

The jewel of Roman heritage reopens its doors

By Nick Squires
in Rome

Still imposing after 2,000 years, a vast funerary monument that was once the resting place of Rome's emperors is to reopen to visitors today after a five-year restoration.

It cost €12 million (£10.4million) to restore the Mausoleum of Augustus, a fortress-like tomb for one of the greatest Roman emperors and his successors.

It is a place that, despite being right in the heart of the capital and just a stone's throw from busy shopping streets, restaurants and hotels, has rarely been open to Romans during the last 80 years.

Benito Mussolini embarked on a project to return it to its glory days in the 1930s, wielding a pickaxe to demolish the first of 120 medieval buildings that crowded around the monument.

But the project was interrupted by the war in 1942 and Il Duce's dreams of being buried in the mausoleum as a modern-day emperor came to an inglorious end when he was killed by partisans. The mausoleum fell into disrepair.

It has been revived with the help of an €8million donation from TIM, an Italian telecommunications firm, with the rest of the money provided by the city of Rome.

"Finally, the mausoleum is reopening and we are restoring to the world a jewel of humanity's heritage after many years of closure," said

Virginia Raggi, the mayor of Rome. "Rome needs to make the most of its past in order to look to the future."

The restoration should be "an important symbol for the recovery of not just the city but the whole country [following the pandemic]", she said.

A tall entrance leads into the monument, which consists of concentric corridors around a central cylindrical structure where the remains of Augustus and his successors, including Tiberius, Claudius and Caligula, were kept.

The outer walls of the monument are high, but they were once twice as impressive, reaching nearly 150ft. On top stood a huge bronze statue of

Augustus, now long gone.

Vast slabs of marble litter the inner courtyard, the remains of the cladding that once adorned the 300ft-diameter monument. Engineers carried out massive structural consolidation work, stabilising the walls and covering them with a protective layer of "pignocata", a special mortar mix. Iron girders and steel rods were used to reinforce vaulted ceilings.

Augustus began the construction in 28BC following his victory in the Battle of Actium in 31BC. "Augustus used architecture as a statement of political power. He built a huge bath complex and the Pantheon, but the mausoleum was the biggest project of all," Tania Renzi, a historian, told *The Daily Telegraph*.

After the fall of the Roman Empire, it was converted into a fortress by the Colonna family of Rome, then became a palazzo for a Florentine banker.

In the 18th century, it was used as an arena for bullfighting. There are also the remains of marble urinals, a legacy of the early 20th century, when the mausoleum was turned into a 3,000-seat concert hall.

Il gioiello del retaggio romano riapre le proprie porte



In Rome, a 2,000-year-old emperor's tomb finally reopens

ft.com/content/a3e2b5e-0a36-488b-a663-dda27828031d

4 marzo 2021



Relics of Augustus's reign are scattered across the city, but visitors can now enter his vast, circular mausoleum

When the Roman emperor Augustus died, in 14AD, on the 19th day of the eighth month, people had the idea that something momentous had happened, that the man and the moment of his death should be commemorated. So they named the month after him. Previously known as Sextilis, the month would be known, henceforth, as Augustus. But Rome's first emperor, adoptive son and heir of Julius Caesar, conqueror of Antony and Cleopatra, didn't get to be the most powerful man in the world by leaving things to chance. At the age of 34 — over forty years before his death — he had made his own arrangements to perpetuate his memory. Among his first building projects was his mausoleum, a vast tomb that became one of the wonders of Rome. Framed by cypress trees and topped with a heroic bronze statue of the emperor that glinted like a beacon in the sun, the mausoleum was as familiar to generations of Romans as the Colosseum, the Pantheon and the triumphal arches of the Forum. But to us, it is less familiar. It turns out that the tomb of even the greatest of emperors can be humbled. When Rome was sacked by Alaric in 410, the Visigoths smashed the vaults and scattered the ashes of the imperial family. As the ancient capital fell into ruin, the mausoleum's marble was looted and, by the end of the 10th century, it was little more than an earthen mound overgrown with trees.

In later centuries it seemed to have as many lives as the stray cats who haunt the ruins of Rome. It became a fortress, a garden, a bullring, a vineyard and a circus. By the early 20th century, it was a famous concert hall known as Auditorium Augusteo until Mussolini, who liked to see himself as a latter-day Augustus, declared it an archaeological site. The war, however, put a stop to excavations, and for decades Augustus's great tomb, one of the most significant monuments of the ancient capital, was a mysterious and

abandoned ruin, sulking behind hoardings, unloved and unseen. Thirty years ago, when I first peered through the hoardings, the tomb was an overgrown ruin covered in a tangle of ivy and weeds. Until now. After a €12m renovation, largely funded by Gruppo TIM, the Italian telecoms company, the great mausoleum has this week opened to the public for the first time in 14 years. Even with few tourists in Rome, visits are already fully booked for the next few months. Rome's first emperor has returned to his city. Before visiting the tomb, I went in search of the man, heading first for the Palatine, one of ancient Rome's swankiest neighbourhoods, where he lived with his wife Livia and his stepchildren. On the way, I looked in on the Capitoline Museums to see a wonderful bust of Augustus. The face is surprisingly contemporary. He looks an actor cast as a handsome hospital doctor. There is an air of calm thoughtfulness, a reassuring bedside manner.

While many historians hail Augustus as the greatest of Roman emperors, some also applaud him as the most modest — though admittedly the latter was hardly a muchcontested accolade. His tastes were simple, they say, his diet frugal. He was said to enjoy bread soaked in water with a handful of raisins, and he rarely drank wine. He collected fossils and was the proud possessor of a whale's skeleton. He enjoyed dice games, and doted on his grandchildren. He was said to have a dry sense of humour, once remarking that a nervous man handing him a petition looked like a man offering a penny to an elephant. His abstemious lifestyle was sometimes in conflict with the more licentious atmosphere of Rome. When he banished his daughter Julia for her involvement in an orgy in the Forum, people thought it harsh. If you started banishing people for the occasional orgy, you would soon empty Rome. Rearing above the Forum, the Palatine Hill is a quiet corner of the ancient city, even in a normal times. This year, it is a place of solitudes where you can find yourself alone with the ancient world. As I followed paths past the skeletons of old buildings to Augustus's house, I thought: this is what the ruins of Rome felt like 150 years ago — larks rising, wild flowers among the rubble of walls and fluted columns, cracked stone steps leading down into the grassy chambers of the past. The Palatine was residential. The great men of the Forum, emperors and senators, climbed this hill to be humbled by love and doubt, by their own obsessions and vulnerabilities.

