# Forum

The forum was the heart of any ancient Roman city. Early forums functioned as marketplaces, but evolved into the center of religious and political life in the city.

Most forums had a single temple, shared among multiple deities. Sufetula’s forum is a rare example with three temples, each one dedicated to a specific member of the Capitoline Triad, Minerva, Juno, and Jupiter.

Built in at least two separate phases, this forum’s original plan was symmetrical, along an axis that ran through the middle of the temple of Jupiter. This phase dates to the end of the 1st century CE. The entry arch, which does not match the symmetry of the site, was built in 139 CE. The arch is dedicated to Antoninus Pius and his adopted sons. The forum was expanded in the 4th century CE, adding a new hallway and temple. The expanded site covers an area of 70m by 67m. The forum’s plaza measures 34m by 37m.

# Temple of Minerva

The Minerva’s temple is the left hand building on the forum’s plaza. Minerva was worshipped throughout the Roman republic and empire as one of the most important gods. From March 19th to March 23rd, Romans celebrated the Quinquatria festival in Minerva’s honor. The first day was believed to be the goddess’ birthday, so shedding blood was forbidden. On the following four days, military games were held to celebrate her military aspects. Music and plays were held throughout the festival.

# Temple of Jupiter

Jupiter’s temple reflects his importance as the most important god in the Roman pantheon. Located in the center of the row of temples, it is slightly taller and larger than the temples dedicated to Juno or Minerva.

As the most important god, Jupiter had many sacred festivals and days. The Ides, or the middle day of each month with a full moon, were sacred for the light shining from the sun and moon. On this day, a white lamb would be sacrificed to Jupiter. Market day, known as Nundinae, took place at the end of every week, which was every nine days according to the Roman calendar. On market days, a ram was sacrificed in Jupiter’s honor. Many other festivals were held throughout the year to honor the king of the gods.

# Temple of Juno

The temple on the right belongs to Juno, the most important goddess in Roman religion. Juno had many roles, but none was more important to the Romans than her aspect as the goddess of mothers. Matronalia was celebrated each year on March 1st in her honor. The festival celebrated the sanctity and importance of marriage. A procession of married women made the way to the temple of Juno to make offerings. Wives received gifts from their husbands and a feast was held for the family’s female slaves.

# Minerva

Minerva, the Roman goddess of wisdom, justice, law, and victory, was born to Jupiter and his early wife, the titaness Metis.

Jupiter feared a prophesy, which stated that one of his children would overthrow him. He therefore swallowed his pregnant wife whole. Metis survived, living in Jupiter's head as the source of his wisdom, but left him with terrible headaches as she forged armor for Minerva. When Vulcan used his hammer to split Jupiter's head open, Minerva emerged, fully grown and clad in armor from the wound on Jupiter's head.

Minerva was the patron of arts, trade and strategy, though she was also associated with music, poetry, medicine, wisdom, commerce, weaving, and crafts. She is commonly represented by owls, snakes, and olive trees and depicted as a tall, athletic woman, carrying a spear and a shield with the head of Medusa, a former priestess of Minerva who was turned into a repulsive monster for forsaking her holy vow of chastity. Pomegranates are also often associated with Minerva.

Minerva is represented in Greek mythology as Athena.

# Jupiter

Jupiter was the son of the Titans Saturn and Ops. Saturn had overthrown his father, Caelus, and feared that the same would happen to him. As Ops presented each newborn to him, Saturn devoured the child. Knowing this, upon the birth of Jupiter, Ops instead gave Saturn a stone and hid Jupiter away. As prophesied, Jupiter eventually overthrew his father with the help of his younger brothers Neptune and Pluto, becoming the king of the gods.

Jupiter originated as a sky god, and is symbolized by the lightning bolt, eagle, and oak trees. Jupiter acted as a witness to oaths and was therefore the protector of laws and the state.

Together with his sister and wife Juno, Jupiter had numerous children, including the gods Mars, Minerva, Vulcan, Bellona, Juventas, and the demi-god Hercules.

Jupiter was the equivalent of the Greek god Zeus.

