

# BACKGROUND

## HISTORY

Rome's history spans three millennia, from the classical myths of vengeful gods to the follies of the Roman emperors, from Renaissance excess to swaggering 20th-century Fascism. Emperors, popes and dictators have come and gone, playing out their ambitions against foreign powers and domestic rivals, stamping out heresies and conspiring for their place in history.

Everywhere you go in this remarkable city, you're surrounded by the past. The martial ruins, huge Renaissance *palazzi* (mansions) and flamboyant baroque churches all have a tale to tell – of family feuding, artistic rivalry or personal grief, of political infighting or dark intrigue.

## THE STUFF OF LEGEND

Rome's ancient history is mired in legend. The most famous of all is the story of Romulus and Remus, the mythical twins who are said to have founded Rome on 21 April 753 BC. Few historians accept the myth as historical fact, but most accept that the city was founded as an amalgamation of Etruscan, Latin and Sabine settlements on the Palatino (Palatine), Esquilino (Esquiline) and Quirinale (Quirinal) hills. Archaeological discoveries have confirmed the existence of a settlement on the Palatino dating to the 8th century BC.

## Romulus & Remus

Romulus and Remus were born to the vestal virgin Rhea Silvia after she'd been seduced, some say raped, by Mars. At their birth they were immediately sentenced to death by their great-uncle Amulius, who had previously stolen the throne of Alba Longa from his brother, and Rhea Silvia's father, Numitor. Fortunately, though, the sentence was never carried out. A royal servant took pity on the twins and instead of killing them abandoned them in a basket on the banks of the River Tiber. In the floods that followed, the basket ended up under a fig tree on the northwestern summit of the Palatino (p59). Here the babies were found and suckled by a she-wolf (in some versions of the story the wolf was sent by Mars to save them) until discovered by a shepherd, Faustulus. Faustulus took the brothers in and, with his wife Acca Larentia, brought them up.

The twins grew up to be a high-spirited, if somewhat unruly, pair and it wasn't long before they were in trouble. Remus was arrested for attacking some shepherds on the Aventino and carted off to face the king. Hearing the news, Faustulus told Romulus about the circumstances surrounding his birth and asked him to save Remus. Romulus immediately set off for the Alban palace, where he not only freed his brother but also killed Amulius and reinstated his grandfather Numitor to the throne.

To celebrate, the twins decided to found a city on the site where they'd originally been saved. But as they didn't know where this was they consulted the omens. Remus, on the Aventino, saw six vultures; his brother over on the Palatino saw 12. The meaning was clear and Romulus began building his new city walls. In a fit of anger Remus is said to have jumped over the unfinished walls, shouting that if they couldn't keep him out how were they going to keep invaders out.

## TIMELINE

753 BC	509 BC	146 BC	73–71 BC	49 BC	AD 14
If you believe the legend, this is the year in which Romulus kills his twin brother Remus, founds Rome and rapes the Sabine women. Archaeological evidence exists of an 8th-century settlement on the Palatino.	On the death of Tarquinius Superbus, the last of Rome's seven kings, Lucius Junius Brutus founds the Roman Republic, giving birth to the acronym SPQR (Senatus Populusque Romanus; the Senate and People of Rome).	Carthage is razed to the ground at the end of the Third Punic War and mainland Greece is conquered by rampant legions. Rome becomes undisputed master of the Mediterranean.	Spartacus leads a slave revolt against the Roman dictator Cornelius Sulla. Defeat comes at the hands of Marcus Licinius Crassus and punishment is brutal. Spartacus and 6000 of his followers are crucified along Via Appia Antica.	' <i>Alea iacta est</i> ' ('The die is cast'). Julius Caesar leads his army across the River Rubicon and marches on Rome. Victory over Pompey is short-lived as Caesar is murdered five years later.	Augustus dies after 41 years as Rome's first emperor. His reign is peaceful and culture thrives. Not so under his mad successors Tiberius and Caligula, who go down in history for their cruelty.

Romulus, by now in a rage himself, killed his brother.

Romulus continued building and soon had a city, albeit one with no citizens. To populate it he created a refuge on the Campidoglio, Aventino, Celio and Quirinale hills, to which a ragtag population of criminals, ex-slaves and outlaws soon decamped. However, Romulus still needed women.

His solution was as audacious as it was devious. In one of history's first recorded sting operations, he invited everyone in the surrounding country to celebrate the Festival of Consus (21 August). As the spectators watched the games he'd organised, he and his men pounced and abducted all the women. Known as the Rape of the Sabine Women, the attack understandably angered the Sabine king Titus Tatius, who promptly marched on Rome. Fate, however, was against him, and after warnings from Juno and Jupiter Romulus repulsed the attack.

But Sabine feelings soon calmed – thanks, it's said, to their women begging for an end to the fighting. Peace was made, and Romulus and Titus ruled jointly until Titus died shortly afterwards. Romulus himself lived to the age of 54. His death, in 717 BC, was as mysterious as his birth. While inspecting troops on the Campus Martius (the area that's now the *centro storico*, or historic centre) he simply disappeared during a terrible storm. Poetic accounts claim he was taken up by the gods; more prosaic versions say that he was murdered by senators.

## The Capitoline Geese

By the 4th century BC Rome had established itself as the dominant force in central Italy. However, it was still far from invincible and in 390 BC a tribe of Gauls swept down from the north and besieged the city. The population retreated to the Campidoglio (Capitoline hill; p66), site of a temple to Juno Moneta (known as the goddess who alerts people), and prepared to sit out the siege. At this point myth takes over from history and relates how a sleeping soldier was woken by the squawking of Juno's sacred geese, just in time to catch a Gallic night attack and raise the alarm. The Gallic siege was finally lifted when the city authorities bribed the invaders to go home.

## Rome Burns, Nero Fiddles

In AD 64 up to 70% of Rome was destroyed by fire. The vast conflagration broke out in shops near the Circo Massimo (p63) and spread rapidly through the wooden housing that covered much of the city. According to the historian Suetonius, the fire raged for six days and seven nights.

## top picks

### HISTORICAL READS

- **Ancient Rome: the Rise and Fall of an Empire**, Simon Baker (2007) – a pacy, sweeping and easy-to-read history
- **Caesar: the Life of a Colossus**, Adrian Godsworthy (2007) – learn what drove Julius Caesar in this gripping biography
- **The Oxford History of the Roman World**, John Boardman, Jasper Griffin and Oswyn Murray (eds: 2001) – fascinating essays on literature, arts and politics by leading Oxford historians
- **Rome: the Biography of a City**, Christopher Hibbert (1998) – an overview of the city's history
- **The Popes: Histories and Secrets**, Claudio Rendina (2002) – potted biographies of the 264 pontiffs from St Peter to John Paul II

What Emperor Nero did during the fire is the subject of debate. Suetonius has him singing on the Palatine, while historian Tacitus claims that he rushed back from his residence in Anzio to lead relief efforts. In the city's gutted lanes, rumours spread that Nero had used the burning city as a backdrop for a play on the fall of Troy, or even that he had started the fire in order to build a vast new city called Neropolis. The pleasure with which he used a large amount of the ruined city for his new palace, the Domus Aurea (p95), did little to assuage popular anger.

In an attempt to deflect criticism, Nero blamed Rome's Christians for the fire. A savage persecution ensued and thousands were killed. Among the victims were St Peter and St Paul: the former was crucified upside down; the latter, a Roman citizen, decapitated.

## THE RISE & FALL OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE

Rising out of the blood-stained remnants of the Roman Republic, the Roman Empire grew to become the Western world's first great superpower. At its zenith under Emperor Trajan (r AD 98–117), it extended from Britannia in the north to North Africa in the south, from Hispania (Spain) in the west to Palestina (Palestine) and Syria in the east. Rome itself had more than 1.5 million inhabitants and the city sparkled with the trappings of imperial splendour: marble temples, public baths, theatres, circuses and libraries. It truly was the undisputed *caput mundi* (capital of the world).

### Republican Roots

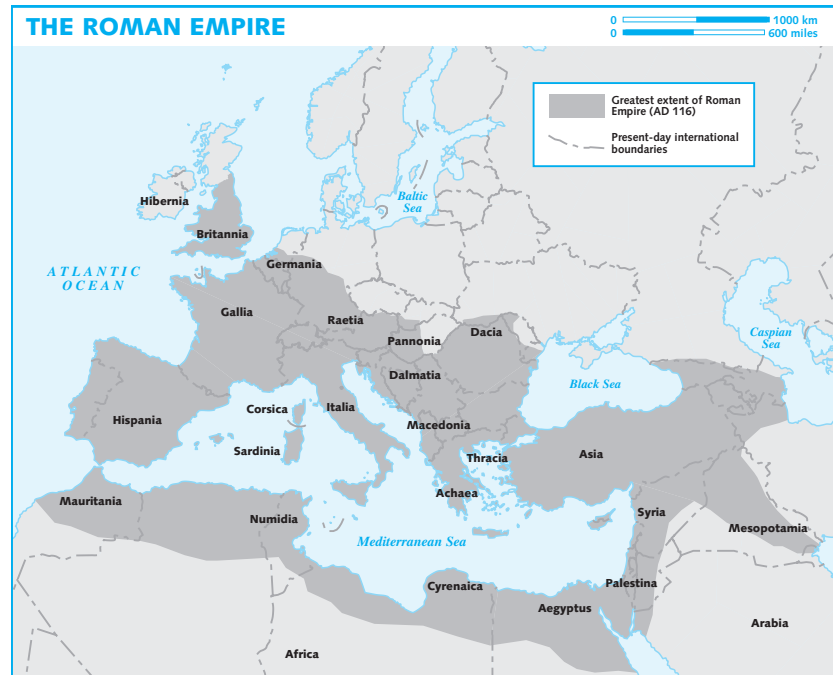
Roman power had been steadily growing since the 3rd century BC, when the battling republic rid itself of its two most dangerous rivals, Greece and Carthage (present-day Tunisia). The Greeks were dealt with first and by 272 BC had fled their Magna Graecia colonies in southern Italy. The North African kingdom proved a harder nut to crack and it took the Romans almost 120 years to tame the Carthaginian forces. By the mid-2nd century BC the Mediterranean was in Roman hands.

But peace was never long-lived, and as the 2nd century BC drew to a close, Rome entered a period of factional strife exacerbated by problems abroad. Germanic tribes began to make a nuisance of themselves in northern Europe and eventually attacked Gaul, while at home divisions were becoming increasingly serious.

In 87 BC civil war broke out between Gaius Marius and his fellow consul Cornelius Sulla. Marius proved no match for the ruthless Sulla, who, in 82 BC, forced the Senate to appoint him dictator for 10 years.

By now power in Rome had become a matter of might – the general who controlled the bigger army prevailed. And no-one was more popular with the troops than the rising military star Julius Caesar. Initially he was happy to share power with Crassus and Pompey, a protégé of Sulla, but when Crassus died in 53 BC Caesar and Pompey fell out in spectacular style. The following civil war led to Pompey's defeat in 48 BC and Caesar's accession to supreme power – in 44 BC he was proclaimed dictator for life. However, his accumulation of power had alienated even those who'd originally supported him, and he was assassinated on the Ides of March (15 March) 44 BC.

Once again the top job was up for grabs. Caesar's lieutenant, Marcus Antonius (Mark Antony), took command of the city, but when Octavian, Caesar's 18-year-old great-nephew and nominated heir, returned to town things began to heat up. At first, Octavian sided with Caesar's assassins against Antonius, but he then switched sides and fought with Antonius



against Brutus and Cassius, who were defeated at Philippi. Finally, in 40 BC, Octavian and Antonius agreed to share control. But it was an uneasy truce, and when Antonius started handing over Roman territory to his Egyptian lover, Queen Cleopatra VII, Octavian attacked. The end came at the naval battle of Actium in 31 BC.

### On the Rise

Octavian was left the sole ruler of the Roman world, but, remembering Caesar's fate, trod very carefully. In 27 BC he officially surrendered his powers to the Senate, which promptly gave most of them back, making him the first emperor of Rome with the title of Augustus.

One of the more stable emperors, he ruled well and Rome enjoyed a rare period of calm and artistic achievement. Virgil, Ovid, Horace and Tibullus contributed to what later generations of Romans would wistfully regard as a golden age. Buildings were restored and monuments erected, including the Ara Pacis Augustae (Altar of Peace; see p85).

But if Augustus set new standards of artistic achievement, his successors plumbed new depths of depravity. Tiberius (r AD 14–37) and Caligula (r AD 37–41) ensured notoriety through

AD 64–67

St Peter and St Paul become martyrs as Nero massacres Rome's Christians. The persecution is a thinly disguised play to win back popularity after the emperor is blamed for the fire that ravaged Rome in AD 64.

AD 80

The 50,000-seat Flavian Amphitheatre, better known as the Colosseum, is inaugurated by Emperor Titus. Five thousand animals are slaughtered in the 100-day games held to celebrate.

285

In an attempt to control anarchy within the Roman Empire, Diocletian splits it into eastern and western halves. The eastern half is later incorporated into the Byzantine Empire; the western half falls to the barbarians.

476

The fall of Romulus Augustulus marks the end of the Western Empire. The end had been on the cards for years: in 410 the Goths sacked Rome; in 455 the Vandals followed suit.

754

Thanks to a deal between Pope Stephen II and Pepin, king of the Franks, the Lombards are driven out of Italy and the Papal States are created. The papacy is to rule Rome until Italian unification.

1084

Rome is sacked by a Norman army after falling to the Holy Roman Emperor Henry IV. Pope Gregory VII had asked the Normans for protection but they arrived too late to prevent him surrendering.

## GLADIATORS

Few images better encapsulate the cruelty and splendour of Ancient Rome than crowds baying for blood at the Colosseum. Gladiatorial combat originated as part of Etruscan funerary rites and was later adopted in Campania and Lucania (modern-day Basilicata). The first recorded bout in Rome was in 264 BC. By the 1st century BC gladiatorial games had outstripped this funerary context and were being staged by wealthy citizens as a form of politics by display – the greater the spectacle, the greater the sponsor's prestige. Later, these private games (*munera*) gave way to public games (*ludi*) controlled by the state.

Gladiator fights were usually staged in the afternoon as part of an all-day spectacle – the morning was given over to animal displays and the lunch break to the execution of condemned criminals. A typical afternoon would involve about 12 pairs of gladiators fighting in bouts of 10 to 15 minutes. Exceptions were rare although often spectacular: Caesar exhibited 320 pairs in 65 BC; Augustus and Trajan each displayed 5000 pairs on different occasions during their reigns. Bouts, accompanied by music, were not usually to the death (*sine missione*), as the games' sponsor was required to pay the owner of a killed gladiator one hundred times the gladiator's value. Clearly, however, accidents happened and gladiators died.

