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978-0-521-19244-6 - The Roman Forum: A Reconstruction and Architectural Guide

Gilbert J. Gorski &amp; James E. Packer

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# THE ROMAN FORUM

## A RECONSTRUCTION AND ARCHITECTURAL GUIDE

The Roman Forum was in many ways the heart of the Roman Empire. Today, the Forum exists in a fragmentary state, having been destroyed and plundered over the past two millennia. Enough remains, however, for archaeologists to reconstruct its spectacular buildings and monuments. This richly illustrated volume provides an architectural history of the central section of the Roman Forum during the empire (31 BCE–476 CE), from the Temple of Julius Caesar to the monuments on the slope of the Capitoline Hill. Bringing together state-of-the-art technology in architectural illustration and the expertise of a prominent Roman archaeologist, this book offers a unique reconstruction of the Forum, providing architectural history, a summary of each building’s excavation and research, scaled digital plans, elevations, and reconstructed aerial images that not only shed light on the Forum’s history but also vividly bring it to life.

With this book, scholars, students, architects, and artists will be able to visualize for the first time since antiquity the character, design, and appearance of the architecture in the famous heart of ancient Rome.

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James E. Packer is emeritus professor of classics at Northwestern University. He is the author of the three-volume *The Forum of Trajan in Rome* (1997); of numerous articles in journals, including the *American Journal of Archaeology*, the *Journal of Roman Archaeology*, the *Bullettino della Commissione Archeologica Comunale di Roma*, the *Maryland Historian*, *Natural History*, *Croniche Pompeiane*, *Technology and Culture*, *Curator*, *Inland Architect*, *Archeo*, and *Archaeology*; and of articles in collections, including the *Lexicon Topographicum Urbis Romae* (1993–2000). He is the recipient of many grants, including from the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, the Getty Grant Program, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. He has excavated at Pompeii, in the Forum of Trajan (Rome), and in the Theater of Pompey (Rome). “The Forum of Trajan” exhibition at the opening of the new Getty Museum in Los Angeles (1997) was based on Packer’s work.



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*Frontispiece. The authors, Professors Gorski (l.) and Packer (r.), discuss the architecture of the Roman Forum overlooking the site from a pavilion in the Domus Tiberiana on the Palatine Hill. (G. Gorski)*