# Juno

Juno was both the wife and sister of Jupiter, born to Saturn and Ops. As queen of the gods, Juno was the most important goddess, and the second most important deity in the Roman pantheon. Juno had an extremely wide range of roles in Roman religion. Her main role was as the goddess of wives, mothers, and fertility. Romans made offerings to her for good marriages, and for healthy families with many children. Juno was also associated with a military aspect, and as Juno Moneta, she was the protectress of money. The funds of Roman cities were often stored in the temple of Juno.

Juno’s symbols are the peacock, the cuckoo, and the cow. Juno is often depicted armed, wearing a goatskin, and sometimes riding in a chariot pulled by peacocks.

Juno is associated with the Greek goddess Athena.

# Imperial Cult/Curia

This building was added as part of the expansion of the forum in the 4th century CE. Various experts debate the role of this building; some believe this was Sufetula’s Curia. Others believe this was a temple to the Imperial Cult. Here it is portrayed as an Imperial Cult temple.

A curia is the city hall, an administrative building where the leaders of Sufetula would meet to discuss the city’s business. Rome’s Senate often met in the Curia Julia, built by Julius Caesar in Rome in 44 BCE.

The imperial cult was established in 44 BCE, shortly before the assassination of Julius Caesar. Caesar claimed a lineage to the god Mars through distant relations to Rome’s ousted line of kings and relation to Venus through the ancient gens Julia family line. The Romans believed that their dedication to the gods ensured the survival of the Roman state, making it treasonous to neglect their worship. The Roman emperors cemented their authority and legitimacy by deifying their lineages.

# Augustus

Augustus, born Gaius Octavius, was the adopted son of Julius Caesar, who was actually Octavian’s great-uncle. He lived from 23 September 63 BCE to 19 August 14 CE. After the death of Caesar and a series of civil wars, Augustus became emperor in 27 BCE and ruled until his death.

Augustus was the first official emperor of Rome and oversaw expansions of Roman power on nearly all fronts, though the legions occasionally suffered serious losses, such as the destructions of three legions in the Teutoburg Forest, in Germania in 9 AD. Augustus’ reign ushered in Pax Augusta, a period of stability, traditional legality, and civility.

# Vespasian

Vespasian (born November 9 CE) took power in 69 CE, the Year of the Four Emperors, and ruled until his death in 79 CE. Vespasian was a renowned military commander, serving in Britain in 43 CE and in the Jewish rebellion in Judea in 66 CE.

Sufetula was established as a Roman colony city sometime around or shortly after his reign, though a settlement probably existed on the site before this period.

Vespasian reformed the Roman financial system through new taxation methods and initiated the construction of the Flavian Amphitheatre in Rome, now known around the world as the Roman Coliseum. Upon Vespasian’s death, power passed to his biological son Titus, establishing the first Roman familial dynasty, the Flavians.

# Titus

Titus (born December 39 CE) ruled as emperor following the death of his father Vespasian. Titus ruled from 79 CE until his death in 81 CE. Titus was a successful military commander, serving under his father in Judea. When his father departed Judea to press his claim on the throne, Titus took command of his father’s legions until the capture of Jerusalem in 70 CE.

Titus acceded to the throne following the death of his father in 79 CE, and was considered a good emperor. He is known for completing the construction of the Coliseum, and for his generosity in assisting the citizens affected by the destruction of Herculaneum and Pompeii during the eruption of Mount Vesuvius and again during a major fire that struck Rome in 80 CE. Titus died of fever in 81 CE and was deified by the Senate and the throne passed to his younger brother Domitian.

Sufetula was in its infancy as a Roman city during his reign.

# Domitian

Domitian (born October 51 CE) was emperor from 81 CE until his death in 96 CE. Domitian was the son of Vespasian and the younger brother of Titus. With his death, the Flavian dynasty ended. Described as “a ruthless but efficient autocrat”, Domitian often clashed with the Senate, whose power he attempted to limit. Domitian was popular with the people of Rome as well as the military, but his reign came to an end when he was assassinated by court officials.

Domitian’s efforts established cultural, economic, and political programs that provided much of the stability that allowed Rome to flourish during the 2nd century. During his reign military campaigns in Britian, Gaul, and Dacia (modern day Romania) gained land for the empire, but failed to reach decisive victories in Caledonia (Scotland) and Dacia. After his death, Domitian was condemned to Damnatio Memoriae, where his inscriptions and monuments were systematically destroyed.

