

Memory of Roman letters

James Mosley

My first visit to Rome, in 1959, was overwhelming, and I retreated to Florence to recover. The experience that I found most exciting was not only or even mostly the sight of the absurdly well-known monuments of Antiquity – the Colosseum, the Pantheon, Trajan's Column – but the quantity and quality of the great buildings of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Above all, the scale of them, the manner in one would come, all unsuspecting, into a little open space over which a great façade like S. Ignazio would loom. And the generous opulence of the sculptural and architectural detail. At school, long before dreaming that I would ever come to Italy, I had already compiled a list of ideal buildings, most of which were in Rome: Bramante's Tempietto, Sta Maria della Pace. But nothing prepared me for reality, the quality of light, the texture of the Traver-tine marble – and the letters. Of course there were inscriptions in the Forum, on the triumphal arches, and (most legendary of inscriptions for an English visitor) at the base of Trajan's Column, but I had not appreciated, from photographs, that lettering continued to play so important a part in the detail of Roman buildings: on the fountains like that of the Acqua Paola, a paraphrase of a triumphal arch, in huge panels, like those of the outside of the apse of the Basilica of Sta Maria Maggiore, and above all, in the huge terrazzo inscriptions of S. Pietro, one inside, round the interior of the cupola (TV ES PETRVS ET SVPER HANC PETRAM AEDIFICABO ECCLESIAM MEAM ET TIBI DABO CLAVES REGNI CAELORVM) and the other, across the façade, emulating that of

the Pantheon with its superbly wordly detail, preserving the name of Borghese just as the Pantheon does that of Agrippa. This lettering was not only superb in its quality, but it was consistent in style, from building to building, and from century to century, beginning with the great revival of Rome in the late sixteenth century.

In the summer of 1963 an extraordinary collection of Italian writing books was offered for sale by Carla Marzoli, an antiquarian book dealer in Milan. They included two works, *Alfabeto delle maiuscole antiche romane* and *Varie iscrizioni del Santiss. S. N. Sisto V*, by a writer who was new to me, Luca Horfei (or Orfei, in modern spelling), who claimed to have been responsible for many of the inscriptions of the buildings of the new Rome of Sixtus v: the militant declamation of the base of the newly-erected Vatican obelisk, the little circular inscription at the base of the interior of the lantern of cupola of S. Pietro, nearly 400 feet above the floor, and the lovely capitals of the inscription over the Fontana dell'Acqua Felice. In the course of her researches for her catalogue, Mrs Marzoli had found in the Vatican Library a manuscript of Horfei's, with drafts for a splendid bold alphabet of inscriptional capitals. The catalogue had an introduction by Stanley Morison, for whom Sixtus v, a powerful old man in a hurry, had long held a fascination, and who many years previously had recognized the remarkable qualities of the lettering associated with many of the artefacts of his reign, from innumerable buildings to the woodcut title page of the great folio Vulgate Bible issued, and then withdrawn, in 1590.

Morison's text had a thesis, which was that the 'Six-tine' letter was the creation of Luca Horfei of Fano,

that it was a 'modernized' version of the antique capitals, which were 'still Roman but without being any longer Imperial. In effect, the Sixtine capitals are a Christian revision of the capitals that were part of the insignia of Augustus, Trajan and the succeeding pre-Christian Emperors'. Of the lettering on the base of the Vatican obelisk, Morison wrote that 'the Sixtine departure from the proportions of the then admired letters on the Trajan column was deliberate, authoritative, and Christian'.

This thesis seemed to me less than convincing. Horfei's constructed capitals, as engraved in copper, are rather mean and wooden in their proportions, but they undoubtedly emulate the 'Imperial' Roman inscriptional capitals. When cut in stone, his letters are even more faithful to their models, one of which – with its characteristically large bowl to the capital R – is certainly the so-called 'Trajan' inscription. In any case, was it right to attribute the creation of this 'Sixtine' letter to Horfei? It seemed to me that a far more likely candidate was Giovanni Francesco Cresci, *scriptor latinus* in the Vatican Library and the man to whom, more than any other, is due the revolution in calligraphy which would ultimately be responsible for the typographical innovations of the Didots and Giambattista Bodoni. The engraved alphabets of capital letters in Cresci's two chief writing books, the *Esemplare di più sorti lettere* (1560) and above all that of *Il perfetto scrittore* (1570) clearly indicate the source of the Sixtine letter, and Cresci's commentary makes it clear that the Imperial Roman letters were its source. In his sadly bad-tempered and half-autobiographical last book, *L'idea*, posthumously published in 1622, Cresci lists the pupils who had helped to spread his new calligraphy with such speed

throughout Italy and Europe. Among them is the name of Luca Horfei da Fano.

We know very little about the process by which the model of the set of capitals of *Il perfetto scrittore* was adopted as the standard letter form, not only of Sixtine Rome, but of all succeeding Papal inscriptions. For our information on Cresci, we are still largely dependent on the researches of James Wardrop, librarian of the Victoria & Albert Museum in London, and published in the English typographical journal 'Signature' in 1948. More recently, however, the remarkable energies of Dr Cesare D'Onofrio have brought many details of the architectural history of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Rome to light, and he is responsible for identifying Ventura Sarafellini, the designer of the great TV ES PETRVS inscription in the cupola of S. Pietro. It should be possible, with perseverance, to add more names of designers of inscriptions to the list, and perhaps to establish a more explicit link with Cresci himself. In 1963 I found myself trying to follow two different lines of enquiry. One was to ask how the model of the inscription on the Trajan Column had become so widely admired in Britain – more than anywhere else – so that it had been imposed on students of lettering as the only permissible model. This seemed to me thoroughly pernicious: not only was the official 'Trajan' letter adopted for the names of British government offices a weak travesty of the original letter, but it was helping to destroy an excellent model for Roman lettering which had survived in Britain since the 19th century (and which traced its roots, ironically enough, to the calligraphic revolution started by Cresci). My other enquiry was into the origins and survival of the 'Sixtine' letter in Rome itself. I

attempted to deal with both subjects in an article, 'Trajan Revived', which appeared in the first (and, as it happened, the only) issue of a new journal called *Alphabet*, which appeared in 1964.

In searching for the origins of the Sixtine letter I made use of the Vatican Library, passing under the great inscription that runs along the so-called 'Galleries of Pope Julius' which Geoffroy Tory in 1529 attributed to Bramante. (If this inscription, made of big separate letters cut from sheets of white marble, is really the original lettering of 1502, then it points to Bramante as one of the inspirers of the Sixtine style, since these letters have many features in common with later inscriptions of the sixteenth and even the seventeenth centuries; but inscriptions are notoriously liable to be recut and remade, and I am inclined to agree with the slight scepticism on its genuineness which was voiced by Matthew Carter in a recent article.)

One day, glancing along one of the side roads of the Vatican City in the way to the library, I spotted the sign of the 'Laboratorio Marmi', and without any authority I wandered into the workshop where, as I had hoped, marble was prepared for all kinds of use, including the cutting of inscriptions, and I had the good luck to meet someone as passionate about lettering as I was. Donato Cautilli's great speciality was the selecting and cutting of coloured marbles for making and repairing the complex floor designs of Roman churches, but he had made a special study of lettering, and the making of inscriptions for the Vatican was largely in his care. My visit was useful, since the Pope was about to visit the Holy-Land, and I was able to give my unofficial *nihil obstat* to the English part of a multi-lingual tablet that would be taken

with him to commemorate the event.

Donato Cautilli, a wise and generous man, would become a close friend. On this occasion, he was able to show me the copper stencils that were still in use, some of which were of great age, which had enabled the Vatican inscriptions to maintain the consistency of design that I had noticed. The Sixtine – or perhaps we should with more justice call it the 'Crescine'? – letter was fattened during the eighteenth century, and its serifs sometimes became more bulbous (look at the tablets at the east doors of S. Giovanni in Laterano – the inlaid brass letter of the same date at the foot of the statues in the interior are much purer and more elegant), but it retained a consistent identity throughout the nineteenth, and well into the twentieth, centuries.

Ida Calabi Limentani, in her manual of epigraphy, retells the story of the English cleric of the twelfth century, who having visited Rome wrote of the number of inscriptions and complained how hard they were to read. It was not that the language was difficult – suggests Calabi Limentani (and a cleric would have had fluent Latin) – but that Roman capitals had been so forgotten that in the twelfth century they had become mysterious cyphers. Whether we are convinced by this story or not, it is not surprising that Rome should have so many inscriptions. It is a city that has always been the goal of visitors, and it is to these visitors, whether literate in Latin or not, that they speak by their beauty of form. What is remarkable is that these inscriptions should have retained this consistency of style. Even the marble street names, the introduction of which I believe is originally due to the nineteenth-century French administration, conform to what one would be encouraged in the

twentieth century to think of as the city's 'corporate identity'. It is satisfying to think that, through a wider appreciation of the work of Cresci and his pupils, the qualities of this style are increasingly recognized.

Roman capitals: five itineraries in Rome

Silvano Fassina

Whoever you are, Roman or foreigner, may you live in happiness and may these ancient stones, elevated by their inscriptions, help you enjoy the richness and beauty of their heritage (...)

From the plaque commemorating the restoration of the cloister of the Basilica of San Paolo fuori le Mura in 1756.

The idea of 'minimal epigraphy itineraries' comes from Armando Petrucci's book *La scrittura*, from looking for the examples cited in Rome, and from a subsequent need to organize these (churches for the most part) into short itineraries by area.

To the initial nucleus of Renaissance and baroque Roman capitals, which increases rapidly, are added the main inscriptions of the imperial age, for comparison with the ancient models, to help trace a path through this immense epigraphic patrimony by examining places of major graphic interest. No attempt has been made either to be exhaustive or to undertake a specialist study. We have chosen here to give preference to evolution in the design of the Roman capital, a choice dedicated to all itinerant calligraphers in search of illustrious models; besides the places cited, any church or street in the centre of Rome has a historic and graphic value that will lend

interest to even the most casual stroll (and this is an invitation for you to further your knowledge of your own itineraries).