THE  
ROMAN  
FORUM

A RECONSTRUCTION AND ARCHITECTURAL GUIDE



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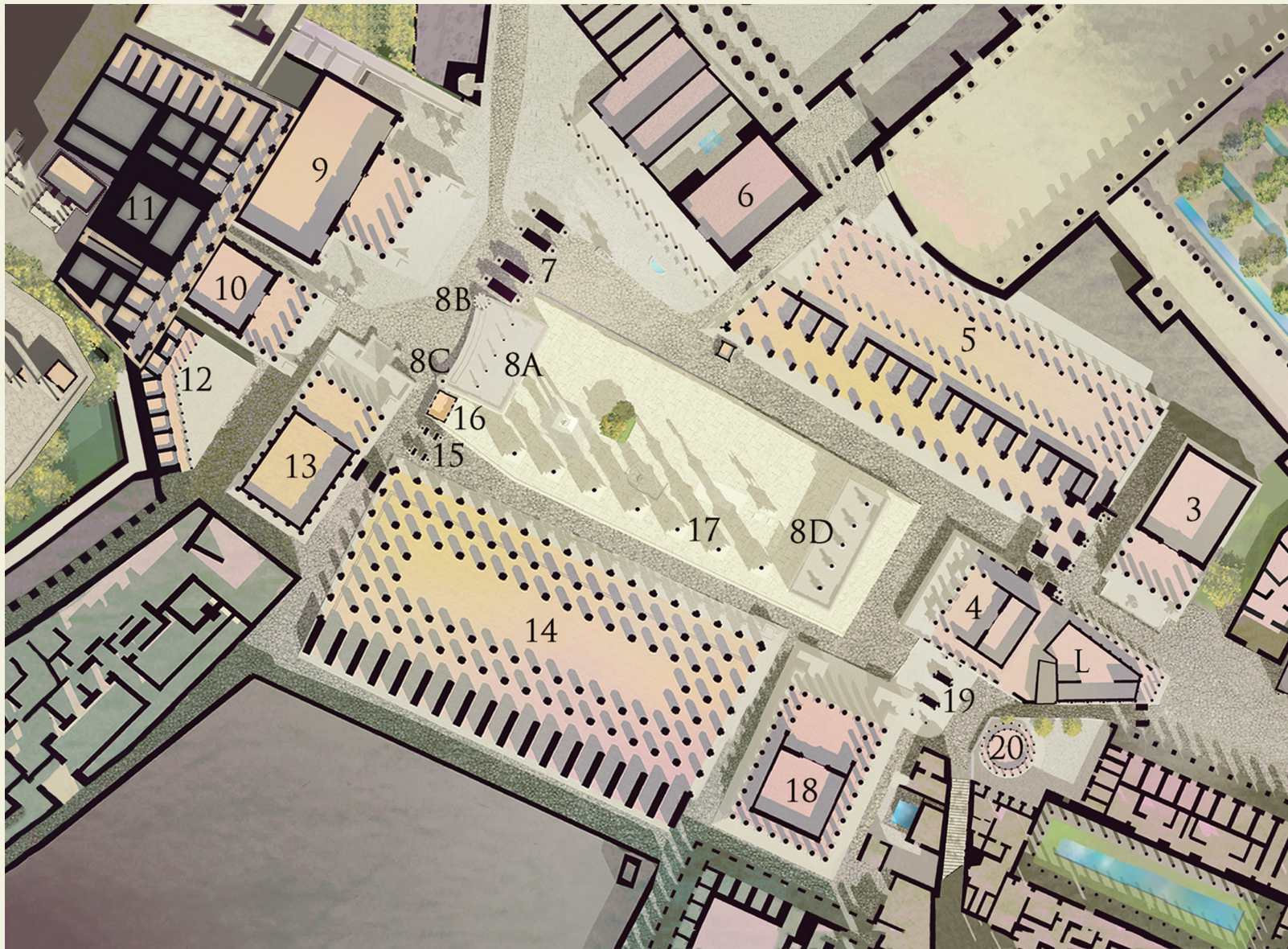
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*Fig 0.1. Plan of the Forum, c. 360. The buildings in the central Forum are numbered in the order treated in the text. (G. Gorski)*

