

# Rome

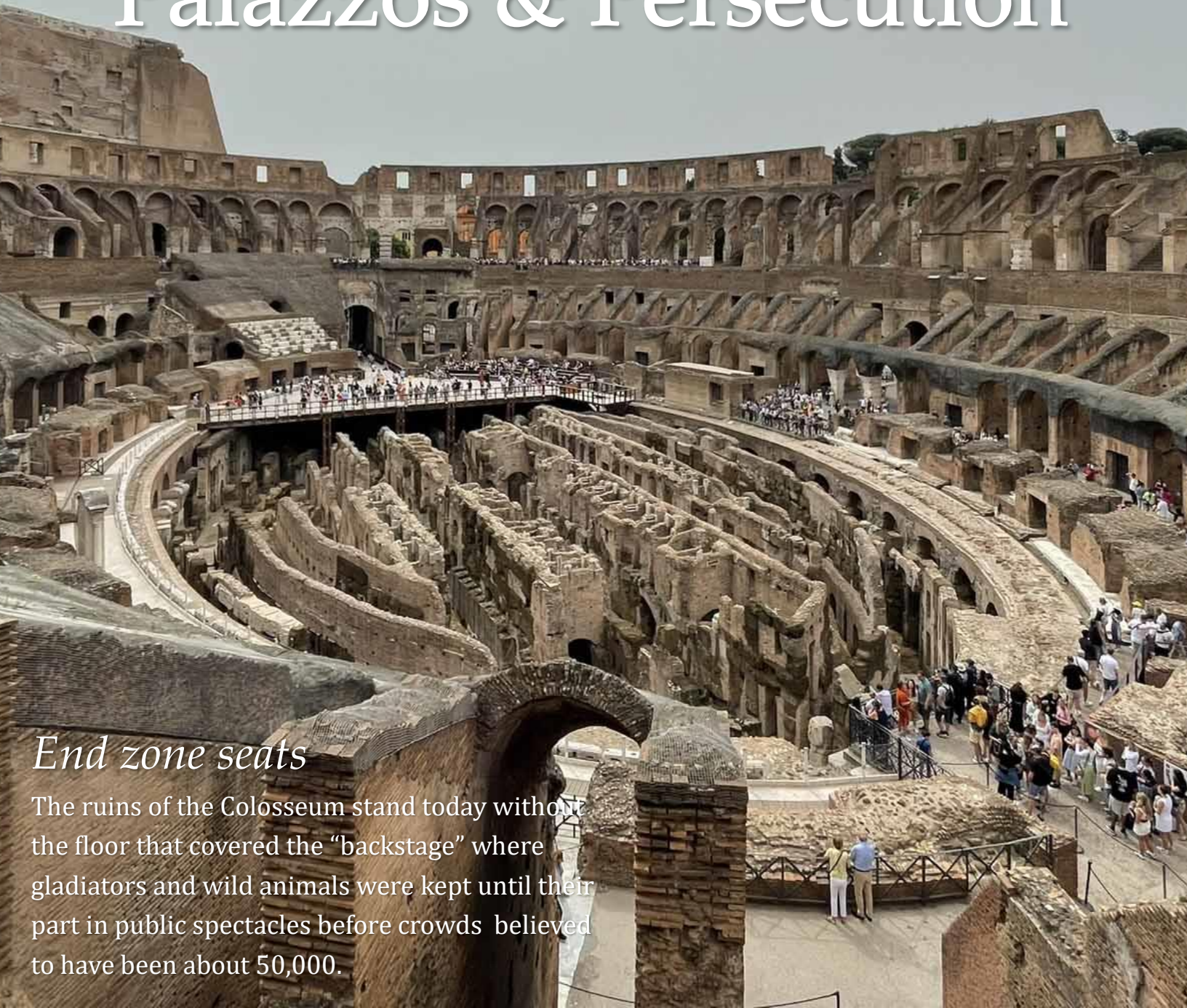
15-19 May 2024

Rome, Italy

## Pizzas, Piazzas, Palazzos & Persecution

### *End zone seats*

The ruins of the Colosseum stand today without the floor that covered the “backstage” where gladiators and wild animals were kept until their part in public spectacles before crowds believed to have been about 50,000.







## *Piazza di Spagna*

Emily stands in the Piazza di Spagna (Spanish plaza) at a boat-shaped fountain called the Barcaccia Fountain. The famous Spanish Steps are just out of the frame on the right.



# Pizzas, Piazzas, Palazzos & Persecution

SOURCES: Underlined words link to them

**A**fter landing **in** Rome on our flight from Paris, my thoughts **organized** themselves around the city's **age** and what I **remembered** from two years of high **school** Latin. "*Gallia est omnis divisa in partes tres,*" the **empire's future dictator**, Julius Caesar, wrote in the opening line of his **memoir** about **conquering** France. "All of Gaul (France) **is divided into three parts.**"

"Latin is a dead language. You can't speak it," people who'd never attended a 1960s Catholic mass told me but nevertheless advised me to take the course for some reason. I discovered why early when I learned the word *agricola*. "That's a farmer," Miz Gordon said.