The Roman capital of the Republican era is rather wide and extended, still much like the archaic one. It generally has few variations in width and shortened serifs, almost like a grotesque letter (Ponte Fabricio, the sarcophagus of Scipio Barbatus, the tomb of Bibulus). With the Empire, from Augustus to Constantine, classical models are established in the enormous production of monumental letters that converge in those of the inscription at the base of Trajan's Column. With the decline of the Empire, the Roman capital fell into oblivion for a long period (it was used again by Charlemagne for the plaque which is today in the entrance to St Peter's), but it gradually re-emerges in examples that are still reminiscent of gothic (Vassalletto's plaque in the cloister of St John in Lateran) or freely inspired by classical models (the *titulus* of San Silvestro in Capite, the house of Lorenzo Manilio). Then came the precise designs of the Renaissance writers, which were all constructed geometrically (Bramante's letters on the Palazzo della Cancelleria); in this humanistic setting Sixtus IV's Sistine letter was born, characterized, in its most common form, by a restrained vivacity of interpretation in the slant of the stems and in the serifs (monuments of del Rio in Santa Francesca Romana, d'Albret in Santa Maria in Araceli, Forteguerri in Santa Cecilia). After a period of confused and not very homogeneous epigraphy, Sixtus V's Sistine letter appeared, designed by Luca Orfei to commemorate the pope's great town planning achievements (base of the Lateran Obelisk, Acqua Felice Fountain). This letter is constructed vertically with delicate strokes and is frequently very widely spaced. Its forms are subsequently transformed, with the gigantic dimensions that characterize baroque epigraphy, into solid strokes, roundish serifs and wide curves (Acqua Paola Fountain, circular papal stones of Innocent X in St Peter's, of Clement XII in St John in Lateran, of Paul V Borghese in Santa Maria Maggiore). In the neoclassical period the use

of metal fictile letters in Roman capitals (Quirinal Obelisk) and in Bodoni characters (propylaea of Piazzale Flaminio) became common. The nineteenth century capital was used in a minor key for the small plaques on the facades of buildings that commemorate illustrious occupants, in monuments to the fallen, in the revival of sacred inscriptions. The latest monumental capital and the latest dictatorship: the massive fascist letter (Piazza Augusto Imperatore and the Foro Italico).

Binoculars are essential in order to study the details of each letter, but pencil and paper are equally important to try at least once to draw a letter from life, to sharpen one's clarity of vision. Where circumstances are favourable the engraved letters can be traced in relief by stretching a sheet of tissue paper (the type used by tailors) over the inscription, sticking it down with adhesive tape, placing a sheet of carbon paper on top, and then rubbing gently with a loosely woven cloth (a piece of sackcloth is ideal); with a little experience an extremely useful method can be learned with results that may often be better than those of a photograph. This technique, called *rubbing* or *frottage*, is used by all epigraphers but terrorizes many museum curators who think it damages the stones; it is always better to reassure them in advance and obtain their permission (in churches always apply first to the sacristy).

Even the most fervent love of Rome may waver when one feels suffocated by traffic, risks being run over while trying to study an obelisk, or when one is faced with the enigmatic and inexorable notice 'closed for repairs'. Yet the rewards will not disappoint those who know how to seek them out. One simply has to have the conviction of the humanists: *litteris servabitur orbis*, letters will save the world.

First itinerary From Piazzale Flaminio to Piazza Venezia

For those coming from the north, the privileged entrance to Rome was at the end of Via Flaminia, the other end of which was marked by the Arch of Augustus in Rimini. In the mid-sixteenth century, with the restoration of the **Porta del Popolo**, the Papacy prepared to welcome more frequent and more prestigious European guests. Between 1562 and 1565, at the request of Pope Pius IV Medici, Nanni di Baccio Bigio worked on Vignola's design for the outer face from an idea of the great Michelangelo. The gate had a single arch and was without the two statues symbolizing papal power. Identifying the Pontiff, with the coat of arms once erected on the attic, the stone (now in the centre, between another two dated 1879, the year when the two lateral arches were opened) dominated the silent country landscape: it was the only text, with the first message written from Rome, and is still today one of the most important Roman inscriptions in historical and graphic terms.

The person responsible for this important epigraphic project, executed between 1562 and 1563 (i.e. as Giovan Francesco Cresci was designing and publishing the basic models for the subsequent creation of the Sistine letter), was Giovanbattista Palatino, a scholar of ancient letters and a writer of treatises. After almost a decade of Sistine epigraphy – which originated with Pope della Rovere (1471-1484) and was widely adopted as an aristocratic style, in sizes and formats according to individual memorial stones, for the monuments of princes and cardinals – now imposed on the gigantism of public works was a compari-

son and fusion with the Roman monumental capital: the Sistine model survives here, not so much in its individual forms, as in its extreme precision generally; in detail, perhaps only in the slant to the left of the oblique stroke and serif of the N, in the strong serifs of the M, slightly off-balance to the left, and in the curve of the tail of the R. The other letters come from the classical tradition, studied with compass and ruler.

The character was produced in three versions for the depth of engraving with a magnificent design and a perfect use of spacing: while the bases of the five lines are all at the same distance, the body of the first is about a third larger and the character of the second has an intermediate intensity. The graphic design becomes more pronounced towards the top partly because the space between the letters increases as the letters become smaller; the first line thus stands out the most, like the title on a title page. The last high number in the notation, common in Sistine epigraphy, goes back to the imperial use.

For anyone going along Via Flaminia (in front of the Gate) for non-epigraphic reasons, don't miss seeing on the façade of the **Palazzina of Pius IV** (at no. 166, the present Italian Embassy to the Holy See, less than one kilometre from the Gate), the stone laid by Fabrizio Colonna just after he took possession of the palace, which was given in dowry by his wife Anna Borromeo, who had received it from her brother Carlo, who had been given it by his uncle (the same Pius IV of Porta del Popolo), after Paul IV had in turn confiscated it in 1577 with the whole of Via Giulia from the family of Julius III Ciocchi del Monte; Pirro Ligorio had carried out extensions at Carlo's request (see the stone above), building the elegant upper floor and it is perhaps to this that the austere classicism of the lower plaque relates, even though it is of the baroque era. Note, in the small central plaque,

the graphic inversion of the u and the v. More passionate researchers should be reminded here that the Etruscan Museum of Villa Giulia is close by, with various small bronze inscriptions that are direct ancestors of the most ancient writing of the Republican age.

Season permitting, the more bucolic may venture into the **Villa Borghese** gardens – on the pretext of going to look at their pure neoclassic character – and postpone the tour of the city.

Their attention will first be drawn to the metallic Bodoni relief letters on Luigi Canica's two propylaea of 1826; then, much further on, turning to the right at Aesculapius' fountain at the bottom of Viale Washington, beyond the ancient Egyptian gate at Viale Fiorello la Guardia, turning to the left again at Piazzale delle Canestre, finally at the end of Viale Pietro Canonica they will find the fake ruin of the temple of Faustina, dated 1792, with an inscription in Latin. They can then go back by Viale Canonica and turn right at the first large avenue or go along Viale di Valle Giulia: in both cases they will come to the lake, where they can decipher the Greek inscription on the architrave of the temple of Aesculapius (1876) before sitting down at the tables of the refreshment kiosk for a well-earned rest and the welcome of the romantic shade.

We, on the other hand, will go through the Gate and enter the city, welcomed by the simple plaque behind us (on the inner face of the Gate), which commemorates in classicist style the arrival in Rome of Queen Christina of Sweden in 1655; on that occasion, only after the Queen had been greeted with ephemeral pomp and ceremony was construction of the inner face begun, to Bernini's design; the appearance of the outer face also changed, with the elevation of the attic, firmly stamped with the heraldic

crest of the newly elected Pope Alexander VII Chigi and crowned on the outside with fanciful ornamentation and breastplates.

The large church rising above us is **Santa Maria del Popolo**, so called either because it was built (this is nothing new) at the expense of the populace or, according to Latinists and botanists, because of the former existence of a poplar tree (*populus*).

The two symmetrical plaques on the façade, at each side of the portal, bear the text of Sixtus IV della Rovere's papal bulls of 1472; in his second year as pope, with the fortification of the Gate and the restoration of the church, he was preparing for the jubilee of 1475 (see the plaques on Ponte Sisto, p. 58). The closely written texts establish the times and types of indulgences granted to those visiting the church. The characters, small and understandably worn (the best plaque is on the left), demonstrate the tendency to develop the style of Sistine epigraphy: in particular the oblique stroke of the N with the top left serif extending prominently over the vertical stroke, as well as the curved tail of the R and the extended one of the Q, the very rounded loop between the stem and the arm of the L (more so than in Trajan's letters) while the A has not yet assumed the typical slant to the left.

Inside, there is a more perfect *littera sistina* on the monument to Giovanni della Rovere (†1483), brother-in-law of Sixtus IV, in the third chapel on the right and on other monuments of the time by Andrea Bregno. Instead, at the end of the two sides of the transept, on a level with the feet of the angels, are the symmetrical curled scrolls of the family of Pope Alexander VII Chigi, with attractive large-scale lettering; added during work by Bernini in 1658, they

are representative of the more moderate and classicist tendency in baroque epigraphy.

At the exit, rather than pausing at the nineteenth century letters naming the barracks opposite, we will head towards the centre of the piazza, where the great **Flaminio Obelisk** stands. This is one of the oldest in Rome (c. 1200 BC), dedicated to the Temple of the Sun in Heliopolis by Ramses II and his son Mineptah; it was brought here at the time of Augustus and erected in the Circus Maximus. It is one of the four landmark obelisks in the town planning of Sixtus V and celebrates the fame of Domenico Fontana who was responsible for the colossal task of having the obelisks erected on their chosen sites. On the west side of the base, facing the Fountain of Neptune (to the right, with its back to the church), the letters designed by Luca Orfei in 1589 to inscribe the text by Cardinal Silvio Antoniano, carved directly in the ancient granite, contrast with the characters, unfortunately almost all illegible, of the age of Augustus on the other three sides (c. 10 BC). James Mosley writes: 'Stanley Morison suggests that the design of Orfei's capitals was encouraged by Sixtus V as part of the pope's determined conversion of pagan materials and buildings to Christian use, and that these 'Sistine' capitals are a Christian revision of the capitals that were part of the insignia of Augustus, Trajan and the succeeding pre-Christian Emperors [...] The Sistine detachment from the proportions of the letters on Trajan's Column was deliberate, authoritative and Christian'.

On the architraves of the twin churches the large letters of the inscriptions await restoration that will render the typically baroque design (last quarter of the seventeenth century) visible once more.

A little after the beginning of Via del Corso, to the left, in the **church of Gesù and Maria**, on the entrance wall at the sides of the portal, two inscriptions in golden letters on black Lydian stone decorate the monuments designed in full-blown baroque style by Ercole Ferrata and Domenico Guidi for Giulio and Camillo del Corno (†1662, †1680). The stones are almost illegible, but are good examples of the use of 'fake irreverent matter' (cloth, animal skins, shells, crumbling leaves) next to the inscriptions or even as a support that animates the lines of engraved text, a central motif in the typology of the baroque funeral monument, together with multicoloured materials and a tendency towards the macabre. Down Via Antonio Canova (the first on the right after the church), site of the sculptor's studio, adorned on the outside with fragments of classical sculpture, we come to Via Ripetta: to the right, at no. 46, the inscription on the façade of the **Hospital of San Giacomo** commemorates its construction in 1584 on the part of Cresci's patron, Cardinal Salviati. The present state of the marble surface makes it difficult to examine the design of these characters which, as James Mosley writes, have an affinity with those of Cresci; more than a direct similarity in the individual letters of 1570 and 1578, can be traced their lightness and style.