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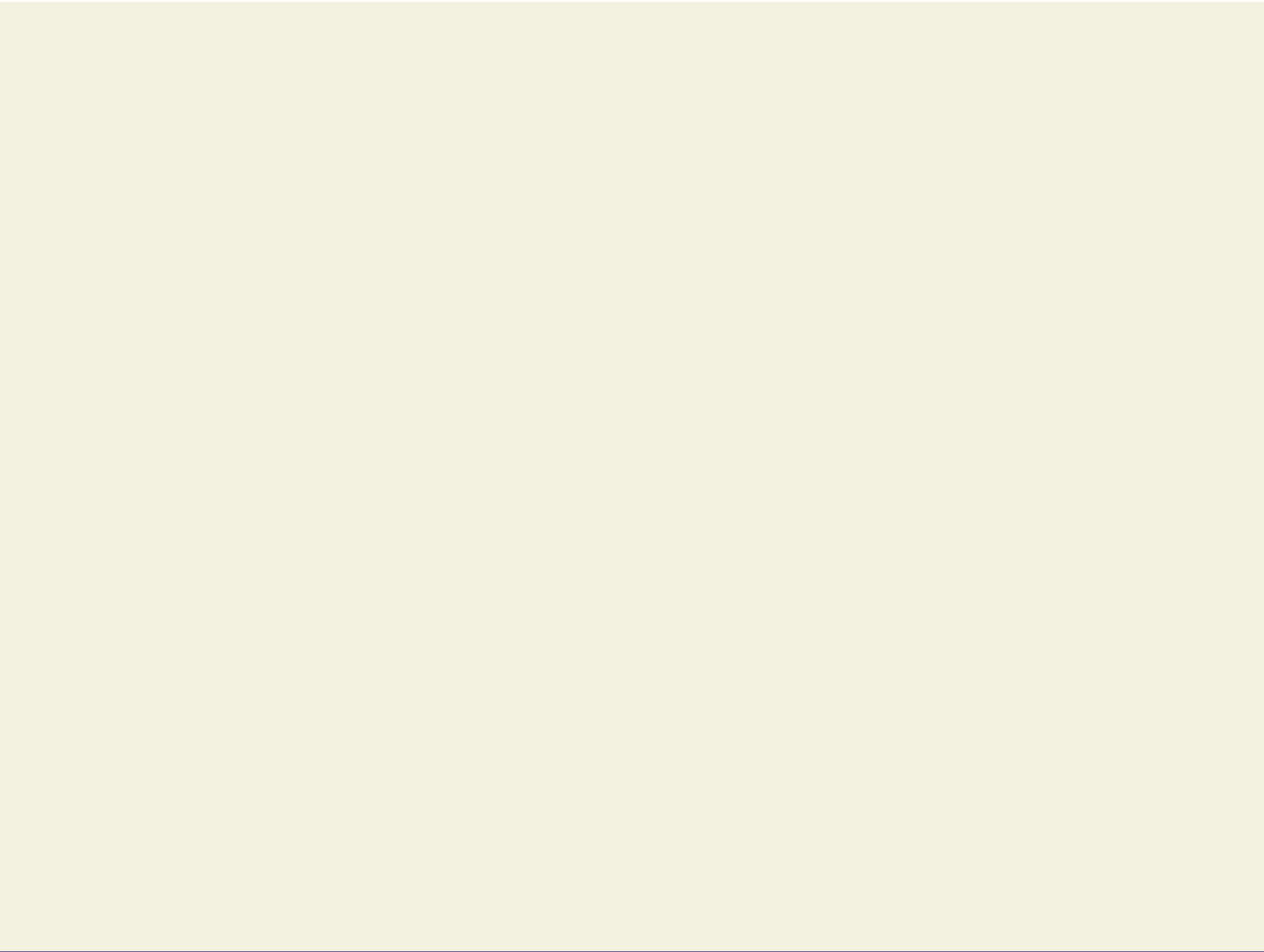
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# PREFACE

*If Roman builders and their patrons sired a great architecture now in ruins, we, who wander through the ruins with open eyes and ears, are parents to its refashioning.*

RABUN TAYLOR<sup>1</sup>



Why another book on the Roman Forum (Figs. 0.1–4, 1.2–6)? Surely, the many who have written on the site in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries will have described it so thoroughly that they must have satisfied all possible future interest. Surprisingly, that is not the case. Works on the Forum fall into three general categories: archaeological reports, articles in learned journals and monographs, and guidebooks. For most readers in English, the archaeological reports and the articles, largely in foreign languages, usually Italian, German, and French (listed here roughly according to the volume of material available in each), are virtually incomprehensible. And should the casual reader live near

a good university library and have the skills and interest necessary to access these essays, he/she will find simple descriptions of the topography of the site and objects found, with or without exegesis, and technical discussions of difficult, special problems.

While recent archaeological monographs may investigate a single building in detail, they do not necessarily reconstruct its original appearance.<sup>2</sup> They include invaluable measured drawings of architectural elements and standing ruins,<sup>3</sup> but they normally do not use these elements in measurable restored plans, elevations, and sections. They consider neither the relationship of their monument to its neighbors nor its conceptual part in the design of the whole Forum. Guidebooks in English are sometimes more helpful, but they also have their limitations. Their short sections usually do little more than identify and briefly characterize each monument,<sup>4</sup> and even their longer entries present every structure either as an excavation or as a three-dimensional nexus for an essay on relevant historical sources.<sup>5</sup> In other words, neither scholarly articles and specialized monographs nor guidebooks in English treat the Forum as an *architectural entity*.



