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DISCOVER ROMAN FLORENCE

The colony the Romans named Florentia was founded by Julius Caesar himself as a military camp. Around the "castrum" all the typical Roman buildings were constructed in the first and second centuries AD. Due to its bellicose origin, the city was blessed by the God Mars, who was the first Patron Saint of Florence.

Tradition states that *Florentia* was founded in 59 BC by **Gaius Julius Caesar** for precise political and strategic reasons: **Fiesole** had been a haven for catilinarians and the Roman general wanted an outpost to control the access to and from the area. The original Roman military camp was basically a square subdivided by seven streets on the north-south axis, intersected by five streets on the east-west axis. Florence's position near the *Via Cassia* and within the **Valley of the River Arno** helped the new Roman settlement to flourish and to quickly become an important trade centre. In the first and second centuries AD, a **bridge**, an **aqueduct**, a **forum**, the **baths**, a **theatre** and an **amphitheatre** were added to the city.

The perimeter of the Roman colony can still be noticed in today's maps; in fact, you can clearly see the nucleus of the first agglomeration with the orthogonal streets intersected by the *cardo* and the *decumanus*, now identifiable in *Via Strozzi*, *Via del Corso* and *Via degli Speziali* (which cut the city centre from west to east) and *Via Roma* and *Via Calimala* (which cut it from north to south).

Florence had an extraordinary development in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance and for this reason not many Roman monuments survive today; however, the **remains of the baths** and an ancient **textile center** were discovered under **Piazza della Signoria**, next to the downhill street heading towards **Piazza San Firenze** (*Via dè Gondi*), where it is likely that the **theatre** was situated. The most recognizable monument of the Roman period is the **amphitheatre** which, even if engulfed by Medieval buildings, still maintains its elliptical form (*Via Torta*).

Contrary to what you may think, almost all the Roman Archeological exhibits in Florence derive from Rome: the **statues** of the **Loggia dei Lanzi**, the **Uffizi Gallery**, the **Pitti Palace** and the **Boboli Gardens** all come from the Eternal City and were brought to Florence during the reign of the Medici and the Lorena.

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