Via Ripetta ends in **Piazza Augusto Imperatore**, built on fascist lines (1940), with typically ostentatious lettering. To the right, in front of us, is the Ara Pacis (only opened to view under glass in the 1970s) with the transcription, on the side towards the piazza, of *Res geste Divi Augusti* in bronze letters, grouped into seven cells of 28 long lines each, a trial of strength for the cult of Romanism. Going back,

skirting the piazza on the left we will come across a fountain with a large mosaic decoration and several lines in Latin inscribed in relief in simple grotesque characters on travertine. These same characters are used for the short dedicatory inscription by the Italian people at the centre of the façade of the building on the side of the piazza to our right.

Down Via dei Pontefici we get back to Via del Corso and, turning right, come to the front of the **church of Santi Ambrogio e Carlo**, with its name written in black in gigantic letters (1672). We pass Palazzo Ruspoli along a stretch that is notable for its air, noise – and lettering – pollution. We escape by turning right into the piazza and going into the **church of San Lorenzo in Lucina**; if we wish to see the degree of skill required to inscribe a long and complex text on a fake lion skin, we should immediately search on the left for the last echo of graphic evolution in the baroque era in the sepulchre of Bernardo Pasquini († 1710), an organist of Santa Maria Maggiore. This memorial stone has also been the victim of drastic ‘bleaching’.

We then make our way to Via di Campo Marzio (leaving the church from the left and turning left again at the end of the piazza) and cross Piazza del Parlamento.

Before continuing, if we have a pretext for going as far as the central post office, keeping to the left, we cross Via del Corso; we then follow Via delle Convertite as far as the piazza where, immediately left, before the post office building, stands the church of San Silvestro in Capite, which gives its name to the piazza. To the right of the portico can be seen the copy of Pope Damasus’s epitaph to San Tarcisio (perfect for looking at the forms of the Philocalian alphabet close up) and a beautiful *titulus* carved in large letters — an

early interpretation of the Roman capital, extremely free and ingenious but with an evident quest for graphic style.

From Piazza del Parlamento we take the narrow Via della Missione, which skirts the righthand side of the Palazzo, and the steps to Piazza Montecitorio; here we can see the small **Montecitorio Obelisk** from Heliopolis, engraved with late hieroglyphics from the period of Psammetichus II (c. 590 BC). This was also brought to Rome by Augustus and erected as the gnomon of a gigantic sundial in the Campus Martius, towards the present Piazza San Lorenzo in Lucina (the large bronze numbers that marked the hours have recently been found in the basements of nearby buildings). The obelisk lay underground for five centuries, until the time of Sixtus V’s town planning reforms, but it was only finally excavated two centuries later by the architect Giovanni Antinori in 1792. On the north side of the base, towards Palazzo Montecitorio and – even more visible – on the south side, the imperial characters display a perfect v-shaped furrow, clearly engraved and precisely designed; the characters of the inscription dating from the time of Pope Pius VI Braschi on the west side are a little less wide but rounded in form, in conformity with the tastes of eighteenth century epigraphy; on the east side is the signature of the architect.

Overlooking the adjacent Piazza Colonna is **Palazzo Wedekind** (where the ‘Tempo’ offices now are). Its sixteen ionic columns, brought from Veio, support an architrave of neoclassical form bearing an inscription dated 1838: note the N without a serif at the top left, in accordance with the criterion of Trajan. On the base of the **Column of Marcus Aurelius** (late second century AC) are four widely spaced

Sistine inscriptions dated 1859, their designs similar to those that Orfei will publish a year later. Via dei Bergamaschi leads us to Piazza di Pietra, with the vast stone columns of Hadrian’s temple. By taking Via dei Pastini on the other side (where a stop at the small crowded bakery for a piece of hot Roman pizza is recommended) we come to Piazza della Rotonda. The inscription on the architrave of the **Pantheon**, which is dedicated to Augustus’ son-in-law, Marco Vipsanio Agrippa ‘consul for the third time’ and financier of the building work in 25 BC or, according to some, in 27 BC (the year of Augustus’ accession to the Empire), was repeated as in the original when the temple was entirely rebuilt, almost a century after the time of Hadrian, who relinquished the *titulus* with his own name. The letters were cast in bronze during nineteenth century restorations. Note the ‘hunch-backed’ curve of the G (typical of the square monumental capital), the very high crossbar of the A, the closed bowl of the P, the sans serif tops of the M, the pointed serif (downwards only) of the central arm of the E and F. Under this, other small and not easily recognizable inscriptions commemorate further restorations of the building at the time of Septimius Severus and later by Caracalla (202).

Walking along the lefthand side of the Pantheon (Via della Minerva), we come to the **Basilica of Santa Maria sopra Minerva**. The small tablets on the right of the façade show the level reached by the Tiber in its devastating floods. The small obelisk of the sixth century BC with its simple hieroglyphics was erected here at the time of Pope Alexander VII in 1667; the text of the inscription, which he composed, under the small elephant of Bernini that was inspired by *Poliphilo*, warns us that *robusta mentis esse solidam*

sapientiam sustinere. Thus aware of the risks we are taking but convinced nevertheless of our own strength, we go into the basilica to see the two undulating scrolls, which contrast with the severe geometrical form of the monuments to Juan Diaz de Coca, in the eighth chapel on the right (1477) and of Diotisalvi Nerone (1842), on the counterfacade to the left of the portal.

To get back to Via del Corso we take Via del Piè di Marmo, which skirts the righthand side of the basilica; at no. 35, the marble sign of A. Scardazza's grocery store is still miraculously preserved intact. Straight on is Piazza del Collegio Romano. On the façade of the Palazzo del Collegio Romano is a weighty inscription by Pope Gregory XIII Boncompagni, dated 1583, two years before the Sistine letter of Sixtus V and Orfei. We continue along Via Lata (on the left, before coming to Via del Corso, after the small so-called Facchino fountain, is one of the very common seventeenth/eighteenth century notices exhorting the populace to maintain cleanliness in the streets).

Before going straight on again along Via dei Santi Apostoli, we stop in the small piazza on the other side of Via del Corso, on the left. There, in the **church of San Marcello**, clear reference to the style of the Renaissance can be seen in the simple plaques – executed by different artists and displaying different characters – dedicated to six members of the Frangipane family, in the third chapel on the left, which was built by Alessandro Algardi in 1625, at the very time of the development of the baroque anticlassical spirit. The fully developed forms of late baroque survive, however, a whole century later in the animated grey marble scroll on the complex sepulchre of Cardinal Fabrizio Paolucci de Calboli (†1726), the work of Pietro Bracci, in the

last chapel on the right, on the righthand wall. On the left of the counterfacade the books that support the sarcophagus of the sixteenth century tomb of the bishop Antonio Ages (†1511) commemorate the 730 codices that he bequeathed to the monks of the San Marcello monastery. Typical ornate monuments in true eighteenth century Bernini style are erected to the Muti Vicentini husband and wife in the second chapel on the right.

We come to the **church of Santi Apostoli** by the street and piazza of the same name: in the portico, to the right, surmounted by the eagle, are two minor examples of the two Sistine letters, one wider and the other longer, as can be seen from the width of the M and the N; the slant to the left of the A is typical. Inside, at the end of the left nave, is the monument to Clement XIV Ganganelli (†1774) – a pope who was both an antiquarian and a collector – laboriously executed by Antonio Canova when he was not yet thirty, between 1783 and 1787. It is one of the first modern examples of the use of applied metal letters, which will have much success in neoclassical epigraphy; the characters are still greatly reminiscent of Roman capitals, later to be supplemented by Bodoni models (actually published at this time), rendered in a robust bronze version during the whole of the first half of the nineteenth century. On the counterfacade, above the portal, is another contemporary example of metal letters. Gigantic blue letters on gold flow along the architrave in late baroque style. We now cross Piazza Venezia and go to the **church of San Marco** (at the end, to the right, turning the corner at Palazzo Venezia); among the collection of ancient stones in the portico to the right, the first on the left bears a closely written text dating back to Paul II Barbo (1466); a pleasant time can be had in

finding the numerous *littera inclusa*, abbreviations and double links (NE, TE) in the lively design of the small letters (less than two centimetres high). Inside, at the back on the right, is the pyramid-shaped monument to Fabrizio Erizzo (†1700), with an elegant inscription in pale rounded letters on a dark background, which takes us towards the final phase of baroque epigraphy, whose excesses will be replaced once more by graphic austerity as we see in the two large symmetrical tondos in red marble with white letters at the sides of the dome of the apse, high up on the walls of the nave. They were offered in 1744 by Cardinal Angelo Maria Querini (commemorated in a memorial stone dated 1735 in the portico as the organizer of restorations in the church), together with the concave plaques at the sides of the altar balustrade. Graphic designers will also appreciate the beautiful geometric design of the Cosmati floor right in front of the altar. At the back, on the left of the stairs, is a dedicatory inscription of 1476 to Cardinal Paolo Capranica, executed in the first years of the papacy of Sixtus IV, with a still uncertain Sistine letter at the beginning of its evolution (there is a strange intermittent use of serifs at the tops of the A and the N). With binoculars, you can clearly see the golden letters at the bottom of the ninth century mosaic in the dome of the apse.

Second itinerary

From Piazza del Campidoglio to Corso Vittorio

We climb the steps up to the Capitol, under the gaze of the small, yet rebellious bronze statue of Cola di Rienzo (on the left), who 'each day used to study the

stone cuttings that lay around Rome. He was the only one who could read the old epitaphs. He made the ancient texts understandable to all' (as quoted by Petrucci).

In the centre of the square, on facing sides of the elegant **base for the statue of Marcus Aurelius**, designed by Michelangelo in 1538 – another famous victim 'bleached' in recent restorations – are two convex tablets, one linked with the Farnese papal coat-of-arms (on the front of the base) and the other with that of the Roman people (on the back). One of the inscriptions is for popes Sixtus IV and Paul III, both responsible, in different ways, for the restoration of the statue, while the other is dedicated to the emperor portrayed here and to his predecessors. A somewhat anticlassical feel emerges from the curved tablets, their severe simplicity of layout with a single letter height based on the longest line of text and the generous white space left on the one tablet.

On the balustrade are other sixteenth century inscriptions. To the left, inside **Palazzo Nuovo** (Capitoline Museum), in the Sala del Fauno, is the large and beautiful *Lex de Imperio Vespasiani* of 69 AC. This is a tablet cast in bronze (and not engraved) with the official text conferring full imperial powers on Vespasian. On the walls of the same room are many small plaques from different periods: in the first window on the left of the Sala delle Colombe are the Pompeius Strabo decree of 90-89 BC and a Greek 'senatoconsulto' of 78 BC, both in bronze; in the second window of the same room is an attractive plate with two portraits, a patronage plate of 260 AC, again in bronze, and a calcite *Tabula iliaca capitolina* with a minutely cut inscription in Greek letters summarizing the whole Iliad.

