession of soldiers bears the massive candelabra (*menorah*) and silver trumpets from the Jerusalem temple, just as earlier armies had borne the sacred artworks of Greece. As in the Ara Pacis, this procession commemorates its dedication. The arch depicted on the relief includes a missing feature from the surviving structure in Rome – a bronze *quadriga* (four-horse chariot) on its summit. On the opposite site, the climax of the procession, appears the relief figure of Titus standing above his army in just such a decorated quadriga. A winged Victory crowns him, and he is escorted by a seminude Genius of the People, while led by Valor. Both reliefs have been celebrated for their remarkably pictorial evocation of motion by means of overlapping figures across space – a notably dynamic contrast to the stateliness of the Ara Pacis procession a century earlier.

The brief Flavian line of emperors ended with the assassination of the despot Domitian, Vespasian's son, in AD 96. The succeeding century saw the new imperial procedure of "adopting" a successor rather than depending on heredity in the form of a natural son. The "Five Good Emperors" who dominated the second century AD made important political and economic consolidations, particularly in the integration of the provinces of the empire. Typical of the new style of ruler was Trajan (ruled AD 98–117), born in Spain and active as a victorious military commander on the frontiers of the empire (Dacia and Parthia). Trajan (with his celebrated architect, Apollodorus of Damascus) left his mark distinctly in the center of Rome, building a massive Forum of Trajan at right angles to the Forum of Augustus. Organized along an axial plan and complemented by an adjacent, massive concrete vaulted market area for public use, the Forum of Trajan was entered through a triumphal arch, with an equestrian statue of the emperor in the center. It reached its climax in the Temple of the Divine Trajan. With this building complex, the monumentalization of the emperor and of Rome as the center of Empire was complete. Moreover, the principle of grand scale, vaulted concrete structures, and planned spatial sequences along an axis flourished as a model for later imperial structures, such as palaces and baths.



2.60 Column of Trajan, Rome, ca. 110 AD. Marble, 125 feet (38 meters) high, reliefs 36 ins (91 cm) high.

TRAJAN'S COLUMN displays the emperor's taste for magnificence and was his grandest sculpted addition to Rome's traditional center. Towering at 100 feet (30.5 meters) high, the column was originally surmounted by a gilded statue (Fig. 2.60). Like the triumphal arch, the column served as a symbol of imperial victory, and it was adorned with a long spiral frieze of reliefs (625 feet; over 200 meters), narrating Trajan's achievements in the conquest of Dacia. Close attention is paid to costumes, geographical detail, and Roman military engineering, which may once have been painted. Apollodorus placed this historical record between the Greek and Roman libraries enclosed within the Forum of Trajan. Originally the column emerged from a base made of captured war trophies and a wreath of victory. Although Augustus had already erected a column tribute to his victory at Actium (lost), Trajan's Column spawned a host of variants made for later emperors to commemorate their victories and declare their majesty.

Hadrian, Trajan's nephew and successor as emperor (AD 117–38), was not a warrior; instead, his passion for culture led him to initiate a notable revival of Greek forms. Rather than being primarily identified with a central, urban architectural

creation, Hadrian's most famous monument is his villa outside the city at Tivoli, a vast and experimental encyclopedia of Roman construction techniques and innovative designs along with a veritable museum of Greek sculpture (chiefly copies). By the time of Hadrian, clearly, Greek culture was a past heritage rather than a living and evolving tradition of which Roman art was the most recent beneficiary.

THE PANTHEON was the greatest of the buildings erected under Hadrian in Rome and one of the most emulated structures in Western architecture (Fig. 2.61). Characteristically, its dedication and its name incorporate all of the gods of the Greek *pantheon* (*pan*=every, *theos*=god), with the learned thoroughness and cultivated sensibility of Hadrian himself. Originally this temple, elevated, had a colonnaded forecourt, now lost, but its principal features begin with a traditional temple front porch with grand Corinthian columns. Behind this portico a solid block helps to support the major space: a domed round building, or *rotunda*, crowned with a circular *oculus* (eye) open to the sky. Entered through bronze doors, this domed space encloses a fully spherical interior, although its exterior shell supports itself partly through stepped terraces upon a cylindrical drum. The entire engineering feat is achieved once more through the Roman mastery of cast concrete, which included reducing the weight of the dome itself through the decorative feature of *coffering* (that is, forming