The fate of a defeated gladiator lay in the hands of the presiding sponsor, who would decide on the basis of the crowd's reaction. Traditionally, thumbs up was said to signal life and thumbs down meant death. However, it's not at all clear that this was the case, and many historians believe that thumbs down was the signal to lower weapons and thumbs up was the go-ahead to stab the defeated gladiator in the chest.

Gladiators were prisoners of war, slaves, condemned criminals or volunteers, many of whom were ex-soldiers signing up for a make-or-break period in the arena. It was a tough life, and although only about 10% of gladiators died in the ring, very few lived beyond the age of 30. Only a tiny majority made it big – gladiators were allowed to keep any prize money they won – and became celebrities.

Once condemned to a gladiatorial life, recruits were sent to gladiator school where they were assigned roles: *secutores* were armed with a large shield and sword; *retarii* carried a trident and net; *thraeces* fought with a scimitar and small shield. To ensure the greatest spectacle, heavily armed gladiators were usually paired with lighter, more nimble opponents.

Part entertainment and part business (vast sums were wagered on the games), gladiatorial games played a key propagandist function. The state-run spectacles were a demonstration of public might, and the use of exotic animals a tactic to advertise the extent of Rome's reach. Crowd participation in the sentencing of defeated gladiators allowed the people to share in the state's authority over life and death.

The popularity of the games waned in the 3rd century AD and in 399 Emperor Honorius finally banned gladiatorial combat.

their insane cruelty, the latter famously making his horse a senator and ordering his soldiers to collect seashells.

Following Caligula's assassination, Rome enjoyed a brief interlude of sanity in the person of his bumbling uncle Claudius (r AD 41–54). A conscientious if reluctant ruler, he extended the port facilities at Ostia (p266) and constructed a new aqueduct, the Acqua Claudia, to serve Rome's growing population. He also strengthened Rome's hold on Britannia (Britain), first invaded by Caesar. But in AD 54 he was murdered, probably by his beautiful and ambitious wife Agrippina, and madness returned to the city.

Claudius' successor was Agrippina's 17-year-old son from a previous marriage, a man best known for his musical pretensions and extravagant sadism. Nero (r AD 54–68) considered

himself a great artist and loved to play the lyre when not indulging in serial rape or the massacre of Christians. But when a violent week-long fire ravaged Rome in AD 64 his already scant popularity took a nose dive. Four years later the Senate declared him a public enemy and he committed suicide.

But if the Romans had been hoping that Nero's death would herald a return to calm, they were sorely disappointed. In the year after his death, the imperial crown changed heads four times before the hard-nosed general Vespasian (r AD 69–79) took charge. A practical man of dry wit and generous nature, he constructed the Colosseum (p58) in the grounds of Nero's demolished Domus Aurea and did much to restore the severely tarnished image of the emperorship.

A golden age followed in the 2nd century under Trajan and his successor Hadrian (r 117–138), who remodelled the Pantheon (p72) and built an extensive villa at Tivoli (p277).

By the 3rd century, however, economic decline was fuelling a new wave of anarchy and civil war. Diocletian (r 284–305) addressed the situation by splitting the empire into eastern and western halves, with himself controlling the rich east and Maximian, based in Milan, in charge of the shaky west.

## Decline & Fall

In 305 Maximian and Diocletian abdicated simultaneously, leaving the empire to Constantius in the west and Galerius in the east. However, the move did little to calm the waters and war eventually broke out between Constantine (Constantius' son) and Maxentius (Maximian's son). In 312 Constantine defeated his rival at the Battle of Ponte Milvio. The first Christian emperor, Constantine later claimed that before the battle he'd seen a vision of the cross and the message 'with this sign you will conquer'. It was a message he clearly took to heart, as in 313 he issued the Edict of Milan and officially legalised Christianity.

Christianity suddenly became all the rage and a number of high-profile churches were built in this period, including St Peter's Basilica (p128) and the Basilica di San Lorenzo fuori le Mura (p103). But it was a short-lived bloom, and when Constantine transferred to the new city of Constantinople in 330, the centre of world power shifted irreversibly eastwards.

Rome was increasingly left to its own devices and in the 5th century the Germanic tribes started to eye the once-great metropolis. The sack of Rome by the Goths in 410 marked the beginning of the end. In 440 only the intervention of Pope Leo I persuaded Attila the Hun not to attack, while 15 years later the city was thoroughly plundered by the Vandals.

In 476, the year traditionally recognised as the end of the Western Empire, the last emperor, Romulus Augustulus, was deposed.

## MEDIEVAL FEUDING

The history of medieval Rome is dominated by the feud between the papacy and the Holy Roman Empire, a feud that set the city's noble families against each other in bitter, and often bloody, rivalry.

The emergence of the two poles dates to the dark period after the fall of the Roman Empire. Rome, leaderless and with a rapidly decreasing population, was a shadow of its former self; there was no fresh water – the aqueducts had all been cut during barbarian attacks – and disease was rife. It was a city crying out for a leader.

1188

Pope Clement III bows to pressure from newly formed artisans' guilds and recognises Rome as a commune with rights to appoint senators and a prefect.

1309

Fighting between French-backed pretenders to the papacy and the Roman nobility, led by the Orsini family, culminates in Pope Clement V transferring his court to Avignon. Only in 1377 does Pope Gregory XI return to Rome.

1471

The Capitoline Museums are established. The first exhibits are a series of bronzes gifted to the Roman people by Pope Sixtus IV. In 1538 Michelangelo starts work on Piazza del Campidoglio outside the museums.

1506

Pope Julius II employs 150 Swiss mercenaries to protect him. The 100-strong Swiss Guard, all practising Catholics from Switzerland, are still responsible for the pope's personal safety.

1508

Michelangelo starts painting the Sistine Chapel while down the hall Raphael begins to decorate Pope Julius II's private apartments, better known as the Stanze di Raffaello (Raphael Rooms).

1527

Pope Clement VII takes refuge in Castel Sant'Angelo as Rome is overrun by troops loyal to Charles V, king of Spain and Holy Roman Emperor. The city is sacked in an orgy of looting and violence.



In the event, it wasn't a person who took power, but an institution – the papacy. And although no one person can take credit for this, Pope Gregory the Great (r 590–604) did more than most to lay the groundwork. A leader of considerable foresight, he won many friends by supplying free bread to Rome's starving citizens and repairing the city's broken aqueducts. He also stood up to the menacing Lombards when they threatened the city.

Ironically, it was the threat posed by the Lombards that consolidated papal power and paved the way for the creation of the Holy Roman Empire. In the 8th century Pope Stephen II (r 752–57) allied with the Frankish king, Pepin the Short, to drive the Lombards out of Italy and incorporate their holdings into the newly created Papal States. The relationship between the Church and the Frankish kings was further cemented when Leo III crowned Pepin's son, Charlemagne, Holy Roman Emperor during Christmas Mass at St Peter's Basilica in 800.

But it was no marriage made in heaven and from the mid-11th century onwards the Papal States battled the Holy Roman Empire for spiritual and temporal control of Europe. In Rome the rivalry between the Guelphs (pro-papacy) and Ghibellines (pro-empire) was embodied in the bitter enmity between the Orsini and Colonna families. The Orsini, who supplied three popes over the years, were avid Guelphs and one of central Italy's strongest feudal families, with holdings in Lazio and Campania. The Colonna were traditionally pro-empire, even if one of their number later put an end to the Great Schism as Pope Martin V.

Adding to the dark and dangerous atmosphere were the French, who had long had their eyes set on the papal throne. Fighting between the French-backed pretenders to the papacy and the Roman nobility in the early 14th century culminated in the 1303 kidnap of Pope Boniface VIII. Led by the excommunicated Sciarra Colonna, a French-backed group of soldiers grabbed the pontiff from his residence in Anagni in an action known as the *schiaffo di Anagni* (slap of Anagni). Boniface was released almost immediately but not before he had seen his prestige reduced to tatters. Six years later, in 1309, the French-born Pope Clement V transferred his court to Avignon.

It was a bleak time for Rome: goats and cows grazed on the Roman Forum (p63), and the population fell dramatically. The feuding Orsini and Colonna families turned the city into a battleground, and Cola di Rienzo tried and failed to wrest control from the nobility (see the boxed text, opposite).

Only in 1377 did the situation in Rome calm down enough for the papacy (by now in the hands of Pope Gregory XI) to return to the city. On arriving, Gregory found a deserted city close to ruins, and decided to decamp to the fortified Vatican, rather than the traditional papal residence, the Palazzo Laterano (p106).

But Gregory didn't enjoy his new home for long; he died in 1378 and the Church feuding continued. The Roman cardinals tried to consolidate their power by electing the controversial Urban VI as pope, but their French rivals elected an antipope, Clement VII, who set up an alternative papacy in Avignon. Thus the Catholic world was headed by two popes – a period known as the Great Schism (1378–1417).

## ROME IS REBORN

Largely destroyed in the Middle Ages, Rome was rebuilt in the Renaissance. Under a succession of ambitious 15th- and 16th-century popes, the city was transformed from a series of smouldering ruins into a showcase capital.

1555	1626	1798	1848	1870	1883
As fear pervades Counter-Reformation Rome, Pope Paul IV confines the city's Jews to the area now known as the Jewish Ghetto. Official intolerance of Rome's Jewry continues on and off until the 20th century.	After more than 150 years of construction St Peter's Basilica is consecrated. The hulking basilica remains the largest church in the world until well into the 20th century.	Napoleon marches into Rome, forcing the elderly Pope Pius VI to flee. A republic is announced, but it doesn't last long and in 1801 Pius VI's successor Pius VII returns to Rome.	As rebellion sweeps Europe, a popular assembly declares a republic in Rome. Led by Giuseppe Mazzini and Giuseppe Garibaldi, it is eventually defeated by French forces fighting on behalf of Pope Pius IX.	Nine years after Italian unification, Rome falls to Italian troops. The city walls are breached at Porta Pia and Pope Pius IX is forced to cede the city to Italy. Rome becomes the Italian capital.	In the small town of Forlì in Emilia-Romagna, Italy's future dictator Benito Mussolini is born. An ardent socialist, Mussolini rises through the ranks of the Italian Socialist Party.

## COLA DI RIENZO

A man of epic vision, Cola di Rienzo (1313–54) is one of the great characters of Roman history. The son of a Roman tavern-keeper and a successful notary, he burst onto the public scene on 20 May 1347, when, in full body armour, he stood before a huge crowd on the Campidoglio and declared himself dictator of Rome.

Surprisingly, he wasn't laughed out of town. The long-suffering Romans were ready to accept anyone who might put an end to the baronial fighting ravaging their city and they welcomed Rienzo. But what they didn't know was that Rome was just the first step in Rienzo's master plan to unite Italy. As part of a package of reforms, he conferred Roman citizenship on all the Italian city-states and prepared to elect a new Italian emperor.

This was Rienzo's first big mistake. Up until this point Pope Clement VI, at the time in Avignon, had been prepared to let events unfold. However, the prospect of a new rival spurred him into action and he condemned Rienzo as a heretic. The Roman nobility was similarly outraged and in a brief display of aristocratic solidarity they joined forces to drive Rienzo from the city in November 1347.

For a little over two years Rienzo lived in the Majella Mountains in Abruzzo. In 1350 he went to Prague, hoping to persuade Emperor Charles IV to invade Rome and rid it of its papal rulers. Charles, however, was having none of it and, at the behest of the pope, handed Rienzo over to the Inquisition. Condemned as a heretic, he was sentenced to death. Fortunately for him, though, Clement died before the sentence was carried out and his successor Innocent VI had other ideas. Innocent saw in Rienzo the chance to regain control of Rome, and it was with this in mind that he packed him off to take charge of the city with Cardinal Gil Albornoz.

Rienzo made his triumphal return to Rome on 1 August 1354. Initially things went well and he resumed his governance of the city. But over the years he'd lost his common touch and become high-handed and arrogant. His popularity plummeted and he was killed in a riot on 8 October 1354.

Pope Nicholas V (r 1447–55) is considered the harbinger of the Roman Renaissance, and it was under his successors that Michelangelo, Raphael, Bramante, Donatello, Botticelli and Fra Angelico all lived and worked in Rome.

Pope Sixtus IV (r 1471–84) had the Sistine Chapel (p137) frescoed and, in 1471, gifted the people of Rome a selection of bronzes that became the first exhibits of the Capitoline Museums (p67). Julius II (r 1503–13) opened Via del Corso (p85) and Via Giulia (p82) and ordered Bramante to rebuild St Peter's Basilica (p128).

The Renaissance, however, was also a period of terrible blood-letting as the European powers fought for supremacy. In 1527 Pope Clement VII (r 1523–34) was forced to take refuge in Castel Sant'Angelo as Charles V's Spanish troops ransacked Rome – an event that is said to have deeply influenced Michelangelo's vision of the *Giudizio Universale* (Last Judgment).

But out of the ruins rose Rome's great Renaissance *palazzi*, roads and piazzas. In 1538 Pope Paul III (r 1534–49) asked Michelangelo to design Piazza del Campidoglio (p66); later under Sixtus V (r 1585–90), the dome of St Peter's was completed.

By the mid-16th century the broad-minded curiosity of the Renaissance had begun to give way to the intolerance of the Counter-Reformation, the Catholic Church's bloody response to Martin Luther's Reformation. With the full blessing of Paul III, Ignatius Loyola founded the Jesuits in 1540, and two years later the Holy Office was set up as the Church's final appeals court for trials prosecuted by the Inquisition.

Paul III's opposition to Protestantism resulted in a widespread campaign of torture and fear. In 1559 the Church published the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* (Index of Prohibited Books) and

## LONGEST-SERVING POPES

- St Peter (AD 30–67)
- Pius VI (1775–99)
- Pius IX (1846–78)
- Leo XIII (1878–1903)
- John Paul II (1978–2005)

began to persecute intellectuals and freethinkers. Galileo Galilei (1564–1642) was forced by the Church to renounce his assertion of the Copernican astronomical system, which held that the earth moved around the sun. He was summoned by the Inquisition to Rome in 1632 and exiled to Florence for the rest of his life. Giordano Bruno (1548–1600), a freethinking Dominican monk, fared worse. Arrested by the Inquisition in Venice in 1592,

he was burned at the stake eight years later in Campo de' Fiori (p81) – the spot is today marked by a sinister statue.

Ironically, though, the harder the authorities tried to suppress freedom of thought, the more creative Rome's architects and artists became. This explosion of artistic imagination reached its climax in the baroque 17th century, led by Bernini and his hated rival Borromini (see p49).

## POWER & CORRUPTION

The exercise of power has long gone hand in hand with corruption. As the British historian Lord Acton famously put it in 1887, 'Power tends to corrupt; absolute power corrupts absolutely'. And no-one enjoyed greater power than Rome's ancient emperors.

Of all Rome's cruel and insane leaders, few are as notorious as Caligula. A byword for depravity, Caligula was hailed as a saviour when he inherited the empire from his great-uncle Tiberius in AD 37. Tiberius, a virtual recluse by the end of his reign, had been widely hated, and it was with a great sense of relief that Rome's cheering population welcomed the 25-year-old Caligula to the capital.

