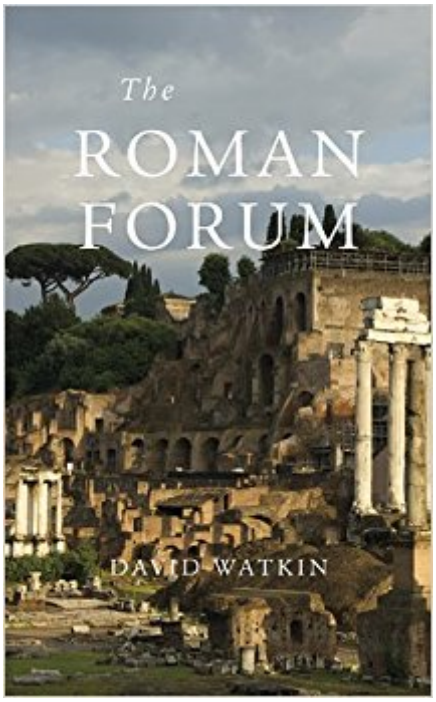
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The Roman Forum (Wonders Of The World)



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Synopsis

One of the most visited sites in Italy, the Roman Forum is also one of the best-known wonders of the Roman world. Though a highpoint on the tourist route around Rome, for many visitors the site can be a baffling disappointment. Several of the monuments turn out to be nineteenth- or twentieth-century reconstructions, while the rubble and the holes made by archaeologists have an unclear relationship to the standing remains, and, to all but the most skilled Romanists, the Forum is an unfortunate mess.David Watkin sheds completely new light on the Forum, examining the roles of the ancient remains while revealing what exactly the standing structures embodyÃ¢â ¬â ¢including the rarely studied medieval, Renaissance, and Baroque churches, as well as the nearby monuments that have important histories of their own. Watkin asks the reader to look through the veneer of archaeology to rediscover the site as it was famous for centuries. This involves offering a remarkable and engaging new vision of a well-visited, if often misunderstood, wonder. It will be enjoyed by readers at home and serve as a guide in the Forum.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Offers a compact but comprehensive course, intended for sophisticated history buffs and travelers, on the history of the Forum...To help the tourist avoid confusion, Watkin embarks on a detailed tour of the place, revealing which structures--or, rather, portions of structures--are truly left from ancient Rome and which have been additions built over the course of the years since the fall of the Roman Empire. Systematic, knowledgeable, and even enthusiastic: just the formula to completely engage

the reader wanting to know more about ancient Rome. (Brad Hooper Booklist 2009-09-15)For a walk through the Forum both in space and history, choose David Watkin's The Roman Forum...There are many books on Rome, but few as deeply urbane. (Tom D'Evelyn Providence Journal 2009-11-15)Edited by classicist Mary Beard, The Wonders of the World book series from Harvard University Press offers architecturally oriented views of various sites, ranging from the Alhambra to the Parthenon to St. Peters. The attractive books are hand-sized, cloth-bound, and illustrated with maps, photographs, engravings, and elevations, making them ideal for the armchair traveler. (Architectural Record 2009-12-01)[Watkin] treats readers to an incisive and insightful history of the Forum with a focus on its evolution following the fall of the Roman Empire. In The Roman Forum, he deftly illuminates the fascinating changes that this once sacred space has undergone in the last millennium, and argues that our modern perception of the Forum, dictated by archaeological pursuits, tends to obscure those aspects of the Forum that are truly impressive. The Roman Forum is the latest entry in the Wonders of the World series from Harvard University Press, which provides in-depth, scholarly explorations of very specific subjects like the Rosetta stone or the Coliseum. Watkin's work in this volume is clearly a labor of love; his sincere appreciation for the Forum and for classical architecture at large is evident, and his expertise helps render an easily navigable portrait of the Forum in four dimensions. He traces the shifting attitudes and pivotal events that have shaped the Roman Forum from late antiquity, through the Middle Ages, all the way to the present day. (Michael Patrick Brady popmatters.com 2009-12-16)Though not strictly modern--well, not modern at all, really--the Wonders of the World series of books from Harvard Universtiy Press remains my favorite ongoing run of architectural tomes. Classicist Mary Beard is the series editor, and each of these trim volumes takes up the subject of a particular building. Ranging from Stonehenge to the Parthenon to the Temple of Jerusalem, imagine these scholarly works as biographies of buildings...[You should] race to add the newly released Roman Forum and Piazza San Marco to your collection...The well-illustrated little book traces the Forum from antiquity to today, and serves as an able roadmap to the historical eras and ideologies written across what may have been the most striking expression of Roman architecture. Popes, plunderers and preservationists all play roles in this book, and it's an ideal stocking stuffer for those who take their architecture with a solid dose of intellectual rigor. And that the book will tuck nicely into a blazer pocket is only a welcome bonus... Be sure to pick up the entire set yourself. I'm awfully glad I've got mine, and can't wait to tuck into the next one. (Aaron Britt Dwell.com 2009-12-15)An entertaining combination of travel guide, history and polemic. (Francis X. Rocca Wall Street Journal 2011-03-26)

David Watkin is Emeritus Professor of the History of Architecture at the University of Cambridge.