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*Fig. 0.2. View of the Roman Forum looking southeast from the modern terrace on the Tabularium. At the east end of the Forum, note the concrete foundations for the Temples of Castor and Pollux (r.) and of Caesar (Aedes divi Juli) (center). (J. Packer su concessione del Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali – Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma)*

Moreover, as David Watkin has pointed out in his recent book on the Forum, contemporary travelers see

...fragmentary foundations of long-vanished ancient Roman buildings at many levels, representing different periods of time.... Though instructive to scholars...[they] are more or less impenetrable to everyone else....[M]uch of what we see...dates from the Early Christian Period...the Middle Ages, the Renaissance and Baroque periods, and the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. There are also frequent reconstructions and rebuilds often unrecognized by the modern visitor.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, while millions of casual tourists visit the site each year, most carry away only vague ideas of how the shattered ruins before them actually appeared in antiquity; and relevant literature in English usually provides little more.

This book, therefore, has two aims: first and most importantly, in the two initial chapters and in the Conclusions (Parts I, III), we discuss the relationships of the Forum's several buildings to one another and to the architectural development of the site during the empire (Figs. 1.1, 21.2, 21–24). Second, by providing the reader with a topographically arranged series of chapters that clearly present the history and character of the Forum's buildings (Part II), we have assembled an architectural guidebook. However, in an effort to produce a relatively compact volume from the vast number of research materials available, we discuss only the major structures around the central plaza – with two notable exceptions: the Temple of Vesta (Figs. 20.1–19) and that of

*Fig. 0.3. View of the Roman Forum, c. 360 CE, looking southeast from the Tabularium. (G. Gorski)*







Antoninus and Faustina (Figs. 3.1–18) – buildings too important to the life and character of the Forum to omit. Of course, these and the other neighboring monuments have histories that cover several centuries, and most were rebuilt more than once. Hence, following the example of architect Italo Gismondi's famous plaster model of ancient Rome in the Museum of Roman Civilization,<sup>7</sup> we portray the Forum at a particular moment in time, just after 360 CE, a year the same as or very close to the one used by Gismondi. By then, all the Forum's famous monuments had been constructed, the Temple of Saturn had just been rebuilt after a fire (Figs. 0.4, 21.2, 21–26), and most of the other buildings were still in good condition. Consequently, apart from a brief introduction, we do not discuss the general character of the Forum during the Republic (509–31 BCE, Fig. 1.1), although for each building we provide a full history, an account of its complete architectural development, and bibliographical references.

For a book of this kind, images are essential. Most of those that best displayed the Forum's monuments previously, both in ruins and as architectural reconstructions, were the work of the young French architects of the École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts.<sup>8</sup> For nearly a century and a half (1819–1968), during their third year of residence in Rome at the Villa Medici, they were required to produce plans and views of a ruined monument and a new reconstruction of its original appearance.<sup>9</sup> Executed in response to this rule and archived at the École des Beaux-Arts across the Seine from the Louvre in Paris, their splendid water-

*Fig. 0.4. Aerial view of the Roman Forum, c. 360 CE, looking southwest. (G. Gorski)*



colors constitute a major resource (as yet largely unexplored) on the excavations of the Forum.

Done by experienced architects exhaustively trained in the principles of classical architecture, their reconstructions are sensible and frequently very useful to contemporary scholars. Most, however, have never been completely published, and, even if that were not the case, many are now outdated by the latest research on the Forum. Yet each one, the product of a principal (an *ancien*) and his less experienced student assistants (the *nouveaux*), a labor of several months or more,<sup>10</sup> is a remarkable work of art. Precisely rendered, brilliantly colored, their drawings are immediately accessible to viewers. Recording their materials sympathetically, they effortlessly instill in their viewers an abiding interest in their subjects.

To illustrate the complexity and detail of our architecture adequately, then, our text would have profited from renderings of this character. The time and expense involved in executing our illustrations as traditional watercolors would have posed a formidable challenge, however.<sup>11</sup> Fortunately, the digital revolution came to our rescue. Utilizing its advances in hardware and software, we have, in a relatively short interval, produced a body of archaeologically updated images that are, we hope, as compelling as those of the French architects. These renderings are based both on our on-site photographs and studies and on the best previous drawings available for each monument. Since our treatments are not complete formal publication of each monument, we do not show which of its parts survive and which are

conjectural. For those who desire such information, however, we provide a footnote, at the beginning of each chapter in Part II. These indicate the written and visual sources used for our views, scaled plans, and elevations.<sup>12</sup> Each of these images represents many hours of research and consultation between the authors, and, as the work progressed, nearly all the illustrations underwent one or more revisions. Our figures are thus visual solutions to protracted archaeological discussions, our own and those of past scholars, and together all these renderings may, for the first time since antiquity, facilitate a new approach to the nature and underlying conceptual grammar of the Forum – a site that was, for the Romans, not a collection of isolated archaeological trenches, but rather an intricate, three-dimensional architectural ensemble.