Their optimism was to prove ill-founded. After a bout of serious illness, Caligula began showing disturbing signs of mental instability and by AD 40 had taken to appearing in public dressed as a god. He made his senators worship him as a deity and infamously tried to make his horse, Incitator, a senator. He was accused of all sorts of perversions and progressively alienated himself from all those around him. By AD 41 his Praetorian Guard had had enough and on 24 January its leader, Cassius Chaerea, stabbed him to death.

Debauchery on such a scale was rare in the medieval papacy, but corruption was no stranger to the corridors of ecclesiastical power. It was not uncommon for popes to father illegitimate children and nepotism was rife. The Borgia pope Alexander VI (r 1492–1503) fathered two illegitimate children with the first of his two high-profile mistresses. The second, Giulia Farnese, was the sister of the priest who was to become Pope Paul III (r 1534–59), himself no stranger to earthly pleasures. When not persecuting heretics during the Counter-Reformation, the Farnese pontiff managed to sire four children.

Corruption has also featured in modern Italian politics, most famously in the 1990s Tangentopoli (Kickback City) scandal. Against a backdrop of steady economic growth, the controversy broke in Milan in 1992 when a routine corruption case – accepting bribes in exchange for public works – blew up into a nationwide crusade against corruption.

Led by the 'reluctant hero', magistrate Antonio di Pietro, the Mani Pulite (Clean Hands) investigations exposed a political and business system riddled with corruption. Politicians,

public officials and businesspeople were investigated and for once no-one was spared, not even the powerful Bettino Craxi (prime minister between 1983 and 1989), who, rather than face a trial in Italy, fled to Tunisia in 1993. He was subsequently convicted *in absentia* on corruption charges and died in self-imposed exile in January 2000.

Tangentopoli left Italy's entire establishment in shock, and as the economy faltered – high unemployment and inflation combined with a huge national debt and an extremely unstable lira – the stage was set for the next act in Italy's turbulent political history.

Chief among the actors were Francesco Rutelli, a suave media-savvy operator who oversaw a successful citywide cleanup as mayor of Rome (1993–2001), and the charismatic media magnate Silvio Berlusconi, whose two terms as prime minister (1994 and 2001–06) were plagued by judicial problems. In 2000 Berlusconi and his former lawyer and defence minister, Cesare Previti, were brought to trial accused of bribing judges in two corporate takeover bids. Berlusconi escaped conviction on both counts; his erstwhile colleague was not so lucky, receiving sentences of 11 and five years. On appeal, the first sentence was reduced to six years and the latter was quashed.

## THE FIRST TOURISTS

As a religious centre Rome has long attracted millions of pilgrims. In 1300 Pope Boniface VIII proclaimed the first Jubilee Year, with the promise of a full pardon for anyone who made the pilgrimage to St Peter's Basilica and the Basilica di San Giovanni in Laterano. Hundreds of thousands came and the Church basked in popular glory. In 2000 some 24 million visitors poured into the city for Pope John Paul II's Jubilee. However, it was in the late 18th and early 19th centuries that Rome's reputation as a tourist destination was born.

The Grand Tour, the 18th-century version of the gap year, was considered an educational rite of passage for wealthy young men from northern Europe and Britain in particular. In the 19th century it became fashionable for young ladies to travel, chaperoned by spinster aunts, but in the late 1700s the tour was largely a male preserve.

The overland journey through France and into Italy followed the medieval pilgrim route, entering Italy via the St Bernard pass and descending the west coast before cutting in to Florence and then down to Rome. After a sojourn in the capital, tourists would venture down to Naples, where the newly discovered ruins of Pompeii and Herculaneum were causing much excitement, before heading up to Venice.

Rome, enjoying a rare period of peace, was perfectly set up for this English invasion. The city was basking in the aftermath of the 17th-century baroque building boom and a craze for all things classical was sweeping Europe. Rome's papal authorities were also crying out for money after their excesses had left the city coffers bare, reducing much of the population to abject poverty.

Thousands came, including Goethe, who stopped off to write his 1817 travelogue *Italian Journey*, and Byron, Shelley and Keats, who all fuelled their romantic sensibilities in the city's vibrant streets. So many English people stayed around Piazza di Spagna (p99) that locals christened the area *er ghetto de l'inglesi* (the English ghetto). Trade in antiques flourished and local artists did a roaring business producing etchings for souvenir-hungry visitors.

Artistically, rococo was the rage of the moment. The Spanish Steps (p99), built between 1723 and 1726, proved a major hit with tourists, as did the exuberant Trevi Fountain (p98).

1922

Some 40,000 Fascists march on Rome. King Vittorio Emanuele III, worried about the possibility of civil war, invites Mussolini to form a government. At 39 Mussolini becomes the youngest-ever Italian prime minister.

1929

Keen to appease the Catholic Church, Mussolini signs the Lateran Treaty, thus creating the state of the Vatican City. To celebrate, Via della Conciliazione is bulldozed through the medieval Borgo to Piazza San Pietro.

1944

On 24 March 1944, Nazis shoot 335 Romans at the Fosse Ardeatine cave complex in retaliation for a partisan attack. On 4 June US forces liberate Rome.

1957

Leaders of Italy, France, West Germany, Belgium, Holland and Luxembourg sign the Treaty of Rome in the Palazzo dei Conservatori on the Campidoglio. The treaty officially establishes the European Economic Community.

1960

Rome stages the Olympic Games while Federico Fellini makes his masterpiece *La Dolce Vita* in Cinecittà film studios. At the same time Stanley Kubrick is using Cinecittà to film his Roman epic *Spartacus*.

1990

Football fans tune into Italia 90, the Italian-staged World Cup. The final, won by Germany, is held in Rome's revamped Stadio Olimpico. Sixteen years later, Italy is to win the 2006 World Cup in Berlin's Olympiastadion.

## THE RISE OF FASCISM

Rome did not suffer unduly during WWI but Italy did, losing 600,000 men. A new class of super-rich industrial barons emerged, but the bulk of the population struggled in penury as the economy floundered. Unemployment was widespread and inflation out of control; strikes and riots were the order of the day. It was an explosive cocktail.

Benito Mussolini was born in 1883 in Forlì, a small town in Emilia-Romagna. As a young man he was an active member of the Italian Socialist Party, rising through the ranks to become editor of the party's official newspaper, *Avanti!* However, service in WWI and Italy's subsequent descent into chaos led to a change of heart and in 1919 he founded the Italian Fascist Party. Calling for rights for war veterans, law and order, and a strong nation, the party won support from disillusioned soldiers, many of whom joined the squads of Blackshirts that Mussolini used to intimidate his political enemies.

In 1921 Mussolini was elected to the Chamber of Deputies. His parliamentary support was limited but on 28 October 1922 he marched on Rome with 40,000 black-shirted followers. The march was largely symbolic but it had the desired effect. Fearful of civil war between the Fascists and Socialists, King Vittorio Emanuele III invited Mussolini to form a government.

His first government was a coalition of Fascists, nationalists and liberals, but victory in the 1924 elections left him much better placed to consolidate his personal power and by the end of 1925 he had seized complete control of Italy. In order to silence the Church he signed the Lateran Treaty in 1929, which declared Catholicism the state religion of Italy and recognised the sovereignty of the Vatican State.

On the home front Mussolini embarked on a huge building programme: Via dei Fori Imperiali and Via della Conciliazione were laid out; parks were opened on the Oppio hill and at Villa Celimontana (p110); the Imperial Forums (p65) and the temples at Largo di Torre Argentina (p73) were excavated; and the monumental Foro Italico sports complex (p155) and EUR (p117) were built.

Abroad, Mussolini invaded Abyssinia (present-day Ethiopia) in 1935 and sided with Hitler in 1936. In 1940, from the balcony of Palazzo Venezia (p68), he announced Italy's entry into WWII to a vast, cheering crowd. The good humour didn't last long, though, as Rome suffered, first at the hands of its own Fascist regime, then, after Mussolini was ousted in 1943, at the hands of the Nazis. Rome was liberated from German occupation on 4 June 1944.

## POLITICS, A MATTER OF FAITH

For more than a thousand years religion and politics have been natural bedfellows in Rome. As capital of the Papal States, the city was under the pope's direct control and still today the Vatican keeps a close eye on events in the Italian parliament, a mere kilometre or two down the road. In recent years this close cohabitation has been put to the test.

Church attendance had been falling for a long time when Pope John Paul II died on 2 April 2005, provoking a mass outpouring of popular grief. His funeral was attended by religious and political leaders and by hundreds of thousands of pilgrims. Millions followed it on TV. If appearances were anything to go by, faith was once again back in fashion.

Certainly, religion played a starring role in a referendum held in June 2005. The referendum called for amendments to a law on assisted procreation and medical research, two subjects on

2001

Charismatic media tycoon Silvio Berlusconi becomes prime minister for the second time. His first term in 1994 was a short-lived affair; his second lasts the full five-year course, an almost unheard-of event in Italian politics.

2005

Seriously ill for a long time, Pope John Paul II dies after 27 years on the papal throne. He is replaced by his long-standing ally Josef Ratzinger, who takes the name Pope Benedict XVI.

2006

In the spring general election, Romano Prodi defeats his long-standing political rival Berlusconi by a whisker. A year on and controversy still surrounds the counting of votes.

which the Church has very clear views. Broadly speaking, the country was divided between those who wanted to loosen the law's restrictions, which included a ban on stem-cell research, and those who didn't. The Church called on supporters not to vote (for a referendum to be valid in Italy, 50% plus one of the electorate must vote), which is pretty much what happened. A 29.5% turnout ensured the law remained untouched.

It was a result hailed as a victory not only by the Church, but also by Silvio Berlusconi's right-wing government, which had loudly followed the Vatican's line.

The defeated opposition was again to feel the weight of Vatican intervention when it moved into government in April 2006. During a long and closely fought election campaign, Romano Prodi's centre-left coalition had promised to introduce rights for unmarried couples (homosexual and heterosexual). And, in February 2007, that's exactly what they did, approving a draft bill according rights to de facto couples regarding inheritance laws and health benefits. It was a bill too far for the Vatican, though. Pope Benedict XVI announced the Church's opposition to be 'non-negotiable' and the Italian Bishops Conference advised Catholic MPs that they had a moral duty to vote against the bill. Right-wing MPs, keen to curry favour with the Church, enthusiastically joined in the chorus of opposition.

Prodi, himself a practising Catholic, could do little in the face of such powerful opposition, and in spring 2007 the bill was quietly dropped. Relations between the Vatican and the Italian government had rarely been worse.

## ARTS

As a cultural centre Rome is back in the spotlight. Its jazz-loving cinephile mayor, Walter Veltroni, has spearheaded a cultural revival, placing the arts back on the political agenda and injecting much-needed cash into the city's arts scene. At the same time, the Auditorium Parco della Musica has provided Rome with a vibrant cultural focus.

Unfortunately, though, young Roman artists still struggle to break through. Funding has largely been channelled towards high-profile international events and locals have been left to feed off the leftovers.

## VISUAL ARTS

Home to some of the Western world's most recognisable art, Rome is a visual feast. Its churches alone contain more masterpieces than many midsize countries, and the city's galleries are thick with works by the world's most famous artists.

## Etruscan Art

Deriving from Greek styles and techniques, Etruscan art was to have a profound influence on later Roman art.

The Etruscans placed great importance on their funerary rites and they developed sepulchral decoration into a highly sophisticated art form. Elaborate stone sarcophagi were often embellished with a reclining figure or couple, typically depicted with a haunting, enigmatic smile. A stunning example is the *Sarcofago degli Sposi* (Sarcophagus of the Betrothed) in the Museo Nazionale Etrusco di Villa Giulia (p153). Underground funerary vaults were enlivened with bright, exuberant frescoes. These frequently represented festivals or scenes from everyday life, with stylised figures shown dancing or playing musical instruments, often with little birds or animals in the background.

The Etruscans were also noted for their bronze work and jewellery. Bronze ore was abundant and was used to craft everything from chariots to candelabras, bowls and polished mirrors. The 5th-century-BC bronze *Lupa Capitolina* (Capitoline Wolf) in the Capitoline Museums (p67) is considered the Etruscans' greatest masterpiece. Etruscan jewellery was unrivalled throughout the Mediterranean. Goldsmiths produced elaborate pieces using sophisticated filigree and granulation techniques that were only rediscovered in the 20th century.

For Italy's best collection of Etruscan art, make a point of visiting the Museo Nazionale Etrusco di Villa Giulia (p153); to see Etruscan treasures *in situ* head out of town to Cerveteri (p267) and Tarquinia (p268).



# Sculpture Through the Ages

## THE ANCIENTS

In art, as in architecture, the Romans borrowed heavily from the Greeks and Etruscans. In fact, the first 'Roman' sculptures were actually made by Greek artists or were, at best, copies of imported Greek works. Largely concerned with the male physique, they generally depicted visions of male beauty in mythical settings; check out, for example, the *Apollo Belvedere* and the *Laocoön* in the Vatican Museums' Museo Pio-Clementino (p135).

Subsequent Roman sculpture was dedicated to glorifying the state and its senior citizens. You need only look at the statues in the Museo Nazionale Romano: Palazzo Massimo alle Terme (p101) to get the gist.

One of the most important works of Roman art was the monumental altar that Augustus (27 BC–AD 14) built to himself in 9 BC. The Ara Pacis Augustae (p85) boasts some stunning reliefs that are widely held to mark the point at which Roman art gained its own identity.

By the 3rd and 4th centuries, public sculpture was beginning to lose its appeal as Christian churches began springing up across town. A notable exception was the 4th-century statue of Constantine, a 12m-high colossus, which stood in the Roman Forum. Pieces of it (namely the head, a hand and a foot) are now in the Capitoline Museums (p67).

## BAROQUE

A golden age for Roman sculpture, the baroque period (at its height between 1625 and 1675) raised the art to new heights. Combining a dramatic sense of dynamism with highly charged emotion, works were typically set in churches, usually in elaborately decorated niches.

Baroque sculpture was dominated by Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1598–1680), whose depiction of *Santa Teresa trafitta dall'amore di Dio* (Ecstasy of St Teresa) in the Chiesa di Santa Maria della Vittoria (p102) is a brilliant blend of realism, eroticism and theatrical spirituality. At the Museo e Galleria Borghese (p149), marvel at his ability to make stone-cold marble seem soft as flesh in the *Ratto di Proserpina* (Rape of Persephone), or his magnificent depiction of Daphne transforming into a laurel tree to escape the clutches of Apollo in *Apollo e Dafne* (Apollo and Daphne).

Bologna-born Alessandro Algardi (1595–1654) was one of the few sculptors in Rome not totally overshadowed by Bernini. His white-marble monument to Pope Leo XI (1652) is in St Peter's Basilica (p128).