We go into **Palazzo dei Conservatori**, to the right: on the left wall in the courtyard is a large fragment that would originally have had bronze letters, from the arch on Via Lata dedicated to Claudius after the conquest of Ancient Britain in 43 AC; here there is almost no difference in thickness of strokes in all sizes of the compact characters. The *Fasti Consulares* and the *Fasti Triumphales* are on the back wall of the Sala della Lupa, designed by Michelangelo (but now lacking the pediment) and list – in a similar form as in the primitive hypothetical setting in the Arch of Augustus in the Roman Forum – the names of the civil and military Roman authorities over the centuries; by pure chance these lists escaped in 1546 from the continual grinding of old marble from the Forum to make lime; to these correspond the modern lists from 1640 onwards with the names of the city magistrates, on the left of the staircase. After these, on the left, are two rooms of important Christian inscriptions.

For the moment, the Braccio Nuovo and the Passaggio del Muro Romano, where many outstanding memorial stones are exhibited, are closed for repairs. Nevertheless, worthy of mention are: the base (in the first room of the Braccio Nuovo) with its dedication to Hercules by the dictator Minucius in 217 BC; in the Passaggio del Muro Romano, the sarcophagus of the supreme pontiff Publius Cornelius Scapola (III century BC), the beautiful base of the statue of Cornelia (III century BC), and the cippus of Agrippina Major. This comes from the Mausoleum of Augustus and was used in the Middle Ages as a measure for salt and corn at the market held in Piazza del Campidoglio, as evidenced by the inscription 'ruggitella de grano' and the decoration of the oldest Roman coat-

of-arms and the acrostic P(opuli) RO(mani) A(utoritate).

'Of the many proportions given by the ancients to the tail of the Q, all of them graceful, he [Cresci] chooses one just under twice the width of the round part of the letter, 'as can be seen in a little epitaph on the Capitol which OSSA NERONIS, etc.' (Mosley). The Tabularium (at present closed), in the direction of the Roman Forum, under the Palazzo Senatorio, was once the seat of the archives of public documents (*tabulae*) and now houses a lapidary collection. A first partial census of the inscriptions that constitute the patrimony of the City of Rome indicated more than six thousand pieces in the Capitoline museums, in the Forums with their antiquarium and in the Coelian depositories; the other two collections in Rome comparable to this are at the Museo Nazionale Romano (at present most of the rooms are closed) and at the Vatican Museums (partly closed for repairs, but accessible in future with an easily obtainable pass).

At the end of the square, on the left, a staircase (temporarily closed) goes up to the **Basilica of Santa Maria in Aracoeli**. Inside, on the counterfacade over the portal is a gigantic scroll with a closely written inscription dedicated to Urban VIII Barberini; on the same wall, at the bottom left, is a monument to Cardinal Ludovico d'Albret (Andrea Bregno, after 1465) bearing the oldest type of Sistine Renaissance letter, already formally defined some years before the Della Rovere papacy. Beneath our feet, a fragment of red marble with the letters I A E M F bears witness to the sacrifice of many pagan classical pieces. Finally, to the right of the d'Albret monument, just before the door, is a small vertical tablet from the time of

Alexander VI Borgia (1493). On the way out, to the right in front of the door, notice the delicately curled serifs in the floor inscription of Flavio Biondo dated 1463, and then look up to the crenellated tower on the roofs in front: it bears the name MAXIMA, according to the Renaissance custom of inscribing towers with the family name (as we will see shortly on Tor Millina, in the next page) and was the observatory of Duke Mario Massimo, astronomer and mathematician, president of the Accademia dei Lincei and a minister in 1848.

Down Via d'Aracoeli, in front of the long staircase, to the left of the gardens, we cross over Via delle Botteghe Oscure and come to the **Chiesa del Gesù**, on the right of the square. Work on the ambitious project of this temple for the order of St Ignatius was finally made possible through the financial intervention of Cardinal Alexander Farnese, commemorated by the inscription of 1575 on the façade: 'some letters (A, R, E) which approach the Trajan idiom, and others (such as S) which are incompatible with it' (Mosley). Buried under a simple red marble flagstone in front of the main altar, the cardinal is celebrated inside the church over the central portal by a large tablet dated 1575 similar to that of Porta del Popolo. Leaving the church we go along the street in front, Via del Plebiscito, that ends shortly ahead on Largo Argentina. Here, in the middle on the opposite side, is the **Teatro Argentina**. For the inscription on the façade, a rather gross and strange capital letter was invented during restorations in 1837, owing nothing to imperial models. Passing the façade of the theatre, to the left we come to Via Arenula; turning into Via Santa Maria del Pianto, the third on the left, we reach Via del Portico d'Ottavia. The building on the

left at the beginning of this lively road, decorated with fragments in high relief, is the **house of Lorenzo Manilio**, completed at the end of the fifteenth century. Its windows greet the city with the motto HAVE ROMA while a love of all things Roman is declared in the large Latin inscription in pseudo-classical characters engraved directly on the wall. Here is commemorated the fact that 'while Rome is born again in its original form, Lorenzo Manilio, for the love he bears his birthplace and within his limited possibilities, gives the name of Manilia to the house on Piazza Giudea built for himself and his heirs, in the year 2221 from the foundation of Rome (1468), at the age of fifty years, three months and two days, in the eleventh day of the August calends'. At the same time as Bramante is promulgating his rigorous, small and widely spaced characters with elegant parsimony and an analysis of Roman capitals via geometry is being undertaken, Lorenzo Manilio's large letters, and their free construction, bear witness to the more direct and lively side of classicism, capable of cocking an eye at emperors with the mere intent to draw attention to their authors' own small individual power. In the last part to the right of the inscription, the craftsman's skill improves; the R has a curved tail and the whole design is more refined.

At the end of the road, on the architrave of one of the remaining propylaeum from the gigantic **Portico d'Ottavia**, an inscription commemorates its restoration at the time of Septimus Severus and Caracalla (203 AC).

On our way back, while eating some famous toasted *bruscolini* from the baker below Lorenzo Manilio's house, we can observe, on Via Publicolis (off via Santa Maria del Pianto to the right) one of the many

seventeenth-eighteenth century tablets about street cleaning. We cross Via Arenula and pass in front of the church of S. Carlo ai Catinari with its dedication to Pius IX Mastai Ferretti of 1861 in the counterfacade. Further on, at the corner with Via dei Chiavari, on the right, is another tablet, similar to the previous one, about street cleanliness. The third street on the left, Via Arco del Monte, becomes Via dei Pettinari and leads to **Ponte Sisto**: on both sides of the retaining wall are two notable tablets commemorating the 1475 jubilee, originally in the City Antiquarium and placed here after nineteenth century restorations to the bridge. The double message was dictated by Platina, the humanist Bartolomeo Sacchi, librarian at the refurbished Vatican. (on the left): 'Sixtus IV Supreme Pontiff reconstructed from its foundations, with great accuracy and expense, this bridge that was rightly called Broken, for the use of the Roman people and for the multitude of pilgrims coming for the jubilee; by his will it is renamed after him, Sixtus'; (on the right): '1475. Ye who pass here, thanks to the providence of Sixtus IV, pray to God that He save us and preserve the Supreme Pontiff. Bless you, whoever you are, for your prayers'.

The letter design is attributed to Bartolomeo Sanvito. The poor cut is a result not so much of the *marmorarius* (who was obviously one of the best, given the importance of the job), but of the action of time and particularly the frequent cleaning required for these tablets, which are much admired by lovers of inscriptions. Even without the original V furrow, these letters demonstrate how similar Sistine capitals in public works are to the severity of imperial models, and how they avoid the graphic effects (distorted and exaggerated serifs) so frequent in

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inscriptions on private monuments.

Let's now walk briefly along Via Giulia and turn right to Via del Polverone which at the end borders on **Palazzo Spada** (to the right); on the façade (mid-sixteenth century) facing Piazza Capo di Ferro, among the windows of the top floor there are eight tablets with relief letters, which introduce lettering in a new way as an element of exuberant decoration.

Through Via dei Balestrari, from Piazza della Quercia in front of the corner of Palazzo Spada, we come to the nearby Campo de' Fiori. At the end of the street, above the street sign, a beautiful Sistine inscription recalls the opening of Via Florea (the present Via del Pellegrino, which continued here in Via dei Giubbonari); the inscription is dated 1483 and is addressed directly to the "terra di Marte" reclaimed under Sixtus IV's urban-planning enterprise.

We cross the square and, at the back to the right, come to **Palazzo della Cancelleria** which overlooks the left side of the homonymous square. While we imagine seeing Arrighi and the other "segretari dei Brevi" calligraphy masters writing papal documents in this hall, we note the letterforms, the same found in the cloisters of Santa Maria della Pace, constructed on geometric lines by Bramante for this façade (1495).

From the portal to the right of the building we enter the old **Basilica di San Lorenzo in Damaso**, dedicated to the pope who was author of the famous epitaphs cut by Filocalus (see p. 68); at the back to the left there is the tomb of Cardinal Ludovico Scarampi, with a late Sistine letter of 1505; on the back wall is a famous Bernini memorial for Alessandro Veltrini, a cubiculum of Urban VIII and, on the right side of the nave, there are some nineteenth century examples of epigraphy, some very fine indeed. Before

we reach Piazza San Pantaleo (for many years seat of the Scuole Pie - writing schools) on the other side of Corso Vittorio, and take the small street on the right leading to Piazza Navona, let's go towards the big **church of Sant'Andrea della Valle** to look at the inscription on the front, but above all, in the inside, at a strangely shaped and unevenly spaced gigantic capital letter that runs along the architrave of the nave; in front of the church we cannot refrain from reading the fascist inscription extolling the virtues of war. We walk the whole length of Piazza Navona, not forgetting to look at the small inscription on the **obelisk** that definitively won over Innocent X Pamphili with regard to Bernini's artistic talents. At the side of the Borromini church we take Via Sant'Agnese, going along Via di Tor Millina (there is a large brick inscription high up on the tower at the crossing) until we get to Via della Pace on the right: here we may enjoy the scenic beauty of the small square while looking for Via Arco della Pace on the left, because at no. 5 we enter the famous Bramante **cloisters** (1504). The strictly geometrical design of the inscription was executed in harmony with the canons of the Renaissance treatises. In the cloisters are two examples of Sistine Renaissance letters (1497 and 1498). As we want to return to Piazza Navona, we go down the alley to the right of the church of Santa Maria della Pace (Vicolo della Pace) and turn right: on Via Santa Maria dell'Anima, to the left of the church dedicated to the German nation, at no. 65 is the **house of Giovanni Sander**, notary of the Sacra Rota. Some examples of lettering can be seen, the best being in the upper part of the rich graffito decoration now almost illegible. Now we return to Piazza Navona: we must pass under the little arch in front of us at the end (at the other side of the square) and continue towards the larger arch that we can see beyond the square. If we avoid getting run over, our tour will end with the façade of **Sant'Agostino**, bearing an inscription dated 1483. 'The proportions are broad, the serifs generously cut, and the squarish curves of the c and g and the huge bowl of r immediately suggest Trajan inscription and that of the Pantheon' (Mosley).