While previous reconstructions portray the monuments of the Forum as undecorated marble, modern research suggests that, like Greek buildings, those of the Romans may also have been partly colored – but to what extent is unclear. Referring to the restoration of the Temple of the Castores in 70 BCE (p. 288), Cicero describes columns that were reconstructed as “freshly whitened,” suggesting both that large parts of the building must have been predominantly white and that the stuccoed shafts were rubbed down, not “painted.” Like the Temple of Mars Ultor in the Forum of Augustus, parts of the buildings in the Forum Romanum were, however, very probably colored. Indeed, we would have preferred to show a colored Forum, and our two detailed illustrations of a section from the east facade of the

Arch of Severus (Figs. 7.12, 13) indicate what we might have done. Yet, without any precise evidence, our colors would have been entirely arbitrary, and, therefore, our Forum is traditionally (if inaccurately) uncolored.

In order to position the buildings correctly, we based our information on a number of sources: satellite images, on-site photographs, unpublished drawings and photographs in the files of the Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, and published articles and books. A map of the existing ruins produced from aerial photographs by S.A.R.A. Nistri, S.r.l., an engineering firm in Rome, provided the elevations of the topography and the ruins. To produce views of the surrounding ancient city, we used the Gismondi model of ancient Rome.<sup>13</sup> Multiple overlapping three-dimensional laser scans carried out at the Forum by a team of students and faculty from the Architecture School at the University of Notre Dame in August 2010 confirmed the accuracy of our on-site materials (Figs. 0.5–6).<sup>14</sup>

Since our new, restored model of the Forum is three dimensional, we were able to document the site in a realistic manner. Thus, for the reader's information, we provide diagrams that label the various architectural elements (Figs. G1–G6), and, for each structure, we provide measured drawings: a detailed plan, front and lateral elevations, perspective views, and architectural orders. We have also included four “section-perspectives” of the entire Forum (Figs. 1.2–6) as well as aerial views (Figs. 0.3, 4). With these digital materials and our texts, we anticipate that future visitors to the Forum will find the site more comprehensible – and, we hope, far more rewarding – than has ever previously been the case.<sup>15</sup>

