



Early Christian & Medieval Rome

Rare splendours from tempestuous times

20–27 January 2026 (MM 875)

£3,570 • 8 days

Speaker: Dr Hugh Doherty

Extensive exploration of the principal early Christian and medieval monuments of Rome.

Architecture, wall paintings, mosaics, marble pavements, sculpture – exceptionally rare and beautiful examples of the building arts.

Charts the historical rises and falls from imperial capital to papal plenitude of power.

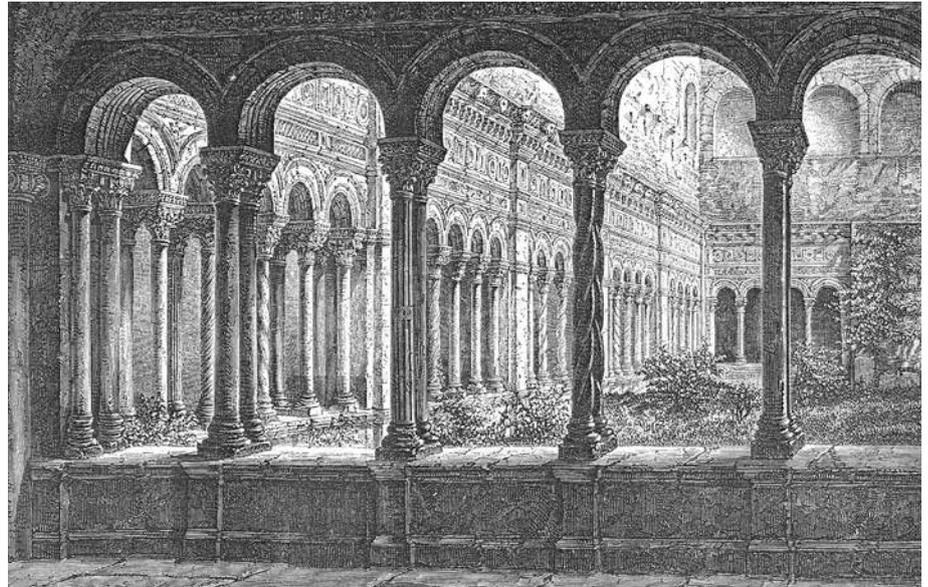
Based in central Rome with excursions to Viterbo, Tuscánia and Tarquinia.

Rome needs little introduction. Of all European cities, it is simply the most enthralling and historically interesting. Imperial capital until the early 4th century, home to both the papacy and papal curia, the place where Octavian was proclaimed Augustus and Saints Peter and Paul were martyred. In no other city can one still find standing buildings from every century of the Christian Era, and none where the allure of the Antique is so clear.

For ease of movement we have grouped buildings topographically. We pair the best of the late Antique funerary basilicas at San Lorenzo fuori le Mura and Sant'Agnese; give over a morning to the churches of Trastevere, relate Santa Maria Maggiore to the two sister churches that sit within her shadow, explore the extraordinarily deep stratigraphy of the churches east of the Colosseum, and spend a leisurely morning among the Early Christian buildings that sprang up within and beyond the Imperial gardens in the south of the city.

Certain themes are well known – the emergence of an identifiably Christian iconography in catacomb painting in the period before Constantine's promulgation of religious tolerance in AD 313, the exhilarating scale and surface polish of the major churches of the fourth and fifth centuries, the self-consciously historicising nature of the Carolingian revival of the Roman Empire under Pope Paschal I.

Other themes are perhaps less widely appreciated; the abundant evidence for the refurbishing of virtually every Roman church over the course of the eighth and ninth centuries, their repaving over the 11th and 12th centuries, the patronage of the new orders of friars in the 13th and 14th centuries, the ways in which churches reflect movements in the population of Rome, the extraordinary



Rome, cloister of St John Lateran, wood engraving 1877.

inventiveness with which monastic precincts were planned, and the impact of papal attitudes to the collection and display of Antique sculpture.

Itinerary

Day 1. Fly at c. 11.00am from London Heathrow (British Airways) to Rome, where all seven nights are spent.