Sufetula was in its infancy as a Roman city during his reign.

# Septimus Severus

Lucius Septimus Severus was born in April 145 CE in Leptis Magna, located on the coast of present day Libya. He had both Roman and Punic ancestry. Severus ruled as emperor from 193 until his death in 211. Severus came to power after a period of civil war known as the Year of Five Emperors, following the death of Commodus, son of Marcus Aurelius.

Sufetula experienced an era of great prosperity during his reign, and an arch dedicated to him was built at the northern edge of the city, though only the foundations remain today. Severus’ military efforts included conquests in Persia, Mesopotamia, Arabia, Africa, and in northern Britain.

Severus contracted an illness while in Britain in 210 CE and died in 211 CE in York. His sons, Caracalla and Geta, assumed the throne following his death, establishing the Severan Dynasty.

# Hadrian

Hadrian (76 CE – 138 CE) was emperor from 117 until 138 CE. Hadrian took the throne after Trajan, who had waged extensive wars to expand the empire. Hadrian largely abandoned Trajan’s expansionism in favor of attempts to consolidate the empire, investing in stable, defensive borders. He is widely known for establishing Hadrian’s Wall in northern England, marking the limit of the province of Britannia.

Hadrian made efforts to visit every corner of his empire, developing military, civil, and religious institutions across the empire. Hadrian was obsessed with all things Greek, and sought to establish Hellenistic culture throughout the empire.

Hadrian is considered among the five “good emperors”, and a benevolent dictator.

# Antonious

Antinous (111 CE – 130 CE) was a Greek youth from Bithynia in modern day Turkey. He was a favourite and probable lover of the Roman emperor Hadrian. Following his premature death by drowning in the Nile river, Antinous was deified on Hadrian's orders, being worshipped in both the Greek East and Latin West, sometimes as a god and sometimes merely as a hero.

Antinous is a rare example showing that even people unrelated to the royal family could be deified. Little is known of Antinous’ life aside from his travels with Hadrian, including that he was present when the emperor killed the Marousian lion in Libya.

# Antoninus Pius

Titus Aelius Hadrianus Antoninus Pius (86 CE – 161 CE) married Hadrian’s niece Faustina, leading Hadrian to adopt him as his son and successor, provided Antoninus promised to adopt Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Varus as his sons and eventual successors. Antoninus ruled as emperor from 138 to 161 CE. He received the honorific “Pius” either for deifying Hadrian.

Antoninus Pius was a good administrator of the empire and built temples, theatres, and mausoleums, and made efforts to support the arts and sciences. During Antoninus’ reign, the empire was largely at peace, though in Britain Antoninus chose to push the borders from the established defensive line at Hadrian’s wall. The empire expanded slightly and established new defensive positions at the Antonine Wall, named for Antoninus. This only lasted for a very short time, and by Antoninus’ death, the empire had returned to the old line at Hadrian’s wall.

The arch marking the entrance to the forum in Sufetula is dedicated to his accession to the throne in 139 CE.

# Faustina the Elder

Faustina (100 – 140 CE) was the niece of Hadrian and the wife of Hadrian’s adopted son, Antoninus Pius. Upon her death at age 40 Antoninus had her deified, becoming the first divine empress.

Antoninus was extremely distressed when Faustina died, and in addition to having the senate make her divine, Antoninus established a temple to her in the forum in Rome and a charity for destitute girls from good families in her name. The emperor never remarried after the death of his wife.

# Marcus Aurelius

Marcus Aurelius (April 121 CE – March 180 CE) was co-emperor from 161 until 180 CE. Antoninus Pius adopted Marcus Aurelius as a son and heir alongside Lucius Verus. After Antoninus’ death in 161, Marcus and Lucius shared power until Lucius’ death.

Marcus Aurelius is considered the last of the five “good emperors”. During his reign, he directed the state to provide aid to victims of floods and famines. Marcus was a noted Stoic philosopher and wrote down his thoughts in several collections, known as The Meditations.