At Augustus's house, I peered in through the window at his study. Its burgundy walls were decorated with frescoes and trompe l'oeil that would not have looked out of place in a Renaissance palace 1,500 years later. Oddly, his study was smaller than my own. From this little room, he ran an empire; from mine, I struggle to run a single shambolic life in England's West Country. Beyond the house, I gazed down on the dusty tracks of the Circus Maximus, where up to 150,000 spectators came on race days in the hope of some serious chariot pile-ups. With such huge crowds, disaster at the Circus was not restricted to the track. Once, 24 elephants broke through the railings and rampaged among hapless spectators. On another occasion, the tiers of wooden bleachers began to crack and give way. The story goes that Augustus, quickly realising the danger, rushed from the imperial box to calm the panicstricken crowds and organise a smooth evacuation. The Circus Maximus too became part of his mythology.

For Augustus — then still known more humbly as Octavian — Julius Caesar's assassination changed everything. When the will was read out, it emerged that he had been named as Caesar's adopted son and heir. There must have been dark murmurings as he skilfully consolidated his position as the first emperor, the very thing Caesar's murder had been intended to prevent. But in the end Rome was grateful for Augustus. He ended the civil war, expanded the empire, ushered in two centuries of Pax Romana, and transformed the city. He built the Theatre of Marcellus, a new Senate House and Rome's first baths. "I found Rome a city of bricks," Augustus would boast, "and left it a city of marble." This vast tomb, built in his thirties so that his subjects could see it in his lifetime, is hardly a work of self-deprecation

The assassination took place on the steps of a theatre in what is now Largo di Torre Argentina. In Rome, with its eerie continuity, it is somehow no surprise to find a theatre still standing on the site — the Teatro Argentina, a grand 18th-century edifice whose auditorium is all plush red velvet and gold leaf. The composer Gioachino Rossini “died a death” here too: the 1816 premiere of his opera *The Barber of Seville* was so badly received that he was obliged to flee and hide in a nearby pastry shop. I crossed the busy Corso Vittorio Emanuele, dodging buses, and dived into the narrow lanes of Rome’s centro storico. Known in ancient times as Campus Martius, or the Field of Mars, this whole area of Rome was first developed by Augustus, working closely with Marcus Agrippa, his friend and colleague. Today it is a meandering labyrinth of old streets lined with high-end fashion boutiques, back-street workshops knee-deep in wood shavings, smart restaurants, tacky souvenir stalls, ecclesiastical outfitters — check out the velvet slippers — and print makers so ancient that they look like they were patronised by the Borgias. It was Augustus who brought water to this part of Rome, with the aqueduct known as Aqua Virgo. After various restorations and modifications over the centuries, the aqueduct’s water still pours forth from famous fountains all over the district from the Piazza Navona to the Trevi Fountain. After a few twists and turns, including a diversion to visit see my favourite Caravaggios in San Luigi dei Francesi and another to have a coffee at Bar Sant’ Eustachio, I emerged in front of the Pantheon. I love the surprise of this colossal Roman temple in these cramped medieval streets. She rises from the clutter of surrounding buildings as a grand dowager, glamorous, a little threadbare, adorned with the trappings of another age. She was already very old when the Goths and the Vandals turned up in the 5th century.

The present building is Hadrian’s, dedicated in 126AD, but the original Pantheon, built by Agrippa a century earlier as part of an Augustan plan, was believed to have had the same footprint. Out of respect for his architectural predecessor, Hadrian left Agrippa’s name on the façade. It is one of the oldest standing buildings in the world, and when you pass through the colossal bronze doors, you are stepping into ancient Rome. Though vast — you are beneath a dome that was, until the 20th century, the largest in the world — the space feels intimate. The open oculus of the roof has a strange effect; I always feel I am wading through honey-coloured light in the Pantheon’s wide embrace. A couple of kings of the unified Italy are buried here. So is Raphael, Rome’s greatest painter. The state lays official wreaths for the monarchs. But once I saw an old woman bring roses for Raphael. In Augustus’s day, a processional avenue led from the Pantheon to his mausoleum. These days, you need to thread your way through the labyrinth. Eventually you emerge on the river, in front of a striking steel-and-glass museum designed by Richard Meier to house the most famous of Augustan monuments — the Ara Pacis, the Altar of Peace. Commissioned by the Senate in 13BC in commemoration of Augustus’s triumphant return from Spain and Gaul, the raised marble altar is the size of a small house. Among its exquisite reliefs is the whole Augustan family, almost 20 figures, the Roman equivalent of a Buckingham Palace balcony scene. At the end of the line of elders you can see the child Claudius reaching up to clutch at the skirts of a toga.

Augustus’s Mausoleum lies just across the street. Thirty years ago, when I first peered through the hoardings, the tomb was an overgrown ruin covered in a tangle of weeds and ivy. Careful and “conservative” restoration work has been going on since 2016 to clear the site and to consolidate the structure. Elaborate landscaping with garden walkways will eventually connect it directly to the Ara Pacis. On opening day, Monday, the first of March, I followed a gravel path down to the colossal entranceway of Rome’s most spectacular tomb. The structure is circular, like the Colosseum, like the Pantheon. At its heart, standing in a circular central court, is a cylindrical structure, a kind of tower that undoubtedly once contained the ashes of Augustus. Around this is a series of barrel-vaulted corridors. Once these spaces must have been ornate and beautiful, rich with tomb decoration, with statues and reliefs and inscriptions on

marble plaques. But all that was precious has been carted away centuries ago. Stripped of their marble and travertine surfaces, the vast featureless walls are austere and funereally bleak.

The roof line seemed as distant as heaven. Windowless behind high outer walls, the whole gloomy edifice looks in on itself, an empty shell that had lost its lustre. In its circular corridors, any direction led me back to where I had begun, back to the tall portal and the entrance to the central court where great blocks of fallen masonry stood like unlettered tombstones. I felt dwarfed by the sheer scale of place. Like some metaphor for death, the human figure in these towering spaces seems small and insignificant. Recommended FT Globetrotter La dolce Vespa: the delights of discovering Rome by scooter I was beginning to wonder about Augustus and his carefully constructed reputation for modesty, all that dining on raisins and water, the small study, the anti-orgy posturing. This vast tomb, built when he was still in his thirties so that his subjects could see it in his lifetime, is hardly a work of selfdeprecation. It is a statement by a man with an appetite for grandeur. One may argue that this was political necessity, rather personal vanity. An emperor needed drama, theatrics. It is an irony that in later years the mausoleum would become an opera house, a theatre. Augustus was wooing his audience, the Roman public. He understood the way political legitimacy was built on appearances. There are many last words attributed to Augustus. Presumably his speech writers were kept busy drafting les mots justes for the death bed. But one stands out as having the ring of truth about it. "Have I played the part well?" he was meant to have said with his last breath. "Then applaud as I exit." The mausoleum is his applause, echoing down the centuries. And this week, there has been yet another ovation.