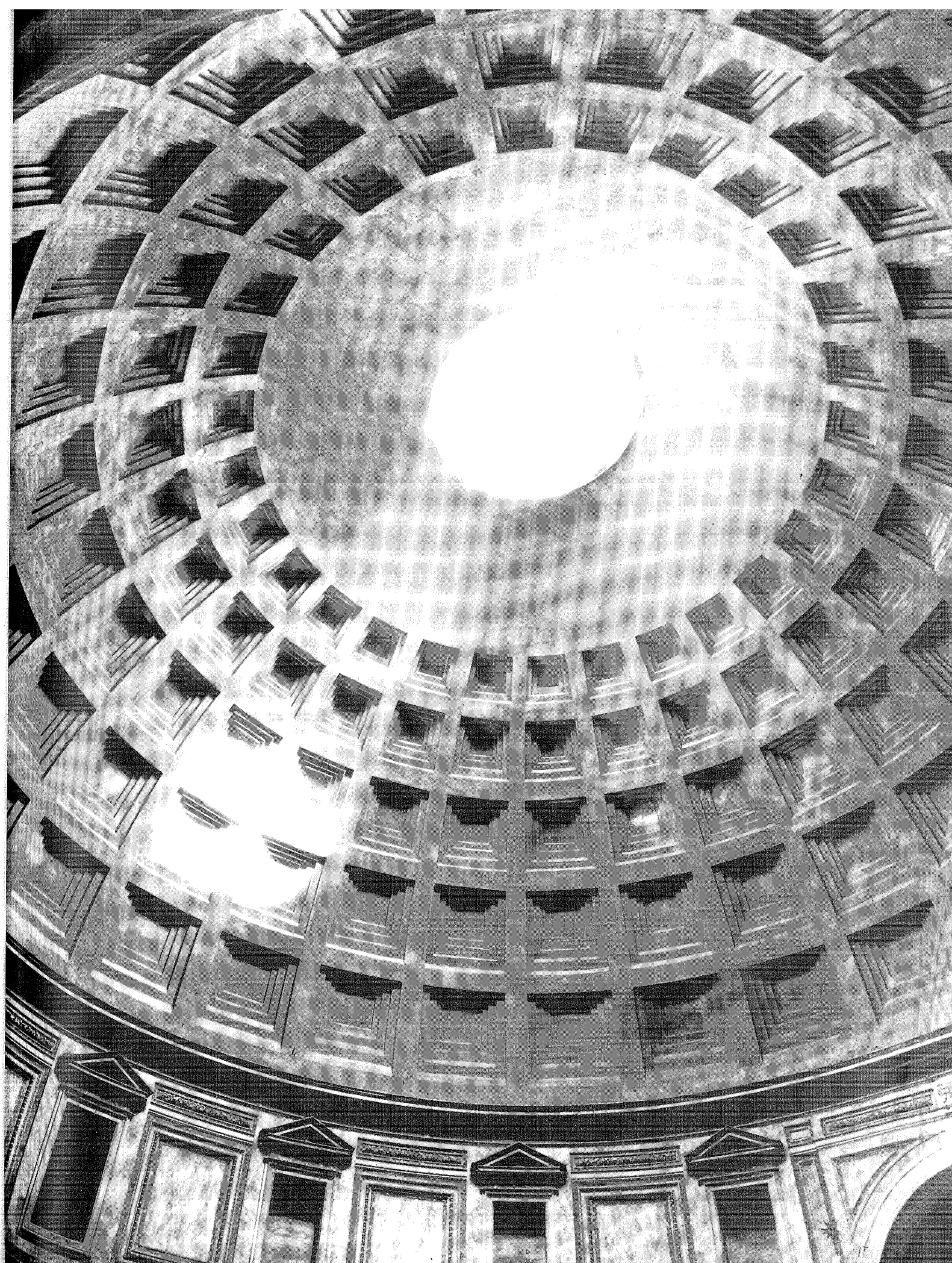
recessed panels in) the ceiling. Sheathed in brick, the structure was originally faced with marble and roofed with gilded bronze, though again this building was used as a quarry by ambitious builders in seventeenth-century Rome. Its otherwise good state of preservation is due in part to its conversion to a Christian church (after the removal of much of its original "pagan" sculptural ornaments) during the seventh century. Still preserved, the marble pavement echoes in its layout the motif of square and circle that defines the geometry of the building. Seven recessed *niches* and projecting altars, presumably dedicated to the seven planetary deities, form their own dialogue of column screens and frames at ground level, in an innovatory, non-structural use of traditional Greek support systems (Fig. 2.62).

Although Nero's Golden House had already featured both the concrete technology and the association of the dome (there an octagonal hall) with the heavenly spheres, the Pantheon enlarges that concept in a public temple space. However, the ever-present trace of sunlight through the *oculus* (more often a feature of domed bath spaces) animates and focuses the symbolism of heavenly presence in this temple of all the gods.