## NEOCLASSICISM

The neoclassicism of the late 18th and early 19th centuries signalled a departure from the emotional abandon of the baroque and a return to the clean, sober lines of classical statuary.

The major exponent of neoclassical sculpture was Antonio Canova (1757–1822). His study of Paolina Bonaparte Borghese as *Venere Vincitrice* in the Museo e Galleria Borghese (p149) is typical of the mildly erotic sculpture for which he became known. Similarly erotic is the *Fontana delle Naiadi* (Fountain of the Naiads; 1901) in Piazza della Repubblica (p101), which caused something of a scandal when it was unveiled. Its creator, the Sicilian-born sculptor Mario Rutelli (1859–1941), was the great-grandfather of Rome's former mayor Francesco Rutelli.

## KNOW YOUR BAROQUE

Baroque is a word you hear bandied around a lot in Rome, particularly in relation to church interiors.

The baroque burst onto the scene in the early 17th century in a swirl of emotional energy. Combining the naturalism that Caravaggio (1571–1610) had so daringly introduced with intense emotion, it was enthusiastically appropriated by the Catholic Church, at the time viciously persecuting Counter-Reformation heresy. The powerful popes of the day saw baroque art as an ideal propaganda tool and eagerly championed the likes of Gian Lorenzo Bernini, Francesco Borromini, Pietro da Cortona and Alessandro Algardi.

Not surprisingly, much baroque art has a religious theme and you'll often find depictions of martyrdoms, ecstasies and miracles. The use of coloured marble, gold leaf and ornamental settings are further trademarks.

See p34 for more on baroque painting, and above for baroque sculpture.

## Mosaic Art

As far back as the 1st century BC, floor mosaics were a popular form of home decoration. They could be bought ready-made in a number of designs or ordered to suit the individual tastes of the purchaser. Typical themes included landscapes, still lifes, geometric patterns and depictions of the gods. Wall mosaics, however, were rare, being unaffordable to all but the wealthiest of citizens. To see some striking examples, head for the Museo Nazionale Romano: Palazzo Massimo alle Terme (p101), where there is a series taken from a *nymphaeum* (shrine to the water nymphs) at Nero's villa in Anzio.

In early Christian Rome, mosaic art moved into the public arena and surpassed sculpture as the principal artistic endeavour. Religious themes took over and mosaics were used to decorate early Christian churches, including the Chiesa di Santa Costanza (p156), the Chiesa di Santa Pudenziana (p94), the Basilica di SS Cosma e Damiano (p65) and the Basilica di Santa Maria Maggiore (p89).

Later, between the 7th and 9th centuries, Byzantine influences swept in from the east, leading to a brighter golden look. Rome's best examples are in the Chiesa di Santa Prassede (p94) and the Basilica di Santa Cecilia in Trastevere (p120).

In the 13th century the Cosmati family revolutionised the art of mosaic-making by slicing up ancient columns of coloured marble into circular slabs, which they then used to create intricate patterns. You'll find memorable Cosmati work in the Sancta Sanctorum (p107) and the Basilica di San Paolo fuori le Mura (p116).

## Frescoes

Fresco painting is not a uniquely religious art form, but ever since Etruscan times it has been used in a religious context. The Etruscans used frescoes to adorn their underground tombs (witness the necropolis at Tarquinia, p268), while the early Christians daubed religious imagery on the walls of their catacombs. Later, the great Renaissance popes employed the finest artists of the day to fresco their chapels and churches.

In pre-Christian Rome, wealthy citizens would often decorate their houses with large wall frescoes. A series of superb 1st-century-BC frescoes taken from Villa Livia, one of the homes of Augustus' wife Livia Drusilla, is on display at the Museo Nazionale Romano: Palazzo Massimo alle Terme (p101).

The great artist Giotto led the way for the re-emergence of the fresco as a religious art form in the late 13th and early 14th centuries. His masterpiece is the Cappella degli Scrovegni in Padua. In Rome Pietro Cavallini's *Giudizio Universale* (Last Judgment) is an impressive example of the genre. You'll find it, not in great nick, at the Basilica di Santa Cecilia in Trastevere (p120).

## RENAISSANCE

More than any other period, it's the 15th-century Renaissance that marks the high point in ecclesiastical design. Between 1481 and 1483 some of the country's greatest painters were employed by Sixtus IV to decorate the Sistine Chapel (p137). The wall frescoes were created by Pietro Vannucci (Perugino; 1446–1523), Sandro Botticelli (1445–1510), Domenico Ghirlandaio (1449–94), Cosimo Rosselli (1439–1507) and Luca Signorelli (c 1445–1523). These artists were assisted by members of their workshops, including Bernadino di Betto (Pinturicchio; 1454–1513), who subsequently frescoed the Appartamento Borgia (p137) between 1492 and 1495. However, it's for Michelangelo's *Genesis* (1508–12), widely considered the high point of

## top picks

### MUSEUMS & GALLERIES

- Museo e Galleria Borghese (p149)
- Capitoline Museums (p67)
- Vatican Museums (p133)
- Museo Nazionale Romano: Palazzo Massimo alle Terme (p101)
- Museo Nazionale Romano: Palazzo Altemps (p78)
- Museo Nazionale Etrusco di Villa Giulia (p153)
- Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna (p153)
- Galleria Doria Pamphilj (p86)
- Capitoline Museums at Centrale Montemartini (p117)
- Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica (p100)

## MICHELANGELO IN ROME

The embodiment of the Renaissance spirit, Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475–1564) was born in Caprese, near Arezzo in Tuscany. The son of a Tuscan magistrate, he was a moody, solitary figure, easily offended and difficult to work with.

As a young man he quickly established a reputation as a brilliant sculptor, and it wasn't long before he was summoned to Rome to create a grand tomb for Pope Julius II. The tomb, now in the [Basilica di San Pietro in Vincoli](#) (p95), preoccupied Michelangelo for most of his life but was never completed; Julius II lies in an unadorned grave in St Peter's.

Michelangelo considered himself above all a sculptor and was reluctant to take on the job for which he is now most famous – the painting of the [Sistine Chapel](#) (p137). But when he finally accepted Julius II's commission, he set to work with an obsession verging on mania. For four years, between 1508 and 1512, he worked lying down on scaffolding lodged high under the chapel's ceiling, pushing himself to artistic and physical limits and bickering constantly with the impatient pope. The results, however, were spectacular.

But Michelangelo wasn't finished with the chapel, and in 1534 he reluctantly returned to paint the *Giudizio Universale* (Last Judgment) on the altar wall. The job was commissioned by Clement VII (r 1523–34) but it was his successor Paul III who chose the subject matter and, in 1535, appointed Michelangelo chief architect, sculptor and painter to the Vatican.

Determined to get his money's worth from Michelangelo, Paul III commissioned him to create a new piazza on the Campidoglio – [Piazza del Campidoglio](#) (p66) – and to design a grand approach to it. The work was not finished until the mid-17th century but successive architects closely followed the original plans.

Other posthumous jobs included the upper storey of [Palazzo Farnese](#) (p81), completed by Giacomo della Porta, and the city gateway at [Porta Pia](#) (p155), finished a year after his death in 1564.

The artist spent his last years working – unhappily (he felt that it was a penance from God) – on St Peter's Basilica. He disapproved of the plans that had been drawn up by Antonio da Sangallo the Younger, claiming that they deprived the basilica of light. To rectify this, Michelangelo created his magnificent light-filled dome, based on Brunelleschi's Duomo in Florence, and a stately façade.

In his old age he was said to work with the same strength and concentration as he had as a younger man. He continued to work until his death on 18 February 1564. He was buried in the Basilica dei Santi Apostoli, although his remains were later moved to Florence.

Western artistic achievement, and his *Giudizio Universale* (Last Judgment; 1536–41) that the Sistine Chapel is best known.

It was at the insistence of Julius II that Michelangelo, a reluctant painter, decorated the Sistine Chapel. And while he was doing so, not more than 50m away, Raffaello Sanzio (Raphael; 1483–1520) was busy painting the pope's official apartments, now known as the Stanze di Raffaello (Raphael Rooms; p136). The commission marked the beginning of the brilliant Roman career of the Urbino-born artist, who arrived in Rome from Florence in 1508 and went on to become the most influential painter of his generation. His masterpiece is usually considered to be *La Scuola d'Atene* (The School of Athens; 1510–11) in the Stanza della Segnatura (p136).

## COUNTER-REFORMATION & BAROQUE

Of the painters working in the late 16th and 17th centuries, two stand out: Annibale Carracci (1560–1609), whose frescoes in Palazzo Farnese (p81) are said by some to equal those of the Sistine Chapel; and Pietro da Cortona (1596–1669), one of the most sought-after decorators of baroque Rome. His *Trionfo della Divina Provvidenza* (Triumph of Divine Providence) fresco on the ceiling of the Salone Grande in Palazzo Barberini (p100) paved the way for numerous other commissions, including the ceiling frescoes in Chiesa Nuova (p80).

## Modern Trends

In the presence of so much Renaissance and baroque art, Italy's modern artists have had a tough act to follow. However, they have risen to the challenge and have produced a substantial body of work.

Italy's answer to the French postimpressionists, the *macchiaioli*, emerged in late-19th-century Tuscany. Turning to nature for their inspiration, they believed that a picture's effect should derive from the painted surface rather than any moral message and thus developed a technique

based on the use of *macchia* (patches or stains) of colour. The best place to catch their work is the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna (p153).

Often associated with Fascism, Italian futurism was an ambitious movement, embracing not only visual art but also architecture, music, fashion and theatre. Although it was founded in 1909 by the poet Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, the painting movement dates to the *Manifesto of the Futurist Painters*, written by Umberto Boccioni (1882–1916) in 1910. A rallying cry for modernism and a vitriolic rejection of artistic traditions, it was hugely influential.

Among the most important painters of the period were Giacomo Balla (1871–1958), whose depictions of the dynamic nature of motion encapsulated the futurist ideals; Giorgio De Chirico (1888–1978), who painted visionary empty streetscapes; and Giorgio Morandi (1890–1964), best known for his trademark still lifes. To see a comprehensive collection of De Chirico's works, head to the Museo Carlo Bilotti (p153) in Villa Borghese.

A sculptor and painter, Giacomo Manzù (1908–91) bucked the futurist trend and revived the Italian religious tradition. His most famous work is the bronze door (the last on the left) in St Peter's Basilica, for which he was commissioned after a competition in 1949.

## LITERATURE

A history of authoritarian rule has given rise to a rich literary tradition, encompassing everything from ancient satires to dialect poetry and anti-Fascist prose. As a backdrop, Rome has provided inspiration to scribes as diverse as Goethe and Robert Harris.

## The Classics

Famous for his blistering oratory, Marcus Tullius Cicero (106–43 BC) was the republic's pre-eminent author. A brilliant barrister, he became consul in 63 BC and subsequently published many philosophical works and speeches. Fancying himself as the senior statesman, Cicero took the young Octavian under his wing and attacked Mark Antony in a series of 14 speeches, the *Philippics*. These proved fatal, though, for when Octavian changed sides and joined Mark Antony, he demanded – and got – Cicero's head.

A contemporary of Cicero, Catullus (c 84–54 BC) cut a very different figure. A passionate man, he is best known for his epigrams and erotic, sometimes obscene, poetry.

On becoming Emperor Augustus, Octavian encouraged the arts, and Virgil (70–19 BC), Ovid, Horace and Tibullus all enjoyed freedom to write. Of the works produced in this period, it's Virgil's rollicking *Aeneid* that stands out. A glorified mix of legend, history and moral instruction, it tells how Aeneas escapes from Troy and after years of mythical mishaps ends up founding Rome.

Little is known of Decimus Iunius Juvenalis, better known as Juvenal, but his 16 satires have survived as classics of the genre. Writing in the 1st century AD, he combined an acute mind with a cutting pen, famously scolding the masses as being interested in nothing but 'bread and circuses'. He also issued the classic warning '*quis custodiet ipsos custodes?*' or 'who will guard the guards?'

As Roman society began to change in the 1st century, so too did the Latin language and the people who used it. While Livy (59 BC–AD 17) had glorified Rome's past, the later Tacitus (c 56–116) viewed history with a decidedly colder eye.

## Street Writing & Popular Poetry

Rome's tradition of street writing goes back to the dark days of the 17th century. With the Church systematically suppressing every whiff of criticism, Counter-Reformation Rome was not a great place for budding authors. As a way round censorship, disgruntled Romans began

## top picks

### BOOKS SET IN ROME

- *La Storia* (History), Elsa Morante (1974)
- *La Romana* (The Woman of Rome), Alberto Moravia (1947)
- *The Borgias*, Jeanne Kalogridis (2006)
- *Imperium*, Robert Harris (2006)
- *Tre metri sopra il cielo*, Federico Moccia (in Italian only; 1992)



posting *pasquinades* (anonymous messages; named after the first person to have written one) on the city's so-called speaking statues. These messages, often archly critical of the authorities, were sensibly posted in the dead of night and then gleefully circulated around town the following day. The most famous speaking statue, which still today is covered with messages, stands in Piazza Pasquino (p79) near Piazza Navona.

Poking savage fun at the rich and powerful was one of the favourite themes of Gioacchino Belli (1791–1863), one of a trio of poets who made their names writing poetry in Roman dialect. Born poor, Belli started his career with conventional and undistinguished verse, but found the crude and colourful dialect of the Roman streets better suited to his outspoken attacks on the chattering classes.

Carlo Alberto Salustri (1871–1950), aka Trilussa, is the best known of the trio. He, too, wrote social and political satire, although not exclusively so, and many of his poems are melancholy reflections on life, love and solitude. One of his most famous works, the anti-Fascist poem *All'Ombra* (In the Shadow), is etched onto a plaque in Piazza Trilussa, the Trastevere square named in his honour.

The poems of Cesare Pascarella (1858–1940) present a vivid portrait of turn-of-the-century Rome. Gritty and realistic, they pull no punches in describing everyday life as lived by Rome's forgotten poor.

## Rome as Inspiration

With its magical cityscape and sense of lived-in history, Rome has provided inspiration for legions of foreign authors. In the 18th century the city was a hotbed of literary activity as historians and Grand Tourists poured in from northern Europe. The German author Johann Wolfgang von Goethe captures the elation of discovering Ancient Rome and the colours of the modern city in his celebrated travelogue *Italian Journey* (1817).

Rome was also a magnet for the English Romantic poets. John Keats, Lord Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Mary Shelley and other writers all spent time in the city. Byron, in a typically over-the-top outburst, described Rome as the city of his soul even though he visited only fleetingly. Keats came to Rome in 1821 in the hope that it would cure his ill health, but it didn't and he died of tuberculosis in his lodgings at the foot of the Spanish Steps (p99).