Third itinerary

From the Quirinal to St John in Lateran

In 1587 Sixtus V Peretti erected the two Dioscuri statues from the third century AC in the **Piazza del Quirinale**, in front of the new papal residence, to serve as signposts to the Strada Pia, the central road leading to Porta Pia. An inscription dated 1589 on the base (XYSTUS PONT MAX), facing Via Ventiquattro Maggio, celebrates the occasion. The characters are similar to Cresci's first designs (the M has the same slanted stems) but are thinner and have particularly extended and slim serifs: the A, V and R are widened. The spacing is moderately wide and all the words are separated from the trilobate points. Under the cornices behind the statues are the two signatures of Domenico Fontana. The script OPUS PHIDIAE (with the central arm of the E extended) and OPUS PRAXITELIS are also most probably from the sixteenth century. Two centuries later, in 1786, at the time of Pius VI Braschi, to a design of the architect Giovanni Antinori, the group was rotated to its present position and the obelisk that had been recently recovered in pieces in the Mausoleum of Augustus was erected between them.

The three epigraphs carved on the sides of the socle of the obelisk (almost illegible because of the colour of the granite) and the central inscription at the base behind the statues (ME QUONDAM AEGYPTI DESECTUM) belong to this phase. These characters are wider and more closely spaced than the previous ones; the furrows are deeper and hence the strokes are thicker, the serifs spread out even more horizontally, the tail of the Q is short and turned downwards, the tail of the R very curved, the M and N are narrower. The design

of the characters in the lower part of the block is more delicate.

The composition was completed in 1818 by Raphael Stern for Pius VII Chiaramonti with the addition of the grey granite basin from the Roman Forum and the epigraph in metallic letters on the front. Using binoculars (and being especially careful, since the obelisk stands in a particularly dangerous position in the middle of fast traffic), we can compare three generations of epigraphs, their differences particularly evident in certain letters.

Along Via del Quirinale and Via Venti Settembre (the Strada Pia), after about 1 km we come to Piazza San Bernardo. The right side of the Quirinal Palace, the so-called 'long sleeve' reaches almost to the crossroads with Via Quattro Fontane. Here we can see the successful effect of the inscription on the undulating surface of the **church of San Carlino alle Quattro Fontane** by Borromini. On the facing building of 1936 we can read the fascist precept of *nova erigere vetera servare, utrisque inter se convenientibus*. We are midway between the two long Sistine street intersections that end with three obelisks (Trinità dei Monti, Quirinal, Esquilina) and Porta Pia. Eventually turning left into Via Quattro Fontane, we come to Piazza Barberini. We skirt the square until we come to the corner of Via Veneto with the **Fontana delle Api**. This was designed by Bernini in 1644 for the corner of what was then just a simple country square, set between the present Via del Tritone and Via Sistina. Demolished in 1867 when new urban planning changed the appearance of the square, it was consequently rebuilt here in 1917 when Via Veneto was opened. The epigraph follows the undulating surface of the scallop shell with a new intermingling of writing and sculpture that goes beyond the traditional limits of a plaque. Of the original fountain, only the central bee remains, the rest has been reconstructed in travertine, in place of the original Luna marble.

The **church of Santa Maria della Concezione** (the Capuccini) is further along Via Veneto on the right. Inside, at the centre of the rostrum, in front of the others, is the lovely pavement tombstone of Cardinal Antonio Barberini, with a self-dedication († 1646). It reflects a simplicity that is quite different from contemporary baroque work: *hic iacet pulvis cinis et nihil*. On the wall to the left is the monument to Prince Alexander Sobieski († 1714), brother of King John III of Poland, designed by Camillo Rusconi. To a similar design as that of Carlo Fontana for Christina of Sweden in San Pietro, the brass letters on the front of the sarcophagus confirm the gradual tendency of eighteenth century epigraphy to abandon baroque for classical models. Via Barberini to the left of the cinema on the square goes up to Piazza San Bernardo.

Here we face the Fountain of Moses, the **Acqua Felice Fountain**. Begun in 1585 and finished in 1587, the Felice aqueduct had already been planned in 1583 by Gregory XIII Boncompagni to collect the three Marcia, Tepula and Giulia watersources. It is the first of the great works by Felice Peretti, who later became Pope Sixtus V. From Porta Furba on the Via Tuscolana, after Porta San Lorenzo, water crossed the street by Porta Salaria (through Piazza Sixtus V, the only remaining arch of which is now on Via Marsala). It passed through Sixtus V's Villa Monfalteo and then, after a short course underground, came to Piazzale Termini, which was equipped with troughs and fountains for livestock. Where we stand it appeared in the fountain and continued on towards Via Quattro Fontane until it reached the new summer papal residence at the Quirinal. Domenico Fontana's project for the fountain seems to have been conceived as a support for the enormous plaque, one of the most beautiful in Rome, serving almost as a proclamation of the grandeur of the Sistine works. The

papal title is barely emphasized by the slightly larger and more heavily carved characters, as was traditional use. The letters have been painted in black and afford a prototype for Orfei's Sistine letters, characterized above all by compact design and wide spacing. The influence of imperial models can be seen in the slightly 'hunchbacked' curves and gentle flow of the serifs of the c. There are some imperfections in the carving, as in the bowl of the p (open three times and three times closed), the width of the last stem of the m (sometimes light and sometimes heavy) or the left serif at the base of the l, which is longer than that at the top. The design of the letters on the architrave is even more refined and slightly different: for example, the final serif of the l curves back on itself and the serif of the crossbar of the e is not pointed like those of the memorial stones.

James Mosley points out the signature of the architect and 'Luca Fanensis', i.e. Luca Orfei da Fano, in a minute inscription down to the left between the stone and the architrave, invisible to the naked eye (with binoculars the top half can be seen). To appreciate these characters, compare them to the two seventeenth century inscriptions on the facades of the two churches and particularly with the huge Latin words that run below the cornice of the Ministry of Agriculture at the beginning of Via Venti Settembre.

We come to Piazza della Repubblica along Via Vittorio Emanuele Orlando (to the right, facing the Moses Fountain). Inside the vast **church of Santa Maria degli Angeli**, on the left, is the monument at the right of the entrance that Carlo Maratta designed in 1704 for himself († 1713) with its contrasts between precious marble and black lettering, beautifully

engraved letters and stucco residues. At the back in the curve of the left apse is the memorial stone for Pius IV Medici († 1565) by Alexander Cioli (1582). The beautiful characters are among the few that follow the models published by Giovan Francesco Cresci in those years. It is possible to enter the Sacristy apse when mass is not being held. An important meridian line traverses the church pavement on the right. Above the door is Benedict XIV Lambertini's large scroll (1749).

Outside the church we turn left and skirt the enormous epigraphic repositories of the Baths of Diocletian, which are closed to the public. At the end of the street we turn left for the entrance to the only section of the **Museo Nazionale Romano** open for viewing, between two newstands. There is a large collection in the garden outside, both of fragments of inscriptions, some monumental, and of funerary pillars and stele from different eras, representing the largest concentration of inscriptions that can at present be viewed in Rome without special permission. In the cloisters (to the right of the entrance) are the precisely designed and carved funerary pillar of Ottavia Theogenide; in a corner at the back are lists of records in the *Ludi Saeculares* of Augustus (17 BC) and fragments of 168 lines of writing that are just over one cm in height. On the side opposite the entrance is the lead *fistula aquariae* with its capital letters in relief from the period of Domitian and Marcus Aurelius, as well as the funerary pillars of Minicia Marcella and Manius Valerius Bassus; Statonia Marcella, the wife of a dignitary at Trajan's court, with its deeply carved letters reminiscent of those in the plaque on Trajan's Column; on the left is the pillar dedicated to Silvano with emphatic serifs apart from the trun-

cated ones on the inside of the right stem of the A and M. On this side of the central garden are several monumental fragments. Leaving the Museum we cross the square in front of the station and go down Via Cavour until we reach the apse of the **Basilica di Santa Maria Maggiore** in the busy Piazza dell'Esquilino, adorned by the **obelisk** that, together with the obelisk now at the Quirinal, once flanked the entrance to the Mausoleum of Augustus. For years reduced to cumbersome ruins in Via Ripetta, it was erected here by Sixtus V in 1587 in front of the entrance to his Villa Montalto as an urban signpost to the Strada Felice, the street that led to Trinità dei Monti. The epigraph on the base by Cardinal Silvio Antoniano was designed and carved by Luca Orfei directly on the granite.

Inside the Basilica are three examples of memorial stones on a black background. If we enter from the apse, on our left is the entrance to the Sistine Chapel (or of the Sacrament), which was created by Sixtus V at the beginning of his papacy for himself and for St Pius V Ghisleri. The monument to the left at the entrance to the Chapel was finished in 1587 by Luca Orfei who produced three magnificent memorial stones, unique for the beautiful design of the letters, the confident engraving, elegance and legibility*. One almost has the impression that the thin letters were directly cut into the marble, because of their evident imperfections and uncertainty together with the shameless presence of guidelines. The serifs are curved and seem almost chiselled, with the same calligraphic sensitivity shown in the varying thickness of the curves, which creates characters that are pleasingly irregular and different one from the other. Note the confident lines of the D and, by contrast, the sli-

ght indecision in the double loops of many of the letter s. In the stone on the right commas and a semicolon have been used.

'Apart from the different layouts or techniques adopted, all the inscriptions (...) designed by Orfei are characterized by an immediately recognizable graphic style, seen principally in the extended relationship between the height and width of individual elements, in the subtle and at times faint *chiaroscuro*, in the moderate but still visible use of serifs, also contributed to by a tendency to extend some strokes or signs (high tail of the Q, Y, etc.) Such elements are recognizable not so much in the exalted models of the imperial age or in Cresci's theoretical examples, as in the style of the Roman epigraphy of a century earlier, imposed by Bregno and Sanvito and adopted between the age of Sixtus V and the beginning of the sixteenth century. Therefore, if there is something "baroque" in Orfei's work, it can be attributed to this very phenomenon, i.e. to his tendency to fall back on "pseudo-antique" or so-called "antique" elements and models. The restoration of classical capitals proposed by Orfei is more preached at than practised since, in actual fact, instead of the Trajan model, in the context of Sistine urban reform, graphic standards are adhered to that are closer in time and more adapted to public taste, that of the late fifteenth century' (Petrucci).

On the other side of the chapel are twin black stones of a more rigid design.

In front of the Sistine Chapel, in the Pauline (Borghese) Chapel, designed by Flaminio Ponzio and commissioned by Paul IV Borghese for himself and for Clement VII Aldobrandini, are further examples of memorial stones with a black background. Here the design is even more calligraphic than in the former examples and the strokes – almost too light – resemble the scratches of a nib on the shiny black

marble. On the floor, surrounding the large marble disk dated 1611 of Paul v Borghese are majestic and gigantic white letters on a black background with typically baroque rounded serifs.

At the end of the lefthand nave is another exit (at present closed).

To the right of the door a gloomy niche preserves at the bottom of the righthand wall, a little stele (SYXTUS PONT MAX) with the final lines in Greek, composed in 1481 by Bartolomeo Sacchi, called Platina, for himself and for his brother. A torch helps to see the two narrow plaques on the side walls of the niche, which commemorate in gothic capitals the donation by Flavia Xantippe (a ninth century copy of a sixth century text).