Rome's Mausoleum of Augustus is set to reopen, yet no instant access



The Mausoleum of Augustus in Rome Photo: IC

For the first time in its more than 2,000-year history, the Mausoleum of Augustus fully opened to the public on Tuesday. But Roman history buffs may have to wait a little longer to glimpse the inside of the resting place of the Roman Empire's most iconic leaders.

Plans for the refurbishment of the massive structure, nested on the eastern banks of the Tiber River in the heart of Rome's historical center, were first announced in 2006.

Now, after at least half a dozen delays and with a budget of more than 10 million euros (\$12 million), doors are set to open to all, 2,049 years after construction on the brick and travertine structure began.

The mausoleum was the final resting place for the remains of Caesar Augustus and more than two dozen members of his family and subsequent emperors and other leaders up until the end of the first century. Since then it has been sacked, plundered, buried and abandoned. It has been used as a castle, as stables, apartments, a circus and a concert hall. But this is the first time in its long history it will be fully open to the public.

"There have been a few times over the centuries that the mausoleum was open by special

appointment or for special events, but this is the first time anyone will have the level of access they will have now," said archaeologist Elisabetta Carnabuci, head of the refurbishment initiative.

The problem for anyone who wants to see it in the near term is that tickets for the mausoleum are sold out until late April.

Rome mayor Virginia Raggi, who formally visited the mausoleum early on Monday, declared in December 2020 that tickets would be available free of charge for anyone from the opening until April 21, the date considered to be the anniversary of Rome's founding in 753 BC.

After that, Rome residents will be able to visit at no cost until the end of 2021. Though the structure is large - nearly 100 meters across and more than 40 meters in height - access will be limited to allow for social distancing required by the coronavirus.

Rome's city government was one of the three main backers of the long restoration plan, along with Italy's Ministry of Culture, and Telecom Italia, the country's main telecommunications company.

When the mausoleum opened to a handful of reporters and photographers on Monday, the day before it opened to the general public, it was clear it was still a work in progress. Wooden boards covered flooring and staircases that will eventually be covered in opus signinum mortar, and in certain corners of the structure, plastic crates were stacked holding fragments of internal monuments or pottery uncovered during the restoration. Parts of the walls were still hidden by scaffolding, and there were tractors and trucks moving dirt and equipment in the area outside of the mausoleum that will eventually feature picturesque gardens.

Carnabuci took a break from her regular work to take small groups of journalists and photographers through the mausoleum on Monday. At the end of one such tour, she told the Xinhua News Agency she had no doubt where the mausoleum would fit in among the city's main historical touchstones when all the work is completed and tourists return to Rome in large numbers after the coronavirus pandemic.

"This will be at the top level for what Rome has to offer," she said of a city whose attractions include the Colosseum, the Trevi Fountain, Piazza Navona, the Spanish Steps, and scores of museums.

"This is a key part of the history of Western civilization, and hardly anyone has seen it before now."

Walk through the 2,000-year-old Mausoleum of Augustus, Rome's first emperor

The circular tomb—used through history as a fortress, a sculpture garden and an entertainment venue—reopens as a museum after an €11m restoration



Mussolini had his eye on the 28BC mausoleum as his final resting place. Abandoned for decades after the Second World War, the Rome landmark reopened to the public on 1 March

Photo: Sovrintendenza Capitolina ai Beni Culturali - Roma Capitale

After decades of disrepair, the massive circular Mausoleum of Augustus—built by ancient Rome's first emperor in 28BC—has finally reopened to the public. A major €11m restoration project, involving complex excavations around six metres below street level, is creating a pedestrian zone around the monument and a new museum route inside.

One of ancient Rome's largest landmarks, it has been closed off since 1936, obscured by cypress trees and overgrown with weeds. Its colourful history includes stints as a fortress, a sculpture garden and, from the 18th to 20th centuries, an amphitheatre for bullfights, firework displays, theatre performances and concerts. The Fascist dictator Benito Mussolini intended to restore Augustus's mausoleum as his own tomb, but his ambitions were scuppered by the outbreak of the Second World War.

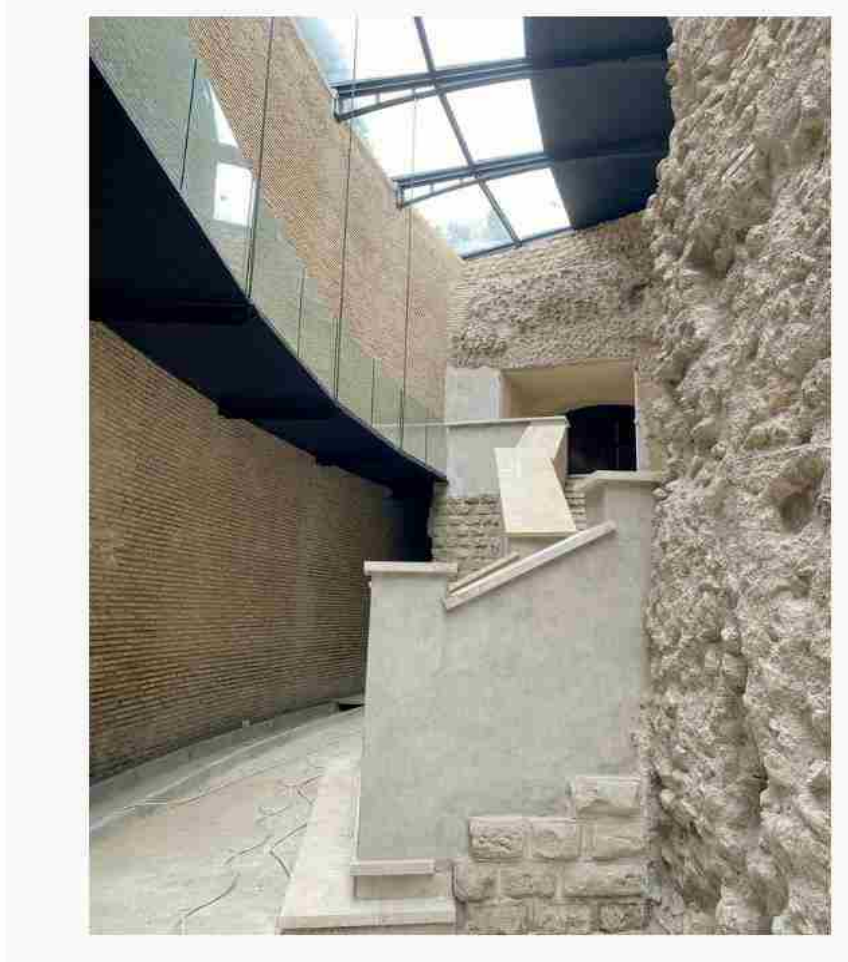


An aerial view of the mausoleum in 2019, showing the central cylinder housing Augustus's burial chamber