*Winter 2012–2013*

JAMES E. PACKER AND  
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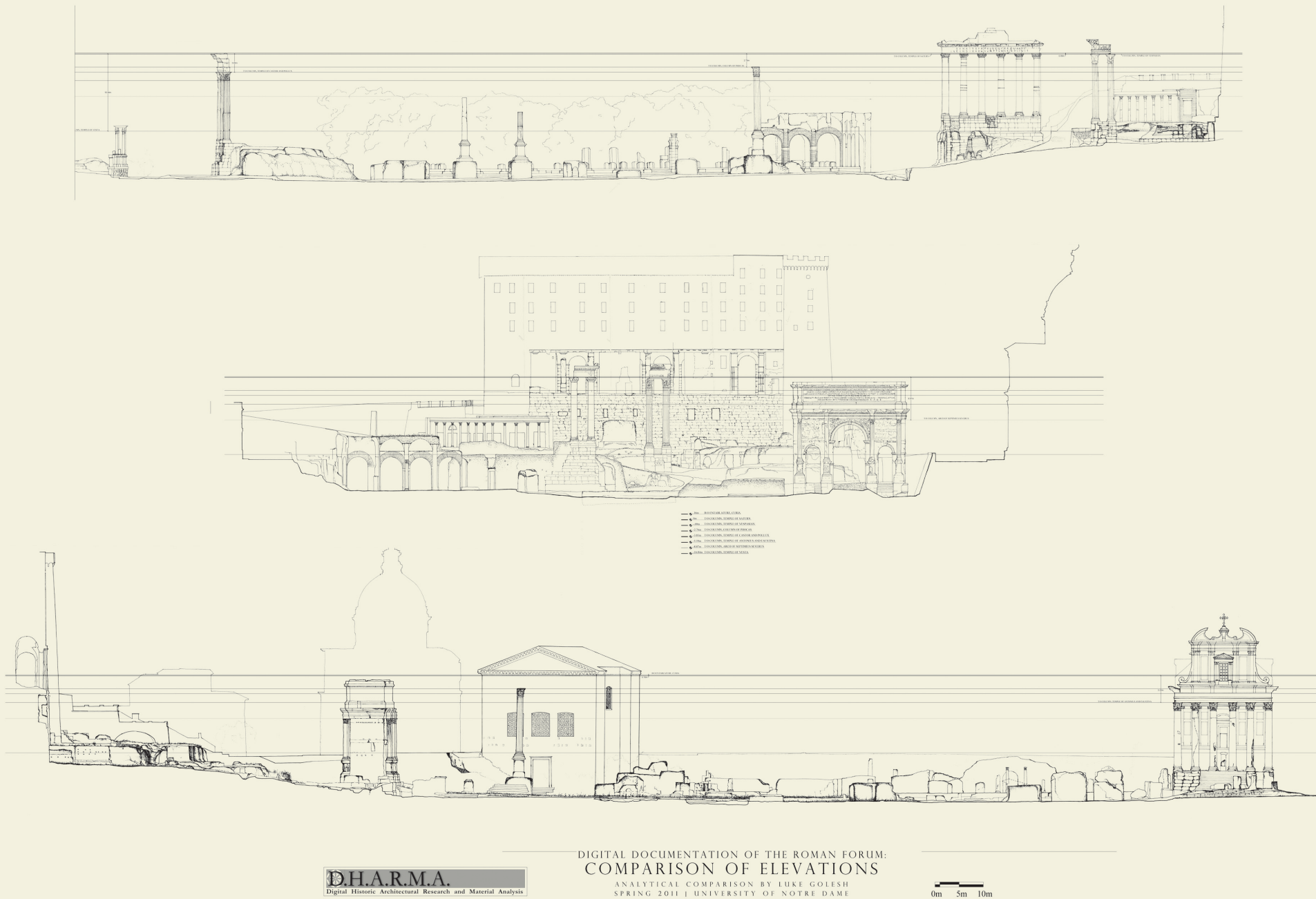




*Fig. 0.5. The Roman Forum: digital documentation plan, 2010. (Dharma)*



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*Fig. 0.6. The Roman Forum: digital comparison of the elevations of standing monuments, 2010. (Dharma)*

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Two institutions deserve thanks and recognition for their mission to support creative people and bring them together. Many years ago I was blessed to receive the Burnham Prize from the Chicago Architectural Club and was awarded an associate fellowship to the American Academy in Rome. It is there I was first introduced to Jim Packer and his work on ancient Rome. Over the next three decades – nearly one of them spent collaborating on this book – Jim has remained a great friend and mentor.

Finally I would like to thank my family: my daughters Jennifer, Rebecca, and Emma and, most of all, my wife, Stacey. A fellow artist who understands an artist’s needs, she has always given me the space and time to pursue my many projects. This book would not have been possible without her support.

## GILBERT J. GORSKI

My thanks both to Professor Angelo Bottini, soprintendente per i beni archeologici di Roma (2005–2009), for his kind permission to work gratis in the Forum and in the Archives of the

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Unfortunately, the *Atlante di Roma Antica* (Milan, 2012) by A. Carandini and others did not reach me until our text had gone to the publisher. Consequently, I do not evaluate herein any of its important restored plans and elevations. My review in the *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 26 (2013): 553–561 does, however,

include discussions of several of the *Atlante*’s reconstructions of the Forum’s buildings.

JAMES E. PACKER

Both authors profited in the Forum and at South Bend from the two seasons of “cloud-point documentation” of the Forum’s monuments undertaken by Professor Krupali Krusche of the School of Architecture at Notre Dame. From that project she also very kindly gave us permission to publish two of her measured elevations of the ruins (Figs. 0.5–6).

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