



Italy

Part 9

*Rome -
The Forum &
Colosseum*

June 20, 2015



June 20, 2015 - We met our next guide, Vittorio, who led us on a walking tour of ancient Rome to the Roman Forum and the Colosseum. We began right near our hotel in Piazza Venezia. The building on the right in the piazza is where Mussolini lived and gave most of his speeches from that center balcony to the people in the square.

We walked past the huge monument to Venice and around to the side.





Just on that next block away from our hotel was so many remnants of ancient Rome. We were told that some of it was recently uncovered when they were going to dig for another subway line. Of course, they stopped with the subway construction and began archeological digs. There's still so much uncovered ruins because over many centuries the modern city of Rome was built over the old ruins. We first came upon this area called Trajan's Forum.









The blue tiles on this area are actually not ancient. Over the years before they started preserving the ruins, people just built their houses within some of the old ruins because floors and walls were already there, so it was easier to just building upon those foundations.





A statue of Julius Caesar.





Our guide, Vittorio, who was educated in art history and archeology, told us he was taking us in this basilica not so much to see the church but to show us something else.



It opened to a courtyard
where we then entered the
church through a door.



At the back of the church was a window. Through the window you could look below to see the old part of Rome underneath the church. The door we went through was a new door, and below was an old entrance.





An old fresco on the wall.

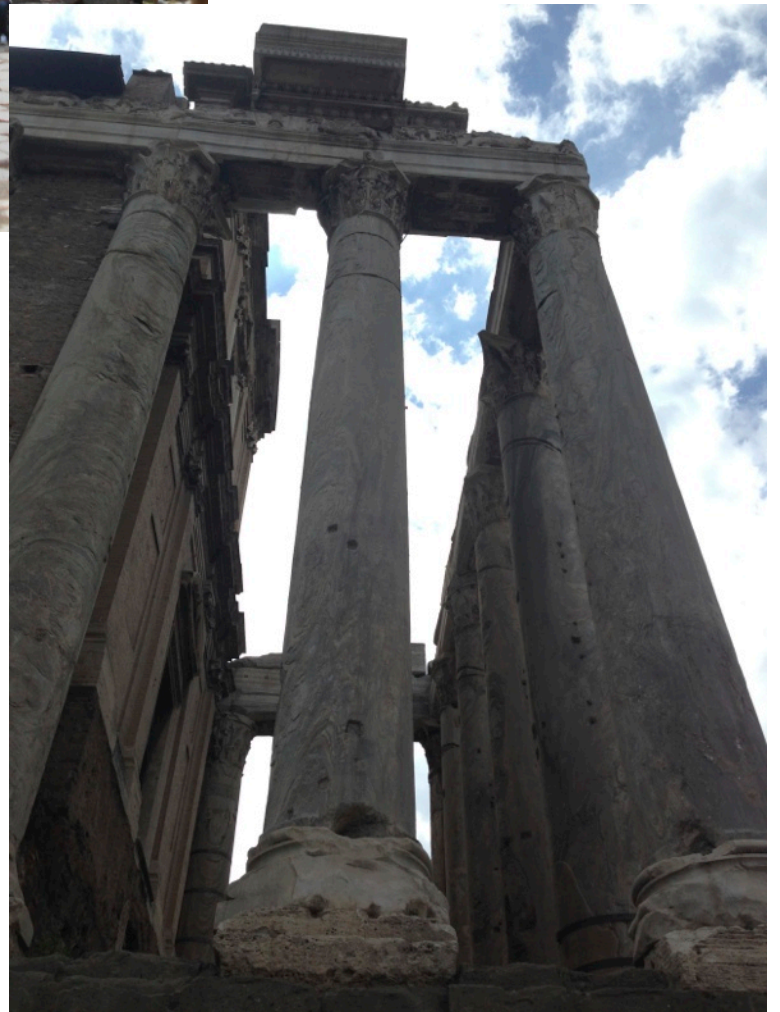
I took the photo of the leaf below, as Vittorio explained that the column in the right photo was Corinthian style, and it was actually inspired by this particular type of leaf.





The Roman Forum.