*Agriculture*, I realized. *L'agriculteur* in French, I'd learn a couple of years later. *Agricultor* in Portuguese, Spanish and Romanian. Romanian? From *Rome*, as in *romance* languages. There's even a Swiss language called *Romansh*. All the boldfaced English words in the first paragraph have Latin ancestries.

Like their relics and ruins, the ancient Romans left their language and their alphabet scattered across the Western World hidden in plain sight. Times New Roman, anyone? Palatino Linotype? (Their numerals weren't worth a damn; thankfully Arabs remedied that).

Centuries before Herod, Pontius Pilate, Jesus and all that ancient New Testament stuff, Roman legions were zipping around Italy in chariots on a network of paved highways that inevitably led to the capital. Citizens of the city drank, washed their clothes and flushed their latrines with water brought in from mountains as distant as 50 miles / 80 kilometers via an aqueduct system more than 2,000 years old that's still in partial use today. Back then, the Gauls were living in huts on swampland along the River Seine where Paris now stands.

As general of the army that conquered Gaul, Spain and Britain in the name of Rome (although he had not been ordered to do so), Julius Caesar erased his personal debts and built a reputation back home as a military genius and hero. It helped that he wrote the history of his own accomplishments, a self-congratulatory eight-volume propaganda memoir — *Commentarii de bello Gallico* (commentaries on the Gallic War) — that two millennia later became the core curriculum of second-year high school Latin classes.

"*His rebus confectis, Caesar ...*" ("These things having been done, Caesar ...") the author would write about himself in the third person and then matter-of-factly move on to the next glorious victory. The last glorious victory came when Caesar intentionally brought part of his army back home with him to Rome when his term as governor of the conquered territory ended in 49 BCE. The Rubicon River marked the border between Rome and its northern provinces, and for Caesar or any other general to bring an army into Rome was an act of treason.

"*Alea iacta est*" ("The die is cast") Caesar is supposed to have said when he crossed the Rubicon. His army won the civil war that followed, and Caesar declared himself "dictator for life." Life, it turned out, was five more years before a group of senators stabbed him to death in the Roman Forum on the Ides of March.

Caesar's exploits are still celebrated *ad infinitum*. And beyond®.





*On the streets where we lived (and ate)*

Paved with stones just like the Appian Way — one of the earliest and most famous “vias” of ancient Rome’s highway system — the Via del Boccaccio near our neighborhood has at least one sidewalk café in every block.



# Notes on photos

**SOURCES:** Underlined words link to them.

**END ZONE SEATS** — Though Pope Benedict XIV said in 1749 that the Colosseum was a place where early Christians were martyred, the Catholic Encyclopedia says there is no evidence for what, after the pope's statement, became widespread popular belief. Both Jews and Christians were martyred elsewhere in Rome, according to multiple documented sources, for their refusal to honor Roman deities. The Colosseum, opened in the year 79, was the scene of many deaths and much gruesome public entertainment however. Professional gladiators fought to the death there, public executions were held and exotic animals from Rome's provinces and Africa were brought in for public display and killing, or were used to kill humans.

**PIAZZA DI SPAGNA** — When it was built in 1629, the water for this fountain came from the Vergine Aqueduct that was completed in 19 BCE. The aqueduct was renovated in 1453 and is the same aqueduct that serves the Trevi Fountain nearby and the Piazza del Popolo, pictured on the last page of my previous newsletter from Rome. The fountain was designed by architect Pietro Bernini, father of Gian Lorenzo Bernini, the Vatican architect also mentioned in that newsletter.

**ON THE STREETS WHERE WE LIVED (AND ATE)** — Rome's streets range from ginormous and difficult to cross to ones even narrower than this. But what makes them pleasant to walk along is that everybody else in town is doing the same thing and there are plenty of great places to stop for pizza, pasta or a drink along the way.

**PANTHEON** — The building is a real architectural wonder and gem, a testimony to the genius of early architects at a time most people in the world couldn't count past 20. It is the largest unreinforced concrete dome in the world, half of a perfect sphere with a circumference of 142 feet / 43 meters finished about the year 126. Since the oculus, the open hole at the top, is also 142 / 43, that means the space inside the building is a perfect sphere, the bottom half of which is half of a perfect cube. The floor contains an imperceptible slant that allows water to run off when rain comes through the oculus. Its name means it's a temple "of all gods." The Latin-speaking Romans turned to the people with a word for everything, the Greeks, for that. But since the year 609 it has been a Catholic church with regular Sunday masses. King Victor Emmanuel II, mentioned in the previous newsletter as the first king of a united Italy in 1,300 years before his death in 1878, is buried in one of the chapels.





## *The Pantheon*

At noon every April 21, when the city of Rome celebrates its traditional birthday, light from the oculus, the circular opening in the Pantheon's roof, illuminates the main door to this temple in what the Italian Ministry of Culture calls "one of history's first great special effects." Watch this [video of the event on YouTube](#). The legend that Rome was founded by Romulus in the year 753 BCE would make Rome 2,777 years old this year.