

PART I.

ARCHITECTURE IN THE ROMAN FORUM DURING THE EMPIRE: A BRIEF HISTORY



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Excerpt
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THE AUGUSTAN RECONSTRUCTION (31 BCE–14 CE)

PROLOGUE: THE REPUBLICAN FORUM (508–31)

Established as a meeting place for the inhabitants of the adjacent, previously independent villages, the Republican Forum occupied an irregularly shaped, marshy valley below the Palatine and Capitoline Hills. Reclaiming the central marsh by massive earth fills in the late sixth century, its builders initiated the continuous evolutionary changes that, in the next five centuries (c. 525–44), transformed the site into the Forum of the

late Republic. Literary tradition credited the Temple of Vesta at the southeast end of the valley to Rome's second king, Numa Pompilius (715–673), who had erected it next to the Regia, his own residence. At the northwest end, Pompilius' successor, Tullius Hostilius (672–641), built the Curia Hostilia, the Senate House named after him, and, in front of it, the Comitium, the outdoor meeting place for Rome's popular assemblies. At the end of the sixth and the beginning of the fifth centuries, the early republican Temples of Saturn and Castor went up to the south, and, by the fourth century, a line of aristocratic dwellings connected these temples and defined the edges of the piazza (Fig. 1.1).

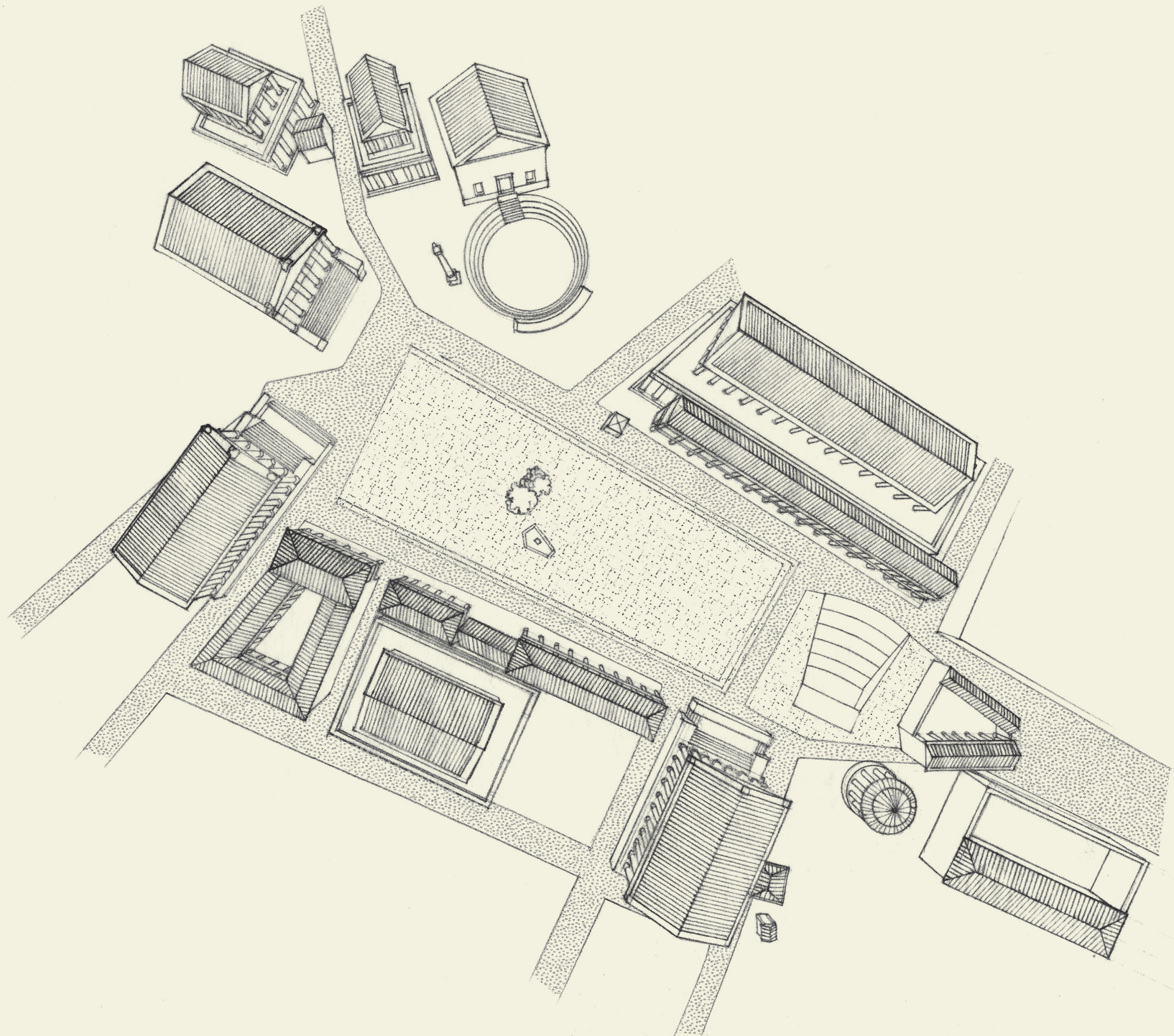


Fig. 1.1. The Republican Forum from above. (G. Gorski)

During the course of the second century, two rectangular basilicas replaced many of these houses. On the north side of the Forum stood the Basilica Fulvia (later called Aemilia), and to the south, the Basilica Sempronia. In the late second century, a temple to Concord on the northwest side of the Forum commemorated an aristocratic victory over the people, and by early in the next century (after 78), the monumental facade of the Tabularium, with its impressive second-story arcade and engaged Doric Order (Figs. 11.1, 2, 6, 9, 10, 21.21), hid the slope of the Capitoline Hill.