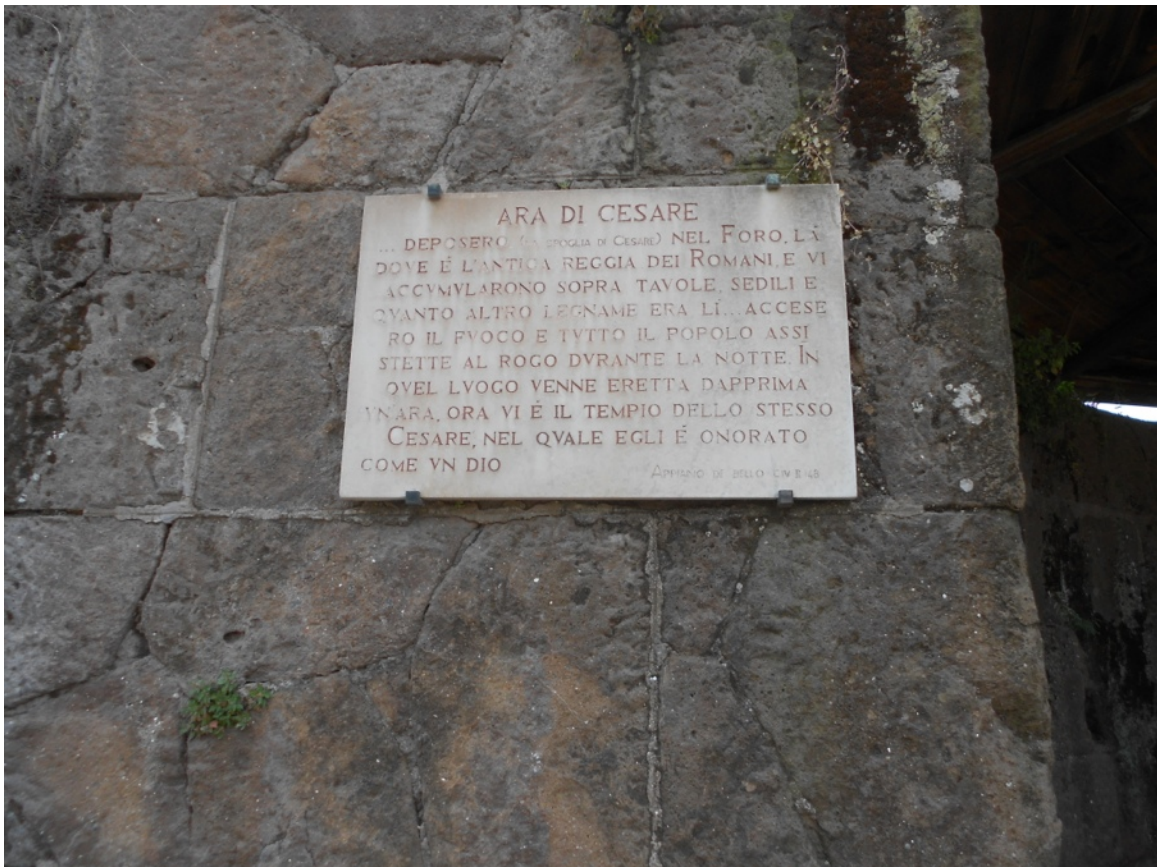








Within the Roman Forum was this sign showing the place where Julius Caesar was cremated after he was assassinated.



Where Julius Caesar was cremated.







We saw the temple and the house of the Vestal Virgins. Among other tasks they were in charge of making sure the sacred fire was always burning.

TEMPIO DI VESTA

Parzialmente ricostruito nel Novecento, il tempio è legato ad uno dei culti più antichi e importanti di Roma. In esso le vergini Vestali custodivano il fuoco sacro, che doveva restare perennemente acceso, in quanto simbolo della forza vitale della città. Era severamente vietato agli uomini – tranne al Pontefice Massimo – accedere all'interno. Del tempio resta il podio, sul quale si elevavano colonne; il monumento circolare fu più volte ricostruito. Quanto oggi resta risale all'età di Settimio Severo, che restaurò la struttura dopo l'incendio del 191 d.C.

TEMPLE OF VESTA

Partially reconstructed in the 20th century, the temple is linked to one of Rome's most ancient and most important cults. Here the Vestal Virgins tended the sacred fire which was to burn perpetually as a symbol of the city's life force. Men – with the exception of the Pontifex Maximus – were severely prohibited from entering. All that remains of the temple is the podium on which the columns stood; the circular monument was reconstructed on several occasions. The current remains date to the period of Septimius Severus, who restored the building after the fire in AD 191.