Later, in the 19th century, the American author Nathaniel Hawthorne penned his lumbering classic *The Marble Faun* (1860) after two years in Italy. Taking his inspiration from a sculpture in the Capitoline Museums (p67), Hawthorne uses a murder story as an excuse to explore his thoughts on art and culture.

### ROMAN READING LIST

'There's no single literary key to enter Rome. The city's too old; there are too many ways of approaching it, too many realities. You can only tackle one reality at a time.'

Paulo Mauri, author, critic and, since 1977, culture editor of *La Repubblica*, is ideally placed to compile a Roman reading list.

'Before coming to Rome, there are various books that you could read. You could try Alberto Moravia's *Racconti Romani* (Roman Tales; 1954) or there's Gadda's *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de Via Merulana* (That Awful Mess on Via Merulana; 1957), a wonderful, linguistically inventive book that might, however, be difficult for foreigners. Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Ragazzi di Vita* (A Violent Life; 1955) tells of a Rome that no longer exists, the Rome of the suburbs in the 1950s.

'If you want to relive the *dolce vita* years, I'd recommend *Diario Notturno* (1956) by Ennio Flaiano. It's written so well and with such intelligent irony that even after several decades it gives a good idea of a life that no longer exists.

'Of the authors writing in Rome today, perhaps the best known is Niccolò Ammaniti, although he doesn't really speak of Rome. One of the most popular contemporary writers is Federico Moccia, whose love stories are adored by adolescents. His book *Tre metri sopra il cielo* (1992) even started a craze by inviting young couples to attach padlocks to Ponte Milvio as a symbol of their love.

'From the editorial point of view there are interesting things happening in Rome today. For example, there's a small editing house called Minimum Fax, which publishes anthologies dedicated to young writers. There's also Einaudi Stile Libero, part of Einaudi, a historic Italian publishing house, which publishes experimental work. Rome's literary scene is in pretty good shape.'

In recent years it's once again become fashionable for novelists to use Rome as a backdrop. Dan Brown's thriller *Angels and Demons* (2001) is set in Rome, as is Kathleen A Quinn's warm-hearted love story *Leaving Winter* (2003). Jeanne Kalogridis transports readers back to the 15th century in her sumptuous historical novel *The Borgias Bride* (2006), a sensual account of Vatican scheming and dangerous passions. Robert Harris re-creates 1st-century-BC Rome with customary aplomb in his fictional biography of Cicero, *Imperium* (2006).

On a lighter note, Lindsey Davis has enjoyed great success with her Roman detective stories. One of the best is *Two for the Lions* (1999), in which her hero Marcus Didius Falco has to investigate the curious murder of a man-eating lion.

## Politics Fuels the Imagination

A controversial figure, Gabriele D'Annunzio (1863–1938) was the most flamboyant Italian writer of the early 20th century. A WWI fighter pilot and ardent nationalist, he was born in Pescara and settled in Rome in 1881. Forever associated with Fascism, he wrote prolifically, both poetry and novels. Of his books, perhaps the most revealing is *Il Fuoco* (The Flame of Life; 1900), a passionate romance in which he portrays himself as a Nietzschean superman born to command.

On the opposite side of the political spectrum, Roman-born Alberto Moravia (1907–90) was banned from writing by Mussolini and, together with his wife, Elsa Morante (1912–85), was forced into hiding for a year. The alienated individual and the emptiness of Fascist and bourgeois society are common themes in his writing. In *La Romana* (The Woman of Rome; 1947) he explores the broken dreams of a country girl, Adriana, as she slips into prostitution and theft.

The novels of Elsa Morante are characterised by a subtle psychological appraisal of her characters and can be seen as a personal cry of pity for the sufferings of individuals and society. Her 1974 masterpiece, *La Storia* (History), is a tough tale of a half-Jewish woman's desperate struggle for dignity in the poverty of occupied Rome.

Taking a similarly anti-Fascist line, Carlo Emilio Gadda (1893–1973) combines murder and black humour in his classic whodunnit, *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de Via Merulana* (That Awful Mess on Via Merulana; 1957). Although the mystery is never solved, the book's a brilliant portrayal of the pomposity and corruption that thrived in Mussolini's Rome.

## The Current Crop

Born in Rome in 1966, Niccolò Ammaniti scored a big hit with his 2001 book *Io Non Ho Paura* (I'm Not Scared). Set in an unnamed village in the deep south, it explores a young boy's reaction to the discovery that his father is involved in a child's kidnapping. In 2003 Gabriele Salvatores made a film based on the book.

Striking an altogether different chord, Federico Moccia's brand of romance-lite was given a cinematic boost when the 2004 film *Tre metri sopra il cielo* (Three Steps Over Heaven) raised his 1992 book to cult status. Starring the young heart-throb Riccardo Scamarcio, it's a classic tale of romance between ill-suited lovers.

## CINEMA & TELEVISION

### Cinema

Never afraid to stick his head over the parapet, Quentin Tarantino ruffled more than a few feathers when he recently decried the state of Italian cinema. Speaking at the 2007 Cannes film festival, he said: 'I really loved the Italian movies of the 1960s and 1970s. But what happened? Recent Italian films I've seen all seem the same. All they talk about is boys growing up, or girls growing up, or couples in crisis, or holidays for the mentally disabled.'

Harsh words maybe, but the fact remains that Italian cinema is not in the rudest of health. Rome's new film festival might have been a success when it premiered in October 2006 (see p142), but behind the gloss the story is one of ever-decreasing funding and stagnation. In recent years the government, one of the major financiers of Italian cinema, has been systematically slashing investment – in 2002 by 43%, then in 2005 by a further 35%. Against such a backdrop it's not surprising that recent film output has been limited.

# top picks

## ROMAN FILMS

- **Roma Città Aperta** (Rome Open City; 1945; Roberto Rossellini) – filmed on Rome's recently liberated streets, this neorealist masterpiece stars Anna Magnani as a woman desperate to save her lover from the Nazis
- **Ladri di Biciclette** (Bicycle Thieves; 1948; Vittorio de Sica) – a genuinely moving drama that follows the protagonist's desperate search for his stolen bicycle
- **La Dolce Vita** (1960; Federico Fellini) – Anita Ekberg frolics in the Trevi Fountain while Marcello Mastroianni looks on in Fellini's slow-moving classic
- **Accattone** (1961; Pier Paolo Pasolini) – this relentlessly grim depiction of Rome's poverty-stricken suburbs centres on the story of a lowlife pimp who fails to escape the life into which he's born
- **Il buono, il brutto, il cattivo** (The Good, the Bad and the Ugly; 1966; Sergio Leone) – the most famous of Leone's testosterone-laden spaghetti westerns, featuring a classic Ennio Morricone soundtrack
- **Profondo Rosso** (Deep Red; 1975; Dario Argento) – a masterclass in terror from the king of Italian horror, this tale of bloody murder paved the way for hundreds of imitations
- **La Stanza del Figlio** (The Son's Room; 2001; Nanni Moretti) – this raw portrayal of anguish makes uncomfortable viewing as Moretti explores the emotions that threaten to destroy a family after the death of a teenage boy
- **L'Ultimo Bacio** (The Last Kiss; 2001; Gabriele Muccino) – Muccino explores the lack of ideals and fears affecting Italy's well-to-do 30-something generation, in a glossy and well-observed film that never entirely convinces
- **Tre metri sopra il cielo** (Three Steps Over Heaven; 2004; Luca Lucini) – the big-screen adaptation of Federico Moccia's 1994 novel has a smouldering Riccardo Scamarcio wooing a schoolgirl in northern Rome
- **Rome** (2005; BBC/HBO) – Ancient Rome is brought to vivid life in this big-budget BBC drama that follows the fortunes of rivals Octavian and Mark Antony
- **Nuovomondo** (Golden Door; 2006; Emanuele Crialese) – Charlotte Gainsbourg stars in the touching story of Salvatore, an illiterate Sicilian farmer who gives up everything to realise his American Dream

The problem is augmented by the screening policies of the big cinema chains. As Elvira Caria, a marketing coordinator with Warner Village Cinemas, points out: 'Hundreds of films get made in Italy but very few actually make it on to the big screen.' The problem, she explains, is that cinemas are under enormous pressure from the big distribution companies and simply can't afford to screen small-scale Italian films. (In 2006 revenue from US-made films was €338 million in Italy, compared with €135 million from homemade films.)

Ironically, though, as Italian cinema fades from the screens there's been a renewal of interest in Rome's film-making facilities. Private investment in the legendary Cinecittà studios lured a number of big-name directors to the city in the early 2000s. Martin Scorsese re-created 19th-century New York for his 2002 epic *Gangs of New York*, and Mel Gibson had ancient Jerusalem rebuilt in 2004 for *The Passion of the Christ*. Much of the 2005 BBC drama *Rome* was filmed at Cinecittà.

## LOCAL TALENT

It's not all bad news and there are a number of young Roman directors emerging onto the scene. Emanuele Crialese (b 1965) earned considerable acclaim for his 2006 film *Nuovomondo* (English title: *Golden Door*), while Matteo Garrone (b 1968), author of the bizarre *L'Imbalsamatore* (The Embalmer; 2002), and Saverio Costanzo (b 1975) both promise good things. Gabriele Muccino (b 1967) has already cashed in on the success of his 2001 smash *L'Ultimo Bacio* (The Last Kiss) by directing Will Smith in *The Pursuit of Happiness* (2006).

Before Muccino, Rome was generally represented by Carlo Verdone (b 1950) and Nanni Moretti (b 1953). A comedian in the Roman tradition, Verdone has made a name for himself satirising his fellow citizens in a number of bitersweet comedies, which at best are very funny, and at worst are repetitive and predictable. His 1995 film *Viaggi di Nozze* (Honeymoons) is one of his best.

Moretti, on the other hand, falls into no mainstream tradition. A socially and politically active writer, actor and director, his films are often whimsical and self-indulgent. Arguably his best work, *Caro Diario* (Dear Diary; 1994) earned him the best director prize at Cannes in 1994 – an award that he topped in 2001 when he won the Palme d'Or for *La Stanza del Figlio* (The Son's Room).

However, for the real golden age of Roman film-making you have to turn the clocks back

## SERGIO LEONE REWRITES THE WEST

Best known for virtually single-handedly creating the spaghetti western, Sergio Leone (1929–89) is a hero to many. Martin Scorsese, Quentin Tarantino and Robert Rodriguez are among the directors who count him as a major influence, while Clint Eastwood owes him his cinematic breakthrough. Astonishingly, though, he only ever directed seven films.

The son of the silent-movie director Vincenzo Leone, Leone cut his teeth as a screenwriter on a series of sword-and-sandal epics, before working as assistant director on *Quo Vadis?* (1951) and *Ben-Hur* (1959). He made his directorial debut three years later on *Il Colosso di Rodi* (The Colossus of Rhodes; 1961).

However, it was with his famous dollar trilogy – *Per un pugno di dollari* (A Fistful of Dollars; 1964), *Per qualche dollaro in più* (For a Few Dollars More; 1965) and *Il buono, il brutto, il cattivo* (The Good, the Bad and the Ugly; 1966) – that he really hit the big time. The first, filmed in Spain and based on the 1961 samurai flick *Yojimbo*, set the style for the genre. No longer were clean-cut, morally upright heroes pitted against cartoon-style villains; instead characters were more complex, often morally ambiguous and driven by self-interest. As *il buono* in *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*, Clint Eastwood is just as determined to get his hands on the loot as his two rivals.

Stylistically, Leone introduced a series of innovations that were later to become his trademarks. Characters were associated with musical themes (brilliantly scored by his longtime collaborator Ennio Morricone – see the boxed text, p41); long silences were accompanied by extreme close-ups and followed by bursts of explosive action; and the Mexican standoff was used, most famously in the three-way shootout at the end of *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*.

Leone's spaghetti westerns were hugely successful in Europe, as was his 1968 homage to the American west, *C'era una volta il West* (Once Upon a Time in the West), written by Bernardo Bertolucci and Dario Argento. In his four-hour epic *C'era una volta in America* (Once Upon a Time in America; 1984), Leone took on another of cinema's classic genres – the gangster movie. He had previously turned down the chance to direct *The Godfather*, preferring to continue work on what, over the course of 20 years, had become something of an obsession. The film, set in pre-WWII New York and starring Robert De Niro, flopped at the box office but is now considered a modern masterpiece.

to the 1940s, when Roberto Rossellini (1906–77) produced a trio of neorealist masterpieces. The first and most famous was *Roma Città Aperta* (Rome Open City; 1945), filmed with brutal honesty in the working-class Prenestina district east of the city centre. Vittorio de Sica (1914–74) kept the neorealist ball rolling in 1948 with *Ladri di Biciclette* (Bicycle Thieves), again filmed in Rome's ugly suburbs.

Federico Fellini (1920–94) took the creative baton from the neorealists and carried it into the following decades. His disquieting style demands more of audiences, abandoning realistic shots for pointed images at once laden with humour, pathos and double meaning. Fellini's greatest international hit was *La Dolce Vita* (1960), starring Marcello Mastroianni and Anita Ekberg.

The films of Pier Paolo Pasolini (1922–75) are similarly demanding. A Marxist Catholic homosexual, he made films that not only reflect his ideological and sexual tendencies but also offer a unique portrayal of Rome's urban wasteland. But while Pasolini played to the intellectuals, Sergio Leone revitalised a dying genre – see the boxed text, [above](#).

Rome's contribution to the cinema, however, goes beyond its cast of directors. Its streets have also provided a memorable backdrop to numerous films. Who can forget Audrey Hepburn and Gregory Peck causing havoc around Rome in the 1953 romantic comedy *Roman Holiday*? Other films shot on Rome's streets include *Three Coins in the Fountain* (1955); *Ieri, Oggi, Domani* (Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow; 1963); *The Belly of an Architect* (1987); *The Godfather Part III* (1990); *The Portrait of a Lady* (1996); and *The Talented Mr Ripley* (1999).

## Television

Italian television has never enjoyed a stellar reputation, and after five years of Berlusconi government (2001–06), its prestige is at a low point. Berlusconi, boss of Italy's biggest media conglomerate, dominated the country's broadcasting scene to an extent unparalleled in Western Europe and ruthlessly exploited his TV channels for political gain while simultaneously raking in profits from advertising.

However, at the time of writing it was more than a year since Berlusconi lost the 2006 general election and Italian TV continued to depress with its ratings-driven refusal to supply quality programming. As sport is increasingly taken over by the satellite channels, broadcasters continue to embrace the reality show with an enthusiasm that reflects its winning low-cost, high-audience

ratio. Soap operas and quizzes are staples and homemade drama rarely goes beyond the tried and tested, with an incessant stream of made-for-TV films on the lives of popes, saints, priests and martyrs. For more on TV, see Media (p44).