By midcentury, the republican government could no longer control the state effectively, and Caesar began the imperial age with the destruction of the ancient Comitium (Fig. 1.1). He replaced it with a new Rostra that faced east into the Forum along a line parallel to the front of the Tabularium (Fig. 8.4). He also aligned the south lateral colonnade of his own new Forum to the northwest with the site of the Curia and in 45 or 44 began the reconstruction of the latter.¹ This “Curia Julia,” named after Caesar’s clan, was still unfinished when Caesar was assassinated, and in the political reaction against Caesar after his death, the Senate briefly (and unsuccessfully) tried to call the new structure by its ancient name, the “Curia Hostilia” (infra, p. 12). Overlooking the south side of the Forum, the front arcade of Caesar’s Basilica Julia, a redesigned version of the old Sempronia, had engaged Doric columns and interior aisles with innovative concrete vaults. Facing it stood Lucius Aemilius Paullus’ new splendidly rebuilt Basilica Aemilia (finished in 55).

PROBLEMS AND RESOURCES

The Forum at the Beginning of Augustus’ Reign

When Augustus celebrated his victory in 31 over his last famous rivals, Antony and Cleopatra, the political disturbances of the recent past had interrupted construction of three of the Forum’s major new sites. Owing to the recent civil wars, the temple to the deified Caesar at the east end of the piazza, the site where Caesar’s body had been cremated, was still unfinished (Figs. 0.3, 4.7–10). Caesar’s new Basilica Julia, his replacement for the old Basilica Sempronia, and the promised new Curia were only partly finished (Fig. 1.4). Of the Forum’s three great temples, Saturn had been under construction since 42 (Figs. 1.3–5, 21.21–23). The other three, dedicated to Concord (Figs. 0.4, 1.3), Castor and Pollux, and Vesta (Figs. 1.5, 19), also probably needed serious maintenance. The former two were politically significant. In the last years of the Republic, the Senate met often in the Temple of Concord (and sometimes in the Temple of Castor), while speakers frequently addressed the people from the rostrum in front of the Temple of Castor. Concord was, unfortunately, too small for an increasingly sizeable Senate, and both buildings, of tufa and travertine masonry finished in stucco, must have seemed to Rome’s new “first citizen” (*princeps*) Octavian – called Augustus after