Photo: Sovrintendenza Capitolina ai Beni Culturali - Roma Capitale

The recovery of the site finally began in 2007 with the excavation of the external area in front of the monument. The “real restoration” between 2016 and 2019 has conserved some 14,000 sq. m of masonry of the “ancient and post-ancient building”, says Sebastiano La Manna, the city architect in charge of the works. The final phase, including new lighting, heating and video surveillance systems for the museum, is funded by a €6m donation from the foundation of the telecommunications group TIM.

Visitors can follow a path through 12 vaulted chambers before climbing to a panoramic walkway on the roof. Three staircases have been consolidated with steel beams while the spiral stairs to the roof were completely rebuilt. “Particular attention has been paid to the need to break down architectural barriers,” La Manna says. Lifts have been installed for wheelchair access.



A restoration project between 2016 and 2019 has conserved some 14,000 sq. m of "ancient and post-ancient" masonry
Photo: Soprintendenza Capitolina ai Beni Culturali - Roma Capitale

However, a plan to protect the monument against the elements with a steel-and-glass dome “remains uncertain and debated”, La Manna says. “Any decision has also been postponed for financial reasons.” The mausoleum’s central cylinder, which houses Augustus’s burial chamber, also awaits restoration.

When the works are completed in 2022, the Roman stone floor at the tomb’s entrance will be revealed for the first time in centuries. Many of the ancient stones still bear the markings used by masons 2,000 years ago to carve the marble, La Manna says.

The reopened mausoleum could become “one of the most interesting and popular places in the city for tourists and Romans”, he predicts. Admission is free of charge for all until 21 April and until 31 December for Rome residents. Tickets are already in high demand: according to Italian press reports, all the [timed-entry slots](#) available online are fully booked until 21 April.

Rome : le Mausolée d'Auguste restauré rouvre ses portes après 14 ans de fermeture



Le Mausolée d'Auguste, ouvert au public depuis le 1er mars © Flickr - Fondation TIM

Le gigantesque mausolée circulaire de l'empereur Auguste (27 av. J.-C.-14 ap. J.-C.) vient de rouvrir ses portes le 1er mars. Il était en restauration depuis 2007 et a pu être rénové grâce au mécénat de la Fondation TIM.

L'ambition de la Fondation TIM, qui a financé à hauteur de 8 millions d'euros la rénovation du Mausolée d'Auguste à Rome, est claire : « *faire revivre un site qui sera prochainement parmi les plus visités au monde* ». Avec une réouverture en pleine pandémie, le 1er mars dernier, il va sans doute falloir attendre un peu plus que prévu pour que la tombe monumentale de L'empereur, construite à partir de 28 av. J.-C., retrouve sa superbe à l'international. Les travaux titanesques réalisés ces 14 dernières années ont déjà permis de mettre au jour de nombreux éléments autour du mausolée, mais aussi de le sécuriser et de le rendre plus accessible. La fin définitive des travaux est prévue pour 2022, mais ne permettra sans doute pas de retrouver l'aspect originel du lieu que des siècles d'abandon ont très sérieusement détérioré.

Des travaux colossaux

Au total, ce sont plus de 11 millions d'euros, publics et privés, qui ont été mobilisés pour la restauration et l'aménagement du Mausolée d'Auguste. Celle-ci a notamment nécessité des excavations allant parfois jusqu'à 6 mètres de profondeur et un travail

LE MAGAZINE



Le numéro du mois

Je m'abonne

Liseuse

Toutes nos publications

archéologique immense, qui, dès 2007, a commencé à révéler toute la partie extérieure du site. Entre 2016 et 2019, la phase de conservation a été enclenchée, permettant de sauvegarder 14 000 m² de maçonnerie. Ces éléments datent pour la plupart de l'époque antique, mais certains sont plus récents. En effet, le mausolée a eu plusieurs usages au cours des siècles.



Vue aérienne du mausolée © Fondation TIM

Monument funéraire de la famille impériale, il a ensuite été converti en forteresse médiévale avant de devenir un parc de sculpture entre le XVIIIe et le XXe siècles. Il a également accueilli des corridas, des représentations théâtrales ou encore des feux d'artifice. Sous le régime fasciste (1922-1945), qui mobilise de nombreuses références de la Rome antique, Benito Mussolini souhaitait en faire sa propre tombe et y a aménagé la « piazza Augusto Imperator », la place de l'empereur Auguste, ce qui a occasionné la destruction de nombreux éléments médiévaux.



L'enceinte circulaire du Mausolée d'Auguste © Fondation TIM

Un monument totalement repensé

Depuis 2019, c'est la fondation du géant des télécoms italiens TIM qui est chargée de l'aménagement du monument. Son mécénat a permis de créer un nouveau parcours muséal, de sécuriser les escaliers, de permettre l'accès aux personnes à mobilité réduite ou encore de créer une promenade panoramique sur le toit de l'édifice. Une large zone piétonne autour du mausolée a également été créée. Les visiteurs ont ainsi pu contempler, dès le 1er mars, l'étendue des travaux menés sur les 12 chambres sépulcrales de l'édifice, mais pas encore la tombe de l'empereur Auguste lui-même. Celle-ci doit encore être restaurée et ne sera accessible au public qu'en 2022, à la fin des travaux.





L'intérieur du mausolée © Flickr – Fondation TIM

La maire de Rome, Virginia Raggi, a donc tenu son pari d'offrir le Mausolée restauré aux Romains avant la fête du « Natale di Roma », qui célèbre, tous les 21 avril, la fondation de la ville en 753 av. J.-C.. Jusqu'à cette date, les billets pour visiter le monument sont gratuits. Ou plutôt étaient gratuits puisqu'ils ont déjà tous été vendus, à peine 2 jours après la [réouverture du site](#). Le Mausolée d'Auguste semble donc promis à un bel avenir touristique et archéologique.