2.61 Pantheon, Rome, AD 118–25. Exterior view.

2.62 (Right) Pantheon, Rome. Interior view.







The unprecedented scale and grandeur of this dome form a tribute to Hadrian's patronage as well as his piety, once again associating Roman rulers, deified after death, with heavenly order. The visible prominence and geometric perfection of this building would inspire architects of Renaissance Rome as well as *Neoclassical* students of the English-speaking world (including Thomas Jefferson for both his home at Monticello and the Library of the University of Virginia, Fig. 7.15).

THE STATUE OF MARCUS AURELIUS Last of the "Five Good Emperors" was Marcus Aurelius (ruled AD 161–80), renowned today as much for his Stoic philosophy (his *Meditations* was written in Greek) as for his efforts to protect the empire against war and economic weakness. One of the most famous surviving monuments of imperial Rome is the (formerly gilded) equestrian bronze statue of Marcus Aurelius (Fig. 2.63), preserved in part because it was misidentified during the twelfth century as Emperor Constantine, whose conversion to Christianity fused the fortunes of the empire and the new mystery religion (see below). The sheer technical skill required to cast such a large sculpture in metal posed a challenge for Renaissance emulators of classical antiquity, while the commanding gesture from horseback inspired portrait images of military leaders in both

2.63 Marcus Aurelius on Horseback, Rome, Capitoline Hill, AD 161–180. Bronze, over-lifesize.

painting and sculpture. Numerous such equestrian statues were produced for Roman emperors, but most were destroyed for their metal content or pillaged as spoils when the city lay in ruins. This lone surviving equestrian image shows the emperor in actual battle dress, as depicted on his own victory column reliefs (erected by his son in AD 181), addressing the army as well as the people of Rome. At the same time the portrayal of the bearded, curly-haired emperor, a fine example of later Roman portrait skills, employs a mixture of the traditional Greek philosopher type, favored by Hadrian, with the youth and strength of the general, like the beardless Trajan. Together, these qualities associate an imperturbable calm with Marcus Aurelius by virtue of his Stoic temperament as well as his imperial command. Apparently, the statue originally once showed a captured foe beneath the hoofs of the horse, after a prototype by Domitian in the Forum. Each Roman emperor used busts of his likeness as legal surrogates throughout the empire (just as Roman and modern coinage uses political or cultural leaders as part of its authority); citizens were required to swear allegiance to the likeness in the absence of the human prototype.

THE EMPIRE IN DECLINE

Historians tend to view the third century as a period of rapid decline in political and economic stability in the Roman Empire; most of the emperors were assassinated by mutinous troops, whose power increased as traditional legal instruments waned in the face of anarchy. Stern measures were imposed with the accession of Diocletian (ruled AD 285–305), a peasant who had risen through the ranks of the army. He imposed a vast bureaucracy on the empire, while maintaining the grandiose construction of imperial buildings, most notably a city-sized retirement palace – and fortress – at Split (AD 305; Spalato, in Croatia). In layout the imperial palace remains a Roman camp, structured around a single intersection of main axes. Back in Rome the grand remains of the Baths of Diocletian survive in their restored form as a church (Santa Maria degli Angeli, renovated by Michelangelo) (Fig. 2.64). To the Roman populace, baths were as important a

public routine as sports – entertainments at the Colosseum or the races at the Circus Maximus. Such great halls, sheltering over a thousand bathers at once, demonstrate the technique of Roman mural architecture in concrete and brick as well as the ability to engineer great groin vaults at the intersection of tunnel-like spaces. Originally, marble facing and mosaic pavements gave the baths a powerful appearance of civic opulence for the benefit of the populace. Their vast extent exemplifies the Roman gift for spatial organization and the integration of rooms of different sizes and shapes within the overriding order of a massive rectangular precinct. If anything, the colossal scale of the Baths of Diocletian imposes a rigid system on the building elements, compared to the creative playfulness of Hadrian's Villa.