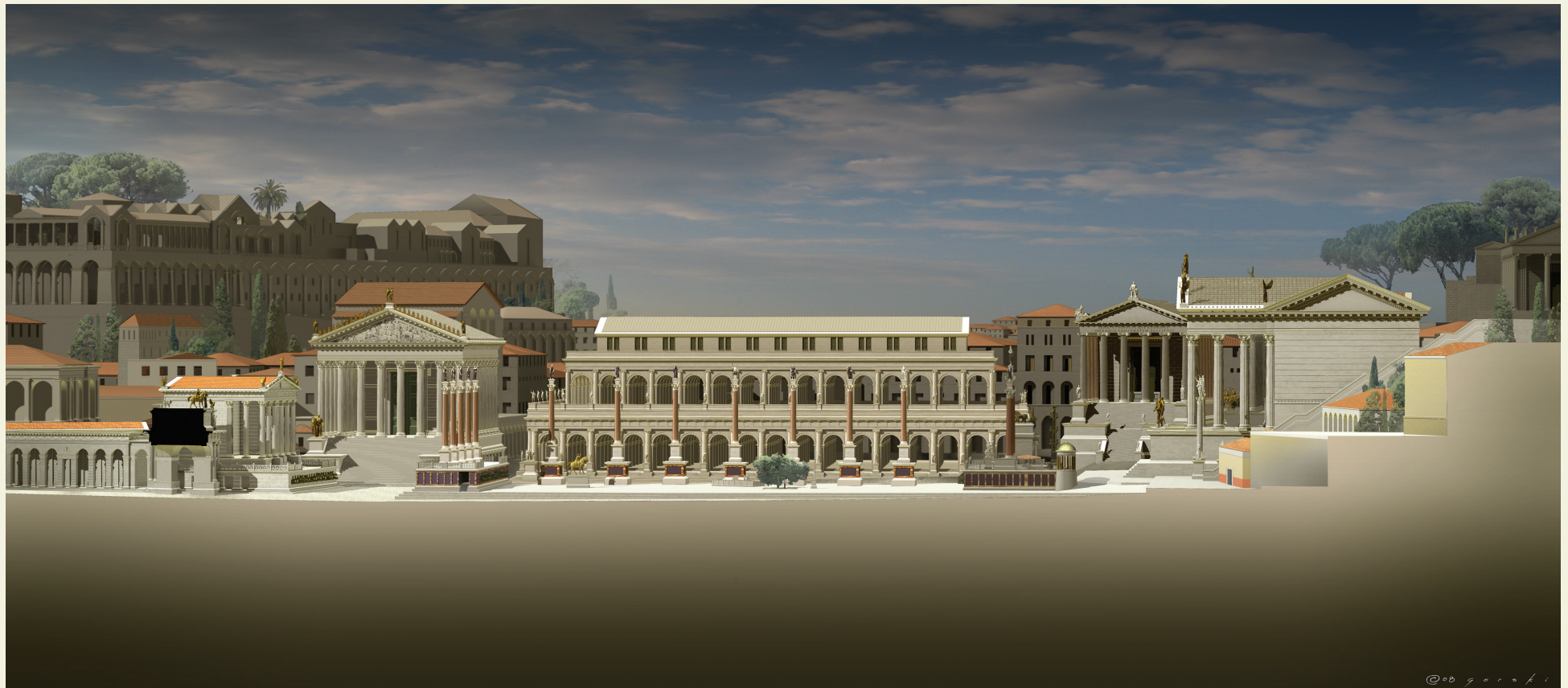


Fig. 1.2. Forum, elevation/section looking east. (G. Gorski)