L'intérieur du mausolée © Flickr – Fondation TIM



6315 - ARTICOLO NON CEDIBILE AD ALTRI AD USO ESCLUSIVO DEL CLIENTE CHE LO RICEVE



Antoine Bourdon

An emperor's legacy

Italy | Relics of Augustus's reign are evident across Rome but now, after a five-year restoration, visitors can finally see his last resting place. By Stanley Stewart

The vast tomb, built in his thirties so that his subjects could see it in his lifetime, is no work of self-deprecation



When the Roman emperor Augustus died, in 14AD, on the 19th day of the eighth month, people had the idea that something momentous had happened, that the man and the moment of his death should be commemorated. So they named the month after him. Previously known as Sextilis, it would be known, henceforth, as Augustus.

But Rome's first emperor, adoptive son and heir of Julius Caesar, didn't get to be the most powerful man in the world by leaving things to chance. At the age of 34 – more than forty years before his death – he had made his own arrangements to perpetuate his memory.

Among his first building projects was his mausoleum, a vast tomb that became one of the wonders of Rome. Framed by cypress trees and topped with a bronze statue of the emperor that glinted like a beacon in the sun, the mausoleum was as familiar to generations of Romans as the Colosseum, the Pantheon and the triumphal arches of the Forum.

But to us, it is less familiar. It turns out that the tomb of even the greatest of emperors can be humbled. When Rome was sacked by Alaric in 410, the Visigoths smashed the vaults and scattered the ashes of the imperial family. As the ancient capital fell into ruin, the mausoleum's marble was looted, and by the end of the 10th century, it was little more than an earthen mound overgrown with trees.

In later centuries it seemed to have as many lives as the stray cats who haunt the ruins of Rome. It became a fortress, a garden, a bullring, a vineyard and a circus. By the early 20th century, it was a concert hall known as Auditorium Augusteo until Mussolini, who liked to see himself as a latter-day Augustus, declared it an archaeological site. The war, however, put a stop to excavations, and for decades Augustus's great tomb, one of the most significant monuments of the ancient capital, was a mysterious and abandoned ruin, sulking behind

hoardings, unloved and unseen.

Until now. After a €12m renovation, largely funded by Gruppo TIM, the Italian telecoms company, the great mausoleum has this week opened to the public for the first time in 14 years. Even with few tourists in Rome, visits are already fully booked for months. Rome's first emperor has returned to his city.

Before visiting the tomb, I went in search of the man, heading first for the Palatine, one of ancient Rome's swankiest neighbourhoods, where he lived with his wife Livia and his stepchildren. On the way, I looked in on the Capitoline Museums to see a wonderful bust of Augustus. His face looks surprisingly contemporary, like an actor cast as a handsome hospital doctor. There is an air of calm thoughtfulness, a reassuring bedside manner.

While many historians hail Augustus as the greatest of Roman emperors, some also applaud him as the most modest – though admittedly the latter was hardly a much-contested accolade. His tastes were simple, they say, his diet frugal. He was said to enjoy bread soaked in water with a handful of raisins, and he rarely drank wine. He collected fossils and was the proud possessor of a whale's skeleton. He enjoyed dice games, and doted on his grandchildren. He was said to have a dry sense of humour, once remarking that a nervous man handing him a petition looked like a man offering a penny to an elephant. His abstemious lifestyle was sometimes in conflict with the more licentious atmosphere of Rome. When he banished his daughter Julia for her involvement in an orgy in the Forum, people thought it harsh. If you started banishing people for the occasional orgy, you would soon empty Rome.

Rearing above the Forum, the Palatine Hill is a quiet corner of the city, even in a normal times. This year, it is a place of solitudes where you can find yourself alone with the ancient world. As I followed paths past the skeletons of old

L'eredità di un imperatore



buildings to Augustus's house, I thought: this is what the ruins of Rome felt like 150 years ago — larks rising, wild flowers among the rubble of walls and fluted columns, cracked stone steps leading down into the grassy chambers of the past. The Palatine was residential. The great men of the Forum, emperors and senators, climbed this hill to be humbled by love and doubt, by their own obsessions and vulnerabilities.

At Augustus's house, I peered in through the window at his study. Its burgundy walls were decorated with frescoes and *trompe l'oeil* that would not have looked out of place in a Renaissance palace 1,500 years later. Oddly, his study was smaller than my own. From this little room, he ran an empire; from mine, in England's West Country, I struggle to run a single shambolic life.

Beyond the house, I gazed down on the dusty tracks of the Circus Maximus, where up to 150,000 spectators came on race days in the hope of some serious chariot pile-ups. With such huge crowds, disaster was not restricted to the track. Once, 24 elephants broke through the railings and rampaged among hapless spectators. On another occasion, the tiers of wooden bleachers began to crack and give way. The story goes that Augustus, quickly realising the danger, rushed from the imperial box to calm the panic-stricken crowds and organise a smooth evacuation. The Circus Maximus too became part of his mythology.

For Augustus — then still known more humbly as Octavian — Julius Caesar's assassination changed everything. When the will was read out, it emerged that he had been named as Caesar's adopted son and heir. There must have been dark murmurings as he skilfully consolidated his position as the first emperor, the very thing Caesar's murder had been intended to prevent. But in the end Rome was grateful for Augustus. He ended the civil war, expanded the empire, ushered in two centuries of Pax Romana and transformed the city. He built the Theatre of Marcellus, a new Senate House and Rome's first baths. "I found Rome a city of bricks," Augustus would boast, "and left it a city of marble."

The assassination took place on the steps of a theatre in what is now Largo di Torre Argentina. In Rome, with its eerie continuity, it is somehow no surprise to find a theatre still standing on the site — the Teatro Argentina, a grand 18th-century edifice whose auditorium is all plush red velvet and gold leaf. The composer Gioachino Rossini "died a death" here too: the 1816 premiere of his opera *The Barber of Seville* was so badly received that he was obliged to flee and hide in a nearby pastry shop.

I crossed the busy Corso Vittorio Emanuele II, dodging buses, and dived into the narrow lanes of Rome's *centro storico*. Known in ancient times as Campus Martius, or the Field of Mars, this whole area was first developed by Augustus, working with Marcus Agrippa, his friend and colleague. Today it is a meandering labyrinth of streets lined with high-end fashion boutiques, back-street workshops knee-deep in wood shavings, smart restaurants, tacky souvenir stalls, ecclesiastical outfitters — check out the velvet slippers — and print makers so ancient that they look like they were patronised by the Borgias. It was Augustus who brought water to this part of Rome, with the aqueduct known as Aqua Virgo. Thanks to various restorations and modifications over the centuries, the aqueduct's water still pours forth from famous fountains all over the district, from the Piazza Navona to the Trevi Fountain.