At the far end of the basilica, on the opposite side at the right of the portal, is the cenotaph of Nicholas v Masci by Domenico Fontana (1574), with a high memorial stone on a black background carved a few years before those of Orfei in the Sistine Chapel (almost illegible in the half light).

In 1614, during the time of Paul v Borghese, Carlo Maderno erected the only remaining column from the Basilica di Massenzio in front of this basilica.

One of the inscriptions on the base engraved by Fabrizio Badessi attributes its origin 'to the impure temple of a false god'. Via Carlo Alberto in front of the basilica takes us to the Vittorio Emanuele metro.

Towards the end of Via Carlo Alberto on the right, in Via San Vito, is the so-called **Arco di Gallieno**, or Porta Esquilina, in the Servian wall. The inscription by A. Aurelio Vittore dedicates the restoration of 262 to the Emperor Gallieno and to his wife Salonina (under restoration). Further on from the entrance to the Piazza Vittorio gardens, on the left, is the so-called **Porta Magica**, which once belonged to

the villa of the marquis of Palombara, a well-known Roman occultist who hosted Christina of Sweden's alchemical meetings in Rome. Underneath the sign of Solomon and between two busts of Bes, a late Egyptian divinity, religion and alchemy merge in the complicated occult meanings of the inscriptions (at present not open to view because of garden restorations).

Two stops on the metro bring us to **Piazza San Giovanni in Laterano**. On the eighteenth century façade is a copy of the inscription in romanesque characters from the outside of the old basilica. The original fragments are in the cloisters. Inside the basilica some large letters are to be seen, first on the pavement of the atrium: Clement XIII Corsini, who had the façade rebuilt, is remembered in a circular inscription dated 1737 with massive capitals inlaid in black on white marble surrounding his noble coat-of-arms. Inside are other large black capitals with rounded serifs in the pavement below the two arches half way up the central nave. They commemorate the new flooring of 1655 at the time of Innocent X Pamphili, shortly after Borromini's work for the jubilee.

The robustly designed fat metal letters in relief, denominating the statues of the Apostles, date back to the eighteenth century. In the apse, work on recomposing the mosaic is completed by a long inscription in golden characters on a blue background dated 1884 and honouring Leo XIII Pecci. In the nave to the right, the third monument on the left, for Alexander III Bandinelli, in typical Borromini style, dates back to the age of Alexander VII Chigi (mid-seventeenth century); the late 1617 drapes below, which commemorate Cardinal Bandinelli, ripple with a simple inscription. To the back at the

right of this nave, just before the transept is a monument to Cardinal Antonio Martinez de Chaves, known as the Cardinal of Portugal († 1447) by Isaia of Pisa. The plaque is vivaciously composed in 'Florentine-style' grotesque capitals, but with spontaneous and irregular variations in the widths at the ends of strokes. Note the squared points and the free initial A in ANNO in the third line, plus the cemented furrows.

From the left nave, towards the apse, we come to **Vassalletto's cloisters** dating from the early thirteenth century and signed in the frieze of the portico facing the entrance, on a stone with characters that forebode the gradual re-emergence of the Roman capital. Ranged around the cloister walls are stone relics from the old basilica of various eras, mainly medieval. One of the few pieces from the Roman era is the stone of a letter carver, Quinto Lucrezio Quinziano (no. 98). The side door on to Piazzale Laterano is at present closed for repairs as a result of the damage caused by the 1993 bombing, so we go out from the back and skirt the basilica on the left. On our right is the strangely rounded Orfei inscription on the façade of the **Scala Santa** (1589).

In the middle of Piazzale Laterano is the **Lateran Obelisk**, the oldest and tallest in Rome. From the temple of Ammon in Thebes, it is dedicated to Tutmes III and IV. In the fifteenth century BC Constantine's son brought it to Rome and erected it in the Circus Maximus, from whence it was excavated in 1587 and raised in Piazzale Laterano the following year by Domenico Fontana for Sixtus V. Luca Orfei's inscription of Cardinal Silvio Antonino's text was carved by Matteo da Meli on the travertine base. The only one in black on white carved on travertine

rather than on granite (like the Flaminio, Vatican and Esquiline obelisks), the inscription on this base clearly represents the Orfei's Sistine character, slightly inclined and widely spaced. Even the z is like this (BAPTIZATUS on the south side towards the portico of the basilica). Note on the east side towards the Lateran Palace the extended tails of the qs.

Fourth itinerary From St Peter's Square to Trastevere

Transporting and erecting the **Vatican Obelisk** in St Peter's Square from the nearby Nero's Circus was the most spectacular and memorable episode of all Sixtus v's undertakings in the City of Rome during his five years as pope. From April to September 1586, Domenico Fontana orchestrated the proceedings together with 44 windlasses, 900 workmen and 140 horses. At the time the monolith was still at the centre of the circus where Caligula had brought it from Heliopolis (see the inscriptions on the north and south sides, behind the bronze eagles). Epigraphs by Luca Orfei are on the four sides of the base, carved directly into the old granite. Of the two minor inscriptions behind the eagle above, the one facing the Basilica is a famous example of cryptographic epigraphy. The present panel appears to be recessed because the previous *titulus* in metallic letters has been cancelled. However, with a magnificent piece of puzzle-solving, in 1976 the epigrapher Filippo Magi, by studying the position of the holes of the mounting, was able to reconstruct and publish the text, first dedicated to the prefect Caius Cornelius Gallio and then substituted by the present one dedicated to Tiberius. On the

architrave of the colonnade, white letters in relief repeat the name of Alexander VII, who planned the square and who is remembered in one of the two superb monuments by Bernini within the Basilica. The black inscription on the façade of the **St Peter's Basilica** dates from 1614: in this 'post-Orfei' period the use of large-size capitals was beginning to become widespread (with their obviously more pronounced strokes compared to Sistine letters). Over the next two centuries these develop into full, much rounder and nearly always perfectly legible forms. The theoretical principles of this new epigraphy, which took root during the papacy of Paul v Borghese (1605-1621), are to be found above all in texts by Cesare Domeniche – the author between 1602 and 1603 of treatises on the production of epigraphs on Orfeian models – where the central role of monumental writing that will lead to graphic gigantism is affirmed.

On the pavement at the entrance, John xxiii's 1962 inscription in inlaid marble Helvetica is an example of common lettering typical of 1960s new graphic design. Very high up between the entrance portals are three important documents (whose characters are visible only with binoculars). One is the papal bull of Boniface VIII Caetani dated 22 February 1300 indicating the first jubilee; the second contains verses by the English monk Alquin carved in Tours on black marble and dedicated to Pope Hadrian I by Charlemagne in 795, five years before his solemn coronation by St Leo III on Christmas night in 800 (the use of the then obsolete Roman capital here takes on evident political meaning); the third is a donation to the Basilica made by Gregory II in 720 of some olive groves to provide oil for the lamps. Note on Fila-

rete's central door (1433-35) in the cornice around the figures of Saints Peter and Paul the invented decorative characters of Arabic inspiration that recall those edging the mantles of various Madonnas in pictorial tradition from the Primitives up to the Renaissance. Inside the Basilica, to the left of the first aisle on the right, is the monument to Christina of Sweden (†1689), to a design by Carlo Fontana of 1702 that will have a great deal of success throughout the eighteenth century, whereby the epigraph is integrated with the elements of the composition such as the cornice of the medallion and the semicircular scroll or, diversely, even on the sarcophagus with its typical upturned trapezium form. On the pavement at the centre of the nave are two large disks: one of Innocent X for the jubilee of 1650 and the other of Pius IX Ratti with sans serif letters for another jubilee, merely dated XIV (of the fascist era: those wishing to may work it out). To the right of the tribune is an attractive black scroll with golden letters on the monument to Clement X Altieri by Mattia De Rossi (1648). Only by using binoculars can we see in the curve of the apse to the right the gesture of Death writing the name of Urban VIII Barberini (†1628) in golden letters in his book.

This famous monument was the work of Bernini between 1642 and 1648. Some years before the inscription on the façade, between 1605 and 1606, the powerful mosaic inscription on the inner tambour of the cupola was executed in gold, blue and enamels. Ventura Sarafellini, author of the project, was a calligraphy master at the schools then run by the Scolopi Fathers of St Giuseppe Calasanzio, which were first in Piazza del Paradiso and later opposite Sant'Andrea della Valle. Known as the Pious

Schools, they trained a whole generation of scribes. Later, in 1619, the same author will execute the nymphaeum inscription in the Villa Aldobrandini in Frascati, a masterpiece of epigraphic gigantism, about a hundred metres long. The inner corridor leading up to the cupola is an excellent viewpoint from which to observe and compare the letters on the tambour with those running in a black on gold frieze on the architrave along the entire length of the nave, and which are nearer to the style of Orfei. The circular inscription of the oculus around the base of the lantern on the cupola is by Luca Orfei (c. 1589). On the back wall above the portals three typically classical plaques commemorate the three greatest popes of the early seventeenth century: Paul v Borghese, Urban viii Barberini and Innocent x Pamphili. Under the Basilica lies a notable pre-Constantinian necropolis, accessible from the pillar of St Andrew and the Vatican Grottoes; permission to visit can be obtained by writing to Rev. Fabbrica di San Pietro, 00120 Città del Vaticano, Italy.

The collections of inscriptions in the **Vatican Museums** are divided into three sections. Christian Lapidary Museum and Profane Lapidary Museum, considering their specialist nature, are excluded from the normal itinerary. A separate written request for each should be sent well in advance to the Direzione Generale dei Musei Vaticani, 00120 Città del Vaticano. For unscheduled visits, try appealing to one of the custodians (information from the switchboard number 69883333). The third section, Lapidary Gallery (now included in normal itinerary), is the main one of the three. It contains about five thousand pieces, takes up more than half of the Braccio Chiaramonti and was set up by Gaetano Marini

at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The Gallery has been closed for a long time for reflooring. Among the profane pieces are many funerary stelae from the imperial era, classified by the occupation or degree of kinship of the subject, and which take up almost all of one of the two long walls. On the other wall mainly Christian stone tablets are displayed.

The Gregorian Profane Museum was built on the initiative of John xxiii to house in the Vatican the archaeological material displayed from Gregory xiv's time in the Lateran Palace. Since its opening it has housed the Christian Lapidary Museum. The Profane Lapidary Museum was created in a new pavilion in 1973 by Ivan Di Stefano Manzella. Many of the fragments, mostly originating from Rome and Ostia, have been displayed for easy consultation on large sliding panels or on hinges when inscriptions are written on both sides (opisthographs). Among the many pieces is a large tablet from Ostia of Septimus Severus, integrated with perfect nineteenth century work, and some writing and style samples.