Fig. 1.3. Forum, elevation/section looking west. (G. Gorski)

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Fig. 1.4. Forum, elevation/section 1 looking south. (G. Gorski)

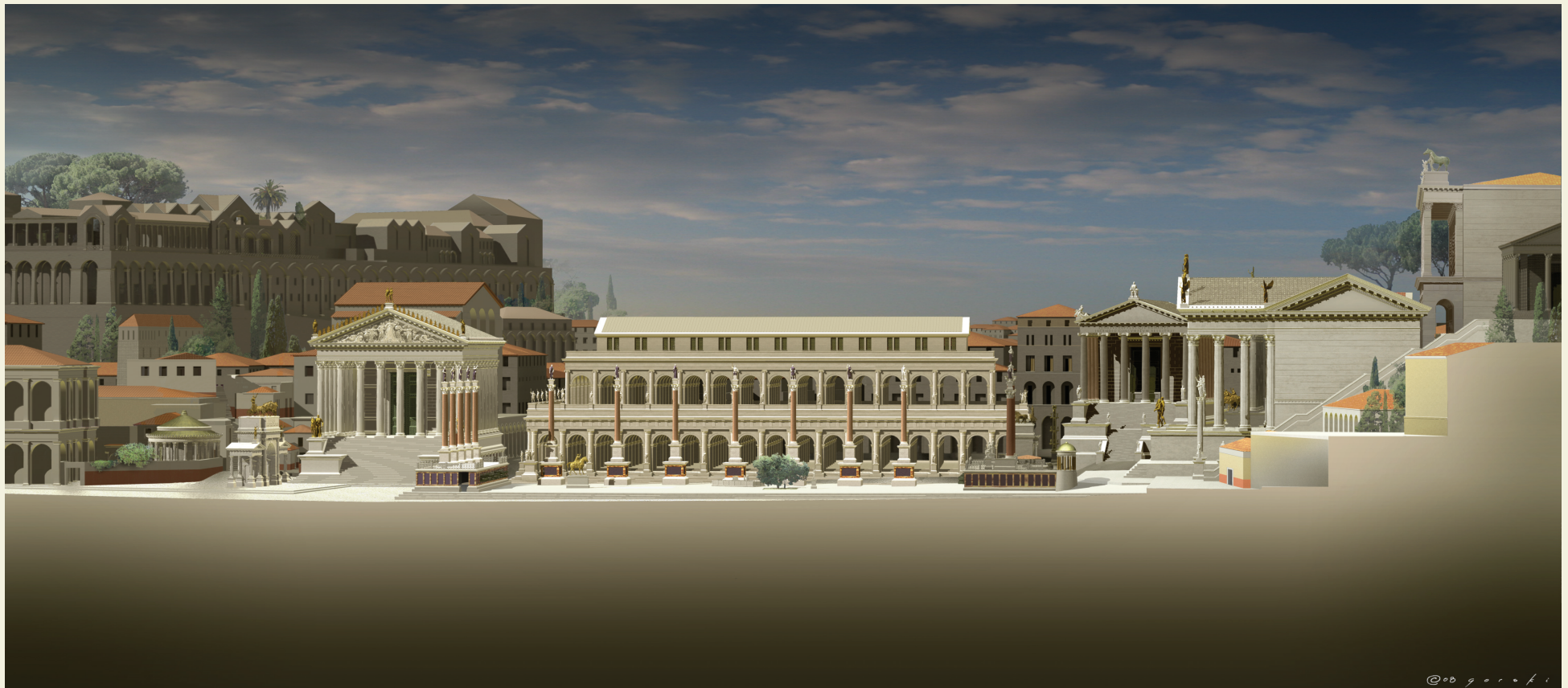


Fig. 1.5. Forum, elevation/section 2 looking south. (G. Gorski)

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Fig. 1.6. Forum, elevation/section looking north. (G. Gorski)