After a few twists and turns, including a diversion to visit my favourite Caravaggios in San Luigi dei Francesi and another to have a coffee at Bar Sant' Eustachio, I emerged in front of the Pantheon. I love the surprise of this colossal Roman temple in these cramped medieval streets. She rises from the clutter of surrounding buildings as a grand dowager, glamorous, a little threadbare, and with the trappings of another age. She was already very old when the Goths and the Vandals turned up in the 5th century.

The present building is Hadrian's, dedicated in 126AD, but the original Pantheon, built by Agrippa a century earlier as part of an Augustan plan, was believed to have had the same footprint. Out of respect for his architectural predecessor, Hadrian left Agrippa's name on the façade. It is one of the oldest standing buildings in the world, and when you pass through the colossal bronze doors, you are stepping into ancient Rome.

Though vast — you are beneath a dome that was, until the 20th century, the largest in the world — the space feels intimate. The open oculus of the roof has a strange effect; I always feel I am wading through honey-coloured light in the Pantheon's wide embrace. A couple of kings of the unified Italy are buried here. So is Raphael, Rome's greatest painter. The state lays official wreaths for the monarchs, but once I saw an old woman bring roses for Raphael.

In Augustus's day, a processional avenue led from the Pantheon to his mausoleum. These days, you need to thread your way through the labyrinth. Eventually you emerge on the river, in front of a striking steel-and-glass museum designed by Richard Meier to house the most famous of Augustan monuments — the Ara Pacis, the Altar of Peace. Commissioned in 13BC to mark Augustus's triumphant return from Spain and Gaul, the marble altar is the size of a small house. Among its exquisite reliefs is the whole Augustan family, almost 20 figures, the Roman equivalent of a Buckingham Palace balcony scene. At

the end of the line of elders you can see the child Claudius reaching to clutch at the skirts of a toga.

Augustus's mausoleum lies just across the street. Thirty years ago, when I first peered through the hoardings, the tomb was an overgrown ruin covered in a tangle of weeds and ivy. Careful and "conservative" restoration work has been going on since 2016 to clear the site and to consolidate the structure. Elaborate landscaping with garden walkways will eventually connect it directly to the Ara Pacis. On opening day, Monday, March 1, I followed a gravel path down to the colossal entranceway of Rome's most spectacular tomb.

The structure is circular, like the Colosseum, like the Pantheon. At its heart, standing in a circular central court, is a cylindrical structure, a kind of tower that undoubtedly once contained the ashes of Augustus. Around this is a series of barrel-vaulted corridors. Once these spaces must have been ornate and beautiful, rich with tomb decoration, with statues and reliefs and inscriptions on marble plaques. But all that was precious has been carted away centuries ago. Stripped of their marble and travertine surfaces, the vast featureless walls are austere and funereally bleak.

The roof line seemed as distant as heaven. Windowless behind high outer walls, the whole gloomy edifice looks in on itself, an empty shell that had lost its lustre. In its circular corridors, any direction led me back to where I had begun, back to the tall portal and the entrance to the central court where great blocks of fallen masonry stood like unlettered tombstones. I felt dwarfed by the sheer scale of place. Like some metaphor for death, the human figure in these towering spaces seems small and insignificant.

I was beginning to wonder about Augustus and his carefully constructed reputation for modesty, all that dining on raisins and water, the small study, the anti-orgy posturing. This vast tomb, built when he was still in his thirties so his subjects could see it in his lifetime, is hardly a work of self-deprecation. It is a statement by a man with an appetite for grandeur. One may argue that this was political necessity, rather personal vanity. An emperor needed drama, theatrics. It is an irony that in later years the mausoleum would become an opera house, a theatre. Augustus was wooing his audience, the Roman public. He understood the way political legitimacy was built on appearances.

There are many last words attributed to Augustus. Presumably his speech writers were kept busy drafting *les mots justes* for the death bed. But one stands out as having the ring of truth about it.

"Have I played the part well?" he was meant to have said with his last breath. "Then applaud as I exit." The mausoleum is his applause, echoing down the centuries. And this week, there has been yet another ovation.

LES ROMAINS REDÉCOUVRENT LE MAUSOLÉE D'AUGUSTE



Construit sur le modèle des tombes étrusques, le plus grand mausolée circulaire au monde était fermé au public depuis 2007. ROMA CAPITALE/DPA

INACCESSIBLE DEPUIS QUATORZE ANS, CE LIEU HISTORIQUE, TÉMOIN D'UNE HISTOIRE MOUVEMENTÉE, A ROUVERT AU PUBLIC LE 1ER MARS.

VALÉRIE SEGOND @ValSegond
ROME

Depuis quatorze ans, le monument avait comme disparu de Rome, sa place transformée en un no man's land, entre parking sauvage et terminus de lignes d'autobus, que chacun prenait soin d'éviter : alors que le mausolée de l'empereur Auguste, caché par des palissades depuis 2007, a rouvert ses portes au public le 1er mars, pour les Romains ce n'est rien de moins qu'une découverte. Son importance historique leur échappe depuis si longtemps que les guides n'y consacrent guère que quelques lignes. Il a comme disparu de leur imaginaire. C'est pourtant un des plus vieux monuments de la ville impériale, plus ancien que le Colisée, aux multiples vies et fonctions en deux mille ans. Les réservations de visites étaient à peine ouvertes début janvier, que les Romains s'y sont précipités. Aujourd'hui, toutes les visites, certes contingentées en raison de l'épidémie, sont réservées jusqu'à fin juin.

Octave, qui deviendra Auguste en 27 avant J. C., a à peine 30 ans quand il choisit de se faire ériger un mausolée

grandiose avec un dessein très politique. En choisissant Rome, quand son rival Marc Antoine avait choisi de se faire enterrer à Alexandrie près de sa maîtresse Cléopâtre, Octave assure ainsi à ses administrés qu'elle restera la capitale de l'empire. Mieux : il choisit le cœur du champ de Mars, cette plaine au centre historique actuel de la ville, là où selon la légende, Romulus, fondateur de Rome, monta au ciel et où Jules César, son père adoptif, fut incinéré. Afin que l'on se souvienne de lui pour l'éternité, Octave aurait ordonné que l'on porte de tous les coins de l'empire une poignée de terre.