Permission is not necessary to see the sequence of bases in the Chiaramonti Museum (in the part of the Braccio that borders on the Lapidary Gallery). Here some fine works, some rustic ones and even some fake Renaissance ones mingle with the originals. All the letters have been rubricated, i.e. redone in red, according to nineteenth century restoration taste. In the Atrium of the Four Gates, at the entrance to the Chiaramonti Museum, is the large peperino sarcophagus of L. Cornelius Scipio Barbatus (consul in 298 BC) from the sepulchre of the Scipio family, the most important set of epigraphs from the Republican era. Once permits have been granted, in order to

avoid the long trip through the Museums, one can cross the Cortile della Pigna directly and continue straight along to the Chiaramonti Gallery and thence to the Lapidary Gallery. On the way back follow the exit signs towards the Gregorian Profane Museum. However, apart from these concentrated collections, many important epigraphs can be found all along the visitors' route in the Museums, although sometimes not in readily evident places, such as behind the pillars in the Octagonal Courtyard or even under the windows of the Library Corridor that leads to the Sistine Chapel.

The Vatican Apostolic Library has more than sixty thousand manuscripts in the whole of its collection. The entrance for scholars is from the Sant'Anna courtyard on Via di Porta Angelica, but on a normal tour of the Museums one crosses the Sistine Hall, where many temporary exhibitions of manuscripts are held. Particularly large exhibitions overflow into the adjacent room and on these occasions the door at the back is left open; only then can be seen Luca Orfei's two plaques on the other side, one forbidding the removal of volumes and cursing those who damage them and the other with a short history of the library collection. They are dated 1588, the year that the Sistine Hall was built, connecting the two long galleries of the Palaces. Painted examples of non-Latin scripts can be seen in the decoration of the pillars and on the scrolls above the historical personages.

There is an important example of an inscription by Bramante (c. 1505) on the outer wall of the Julius II Gallery that connects the Belvedere Palace with St Peter's Basilica. In Mosley's view, the extremely free design, "soft" serifs and singular grandeur of the

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whole inscription pre-announce the Sistine letters of Cresci and Orfei.

Either we can go by car along Via delle Mura Aureliane from Piazza di Porta Cavalleggeri, past the righthand side of St Peter's Square or take the no. 23 bus near the Vatican Museums (Via Leone IV) to Lungotevere in Sassia, in front of the Santo Spirito hospital, and then change to bus no. 41. Ask for directions to the "Fontanone" (big fountain) on the Janiculum, which is what the Romans call the **Mostra dell'Acqua Paola** (the Fountain of the Acqua Paola). This was executed between 1610 and 1612 at the end of the work undertaken by Paul V Borghese to provide the Vatican and the Borgo and Trastevere districts with a new aqueduct running from the source of Trajan's aqueduct but also collecting water from two lakes; the water fed the gardens and fountains of the Vatican and Villa Pamphili as well as providing energy for a mill and a paperplant. In the design of the façade, a triumphal arch with a stone attic and papal coat-of-arms, constructed in marble from the Forum of Nerva, Flaminio Ponzio and Giovanni Fontana repeat the design of the Mostra dell'Acqua Felice. At the beginning of the seventeenth century the size of the letters starts getting bigger: strokes get thicker, serifs are more concave and, as can be seen with the help of binoculars, the tips are much more rounded. Thus is the new gigantic capital whose heavy body will adorn many architraves and will remain unchanged until the second half of the eighteenth century. For this letter, a dark sign on a light background (black or grey on white for the façades, as in this case; blue or black on a gold background for the interior) is often preferred to the chiselled v-shape, together with metal and

more recently relief letters as well.

In this enormous plaque the structure of the character is still close to Orfei's designs. Nevertheless, while at the Mostra dell'Acqua Felice (20 years earlier), spacing tended to exceed even line spacing, these characters are much closer together and larger.

To the right of the Fontanone, at the beginning of the way down Via Garibaldi, is the fascist sacrarium of 1941 honouring those who fell for an Italian Rome, with relief inscriptions on travertine and mosaics in the crypt.

From the Fontanone we could walk down towards Trastevere along Via di Porta San Pancrazio and then left along Via Garibaldi, but survival is threatened by too many cars. Instead we can take bus no. 41 just after Via Garibaldi to the right of the Fontanone and to the left of the beginning of Viale delle Mura Gianicolensi (note the inscription of Pius IX on Porta S. Pancrazio).

If we have not seen the Paula Fountain in the Vatican we can take any passing bus for Lungotevere in Sassia, as already mentioned, and get off at Piazza Trilussa where there is another smaller Acqua Paola fountain. This was transferred here from the opposite side of the Tiber when the embankments were being built, thereby frustrating the text of the epigraph, which commemorates the crossing of the river by the Acqua Paola itself. Facing us is an example of the Latin mottoes that were written on the fronts of buildings in the 1930s. Common to all Roman districts, they present numerous variations of Roman capitals, from Art Nouveau types like this one to Art Deco, to those of more severe forms incised on plaster or marble with careful attention to design and spacing. At the end of Via del Moro to the left we

come to the square and **church of Santa Maria in Trastevere**. In the atrium and within is a collection of Christian stones including two famous examples of Gothic capitals: one in the small alternating black and white bands that enclose Pietro Cavallini's mosaic cycle in the basin of the apse (late thirteenth century) and which closely resemble a Medieval manuscript; the other is in the righthand plaque underneath the organ in the left arm of the transept and is one of the last Roman inscriptions in Gothic characters composed after 1417 for the monument Paolo Romano designed for Cardinal Pietro Stefaneschi. To the left underneath the bas-relief of the *Dormitio Virginis* are similar letters, carved about twenty years before for Cardinal Filippo d'Alençon. Follow Via della Lungaretta until Piazza in Piscinula, and then turn to the right to reach Piazza Santa Cecilia and enter the **Basilica di Santa Cecilia**. Through the verdant cloisters the vestibule contains a tombstone for Paul III Farnese dated 1554 and two for Gregory XIII Boncompagni dated 1582, minor examples of Roman epigraphy immediately prior to Sixtus V's reforms. On the pillar to the left of the portico is enclosed a small Roman funerary inscription. On the architrave large metal eighteenth century letters commemorate the important restorations of 1724 on the part of the titular Cardinal Francesco Acquaviva. To the right is the ornate monument to Cardinal Paolo Sfrondati († 1618), one of the powerful family of Gregory XIV. The black background of the fine inscription contrasts with the colours of the marble, at present somewhat dull and neglected. Inside immediately to the left is the monument to Cardinal Nicolò Forteguerri († 1473) attributed to Mino da Fiesole, with one of the most precise exam-

ples of Renaissance Sistine epigraphs. In the pavement in front of the main altar is a disk in red marble with a white inscription and Arabic numbers, another example of epigraphic classicism in the early seventeenth century. In the mosaic of the apse is a gilded inscription of Pasquale I (817-824). The Aventine – on the opposite bank of the Tiber at this level – is the hill where several of the main paleo-Christian basilicas are clustered. In particular **Santa Sabina** conserves inside, over the central door, a large mosaic band with a very beautiful inscription in gilded letters on a blue background, the only remaining piece of the primitive fifth century basilica. About thirteen and a half metres long and four metres high it was made to commemorate the presbyter Peter, founder of the Basilica at the time of Pope Celestine V (422-432). Some decades apart from the Christian character originally created by Filocal, monumental celebratory inscriptions tend to adhere fairly closely to imperial models. The irregularly drawn and spaced letters are 40 cm high and take up seven lines. Apart from the striking slant of the v, note the serifs even on the flattened top of the A and the strange variations in the crossbars of the T. Not far away in the scenic setting of **Piazza dei Cavalieri di Malta**, Giovan Battista Piranesi includes a large memorial stone honouring Clement XIII Rezzonico in the walled square he designed in 1765.

Fifth itinerary Roman Forum and Appian Way

The tablet on the base of **Trajan's Column** is almost unanimously acclaimed as the greatest epigraphy

masterpiece of all time. The characters, carved some nineteen centuries ago (between 112 and 113 AC) are still a supreme example – unsurpassed for some – of accurate design and legibility, carefully spaced and perfectly cut. The Trajan letters come from rich imperial epigraphic experience and have been the ideal model for Roman capitals from the sixteenth century up to the present.

After Cresci, Jan Tschichold and Eric Gill have put forward hypotheses of reconstruction based on reliefs and yet differing between them. James Mosley has studied their evolution and finally Father Edward M. Catich has published various analyses culminating in 1968 with a massive work (almost a police investigation), concluding with the assertion – definitive in his view – that the imperial inscriptions were first painted in all details with a flat brush, at a slant of about thirty degrees, then carved and painted red; the inscription is therefore preceded and conditioned by the stroke of the brush; in this sense the serifs cannot be justified as unavoidable retouching of the carving of the triangular furrow but are a conscious graphic choice, and above all the cliché can be retracted whereby all Roman capitals must always be constructed geometrically.

The text reads: 'The Senate and the Roman people to the Emperor Caesar Divo Nerva, son of Nerva, Trajan, Augustus, Germanicus, Dacicus, Pontifex, Maximus, seventeen times tribune, six times emperor, six times consul, father of the homeland, to show how high was the hill that with such fatigue has been excavated'. The hill was the 'saddle' between Quirinal and Capitol; the Column, almost 40 metres high including the base (the column itself is 100 Roman feet high) was built to celebrate

Trajan's victory over the Dacians in 107 AC. The inscription is not on general view: one can go directly to the entrance to Trajan's markets, on Via Quattro Novembre (the visit to the markets does not include the Column, so hope to find an amenable custodian), or telephone the relevant service on 67231. During Spring 1994 on Sundays when Via dei Fori Imperiali was closed to traffic, the town council organized exceptional opening hours for Trajan's Forum, but we do not know whether this enterprise will be repeated.

On the grass, to the left of the Altare della Patria are the remains of the tomb of C. Publius Bibulus, *edilis plebis e tribunos plebis* in 209 BC; the characters of the inscription – which seem to be more of a century later – are some of the few examples remaining of monumental epigraphy from the Republican era. On Via dei Fori Imperiali, behind the gardens, a fine view can be had of the Roman Forum, from the Curia side, with an excellent and free observation deck for the arch of Septimius Severus. The nearby church is dedicated to saints Luke and Martina; on the façade a baroque inscription (Urban VIII Barberini) takes up the classical tone, more suited to the context of the Forum. Before going into the Roman Forum we pass Largo Corrado Ricci where, on the side of the Tor de' Conti looking on to the street that bears its name, a third century tablet in gothic capitals can be seen.

Going into the **Roman Forum** from the entrance on Via dei Fori Imperiali, after the ramp, on the right is a monumental inscription to Augustus' nephew, Lucius Caesar, the 'prince of youth', from an arch of 2 BC and another imperial monumental fragment of the first century (IMP AUG TRIB PLEBS). Further on, in

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front of the large brick Curia building, under the so-called Tomb of Romulus, at present closed, in the area known as Lapis Niger from the previous black marble floor, a sacred stele is preserved with the oldest Latin inscription (royal period, VI century BC, written in two alternate directions (boustrophedonic writing); there are two copies in the Vatican Profane Museum and in the Museo della Civiltà Romana. Nearby on the left is a base of 403 with a chiselled name for the *damnatio memoriae* of General Stilicho. On the ground, a precious fragment shows a comparison between square and rustic capitals.