Throughout Marcus Aurelius’ reign, Rome was heavily engaged in military conflicts in Parthia (Persia), Armenia, and Germania. The Antonine Plague (probably smallpox or measles) also heavily affected the Roman Empire around 165 CE. Five to ten million Romans died, around 10% of the total population.

Towards the end of his life, Marcus made his biological son Commodus co-emperor at age 17. After Marcus’ death in 180 CE, Commodus’ rule became increasingly brutal, resulting in his assassination in 192 CE. This started a period of civil war known as the Year of Five Emperors.

# Lucius Varus

Lucius Varus (130 CE – 169 CE) was an adopted son of Antoninus Pius and adopted brother of Marcus Aurelius. Together with his brother, Lucius ruled Rome as co-emperor. This was the first time that the role of emperor was shared, though this would become common in the late Roman Empire.

Immediately after the death of Antoninus Pius, war broke out with the Parthian Empire. Lucius Varus went east to Antioch in modern day Turkey to oversee the military’s efforts, but much of his time was spent in carousing and debauchery.

Lucius had ruled alongside Marcus Aurelius for only eight years when he passed away, likely a victim of the Antonine Plague that was then raging throughout the empire. Upon his death, Lucius was deified by the Senate as Divus Verus.

# Arch of Antoninus Pius

Built in 139 CE, this arch is dedicated to Antoninus Pius and his adopted sons and heirs, Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Varus. Built to commemorate Antoninus’ accession to the throne, it appears that the arch was never fully completed, as is evidenced by the fact that the columns were not smoothed out.

More information to Antoninus Pius, Marcus Aurelius, and Lucius Varus is provided inside the Imperial Cult Temple.

# Arch of Diocletian

Dedicated to the first Tetrarchy, this arch was built during the reign of Diocletian, around 300 CE. This arch marked the eastern edge of the city.

Diocletian (242 CE – 311 CE) was emperor from 284 CE until 305 CE. Diocletian was born to a low status family in Dalmatia (near modern day Croatia). He rose through the military to become a calvary commander under Emperor Carus. Following the death of Carus and his heir on campaign in Persia, Diocletian’s troops proclaimed him emperor.

Diocletian ended the Crisis of the 3rd Century, bringing a period of stability after 50 years of revolts, economic collapse, civil wars, and barbarian invasions. Diocletian first made the decision to split the rule of the Roman Empire into an eastern and western empire in 286 CE. Diocletian ruled in the eastern empire and named a fellow military officer, Maximian, as co-emperor in the west. Diocletian added two junior emperors, Galerius and Constantius in 293, forming the Tetrarchy.

Diocletian’s reforms secured the empire’s borders and enlarged the bureaucracy of the Roman state. Some of Diocletian’s reforms were less successful, such as his efforts to control inflation through a codified list of goods that set standardized prices throughout the empire. Diocletian and Maximian also were staunchly anti-Christian, and launched the empire’s bloodiest persecution of the religion. It may be for that reason that the inscription on this arch is damaged, chipped and smashed by the hammers of Christians seeking revenge for their persecution.

The Tetrarchy collapsed almost immediately after Diocletian retired in 305 CE. 306 CE found the empire torn by civil war and usurpations. This period of unrest would last until 324 CE.

# Shops

This area of small shops was one of the main markets in Sufetula. The buildings along the road had their own water supplies, fed by terracotta pipes. Excavations have revealed floors, paved or covered in mosaics. Each shop consisted of two to three rooms.

The road, the Decumanus Maximus, was the major artery of the city. Five meters wide, it probably existed before the forum was built, explaining why the forum interrupts the roadway. A sewer system exists below the streets of Sufetula.

# Forum Expansion

Sometime in the 4th century, the forum’s symmetry was broken by the expansion of this range. A new hallway and the curia or imperial cult temple were added to the site. While it is clear that many doorways were added to give access to the hallway from the street outside, there is debate on how this linked to the internal parts of the forum. Here, the rear walls of some of the existing small rooms have been removed, which would have allowed easy access between the forum and the plaza and fountain outside the forum. This fountain was built around the same time as the expansion to the forum, indicating the functions may have been linked.