## MUSIC

Until a few years ago Rome was a musical wasteland. Its reputation among serious musicians was dire, funding had long since dried up and the city lacked a concert hall worthy of the name. Not so now. The 2002 opening of the Auditorium Parco della Musica (p231) has revitalised the city's music scene, leading to an increase in orchestral standards and the birth of a thriving concert calendar. At the same time, mayor Walter Veltroni has promoted a number of high-profile musical initiatives. In recent years Sir Paul McCartney has played at the Colosseum (May 2003), Rome has hosted MTV's European Music Awards (November 2004) and Genesis has played at the Circo Massimo (July 2007). On the downside, home-grown musical talent remains thin on the ground.

## Choral Music

In a city of more than 900 churches, it's little wonder that choral music has deep roots. In the 16th and 17th centuries, just as the great Renaissance artists were summoned to work on the pope's latest building project, so top musicians were summoned to tutor the papal choir. Two of the most famous were Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina (c 1525–94), one of Italy's foremost Renaissance composers, and the Naples-born composer Domenico Scarlatti (1685–1757).

## INSIDE GUIDE

A well-known journalist and author, Leonetta Bentivoglio has been writing on music, dance and theatre since the early 1980s.

The most important event in recent years has been the opening of the Auditorium. Before that it was a real problem finding a good concert venue in Rome. The Auditorium, with its three halls and open-air arena, has really inspired the music scene, not just in classical music but also rock, pop and ethnic music. Run by the Associazione Santa Cecilia and the Fondazione Musica di Roma, an association created by the Comune di Roma, it has staged many musical events. It's also hosted the Festival of Cinema, a festival of philosophy, and many other events.

It's really inspired a revival of classical music. The Accademia di Santa Cecilia is now excellent and has a very well-known musical director, Antonio Pappano. Pappano, who was brought up in London (he's also musical director of London's Royal Opera House), is adored in Rome. He's taken the Santa Cecilia to the Proms in London and to Vienna, and he is often invited to big European festivals. Every September he organises a concert series dedicated to a single composer; say, Mozart one year, Beethoven the next. Anyone who loves music should really keep their eye on Santa Cecilia's programme.

Of the other music associations, one of the most interesting is the Accademia Filarmonica Romana, which puts on high-level performances at the Teatro Olimpico. Another active institution is the Istituto Universitaria Concerti, which does a lot of work with the university and puts on concerts at the university's Aula Magna.

The Teatro dell'Opera, which performs at three venues – the Teatro dell'Opera, the Teatro Nazionale and, in summer, the Terme di Caracalla – has done interesting things under its current director Gianluigi Gelmetti. However, he's never been able to forge an international identity for the theatre, which is one of the most unionised in Italy and has traditionally had serious management problems.

An interesting initiative is the RomaEuropa Festival in autumn. Inspired by the Festival D'Autumne in Paris, it brings exciting new theatre and dance to Rome.

In terms of composers, Giorgio Batistelli does a lot of musical theatre and is well known abroad. He's innovative and fun. More cerebral is the German-trained Luca Lombardi. Of course, there's Ennio Morricone, who doesn't just do film work but also writes symphonic music, and the great German composer Hans Werner Henze, who lives just outside Rome in Marino Laziale.

As a postscript, Bentivoglio's colleague Ernesto Assante drops a few names to look out for in the world of jazz, rock and rap.

There's Niccolò Fabi, a young singer-songwriter who plays clubs a lot and is becoming well known. Achtung Babies, a U2 cover band, is very popular and arguably better than the real thing. Doctor Three is one of the most interesting jazz names to look out for. There are also many rap outfits in the city. One worth catching is Cor Veleno.

## MORRICONE'S MUSIC MAKES CINEMA MAGIC

The success of Sergio Leone's spaghetti westerns (see p39) owes a huge debt to the music of Ennio Morricone, Rome's best-known modern composer. Although Leone had initially been reluctant to hire his old schoolmate for *Per un pugno di dollari* (A Fistful of Dollars), he relented, opening the door to what would become one of the finest creative partnerships in cinematic history.

Arguably his finest work was the haunting score for *Il buono, il brutto, il cattivo* (The Good, the Bad and the Ugly) in 1966. A unique orchestration of trumpets, whistles, gunshots, church bells, harmonicas and electric guitars, it has lost none of its power to thrill.

Born in Rome on 10 November 1928, Morricone studied trumpet, composition and choral music at the Conservatory of Santa Cecilia before graduating to become a successful studio arranger for the Radio Corporation of America (RCA). He worked with Chet Baker and the Beatles before he began his collaboration with Leone in 1964. Since then he's scored up to 500 films and TV series. He's worked with a who's who of directors, including John Carpenter, Brian De Palma and, most recently, Quentin Tarantino and Robert Rodriguez on *Grindhouse* (2007).

Morricone has never won an Oscar despite being nominated five times, most notably for *The Mission* in 1986 and a year later for *The Untouchables*.

Girolamo Frescobaldi (1583–1643), admired by the young JS Bach, was twice an organist at St Peter's Basilica.

The papal choirs, originally composed of priests, were closed to women and the high parts were taken by *castrati*, boys who had been surgically castrated before puberty to preserve their high voices. Although castration was punishable by excommunication, the Sistine Chapel and other papal choirs contained *castrati* as early as 1588 and as late as the early 20th century. The last known *castrato*, Alessandro Moreschi (1858–1922), known as *il angelo di Roma* (the angel of Rome), was castrated in 1865, just five years before the practice was officially outlawed. He entered the Sistine Chapel choir in 1883 and 15 years later became conductor. He retired in 1913, 10 years after Pius X had banned *castrati* from the papal choirs. Boy sopranos were introduced in the 1950s.

In 1585 Sixtus V formally established the Accademia di Santa Cecilia (p231) as a support organisation for papal musicians. Originally it was involved in the publication of sacred music, although it later developed a teaching function (Arcangelo Corelli was an early maestro in 1700), and in 1839 it completely reinvented itself as an academy with wider cultural and academic goals. Today it is one of the most highly respected conservatories in the world, with its own orchestra and chorus.

## Opera

To a serious opera buff, Rome lags behind Milan, Venice and Naples. But that's not to say that it's to be altogether discounted. Under musical director Gianluigi Gelmetti, the Teatro dell'Opera di Roma (p233) has enjoyed a revival in fortunes and performances are enthusiastically followed. The Romans have long been keen opera-goers – it's said that Barberini used to stage spectacular performances in Palazzo Barberini in the 17th century – and the city offers a number of extraordinary venues, including the majestic Terme di Caracalla (p110).

In the 19th century a number of important operas were premiered in Rome, including Rossini's *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* (The Barber of Seville; 1816), Verdi's *Il Trovatore* (The Troubadour; 1853) and Giacomo Puccini's *Tosca* (1900).

*Tosca* not only premiered in Rome but is also set in the Italian capital. The first act takes place in the Chiesa di Sant'Andrea della Valle (p83), the second in Palazzo Farnese (p81), and the final act in Castel Sant'Angelo (p138), the castle from which *Tosca* jumps to her death.

## Hip-Hop & Rap

Rome might lack the street kudos of New York or Detroit, but that hasn't stopped it developing a vibrant hip-hop scene. Hip-hop arrived in Italy in the late 1980s and spread via the alternative *centro sociale* (organised squat; see p227) network. Spearheading the movement in Rome were three rappers who, in 1994, formed the gangster-rap outfit Flaminio Maphia. Although they've never enjoyed great success outside of Italy, or indeed much mainstream success in



Italy, they've opened concerts for Ice T, Coolio and De La Soul and still command considerable respect among Roman rappers. Contemporaries Colle der Fomento enjoy similar status.

Crossing over into the mainstream, Tommaso Zanella, aka Piotta, burst onto the national airwaves in 1999 with his diabolically catchy 'Supercafone'. A celebration of the Roman *coatto* (a working-class tough guy with attitude and bling), the song was played relentlessly on radio and TV, even attracting the attention of the *International Herald Tribune*. The album of the same name eventually went on to sell more than 100,000 copies. Since then Piotta's kept a relatively low profile despite four new albums.

## THEATRE & DANCE

Surprisingly for a city in which art has always been appreciated, Rome has no great theatrical tradition. It has never had a Broadway or West End, and while highbrow imports are greeted enthusiastically, fringe theatre is something done better in Bologna and Milan.

Ancient Rome was more famous for its gladiators than for its actors. Even borrowing heavily from Greek theatrical traditions – the 2nd-century-BC Roman playwright Terence set his comedies in Athens – the play as an art form could never compete with chariot races or bouts of combat in the Colosseum.

Although not strictly speaking a Roman, Dacia Maraini (b 1936) has produced her best work while living in Rome. Considered one of Italy's most important feminist writers, she continues to work as a journalist while her all-women theatre company Teatro della Maddalena stages her 30-plus plays. Some of these, including the 1978 *Dialogo di una Prostituta con un suo Cliente* (Dialogue of a Prostitute with Client), have also played abroad.

Gigi Proietti (b 1940), on the other hand, is pure Roman. A hugely popular writer, performer and director, he combines TV acting with dubbing (he's dubbed Robert De Niro, Richard Burton, Marlon Brando and Dustin Hoffman) and theatre work. He's artistic director of the Teatro Brancaccio and regularly plays to full houses. His one-man show *Io, Totò e gli Altri* (Me, Totò and the Others) was a runaway success in 2001.

Rome's dance scene has benefited from the citywide resurgence of the arts but home-grown talent remains rare. Despite being led by the internationally renowned Carla Fracci (b 1936), the city's principal ballet company, the Balletto del Teatro dell'Opera, is still regarded as second-rate.

Modern dance is popular in Rome. But despite an increase in the number of contemporary-dance companies, most of the best performances are still by foreign troupes. One local company whose performances regularly attract press attention is ARSmovendi ([www.arsmovendi.it](http://www.arsmovendi.it) in Italian), founded by Andrea Cagnetti and Tiziana Guarna in 1999.

See the Festivals & Events chapter (p141) for details of Rome's arts festivals, and the Arts chapter (p230) for listings of theatre and dance venues.

## ENVIRONMENT & PLANNING

### THE LAND

Rome's best-known geographical feature is its seven hills: the Palatino (Palatine), Campidoglio (Capitoline), Aventino (Aventine), Celio (Caelian), Esquilino (Esquiline), Viminale (Viminal) and Quirinale (Quirinal). Two others – the Gianicolo (Janiculum), which rises above Trastevere, and the Pincio, above Piazza del Popolo – were never part of the ancient city. The city's highest spot (139m) is at the top of Monte Mario, to the northwest of the centre.

Hills make for tough walking and some spectacular views. One of the best vantage points is the top of the Gianicolo (p125), from where it's possible to identify each of the seven hills, although the Viminale and Quirinale are swallowed up by the city sprawl and seem little more than gentle slopes.

The River Tiber, which has its source in the Apennines north of Arezzo (in Tuscany) and runs into the sea at Ostia, is subject to flooding. Until the late 19th century this was a major problem, but it was solved in 1900 by raising the level of the river's embankments. It is still possible to see markers around Trastevere denoting the water level reached by various floods.

In ancient times the city was enclosed by defensive walls: the first, the Servian Wall, was built in 378 BC; the second, the Aurelian Wall, between AD 271 and 275.

## GREEN ROME

In May 2007 researchers revealed that traces of cocaine, cannabis, caffeine and nicotine had been found in Rome's air. The story, which caused predictable glee in the world's press, not only revealed the capital's alarming coke habit but also highlighted Rome's serious pollution problem.

Traffic restrictions have been introduced – much of the city centre is delineated a ZTL (limited traffic zone) – but smog levels remain high and inevitably many monuments are suffering.

Graffiti is another issue that refuses to go away. Despite the efforts of the Ufficio Decoro Urbano (Office of Urban Decorum), the sight of buildings daubed with unsightly spray-paint is still common.

But it's not all bad news. Efforts to promote recycling continue, and even if Rome lags behind Paris and Vienna, figures show that Romans recycle more paper than their London counterparts. An experiment, ongoing at the time of research, to replace communal street bins with recycling bins in individual apartment blocks was showing positive results.

With the exception of a flourishing cat population, Rome's flora and fauna is largely limited to the city's 14 natural parks, many of which used to belong to Rome's noble families. As they were designed and planted according to the fashion of the day, they generally contain a wide variety of exotic species.

Archaeological sites provide an ideal environment for the *cappero* (caper). In spring it forms cascading, puffy bushes, which in June become masses of pink flowers. You'll see them growing in areas including the Palatino and Terme di Caracalla, and on the Ponte Rotto near the Isola Tiberina.

## URBAN PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT

Mayor Veltroni has made a big deal about being committed to urban renewal, and in March 2006, after years of deliberation, city hall approved a sweeping plan. The highly ambitious *piano regolatore di Roma* (PDR) calls for the construction of 100,000 new houses/flats, 14 new transport corridors (including four metro lines), the creation of 19 parks and a substantial redevelopment of the capital's run-down suburbs. High-profile projects, such as Massimiliano Fuksas' Centro Congressi in EUR and the revamping of Stazione Tiburtina, are also covered.

Not surprisingly, the plan is not without its critics, many of whom ask why a city whose population is decreasing needs 100,000 new homes. They also inquire as to where all the money is going to come from.

## GOVERNMENT & POLITICS

Italian life is political to degrees that foreigners find difficult to comprehend. Cynicism is deeply ingrained and nothing happens without speculation as to the dark political motives behind it. On an everyday level, the fact that most Romans live in self-managed *condominios* (blocks of individually owned flats) gives rise to all sorts of politicking as rival residents seek to outsmart one another at *condominio* meetings.

The top man in Rome is the *sindaco* (mayor), currently Walter Veltroni, who heads the city's municipal government up on the Campidoglio, the seat of city government since the late 11th century. The mayor leads

## top picks

### READING UP ON POLITICS & SOCIETY

- **The Dark Heart of Italy**, Tobias Jones (2003) – a scathing study of the Berlusconi phenomenon, this fierce critique caused a scandal in Italy
- **The Moro Affair**, Leonardo Sciascia (2002) – Sciascia, author of the Mafia classic *The Day of the Owl*, relives the 1978 kidnapping and murder of Aldo Moro by Red Brigades terrorists
- **Italy – The Unfinished Revolution**, Matt Frei (2001) – the BBC's former Rome correspondent catalogues the changes Italian society has undergone in the past decade
- **Modern Italy: A Political History**, Denis Mack Smith (1997) – Mack Smith is widely regarded as the leading authority on Italian politics writing in English; the title tells all
- **The New Italians**, Charles Richards (1995) – British journalist Richards takes you through the murky backstage of modern Italian life; packed with surprising revelations, it's a fascinating eye-opener

## CONTROVERSY PLAGUES BERLUSCONI

In 2006 *Forbes* magazine listed Silvio Berlusconi as the world's 37th-richest person, with an estimated fortune of US\$11 billion. Five years earlier his net worth had been US\$10.3 billion. In five years of government, Italy's richest man had earned US\$700 million.