When Constantine emerged triumphant from a period of civil war in Rome, his reign (AD 306–37) marked a new

2.64 Baths of Diocletian, Rome, restored by Michelangelo into Church of Santa Maria degli Angeli, AD 298–306.



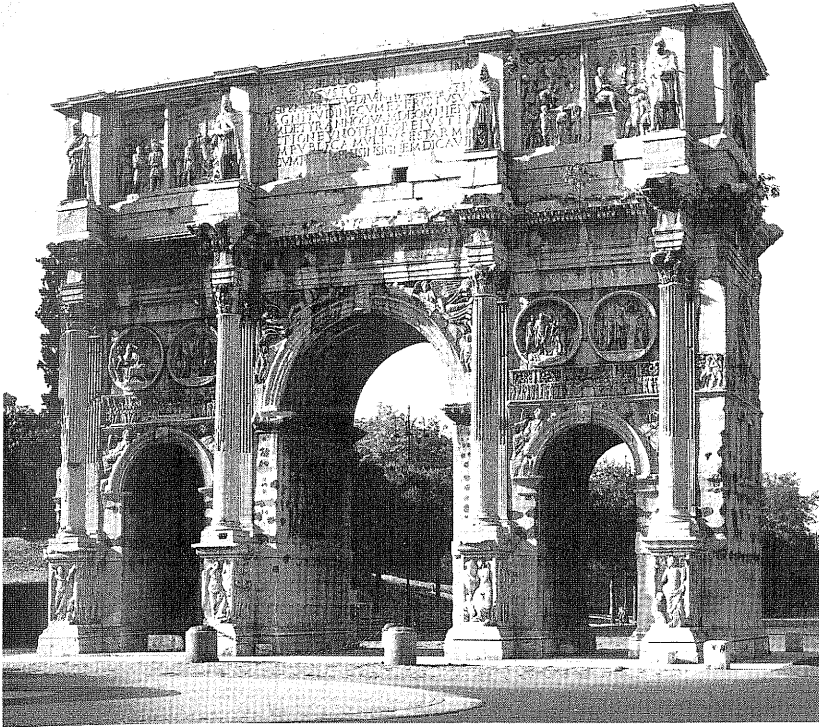


2.65 Basilica of Constantine (Maxentius), Rome, AD 307–312.

beginning in imperial fortunes. One of the major Roman buildings of Constantine employs concrete barrel vaults to create a grand ceremonial space. The Basilica of Constantine in the Roman Forum, site of a colossal 30-foot (9-meter) statue of Constantine, supported a great central hall with three flanking cavernous barrel vaults and external buttresses, of which only one side survives (Fig. 2.65). As such, it served as a final assertion of imperial grandeur and authority in the heart of Rome, ornamented with marble and stucco decoration and lighted by giant, semicircular windows. New, regular rhythms of wall and window articulate the great arched vault openings. *Basilica* structures would later serve as the basic longitudinal building formulas for Christian churches, but in the Roman world they served primarily as imperial audience halls. Their association with the worship of emperors and their open spaciousness made the transfer of their dedication to Christ a simple, even logical step after the conversion of Constantine himself.

Near the Basilica of Constantine, the emperor erected his own triumphal arch, the last one sited on the Sacred Way of the Forum (Fig. 2.66). As a structure, this later arch employs the opulent elaboration of visual grammar in later Roman buildings, multiplying the arched openings and utilizing appended, fluted Corinthian columns for volumetric surface decoration.

Virtually all surfaces are ornamented with sculpted reliefs, many in high relief. Most are pillaged from earlier imperial commemorative monuments, including works for Trajan, Hadrian, and Marcus Aurelius. Close inspection reveals that typical Hadrianic classicism dominates the larger reliefs of the circular tablets, or *medallions*, where a boar hunt and a sacrifice to Apollo celebrate the traditional valor and piety of the emperor. However, underneath these larger remnants of two centuries earlier runs a smaller scale relief of the emperor (Constantine's head is lost) standing in majesty at the center of a stiffly posed assembly as he addresses the people of Rome. In the rendering of costume, facial features, movement, and space this relief appears to be a crude simplification of previous achievements, such as the Arch of Titus or the Column of Trajan. Here priority is given to hierarchy and authority (the arch in fact commemorates Constantine's civil war victory over Maxentius), even as his use of the traditional arch form, forum site, and a pastiche of former memorials points to Constantine's assertion of his official imperial position. The spatial illusion and interest in figure movement, in short the illusion so basic to classical reliefs, have now all but disappeared, in favor of an art of symbolic assertion and abstract principles, where position and attributes convey notions of status and power. To the new Christian era, late imperial Roman art bequeathed its assertion of authority and militant triumph, fittingly led in its first great wave of patronage, especially of buildings, by the emperor, heir to Augustus's role of *Pontifex Maximus*, chief priest.



2.66 Arch of Constantine, Rome, AD 312–15. *Below*, detail of sculpted reliefs, including earlier reliefs (*Wild Boar Hunt* and *Sacrifice to Apollo* from ca. AD 131–38), AD 312–15. Marble, frieze 40 ins (102 cm) high.