Recouvert d'arbres sur le modèle des tombes étrusques, le plus grand mausolée circulaire au monde ne servit de chambre funéraire qu'un peu plus de deux cents ans, et ce pour quinze personnes dont Auguste, qui meurt à 77 ans empoisonné par sa femme Livie. Après lui, viendront celles des empereurs Tibère, Caligula, Claude et Vespasien. C'est alors, aux bords du Tibre, un bâtiment circulaire de pierre blanche, marqué de deux obélisques à l'entrée, entouré de hauts cyprès, et au sommet duquel trône la statue géante en métal de César Auguste.

Mais il ne restera que peu de temps dans cet état originel. N'ayant pas été christianisé, ce monument est mal conservé et fait l'objet pendant mille cinq cents ans de tous les recyclages, plus ou moins heureux, de l'histoire. C'est même l'exemple le plus achevé de cette transformation permanente des bâtiments qui ont fait la richesse de Rome. Après l'arrivée du christianisme, dans les années 400, le mausolée sert de fondation à une forteresse entourée de vignes et de potagers, vraisemblablement construite par la gran-

de famille romaine des Colonna, qui en a longtemps été la propriétaire. En fait, explique Anna Maria Riccomini, auteur d'une histoire du mausolée publiée en 1996, *La ruina di sì bela cosa* (éditions Electa), « on sait peu de choses sur lui jusqu'au début du Moyen Âge où, recouvert de terre, il fait alors figure de petite colline au milieu du champ de Mars, une butte que les Romains associeront toujours à Auguste ».

Magnifique jardin à l'italienne

Mais ce que l'on en connaît révèle un bien étonnant destin pour ce monument qui a été dans toutes les mains. En 1241, le pape Grégoire IX chasse les Colonna et démantèle la forteresse qui devient une carrière de travertin, et le mausolée servira de terre de vignoble sous les Orsini. En 1546, la grande famille florentine Soderini, adversaire acharnée des Médicis, le rachète pour en faire un magnifique jardin à l'italienne surélevé, peuplé de statues grecques et romaines, bas-reliefs, sarcophages. C'est alors une référence où les exilés de Florence chassés par les Médicis, mais aussi les intellectuels de toute l'Europe, se presseront durant deux siècles. En 1751, un marquis portugais du nom de Benedetto Correa de Sylva en fait l'acquisition et le transforme en arène de corridas, très en vogue à Rome depuis le Moyen



I romani riscoprono il mausoleo di Augusto

Âge, où sont produits aussi de grands feux d'artifices et spectacles pyrotechniques devant pas moins de 4 000 à 5 000 spectateurs. Racheté en 1802 par la chambre apostolique, il sert de salle de jeux de cirque prisés par les Romains. En 1870, le comte Giuseppe Telfener le loue pour le recouvrir d'une structure de métal et de verre, et pour le transformer en « amphithéâtre Umberto ». On y joue des opérettes et opéras-bouffes. Mais en 1888, jugé dangereux pour le public, il sera utilisé comme chantier pour la construction du Vittoriano, le monument à l'Unité italienne, piazza Venezia. En 1907, la ville de Rome en fait l'acquisition pour le transformer en vaste « auditorium Augusteo », de 3 800 places, qui fera pendant trente ans et jusqu'au 13 mai 1936 la joie des Romains en raison d'une acoustique exceptionnelle. S'y produira notamment Toscanini. Jusqu'à ce qu'en 1936, Mussolini, qui voulait en faire son tombeau pour s'inscrire dans la lignée d'Auguste, ordonne la destruction de tout ce qui, sur le bâtiment, est postérieur à la période de l'empereur, mais aussi tout le quartier alentour pour dégager le mausolée sur la « place d'Auguste-Empereur ». De magnifiques palais, dont certains dessinés par Raphaël, sont alors détruits. Un retour aux origines en forme de désastre. Mussolini voulait restaurer sa Rome impériale ? *« Il ne retrouva qu'un tas de ruines, le condamnant à rester à l'écart des chemins touristiques et de la vie sociale »*, se désole Anna Maria Riccomini. Au point que les Romains l'appelèrent longtemps « la dent cariée ».

Aussi, l'intérêt de la visite de ce lieu où on ne voit plus grand-chose sera-t-il pour beaucoup dans les lunettes de réalité augmentée développées par l'opérateur télécoms TIM, qui a financé en partie la réhabilitation. Disponibles à compter du 21 avril, celles-ci devraient fort heureusement restituer au visiteur les différents âges et fonctions du monument. Car, conclut Anna Maria Riccomini, *« aucun monument de Rome n'a eu une vie aussi riche que le mausolée d'Auguste »*. ■

The tomb of Rome's first emperor at last reveals its secrets

 [apollo-magazine.com/mausoleum-augustus-rome-restoration-website](https://www.apollo-magazine.com/mausoleum-augustus-rome-restoration-website)

March 22, 2021

Features

Matthew Nicholls

22 March 2021



The Mausoleum of Augustus. Courtesy Fondazione Tim

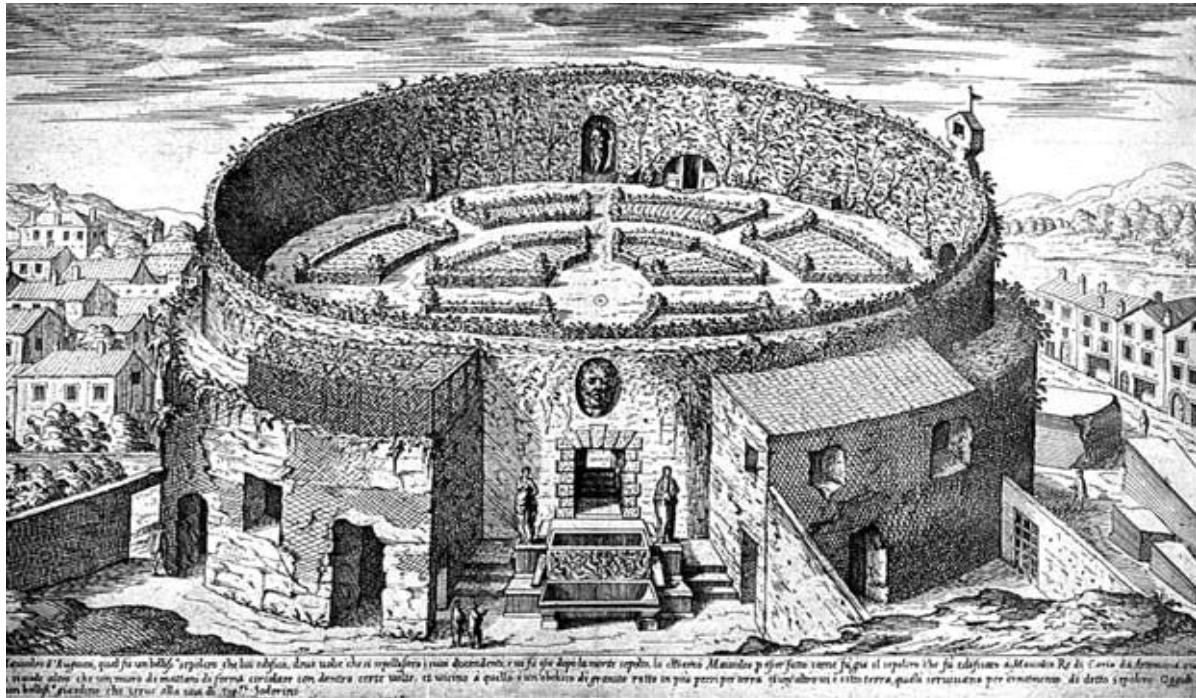
The Mausoleum of Augustus, one of the most significant ruins of ancient Rome, has long been a dank and forlorn space, accessible only by special permit and rather hard to read from the street. Hiding in plain sight, it was covered in vegetation and often obscured by fencing. So genuine delight greeted the news, long awaited and often promised, that it finally reopened to the public at the start of this month.