Day 2. Morning on the Celian Hill. The church of the Quattro Coronati provides a perfect perspective on early medieval Rome, displaying successive retrenchment until an exquisite cloister was added in the 12th century. Thence to San Clemente, a superb columnar hall rebuilt after the 1084 sack of Rome – its fourth-century predecessor remains below. Afternoon around the Lateran, particularly the Baptistery and the chapels which surround it, before finishing at Santo Stefano Rotondo, that wonderful fifth-century puzzle of a building.

Day 3. Trastevere: the Ionic nave arcade of San Crisogono, magnificent Pietro Cavallini frescoes at Santa Cecilia, overall splendour of Santa Maria. The afternoon takes us extramuros, to San Lorenzo, a stunning sixth-century cemetery church to which a new nave was added around 1200. Then to Sant'Agnese, a massive funerary basilica to which a daughter of Constantine added her mausoleum, and where Pope Honorius I (625–638) built

a second church for easier access to the underground tomb of Saint Agnes.

Day 4. Morning on the Capitol, ceremonial centre of ancient and medieval Rome. The Capitoline Museums were created in 1471 with the donation of the papacy's collection of Antique sculpture to the city. Savour the contrasting treatments meted out to the tiny 6th-century church of San Marco, and the Franciscan reconstruction of Santa Maria in Aracoeli. Afternoon examining the two principal Early Christian churches of the Roman forum – Santa Maria Antiqua and Santi Cosma e Damiano.

Day 5: Tuscánia, Viterbo. An opportunity to venture into the hills north of Rome, our eventual goal the important papal town of Viterbo – frequent seat of the 13th-century papacy. First, however, drive to Tuscánia to see an extraordinarily well-preserved pair of Romanesque churches. In Viterbo visit the surviving papal palace, cathedral and mendicant church of San Francesco (tomb of Clement IV).

Day 6. Leisurely morning by the Aurelian walls. San Giovanni a Porta Latina, just inside the Appian Gate, was remodelled in the eighth and 12th centuries from a building first constructed c. 500. Continue south along the Via Appia Antica to the Catacombs of San Callisto. Here Christian burials underground

Early Christian and Medieval Rome
continued

spread architectural ornament and frescoes through an eventual total of 20 km of passages on five levels. The afternoon is free.

Day 7. Morning examining a great trio of buildings – Santa Sabina, Santa Maria Sopra Minerva and the Pantheon, the last influentially rededicated to the Virgin Mary in the seventh century. Afternoon on the Esquiline, starting with Santa Maria Maggiore, one of the four ‘major basilicas’ of Rome and still substantially as it was when rebuilt by Pope Sixtus III (432–440). Santa Pudenziana and Santa Prassede house between them the earliest Christian apse mosaic in Rome and the most magnificent Carolingian oratory.

Day 8: Tarquinia. Gentle drive out to Tarquinia to visit the fantastically ambitious former cathedral of Santa Maria in Castello, spectacularly situated within the medieval town walls. Drop back south to Rome Fiumicino; arrive Heathrow c. 6.30pm.

Lecturer

Dr Hugh Doherty. Lecturer in medieval history at the University of East Anglia. He was taught at the Universities of London, Cambridge, and Oxford, and was a research fellow at Jesus College, Oxford. He specialises in the period, 700–1200, and publishes on western kings, secular élites and their records. He is a keen believer in the value of exploring and understanding the architectural fabric, material culture and landscapes of the past.

Practicalities

Price. Two sharing: £3,570 or £3,410 without flights. **Single occupancy:** £4,280 or £4,120 without flights.

Included: flights (Euro Traveller) with British Airways (Airbus 319); travel by private coach; hotel accommodation; breakfasts; 4 dinners with wine, water, coffee; all admissions; all tips; all taxes; the services of the lecturer.

Accommodation. Hotel L’Orologio, Rome (<https://www.hotelorologioroma.com>): An elegant 4-star hotel located in the heart of Rome, a few steps away from Largo Argentina. *Single rooms are doubles for sole use.*

How strenuous? This is a particularly strenuous tour, which unavoidably involves a lot of walking, some of it over rough ground on archaeological sites. There is a lot of standing in museums and on sites, sure-footedness is essential. The historic area is vast, and vehicular access is increasingly restricted. Minibuses are used on some occasions but otherwise the city is traversed on foot. The tour should not be attempted by anyone who has difficulty with everyday walking and stair-climbing. Fitness is essential. Average distance by minibus per day: 38 miles.

Group size: between 10 and 22 participants.