The garden of the Vestal Virgins where there are statues depicting some of them.





The sign above translates as the house of the Vestal and a headless statue of one of them in the garden.





Somewhere around here Vittorio led us to an out of the way public restroom after we walked through old buildings and hallways. Most of the public wouldn't be able to find it without a local guide, so there were no long lines. I can't remember but it was probably what Anna and I referred to as a "squatter." A lot of public restrooms and even some in restaurants don't have toilet seats, so you have to squat over them!





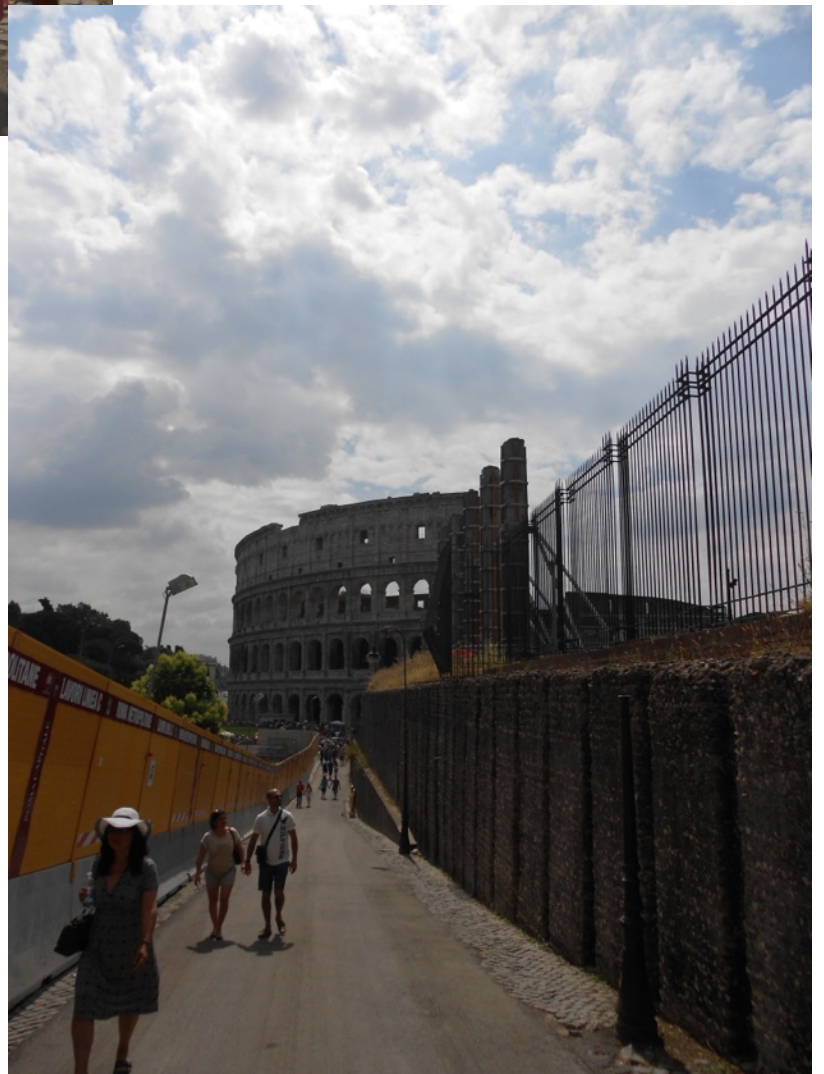
By the look on my face I might have been thinking..."How many more old ruins do we have to see?" Like you're probably thinking while looking at these travel journals. But not really, as Anna and I really enjoyed the depth of information by our very well educated and interesting guides. Today's guide, Vittorio, was actually a professor at a Parisian college in the winter and led the guided tours in Rome in the summer. He explained that there are people passing themselves off as guides who are uneducated and not professionals. Our travel agency WAC Travel really hooked us up with great guides.