Nicknamed Il Cavaliere (the Knight), Berlusconi was already a controversial figure when he became prime minister in 2001. A self-made media magnate, owner of the Milan-based Mediaset company (producer of Italy's top three commercial channels) and Mondadori, Italy's biggest publishing house, he was loved and hated in equal measure.

Inevitably his government attracted controversy. At the forefront of political debate was the so-called 'conflict of interest' issue. Naturally Berlusconi claimed that his control over Italian TV was irrelevant to his role as prime minister. His critics tried to get a word in edgewise but found access to the media strangely limited.

To be fair, though, Berlusconi's government did introduce legislation to deal with the conflict, even if few opponents were appeased. The law, which established that there was no conflict of interest if a company owner had no official company responsibilities, didn't change a thing, they said. Berlusconi was still free to own as many companies as he liked as long as he didn't officially work for them. Which, of course, he never did.

his appointed *giunta*, a group of councillors called *assessori* who hold ministerial positions as heads of municipal departments. The *assessori* are appointed from the *consiglio comunale*, a body of elected officials much like a parliament.

A former member of the Democratici di Sinistra (Left Democrats) party, Veltroni has enjoyed a successful period at city hall. Dubbed 'Action Man' by *Time* magazine, he has stewarded Rome through something of a mini-Renaissance. Since he took the helm in 2001, tourism has thrived and the city has become a major cultural player. However, he's not been without his critics, many of whom accuse him of a superficial *buonismo* (good-ism), of cultivating a positive image while neglecting the grit beneath the surface.

Yet Veltroni's recipe would seem to be working, and in October 2007 he was elected leader of the new Partito Democratico (Democrat Party), the party that supporters hope will unite Italy's notoriously fractious left wing. Following his election there was debate as to whether he could continue as mayor of Rome, but with no obvious successor he saw little reason to step down and he remains in the hot seat.

Since 2005 Veltroni has enjoyed the support of Lazio's regional government under governor Piero Marrazzo. A former TV journalist and political novice, Marrazzo surprised many when he beat the far-right-winger Francesco Storace in the 2005 regional elections. In government Marrazzo has kept a fairly low profile, happy to leave the limelight to Veltroni.

A parliamentary republic, Italy is headed by a president (Presidente della Repubblica Italiana), who appoints the prime minister, known as the Presidente del Consiglio. The parliament consists of two houses – a Senate and a Chamber of Deputies – both with equal legislative power.

The president resides in Palazzo del Quirinale (p96), on Rome's Quirinale hill; the Chamber of Deputies sits in Palazzo di Montecitorio (p86), just off Via del Corso; and the Senate sits in Palazzo Madama (p80), near Piazza Navona.

At the time of writing the Italian prime minister was Romano Prodi, former president of the European Commission. He's had a tough time of it since scraping to victory in the hotly disputed 2006 general election – not so much from the Berlusconi-led opposition but from elements of his own left-wing coalition that have contested many of his financial reforms.

## MEDIA

To discuss the media in Italy is to discuss Silvio Berlusconi (see the boxed text, above), Italy's undisputed TV king. He may no longer be prime minister, but as founder and controlling shareholder of Mediaset, one half of Italy's TV duopoly, he still wields enormous power. Furthermore, as former prime minister and leader of the opposition he enjoys considerable influence over RAI, Italy's Rome-based state broadcaster. In his prime-ministerial heyday between 2001 and 2006, he was said to control up to 90% of Italy's TV output. For information on Rome's cinema scene and more on Italian television see p37.

Political interference in RAI has deep roots. Ever since it started broadcasting in 1954, it has been a highly politicised company, and still today senior appointments are based on political

considerations. In the early 2000s there was talk of a partial privatisation but efforts were half-hearted and the issue was quietly dropped in 2005.

Fortunately, there is life in the media after TV. Rome's publishing houses are often small, family-run affairs that tend to rely on government contracts or serve specialised markets, such as the academic university sector.

*La Repubblica* and *Il Messaggero* are the two major newspapers produced in Rome, along with the popular sports daily, *Corriere dello Sport*. For more information, see p293.

Rome's alternative media scene is centred on the *centri sociali* (organised squats; see p227), of which there are about 30 in and around town. For an overview of Rome's counterculture go online at [www.tmcrow.org](http://www.tmcrow.org).

## FASHION

After New York, Rome is the most fashionable city in the world. According to a list published by the Californian company Global Language Monitor (GLM), in 2007 Rome was cooler than London, Paris and Milan. However, by any criteria other than GLM's linguistic analysis, Rome falls far short of fashion superstardom.

Fashion might be a way of life here, but only in the sense that trends are followed without a second thought. Whatever the look, be it preppy smart or hip-hop street, Romans wear what their peers are wearing.

This slavish adherence to fashion isn't, of course, limited to clothes. The Smart car (see the boxed text, below) has become something of a city icon, while mobile phones continue to multiply. The sight of teenagers dexterously texting messages has become so common that some cultural commentators have claimed it's affecting their ability to write proper Italian.

Among recent US imports, one of the most unusual has been the flashmob (a gathering called together on the internet to carry out some predetermined action). In July 2003, just a month after the phenomenon premiered in New York, Rome became the first European city to organise its own flashmob. Four years on the trend is still going – in March 2007, 200 combatants met in Villa Doria Pamphilj for a mass pillow fight.

The flashmob phenomenon might not be Rome's finest hour, but it does at least show a desire to set a trend, rather than follow those set elsewhere. On the whole Rome's trendsetters look abroad and copy the foreign modes of the moment; the rest follow them first, each other second. However, unoriginal as styles may be, clothes are invariably of a high quality and worn well. Conservatism and elegance are the order of the day, even when that involves the figure-hugging styles so beloved of Italian women. Skin-tight hipsters and miniskirts may be sexy but they no longer shock; they've become mainstream.

The two big names in the world of Roman fashion are Valentino Garavani and Laura Biagiotti. Of the two, it's Valentino who's been hogging the headlines recently. In July 2007 he celebrated 45 years of *alta moda* (high fashion) with a glamorous 36-hour fashion extravaganza in Rome (see p173). Laura Biagiotti is known for her luxurious knitwear and sumptuous silk separates, often in cream and white.

Rome's major fashion event is the Alta Moda spectacle, staged in January and July in various suggestive settings.

## RETURN OF AN ICON

Twenty-two years after it went out of production, the Fiat 500 is back in fashion. But we're not talking about the old *cinquecento* (500), the classic microcar beloved of *dolce vita* Italy; this is the souped-up 21st-century version, the 'iPod of cars' as Fiat CEO Sergio Marchionne would have us believe. Launched to huge fanfare in July 2007, the car has proved an immediate hit, with 57,000 being ordered within three weeks of its launch.

This news can hardly have delighted bosses at DaimlerChrysler, producers of the Smart, the modern pretender to the *cinquecento* crown. Since 1998 the tiny two-seater Smart has sold better in Rome than anywhere else. The brainchild of Nicholas Mayek (CEO of the Swatch watch company), it suits the Roman motorist perfectly: it's fast, highly visible and, best of all, short enough to park perpendicular to the kerb. But with the exception of Italy, and Rome in particular, it hasn't really caught on. Of the 750,000 Smart cars sold worldwide until 2006, 210,000 were sold in Italy, and a staggering 50,000 of those in Rome.

## top picks

NOTABLE BUILDINGS  
& MONUMENTS

- Pantheon (p72)
- Auditorium Parco della Musica (p155)
- St Peter's Basilica (p128)
- Tempietto di Bramante (p126)
- Colosseum (p58)

labour through buried ruins. The balance between respecting the past and running the present is one that Rome's authorities struggle to maintain.

Throughout history, architecture has been set at the service of the state. Rome's ancient emperors understood only too well the power of architecture to shape reputation and built on a scale that was designed to awe. Similarly, the great Renaissance and baroque popes used marble as much as might to transform Rome into their avant-garde capital. Even today, city authorities are attempting to restore Rome to the spotlight through architecture – since the mid-1990s a number of high-profile building projects have drawn the world's top architects to Rome.

THE EARLY DAYS  
ANCIENT ROME

To a large extent early Roman architecture was inherited from the Etruscans in northern Lazio and southern Tuscany, and from the Greeks in southern Italy.

The early Romans looked to the Greeks for inspiration in designing their temples. But whereas Greek temples had steps and colonnades on all sides, the Roman versions had a high podium with steps and columns only at the front, forming a deep porch. Roman examples of this include the Tempio di Ercole Vincitore and Tempio di Portunus (p69) near Piazza della Bocca della Verità and, though not so well preserved, the temples in the Area Sacra di Largo di Torre Argentina (p73).

The Roman use of columns was also Greek in origin, even if they favoured the more slender Ionic and Corinthian columns over the plain Doric versions. To see examples of all three study the outside of the Colosseum (p58), where the columns are Doric at ground level, Ionic in the middle and Corinthian on the top.

But the early Romans' greatest architectural achievement was in perfecting existing construction techniques and using them on a hitherto unseen scale. They learnt how to build roads and bridges from the Etruscans, and used these skills to create aqueducts and arches that still impress today.

However, they weren't completely without ideas of their own, and when they invented concrete in the 1st century BC, there was no stopping Roman ingenuity. Concrete was used to roof vast areas such as the Pantheon, which boasts the largest unreinforced concrete dome in existence (see the boxed text, [opposite](#)), and the huge vaults that covered the baths in the Terme di Caracalla (p110), built in AD 217.

Concrete, however, wasn't particularly attractive, and while it was used for heavy-duty structural work it was usually lined with coloured marble and travertine, imported from Greece and North Africa. Brick was also an important material, used both as a veneer and for construction.

As Rome's power grew, so its builders became increasingly audacious. The forums developed into richly decorated public spaces dedicated to civic, religious and commercial activity. You

Spanning three thousand years of unfettered urban development, Rome's architectural legacy is unparalleled. A remarkable patchwork of styles, it combines martial ruins, medieval churches, Renaissance *palazzi* (mansions), baroque fountains and neoclassical porticoes, all interwoven with Roman roads, cobbled lanes and Fascist thoroughfares.

But while this cluttered cityscape thrills visitors, it doesn't always make life easy for locals. Commuters struggle on roads designed for medieval traffic, while residents face murderous maintenance costs to stop their *palazzi* crumbling around them. Beneath the surface, engineers working on Rome's new metro lines

need only look at the Mercati di Traiano (Trajan's Markets; p65) to realise that shopping was an important pursuit in 2nd-century Rome. To the northeast, the 13-hectare Terme di Diocleziano (p101), built in 298, became the largest baths complex in Ancient Rome.

In the 4th century, as the empire slipped into terminal decline, Constantine financed an ambitious building programme. The most notable of the many churches that the Christian-friendly emperor commissioned is the Basilica di San Giovanni in Laterano (p106). Built between 315 and 324 and reformed into its present octagonal shape in the 5th century, it was the model on which many subsequent basilicas were based. Other show stoppers of the period include the Basilica di Santa Maria in Trastevere (p121) and the Basilica di Santa Maria Maggiore (p89).

## MEDIÉVAL CHURCHES

By the 8th century Rome was firmly in the hands of the papacy, even if the papacy was far from firm itself. A pope's life was a risky one, so many took to building to leave some sort of historical imprint. The result was a flurry of church-building between the 9th and 12th centuries.

By this time churches were almost universally based on the layout of the Roman basilicas (originally a basilica was a hall for public functions). Typically these were rectangular with a flat roof and wide nave, flanked on both sides by narrow aisles. A good example is the Basilica di Santa Sabina (p115), which owes much of its current look to the 9th and 13th centuries.

Other churches dating to this period include the Chiesa di Santa Prassede (p94), built in the 9th century and famous for its spectacular mosaics, and the 8th-century Chiesa di Santa Maria in Cosmedin (p69), better known as home to the Bocca della Verità (Mouth of Truth).

The 13th and 14th centuries were dark days for Rome as internecine fighting raged between the city's noble families. While much of northern Europe and even parts of Italy were revelling in Gothic arches and towering vaults, little of lasting value was being built in Rome. The one great exception is the city's only Gothic church, the Chiesa di Santa Maria Sopra Minerva (p73).

REVAMPS  
RENAISSANCE REBUILD

Florence, rather than Rome, is generally regarded as Italy's great Renaissance city. Yet it was in the heady days of the 15th century that Rome embarked on its great makeover, a process that was to recast the city as a centre of avant-garde art and design.

It's impossible to pinpoint the exact year that the Renaissance arrived in Rome, but many claim that it was the election of Pope Nicholas V in 1447 that sparked off the artistic furore

## THE DOME THAT DEFIES THE EXPERTS

One of the city's must-see sights, the Pantheon is widely regarded as the pinnacle of Ancient Rome's architectural achievement. A solid, thick-set temple (now church), it's topped by the largest masonry vault ever built, a structure so sophisticated that no-one is quite sure why it is still standing. Had it been made with modern concrete it would have collapsed under its own weight long ago.

Supported by giant piers hidden in the main hall's 6m-thick walls, the dome was built over a temporary wooden frame onto which increasingly thin layers of concrete were poured: the concrete is 5.9m thick at the base of the dome and 1.5m at the top. This was one of the key tricks used to keep its weight to an absolute minimum.

Weight reduction was the main problem facing the Pantheon's architects. They employed various solutions, of which two were particularly ingenious. One was to circle the dome with five bands of decorative coffers (the rectangular recesses you see on the inside of the dome); the other was to modify the grade of the concrete to ensure that it was lighter at the top than at the base. The Romans invented concrete in the 1st century BC by mixing lime with pozzolana (volcanic ash from the Campi Flegrei area near Naples) and an aggregate, usually tufa rock. No-one is exactly sure of the composition used for the Pantheon, but the most credible theory is that heavy basalt was used as the aggregate at the bottom, brick or tufa in the midsection and light pumice at the top.

At the centre of the dome, the 8.7m-diameter oculus serves a dual purpose. Most obviously, it allows light into the building, but it also acts as a compression ring, absorbing and redistributing the huge structural forces centred on the dome's apex.



# top picks

## ARCHITECTURE BOOKS

- **Not Built in a Day: Exploring the Architecture of Rome**, George H Sullivan (2006) – personable and accessible guide to 12 themed walking tours
- **Rome: An Oxford Archaeological Guide**, Amanda Claridge (1998) – comprehensive, comprehensible guide to Rome's earliest monuments
- **The Genius in the Design: Bernini, Borromini and the Rivalry that Transformed Rome**, Jake Morrissey (2005) – the intriguing tale of Rome's two baroque superstars
- **Roman Art & Architecture**, Mortimer Wheeler (1985) – easy-to-carry, easy-to-read look at the city's treasures
- **Principles of Roman Architecture**, Mark Wilson Jones (2003) – considered analysis by a practising US architect

di San Pietro in Montorio, is a masterpiece of elegance. Surrounded by 16 Doric columns, it was the first building in Rome to depend entirely on the proportions of the classical orders and was the most sophisticated attempt thus far to incorporate the ideals of faith and art in a perfect temple.