Septimius Severus' triumphal arch, built in 203 AC for the tenth anniversary of his empire is the first of the three large triumphal arches remaining, all with inscriptions for bronze lettering (*litterae calatae*) and with drilling holes. The double inscription on the attic commemorates the victories of the emperor and his sons. In front of the Column of Phocas dated 608, an inscription of large bronze letters (restored in 1955) recalls how the praetor L. Nevio Sordino had the Forum square paved at the beginning of the Empire (c. first century AC).

We go back towards the Temple of Antoninus and Faustina, with a large inscription on the architrave. In front of the circular temple of Vesta is the arch of Augustus; the Fasti that are today in the Sala della Lupa of the Capitol, that were once thought to pertain to Regia nearby, would have been exhibited here on the supports of the arch.

At the edge of the rectangular basin of the Fountain of Juturna, a sacred place for the Dioscuri, but at present closed, there is an aedicula with a copy of an important dedicatory inscription to the goddess Juturna.

In the adjacent **church of Santa Francesca Romana** (entrance at the end of Via dei Fori Imperiali), the equestrian monument to commander Antonio del Rio († 1475) in the second chapel to the right shows a variation on the Renaissance Sistine letter; note the elegantly extended serifs of the N at the top left, in the A down to the right and above. The characteristic strokes are very pronounced — thus the A slants to the left and the V to the right, the tail of the R is decisively curved and lifted, the first stem of the M is vertical, the last is oblique and to the left. Outside at the side of the church, among others is a tombstone to Cardinal Pisani († 17 September 1422) with cuneiform serifs, a residue from gothic capitals, immediately before the Sistine letter. In the nearby Antiquarium, the cloisters that should house a collection of fragments of inscriptions, are almost totally inaccessible. We continue on to the arch of Titus, erected by his successor Domitian around 81 AC in honour of Titus and his predecessor Vespasian. On the attic looking towards the Forum is an inscription of metallic letters commemorating restorations by Pius VII Chiaramonti (1823); on the side towards the Colosseum is a large imperial tablet with a very short inscription in large stout descending letters with little spacing; these have greatly extended serifs except inside the base of the right stem of the A and the M. We leave the Roman Forum and walk over the immense ruins of imperial palaces, while we wait for the Palatine Antiquarium to open, where there are a number of notable epigraphs. If we find the way, we can leave from the large sixteenth century portal on Via di San Gregorio, without going back along Via dei Fori Imperiali.

If we have enough energy left to climb up the steps of the **church of San Gregorio al Celio**, to the right in front of us, we will find in the presbytery two of the best examples of eighteenth century epigraphs of classical taste. Placed there in 1734 at the end of work by Cardinal Angelo Maria Querini, the two titular tablets have been carved as one, with flaring stems, accentuated variations in thickness, ample curves and emphasized serifs. In the cloisters, among others, is a monument to the Bonsi brothers with an uncertain Renaissance Sistine letter. To note, nearby at the bottom of Clivo di Scauro (turning right outside San Gregorio), the **Basilica of Saints John and Paul**. On the architrave is a twelfth century inscription carved with the renewed technique of the V furrow in letters that are once again inspired, after several centuries, by classical models. Let us remember here the remote existence of the prestigious Coelian Antiquarium, rich in relics and still cruelly indicated by a stylized marble tablet and relative arrow (on the steps to the right, going towards the Arch of Constantine).

The **Arch of Constantine** was erected in 315 AC, three years after the victory over Maxentius at Ponte Milvio, and was decorated with statues and bas-reliefs scavenged from other monuments of the classical period. It has a double tablet on the attic with a closely written inscription: 'This arch decorated with trophies is dedicated by the Senate and the Roman people to the emperor Caesar Flavius Constantine Maximus Pius Felix Augustus through whose divine favour and magnanimity, together with his army, defended the State from the tyrant and from all other factions in a just war'. This is the last example of cellular letters. Taking bus no. 118 we set off for the Appian Way in the other direction.

Piazzale Numa Pompilio is halfway between the old Porta Capena (whose name only remains) and Porta

San Sebastiano (formerly Porta Appia): the area between the two gates gives us an idea of how urban space has increased, from the approximately seven kilometres of the Servian Walls (of the Republican era) to the approximately twelve of the Aurelian Walls (272 AC).

By car we can go straight down towards **Porta San Sebastiano**; inside the gate a small inscription in gothic capitals dated 1327 celebrates the victory of the Trastevere leader, Giacomo Ponziani, over Roberto d'Angiò of Naples; next to it is carved a large figure of the archangel Michael. Here the **Appian Way** begins.

Entrance for cars at the **Catacombs of S. Calixtus** is at the centre of the crossroads between Appia Antica (to the left) and the Ardeatina (to the right). After three bus stops the pedestrian entrance is at no. 110. In the Popes' Crypt is the most famous of the many epigraphs that Pope Damasus (366-384) composed to honour the burials of his predecessors and other martyrs of persecution. The solid characters designed by the calligrapher Furio Dionisio Filocalo, 'devoted friend', with their curly serifs represent – as suggested by Stanley Morison – the first assertion of independence from the imperial tradition of autonomous power of the Bishop of Rome. The tablet was found in fragments and recomposed by Giovanni Battista de Rossi in the nineteenth century on the basis of later copies. In the Crypt of Sant'Eusebius, another similar tombstone has instead been almost entirely created *ex novo* on the basis of a few fragments: in this tablet the signature of the calligrapher Filocalo has been vertically carved. A visit to the Catacombs of S. Calixtus requires a good dose of Christian resignation since it is necessary to join the slow groups

of tourists but is recommended to all lovers of Christian epigraphy for the quality and quantity of the inscriptions.

Three kilometres further on, to the left, is the large cylindrical tomb of Cecilia Metella, daughter of the conqueror of Crete Quintus Metellus Creticus, and wife of Crassus, the son of the triumvir. Built at the end of the Republic, the tomb was then transformed by the counts of Tuscolo into a tower fortress within their large castle straddling the street. It was endowed with Ghibelline battlements by the Caetani in 1302. There is a simple large tablet above. From the ox heads in the decoration, the area was known as Capo di bove.

A further kilometre and a half brings us to the tomb of the children of the freed slave Sixtus Pompeus the Righteous, on the left (*Hic soror et frater*); three hundred metres further on is the tomb of Caius Licinius and that of Claudio's freed slaves, to the right, with its attractive imperial letters. The present patrimony of inscriptions on the Appian Way is all here. After the crossroads with Via Eroe Attico, the road continues for a further four kilometres without any notable stones and ends abruptly with the motorway.

Other sites

Foro Italico. The project of Enrico Del Debbio is based on a strong commemorative and decorative presence of lettering. The writing is arranged on the long row of travertine blocks at the entrance and is displayed as a texture in the mosaic on the floor. It is also, of course, on the obelisc where the name *Mussolini dux* is cut in vertical.

Museo della Civiltà Romana. In the large rooms, somewhat sad and dusty, are "deposited" the reproductions of the most important examples of roman epigraphy. The casts were made (not very carefully) for the Mostra Archeologica at the Terme di Diocleziano in 1911 and for the Mostra Augustea della Romanità in 1937.

Although very approximative and roughly painted in red, they can at least give us an idea of the different types and styles; among the best is the copy of Pope Damasus epitaph that we recommend to those who cannot pay a visit to the catacombs of San Callisto. The attraction of the museum is in fact the marvelous 200 square meters model of Rome at the time of Costantinus. The other important piece is going to be the cast of the Trajan Column (permanently under restoration): will the base be there too?

Museo Lapidario di San Paolo. Almost 3000 pieces, mostly pagan or catholic tombstone inscriptions, are located in two departments.

One is in the Basilica cloister (around 700 pieces generally available to the public) and the other is on the first floor of the convent joined to the Basilica (the entrance is on via Ostiense but it can be visited

only with a pass delivered by the Direzione generale dei Musei Vaticani, 00120 Città del Vaticano).

Piramide di Cestio. The pretor Caius Cestius Epu-
lus built it between 18 and 12 BC as a pharaonic grave
for himself. A twofold inscription is on the west
façade towards the Ostiense Station (one has his
name in the nominative case and has the *cursus hono-
rum*, the other has his last wills and a record of the
duration of the works).

Nearby, on via Caio Cestio, the old and graceful non
catholic cemetery deserves a visit. Halfway on via
Ostiense, which leads to the San Paolo Basilica, some
beautiful Art Nouveau letterforms can be seen above
the entrance of Mercati Generali.

Ponte Fabricio. It joins Isola Tiberina to "Ripa Giu-
dea" and is the oldest surviving bridge of ancient
Rome. It was built in 62 BC at the time of L. Fabri-
cius *curator viarium*, as can be read on the twofold
inscriptions on both sides of the bridge. Here the
width of M (in which the lower apex touches the top
of the next line), the small contrast in thickness and
the reduced serifs, are recurring elements in the let-
terforms of the republican period. On the inscription
which is closer to the Synagogue, a smaller line of
imperial letterforms recalls the restoration of 21 BC
which the consuls Marcus Lollius and Quintus Lepi-
dus initiated two years after the terrible flood that
destroyed Ponte Sublicio too.

Porta Maggiore. It was built in 52 AD at the time of
Claudius at the junction of the roads to Labici and
Prenestae; in the attic was the pipeline for the Clau-
dia water. The inscriptions in big monumental let-

ters are very beautiful; they glorify Claudius and the
Vespasian (71) and Titus (81) restorations; unfortuna-
tely they are scarcely readable because there are now
many stains on the surface of the travertine stone. A
pair of binoculars is absolutely essential.

Ivan Di Stefano Manzella points out to us that Clau-
dius, when he was a censor, in 47 AD, introduced and
tried to establish with strict rules the use of three new
alphabetical signs (the "Claudius letters which were
in fact almost totally ignored). Until the death of
Claudius (52) only a few examples of the first two are
known. Those new letters were an F upside down
and mirrored (it was called "digamma retroverso" for
the semivocalic *v* sound), an I with cross bar (like an
H missing its right stem) representing a sound in
between I and U, and a mirrored c (called "anti-
sigma") having different variations in shape for the
sound *ps* (and *bs*).

The famous grave of M. Virgilio Eurisace, State
baker, is also near Porta Maggiore.

Porta Tiburtina. Three large inscriptions on top of
each other tell us that it was built by Augustus (5
AD), restored by Titus (79) and by Caracalla later on
(213); the unity of their design is astonishing. In the
nearby Sixt v Square, adjacent to Stazione Termini,
is the arch erected in 1585 for the Sistine street works
and the opening of the Felice aqueduct: it shows two
very tightly spaced inscriptions in the style by Luca
Orfei.

Via Makallè. In the green is located a small example
of modern epigraphy realised in the old tradition:
four letters of Giovan Battista Cresci cut in marble
by Giovanni Lussu (1993).