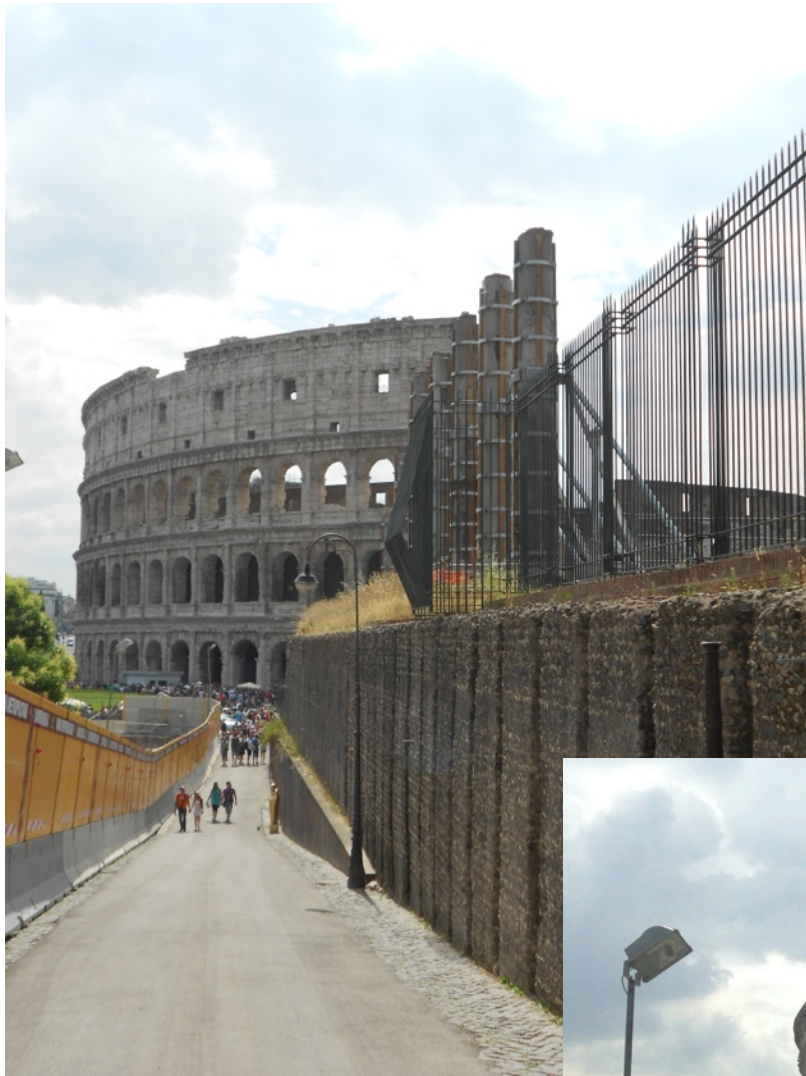






We then walked a few more blocks to the Colosseum. That's Vittorio in the blue shirt and Anna walking in front of me, as I snapped this first photo of seeing it for the first time.





I had to get the traditional tourist shot of me actually standing with the Colosseum in the background.







More horses and carriages waiting outside to try to catch the tourists' eye for a ride. Those masks and hats for the horses sure caught my eye, as they even cover their ears from all the noise of the thousands of tourists gathering there each day.





What is best about having the guided tours is not only the knowledge they impart, but the fact that you can bypass the long tourist lines and get in sooner. However, there still was a bit of a line for us to inch our way in even with the privilege of jumping the regular line. Vittorio warned us about pickpockets in such close quarters with a bunch of strangers. I had bought a travel cross body bag that was slash proof and RFID proof with little clips to sort of lock the zippers, so I snapped the clips and also held onto my purse until we moved through the crunch of the crowd.

One of the first things we saw was this cross. The very well educated professor Vittorio explained that it was put there more recently to honor what people believe was the execution of Christians in the arena. However, he said there is no real archeological or historical evidence that large groups of Christians were martyred here. I then said, "It's just the stuff of Hollywood movies." And he nodded, yes.





Vittorio went on to explain that gladiators did fight various types of exotic and fierce animals in the arena. It was staged like modern theater with scenery and sets with things like trees, etc. He pointed out where the scenery was kept and how it was moved into the arena and also where the animals were locked up until released into the arena. There was a wooden platform like a stage over those arches in the photo to the right. Underneath was like the dressing room of the theater!