Similarly harmonious is Bramante's beautifully proportioned 1504 cloister at the Chiesa di Santa Maria della Pace (p79) near Piazza Navona.

In 1506 Julius commissioned Bramante to start work on the job that would finally finish him off – the rebuilding of St Peter's Basilica (p128). The fall of Constantinople's Aya Sofya (Church of the Hagia Sofia) to Islam in the mid-14th century had pricked Nicholas V into ordering an earlier revamp, but the work had never been completed and it wasn't until Julius took the bull by the horns that progress was made. Bramante never got to see how his original Greek-cross design was developed, as he died in 1514.

St Peter's Basilica occupied most of the other notable architects of the High Renaissance, including Giuliano da Sangallo (1445–1516), Baldassarre Peruzzi (1481–1536) and Antonio da Sangallo the Younger (1484–1546). Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475–1564) eventually took over the task in 1547 and created the magnificent dome, based on Brunelleschi's design for the Duomo in Florence.

## COUNTER-REFORMATION CHURCHES

The Counter-Reformation, the Catholic Church's vicious response to the Protestant Reformation, was a turbulent time in Rome. Books were banned, freethinkers were branded heretics and tortured by the Inquisition, and the Jesuits were founded. Ironically, though, art and architecture thrived. As part of a sweeping propaganda campaign, the Church launched a costly building programme, employing architects to create huge churches to attract and overawe worshippers.

The prime example of Counter-Reformation architecture is the magnificent Chiesa del Gesù (p76), designed by the leading architect of the day, Giacomo della Porta (1533–1602). In a move away from the style of earlier Renaissance churches, the mannerist façade has pronounced architectural elements that create a contrast between surfaces and a play of light and shade. Della Porta also worked on the construction of St Peter's Basilica and designed the Palazzo della Sapienza (p80), seat of Rome's university until 1935.

that swept the city in the 15th and 16th centuries. Nicholas believed that as head of the Christian world Rome had a duty to impress, a theory that was eagerly taken up by his successors, and it was at the behest of the great papal dynasties – the Barberini, Farnese and Pamphilj – that the leading artists of the day were summoned to Rome.

The Venetian Pope Paul II (r 1464–71) commissioned many works, including the Palazzo Venezia (p68), Rome's first great Renaissance *palazzo*. Built in 1455 when Paul was still a cardinal, it was enlarged in 1464 when he became pope. Sixtus IV (r 1471–84) had the Sistine Chapel (p137) built, and enlarged the Chiesa di Santa Maria del Popolo (p154). But it was under Julius II (1503–13) that the Roman Renaissance reached its peak, thanks largely to a classically minded architect from Milan, Donato Bramante (1444–1514).

Considered the high priest of Renaissance architecture, Bramante arrived in Rome in 1499. Here, inspired by the ancient ruins, he developed a refined classical style. His 1502 Tempietto (p126), in the courtyard of the Chiesa

The end of the 16th century and the papacy of Sixtus V (1585–90) marked the beginning of major urban-planning schemes. Domenico Fontana (1543–1607) and other architects created a network of major thoroughfares to connect previously disparate parts of the sprawling medieval city, and decorative obelisks were erected at vantage points throughout Rome. Fontana also designed the main façade of Palazzo del Quirinale (p96), the immense palace that served as the pope's summer residence for almost three centuries. His nephew, Carlo Maderno (1556–1629), also worked on the *palazzo*, when not amending Bramante's designs for St Peter's Basilica.

## ARCHITECTURE AS THEATRE BAROQUE RIVALRY

No two architects did more to fashion the face of central Rome than the two undisputed maestros of Roman baroque: Francesco Borromini (1599–1667) and his chief adversary Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1598–1680). Two starkly different characters – Naples-born Bernini was smooth and charismatic, while Borromini, from Lombardy, was difficult and depressive – they led the transition from Counter-Reformation rigour to baroque exuberance.

Bernini is perhaps best known for his work in the Vatican. He designed Piazza San Pietro (p133), famously styling the colonnade as 'the motherly arms of the Church', and was chief architect at St Peter's Basilica from 1629. While working on the basilica, he designed towers for Carlo Maderno's façade (which were structurally problematic and later demolished) and created the baldachin (altar canopy) above the main altar, using bronze stripped from the Pantheon.

Under the patronage of the Barberini pope Urban VIII, Bernini was given free rein to transform the face of the city, and his churches, *palazzi*, piazzas and fountains remain landmarks to this day. However, his fortunes nose-dived when the pope died in 1644. Urban's successor, Innocent X, wanted as little contact as possible with the favourites of his hated predecessor and instead turned to Borromini, Alessandro Algardi (1595–1654), and Girolamo and Carlo Rainaldi (1570–1655 and 1611–91, respectively).

The son of an architect and well versed in stone masonry and construction techniques, Borromini created buildings involving complex shapes and exotic geometry. A recurring feature of his designs is the skilful manipulation of light, often obtained by the clever placement of small oval-shaped windows. His most memorable works are the Chiesa di San Carlo alle Quattro Fontane (1638–41; p96), which has an oval-shaped interior, and the Chiesa di Sant'Ivo alla Sapienza (p80), which combines a complex arrangement of convex and concave surfaces with an innovative spiral tower.

Bernini came back into favour with his magnificent design for the 1651 Fontana dei Quattro Fiumi in the centre of Piazza Navona (p78), opposite Borromini's Chiesa di Sant'Agnese in Agone.

Like Michelangelo, Bernini thought of himself first and foremost as a sculptor, and his best-known works fall somewhere between sculpture and architecture. He was responsible for the tombs of Urban VIII and Alexander VII in St Peter's Basilica and the angels on Ponte Sant'Angelo (p139), as well as the 1658 Chiesa di Sant'Andrea al Quirinale (p96).

Carlo Fontana (1634–1714), the most popular architect at the tail end of the baroque era, also designed various palaces and churches, including the portico of the Basilica di Santa Maria in Trastevere (p121).

## ROCCO FRILLS

In the early days of the 18th century, as baroque fashions began to fade and neoclassicism waited to make its 19th-century entrance, the rococo burst into theatrical life. Drawing on the excesses of the baroque, it was a short-lived fad but one that left a memorable mark.

The Spanish Steps (p99), built between 1723 and 1726 by Francesco de Sanctis, provided a focal point for the many Grand Tourists who were busy discovering Rome's classical past. A short walk to the southwest, Piazza Sant'Ignazio was designed by Filippo Raguzzini (1680–1771) in 1728, to provide the Chiesa di Sant'Ignazio di Loyola (p86), Rome's second Jesuit church, with a suitably melodramatic setting.

Most spectacular of all, however, was the Trevi Fountain (p98), one of the city's most exuberant and enduringly popular monuments. It was designed in 1732 by Nicola Salvi (1697–1751) and completed three decades later.

## ROME, CAPITAL OF ITALY

### POSTUNIFICATION MODERNISATION

After more than a thousand years of direct papal control, in 1870 Rome found itself capital of the new Kingdom of Italy. To meet the challenges of its new role widespread changes were required: houses were needed for the new army of bureaucrats and the city's infrastructure was in dire need of an upgrade. New piazzas were built – Piazza Vittorio Emanuele II (p95), at the centre of a new upmarket residential district, and neoclassical Piazza della Repubblica (p101), over Diocletian's bath complex – and roads were laid. Via Nazionale and Via Cavour were constructed to link the city centre with the new railway station, Stazione Termini, and Corso Vittorio Emanuele II to connect Piazza Venezia with the Vatican. To celebrate unification and pander to the ego of the ruling Savoy family, the Vittoriano monument (p68) was built between 1885 and 1911, much to the disgust of the Roman population.

Fortunately there was still time for flights of fancy, such as the wonderfully frivolous Art Nouveau *palazzi* of the Coppede district (see p149), before Mussolini and the Fascists bulldozed their way into power.

### MUSSOLINI, EUR & POSTWAR BLUES

A shrewd manipulator of imagery, Mussolini was keen that Fascist Rome should become a modern city worthy of its imperial past. To this end he embarked on a series of grandiose building projects, including the 1928–31 Foro Italico sports centre (p155) and his most famous architectural legacy, the EUR district (p117).

For years EUR has been overlooked by serious architects, who have been reluctant to take on the area's political ghosts. However, in recent years, sensibilities have changed and EUR is now being revalued as an architectural phenomenon. At the centre of the debate is superstar architect Massimiliano Fuksas, who has gone on record as saying that EUR is modern Rome's most important landmark.

Built for the Esposizione Universale di Roma in 1942, this strange quarter of wide boulevards and huge linear buildings owes much of its look to the 1920s *razionalisti* (rationalists). Their architectural vision – a mix of functionalism and classical elegance – appealed to Mussolini, who commissioned them to design his new quarter. However, by this stage most of the group had fallen out with the ruling junta and only one of their number, Adalberto Libera, actually worked on the project. His Palazzo dei Congressi remains a masterpiece of rationalist architecture.

For much of the postwar period architects in Rome were limited to planning cheap housing for the city's ever-growing population. Swathes of hideous apartment blocks were built along the city's main arteries and grim suburbs sprang up on land claimed off local farmers.

The 1960 Olympics heralded a spate of sporting construction, and both Stadio Flaminio (p240) and Stadio Olimpico (p240) date to this period. Pier Luigi Nervi, Italy's master of concrete, added his contribution in the form of the Palazzetto dello Sport.

### CONTEMPORARY ROME

You'd never know it by walking the city's history-filled streets, but contemporary architecture is thriving in the capital. In the past decade a clutch of superstar architects have completed projects in Rome or won commissions for daring new buildings. These include Italy's top architect, Renzo Piano; renowned American Richard Meier; Zaha Hadid, the first woman to win the Pritzker Prize (architecture's equivalent of the Nobel); and Dutch legend Rem Koolhaas. Out in EUR, work is under way on Massimiliano Fuksas' cutting-edge Centro Congressi Italia.

The foundations of this building boom date to the early 1990s. When Francesco Rutelli became mayor in 1993, Italy was in the midst of the Tangentopoli corruption scandal (see p28). A period of collective slate-wiping and conscience-cleansing, it was exactly the right time, reasoned Rutelli, to revamp Rome. Inspired by Barcelona's successful makeover for the 1992 Olympic Games, he began to clean up the *centro storico* (historic centre) and, in 1995, commissioned the city centre's first new building in 60 years.

Predictably, Richard Meier's plans for a state-of-the-art museum for the Ara Pacis Augustae (p85) caused controversy. Among the most vociferous opponents was Vittorio Sgarbi, an outspoken art critic and politician, who claimed that the American's design was the first step to globalising Rome's unique classical heritage. In fact, Meier's glass-and-steel design represented little more than the natural progression of architect Vittorio Morpurgo's 1930s shell that already encased the altar. The museum was finally inaugurated in 2006 in a blaze of publicity and muted reactions. While most Romans appreciated the idea of introducing modern architecture to the city centre, few were entirely convinced by Meier's design.

Ironically, Meier won far more acclaim for a second project, his Chiesa Dio Padre Misericordioso (p104) in Tor Tre Teste, an unexceptional suburb east of the city centre. Another religious project that won widespread applause was Paolo Portoghesi's postmodern mosque (p156), opened in 1995 in the upmarket Parioli district.

Back nearer the centre, Renzo Piano's Auditorium Parco della Musica (p155) has had a huge impact on Rome's music and cultural scene. Piano, the man behind the Centre Pompidou in Paris, the Kansai terminal at Osaka airport and the wind tunnel at Ferrari's Maranello headquarters, is one of two Italian architects who can genuinely claim international celebrity status. The other is Massimiliano Fuksas.

Born in Rome in 1944, Fuksas is known for his futuristic vision, and while he has no signature building as such, his design for EUR's Centro Congressi Italia comes as close as any to embodying his style. A rectangular 30m-high glass shell containing a 3500-sq-metre steel-and-Teflon cloud supported by steel ribs and suspended over a vast conference hall, its look is fearlessly modern. Yet it's not without its references to the past: in both scale and form it owes its inspiration to the 1930s rationalist architecture that surrounds it in Mussolini's futuristic quarter. Construction work started on the project in March 2006 and is expected to take at least three years.

Work also continues, albeit slowly, on two modern art galleries. Within a few blocks of Piano's auditorium, the new Museo Nazionale delle Arti del XXI Secolo (MAXXI; p155) has been beset by money problems and progresses slowly. Conceived by Zaha Hadid, its glass-and-concrete

### THE REALITY BEHIND THE GLOSS

Eager to drag Rome into the 21st century, the city authorities have been enthusiastically commissioning top international architects to spice up the cityscape. But with the exception of Massimiliano Fuksas not one of them is Roman, and of the others only Genoan Renzo Piano is Italian. So what is the reality behind the gloss? What is life really like for Rome's young architects? Architects Raniero and Stephanie Santini explain:

'The situation is tragic. Everybody wants to leave, to go to Germany, Spain or the US. With 17,000 registered architects in Rome it's obvious that there's a limited amount of work to go round. Also other countries offer much more chance to experiment. Architecturally, Rome is very static; they just want to keep everything as it is. There's little modern work done and that which there is always done by the same companies. Young architects in Rome [both Raniero and Stephanie are in their early 30s] are not very happy. The fact is that if you're not over 60 they simply don't trust you.'

'Another problem is the bureaucracy. One of the reasons why foreigners don't invest here is that there's never any guarantee as to how long a project will take. Or how much it will cost. What happens, for example, if you find Roman ruins while you're building?'

On a more positive note, they comment on some of the capital's better-known buildings.

'My favourite building is the Pantheon,' says Stephanie. 'From a construction point of view it's fascinating. The techniques they used were so cutting-edge and the oculus in the dome is quite unique. When you enter it's quite breathtaking.'

Raniero continues: 'I really like the Auditorium, one of Rome's few modern buildings. It's got a really original shape and the surface is unusual. It's lined with a mix of zinc and lead, which over time whitens. Some people think this is a mistake, but actually Renzo Piano wanted it that way.'

'A *palazzo* that I think is really underrated is Palazzo del Quirinale. The piazza outside is specially beautiful at sunset when the light is wonderful.'

But while Rome's cityscape is unique, many of its problems are not. Ageism is not a uniquely Roman issue, or indeed one limited to architecture. Italy's population is an elderly one and, with unemployment high in many parts of the country, young people often struggle to break into the professions.

design has won many plaudits for the way it incorporates galleries in and around a former army barracks.

Similarly ambitious is Odile Decq's Museo d'Arte Contemporanea di Roma (MACRO; p157). The fundamental idea behind the French architect's design is the breaking down of barriers between the museum and the area that surrounds it. This finds its most dramatic expression in the multilevel rooftop garden.

On the other side of the centre, on Via Ostiense, Rome's former wholesale markets are being overhauled to a design by Dutch architect and Harvard professor Rem Koolhaas. When work is finished, Rome will have a spanking-new arts and retail centre.

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