The Mausoleum of Augustus. Courtesy Fondazione Tim

It was built to house the remains of Rome's first emperor, Augustus, who claimed that he was the first among equals, a restorer in some sense of the Republic that had been shattered by civil wars. On two bronze pillars outside his enormous mausoleum, in the Field of Mars to the north of central Rome, Augustus inscribed a long record of his achievements, including the claim that in 27 BC 'when I was by universal consent in absolute control of affairs, I transferred the state from my own control to the will of the Senate and the Roman people [...] After that time I took precedence over all others in rank, but of power I possessed no more than those who were my colleagues in any magistracy'.

This was a convenient pretence: Augustus continued to rule with absolute personal authority, as some of his building projects showed. His mausoleum was begun at around the time that Augustus modestly claimed to be handing back power to the senate and people. This round tomb, its 90m diameter topped with a rising mound crowned with cypress trees and a bronze statue of Augustus, waited more than four decades before it finally accommodated the earthly remains of the deified emperor; during that time anyone entering or leaving the city to the north walked past what was clearly a monument to dynastic permanence and a claim to the attention of posterity. Even its ancient name 'mausoleum' alludes to the tomb of King Mausolus of Caria, one of the wonders of the ancient world. Its immense size and round shape echoed the tomb of Alexander the Great in Egypt and the resting places of Etruscan kings. There is nothing modest, or republican, about it.



Engraving of the Mausoleum of Augustus (1575), Étienne Dupérac

As one might expect, the tomb was built to last. At this time Roman architects and engineers were increasingly using concrete as a cheap, sturdy core material over which a decorative veneer could be applied. The facing marbles and bronzes have long since been prised off, but the hulking and practically indestructible concrete remains of the mausoleum's core have had a long and varied afterlife. It was supposedly sacked by Alaric's Gothic invaders in 410 AD, and then abandoned. The medieval Colonna family turned it into a fortress (its counterpart over the river, the tomb of the later emperor Hadrian, became the papal Castel Sant'Angelo). Later, as the Campus Martius rediscovered its identity as a pleasure ground, the round interior of the mausoleum was repurposed as a garden, a bullfighting arena and, by the early 20th century, a concert hall. The additions and alterations of 20 centuries were then stripped away in 1936 by Mussolini, whose grim fascination with Augustus inspired a stolid new urban quarter around the remaining ancient core of the tomb, as well as a huge copy of the inscription and a glass pavilion for the Augustan marble Altar of Peace. These alterations left the mausoleum itself rather isolated, sitting below ground level in a space that was eventually fenced off and left to weeds and litter.



Inside the Mausoleum of Augustus. Photo: Filippo Monteforte/AFP via Getty Images

The Mausoleum has now undergone a two-part restoration process, funded by Fondazione Tim, Telecom Italia's charitable foundation. The complex remains of the structure have been cleared and stabilised over the past five years, and an accessible visitor itinerary, covering the varied history of the building, has been installed in its interior spaces. Naturally, current restrictions mean that it is once again off-limits for the time being; even once it does reopen, it will likely be some time before those of us not in Italy are able to visit. This and the rather complex history of the building mean that good visualisations of the structure over the ages are an essential part of its address to the public. Imagination is required to see anything like the original structure in what remains, let alone the centuries of overbuilding that have ebbed and flowed around it. Modern technology makes this possible, and the re-opened Mausoleum is now the subject of an extensive [website](#).

This contains information about the history of the building and its current restoration, timelines, background on Augustus and his times, and an '[interactive experience](#)'. The latter presents a series of 'chapters' in English and Italian, covering Augustus, his plans for his tomb, its location in the Campus Martius, Roman imperial culture and architecture, and the various later phases of the building's history. Each chapter contains a series of clickable topics orbiting round a monochrome 3D model, which in turn bring up a side bar showing a short explanatory text and useful images.



Screenshot courtesy Fondazione TIM

Like many visitor ‘experiences’, this one wants to conduct you along a route of its choosing, following sequentially numbered chronological chapters and sub-headings; you can’t easily play around separately with the 3D models of the mausoleum as built or as arena or gardens, which might have been a fun way of exploring, though you can orbit around these as routes into their respective pages. There is a great deal of useful information here and some fine archive images which make the very complex history of the site easier to understand. For reading up in advance of a visit or after one – or even as a Covid-compliant alternative, or a classroom resource – this is a fine collection of information.

The website for the newly opened site promises a virtual and augmented reality visitor experience, in which colourful 3D reconstruction models of the restored building appear on a handheld device or an immersive headset. Access to the site is limited, however, to 50-minute slots for 10 people at a time (already sold out until July). If it is comparable to other VR and AR site presentations in Rome, which [I wrote about for *Apollo* in 2019](#), this will be visually spectacular. The [trailer video](#) promises a vivid transformation of the surviving remains into an approximation of the original building, but if visitors are on a set route and a schedule, visits may offer limited scope for personal in-depth exploration. The rich content on the website is therefore a very welcome addition, and a good example of how an ancient site can be presented online to complement a time-limited visit in person.