l'area di rispetto dell'anfiteatro

All'esterno dell'Anfiteatro era un'area di rispetto pedonale larga circa 17 metri, pavimentata in blocchi di travertino e delimitata da cippi nello stesso materiale. La pavimentazione si conserva in più punti: due porzioni, e parti della contigua strada basolata, sono visibili lungo il versante orientale; cinque cippi sono ancora nella posizione originaria, collocati a distanze regolari lungo il perimetro dell'area di rispetto, infissi direttamente nel terreno, senza fondazioni. L'inclinazione degli esemplari conservatisi in direzione del monumento è dovuta alla spinta esercitata dagli interri retrostanti formatisi in età postantica. I cippi separavano la via pubblica dallo spazio pedonale e svolgevano funzione di barriera per contenere la folla che si accalcava in prossimità delle entrate dell'Anfiteatro. Sono infatti tuttora visibili 4 fori, uno sulla sommità e tre sul fronte verso il monumento, utili all'ancoraggio di due catene o sbarre orizzontali collegate al cippo successivo tramite una barra verticale intermedia infissa nel lastricato di travertino della platea, come mostrano i fori di alloggiamento ancora esistenti.

In assenza di spettacoli, l'Anfiteatro era chiuso da una duplice fila di cancelli inseriti tra le arcate del I ordine.

L'area di rispetto fu scoperta nel 1895 durante lavori di sterro attuati intorno all'Anfiteatro. Dopo gli scavi il piano pavimentale esterno al Colosseo risultò a quota più alta rispetto al lastricato originale; l'accentuato dislivello tra la Valle e la sopraltante viabilità fu colmato attraverso la creazione di terrapieni erbosi rinsaldati nel 1908 da muri di contenimento. Negli anni '30 del XX secolo la Valle fu ricoperta da un piano di asfalto funzionale al traffico veicolare.

Gli interventi più recenti, quali la pedonalizzazione dell'area (1979-81), la rimozione del piano di asfalto sostituito da sampietrini (2000) e il ripristino delle quote originarie dei piani di calpestio esterno e interno dell'Anfiteatro (2007-2009), hanno reso finalmente percepibile il legame di continuità tra l'edificio, la sua originaria area di rispetto e l'area archeologica del Foro-Palatino.

the precinct surrounding the amphitheatre

Outside the Amphitheatre was a surrounding pedestrian precinct about 17 metres wide, paved in blocks of travertine and demarcated by slabs of the same material. The paving is preserved in several places: two portions, and parts of the contiguous basalt street are visible along the eastern side; five slabs are still in their original position, placed at regular distances along the perimeter of the precinct area, fixed directly into the ground without foundations. The examples preserved slope in the direction of the monument because of the earth at the back which accumulated in the late antique period. These slabs separated the public road from the pedestrian area and performed the function of a barrier to contain the crowd which thronged round the entrances of the Amphitheatre. Indeed, 4 holes are still visible, one at the top and three on the front towards the monument, used to fasten two chains or horizontal bars connected to the next slab by means of an intermediate vertical bar fixed into the travertine slabs of the paving, as shown by the fastening holes which still exist.

When no shows were being put on, the Amphitheatre was closed by a double row of gates within the arcades of the ground floor.

The surrounding precinct area was discovered in 1895 during excavation works inside the Amphitheatre. After the excavations the external ground level outside the Colosseum appeared to be on a higher level than the original pavement; the marked difference in level between the Valley and the roads above it was filled in by creating grassy embankments, reinforced in 1908 by containing walls. In the 1930s the Valley was covered by a layer of asphalt to form a road for traffic.

The most recent interventions, such as the pedestrianization of the area (1979-81), the removal of the asphalt and its replacement by cobbles (2000) and the restoration of the original floor levels both outside and inside the Amphitheatre (2007-2009), have finally established the link of continuity between the building, the original surrounding precinct area and the archaeological area of the Forum-Palatine.

Il Colosseo e l'area di rispetto nella ricostruzione di Ciro Nisfi-Landi (grazie a: Al. Savio, Archivio SSBAO)

The Colosseum and the surrounding precinct in the reconstruction by Ciro Nisfi-Landi (first half of the 20th)

Depiction of the original look of the Colosseum.





One of the many tunnels leading in.



Vittorio was able to get us to go up in the elevator rather than climb the stairs...a-hem...due to our age! Up there he pointed out this diagram of what it once looked like filled with people.





The white seats seen in the right photo is where the privileged "senators" sat.



Wow...this old ruin is making us look pretty young!







Since it was Saturday, Vittorio suggested that we should try to see the Colonna Palace, which was located right around the corner from our hotel. Apparently we lucked out, as it was only open for tours on Saturdays. He was also very nice to drive us in our car right to the Palace since he was going that way. It saved us from walking or having to take a taxi. We gave him a nice tip!