Historical survey of the Roman Forum site from Antiquity to the modern age. Unlike most other books concerning the site, this book traces in great detail the post-classical history of the site and its buildings.The archaeological exploration and partial reconstructions of some of the buildings are also covered extensively but the architectural aspect is not. The author relies too much on Piranesi as a guide and injects too many of his own opinions concerning archaeologists and their impacts on the forum for my taste. Book construction for edition printed in the United States: The book is cloth bound and is printed on alkaline paper. Unfortunately the pages are adhesive bound-not sewn as are other books in the series (The Parthenon, The Colosseum, etc.)

The book attempts to peel back the layers of the Roman forum to give the reader an understanding of what can be seen there today. The current forum is largely the result of attempts to wipe out changes made after the classical period and return the space to some idealized version of its ancient self. In their own way these changes have been as destrcutive as any force, and make it that much more difficult to appreciate the forum. These efforts fail to appreciate the forum’s fifteen hundred years (or so) of history after the fall of Rome. This book is a great complement to the Oxford Archeological Guide to Rome.

This slim volume is packed with information that is indispensable for the serious visitor to the forum. It reveals which structures were destroyed in recent decades to create the forum as we now see it, and how others were created more or less arbitrarily in the 1930s. It is especially interesting with regard to the Senate building, which was until the past century hidden within a Baroque church, and thus preserved. The bare brick of the interior does not reflect what was undoubtedly a rich marble wall. You will see the forum in a somewhat different light but be sure to take the book with you to work with it on site.

I agree with what has been said in the other reviews: Watkin provides an unusual and mostly fascinating approach to the Roman Forum with elegant descriptions of the main ancient and Christian monuments. His account of the post-empire fate of the forum is unusually rich, answering the curiosity I suspect many visitors have upon encountering the site as to how it came to look the way it does today. A historical account of the making of ruins is destined to be tinged by regret--what if the forum had not been used as a quarry a mere 500 years ago? And there is no

doubt that the Forum like Pompeii and other sites excavated in the early years of archaeology (otherwise known as treasure-hunting) suffered for it and that subsequent decisions, especially the indiscriminate clearing away of buildings during the Fascist era, was overall a tragedy. But Watkin's obsessive harping on the damage 'archaeologists' as a category have done to the aesthetics of the Forum gets old and, given his own excitement about each new discovery and reliance upon archaeological evidence, is self-contradictory. I agree that the aesthetics of the Forum should be improved, especially in the cases of the imperial forii. Instead of the endless griping, it would have been nice if Watkin reigned it in a bit and maybe even made some positive suggestions of how best to balance the needs of preservation and aesthetics. However, the griping about archaeologists is more irritant than a deficiency and I strongly recommend the book for anyone interested in a fuller history of teh Forum.

As another reviewer noted, a considerable portion of the book consists of attacks on and laments about the activities of "the archaeologists." By the end, one might be pardoned for thinking the Vandals themselves must have been valued and considerate house guests in comparison.It is sad that some of the post-antique churches in and near the forum have been cleared. But at the same time, Watkins often seems to miss the point that the goal of archaeology isn't really to promote an aesthetic agenda or preserve a particular Baroque or Romanesque facade at any cost. Archaeology is about systematically analyzing and cataloging the remains left by previous civilizations in the attempt to fill in significant gaps in our knowledge of them. This is not to say mistakes were not made methodologically, particularly in the Nineteenth Century and while Rome was under fascist control. However, just to name one example, excavating the Forum down to the ancient level (even at the cost of removing a row of Renaissance elm trees that had been planted right over it) was not one of them. Complaining that many of the remains found are not particularly "attractive" or that the casual visitor to the Forum might not know what the Lacus Curtius is misses the point entirely.However, the book has much to recommend it, not the least of which is that it pays significant attention to the post-antique history of the Forum -- a subject broached in passing (if at all) in practically every other source of which I am aware. Historians, art historians, architects, and yes even those uncouth archaeologists all need to know much more about this. I am not aware of any better concise source for it, and it filled some shameful gaps in my knowledge of the site.

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