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Study Visit in Rome



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A Visual Guide

[Official Website of the Project](#)

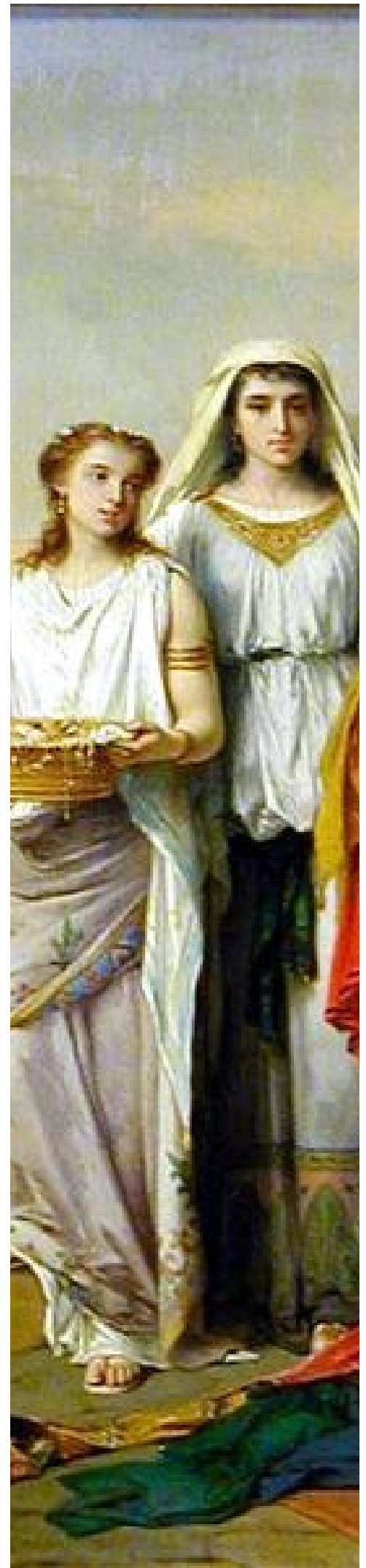


Guided Tour



Women of Rome

- 01 Trajan's Column : **Plotina**
Trajan's Wife
- 02 Michelangelo's House : **Vittoria Colonna**, Michelangelo's best friend
- 03 Vittoriano : **Maria Bergamas**,
mamma del milite ignoto
- 04 Bonaparte Palace : **Letizia Ramolino** Madame Mere Napoleon
- 05 Campidoglio : **Virginia Raggi**, first female mayor of Rome
- 06 Tor de schiavi Monastery : Saint Frances Roman Patron of Rome
- 07 Teatro Marcello/Portico Di Ottavia: **Octavia**
- 08 Palazzo Cenci : **Beatrice Cenci**
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- 10 Pantheon : **Queen Margherita** First Queen of Italy
- 11 **Nilde Iotti/Maria Elisabetta Alberti Casellati/Giorgia Meloni**





A Journey Through Women's History in Rome

On a crisp winter morning, our study visit to Rome unfolded, weaving through the ancient streets steeped in history. Our first destination was the iconic **Trajan's Column**, where the air was filled with tales of conquests and victories. Amidst the tales of Roman glory, we took a moment to reflect on the often-overlooked figures behind the powerful men of history, beginning with the enigmatic **Plotina**, Trajan's wife.



As we passed the iconic Trajan's Column we remembered his wife, Plotina. Born around 70CE, Plotina used her position as empress to strongly participate in political decisions. Through strategic thinking and political acumen she earned respect among many leaders in the Roman Empire and worked her way up to become Trajan's closest advisor. She is known for her intelligence and dedication to public welfare. Education and development assistance were specific focus points of her political orientation. In the empire she was known to stand up for impoverished citizens.

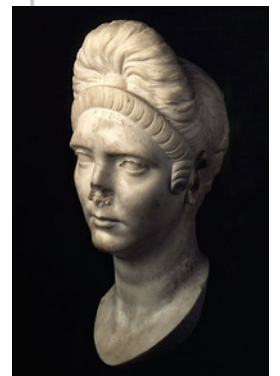


Plotina's influence also had a lasting impact on the imperial succession. It is believed that she played a pivotal role in the adoption of Hadrian as Trajan's heir. Hadrian had been married to one of Trajan and Plotina's nieces and been argued to be a possible successor following Trajan. Nonetheless, he was adopted by the emperor only three days before his death, with the only witness to said events being Plotina, who had been strongly in favor of Hadrian. His reign was of remarkable success and his adoption through Hadrian ensured a smooth transition of power in the empire. Hadrian, who still relied on Plotina as a close advisor, went on to become one of the "five good emperors", known for his efforts in consolidating and strengthening the empire.

Plotina's posthumous reputation endured through the writings of contemporary historians, portraying her as a forward-thinking, wise woman. Her legacy intertwined with the golden age of the Roman Empire, reflecting the important role that influential women played behind the scenes in shaping the course of history.

"Women should never stand behind men; they should stand beside them, as equals, partners, and leaders in their own right".

-Eleanor Roosevelt





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Our space slowed as we got closer to the Campidoglio because we reached Michelangelo's House, the place where Vittoria Colonna first met the renowned artist. The relationship between Michelangelo and Vittoria Colonna started within these walls, and as a result, both of them had a beneficial influence on one another and made a significant impact on the state of art at the time.

Vittoria Colonna, celebrated as a poetess and intellectual in ancient Rome, left a mark on the cultural and artistic climate of Renaissance Rome. Her poems capture human experience with its struggles and emotions in depth. In contrast to what society expected women to think about, she captured the zeitgeist of her era with wisdom and insight.





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Their friendship resulted in a collection of letters and philosophical sonnets that prove the positive artistic influence they had on each other. Despite her own accomplishments, Colonna's association with Michelangelo often overshadows her individual brilliance. In that, she stands testament to women of her time, getting their light dim by associations to male acquaintances.

In the bilingual collection "Sonnets for Michelangelo" (2005), Colonna's enduring bond with the renowned artist is preserved for posterity, a reminder of her significance in her own right



Standing before the grandeur of Bonaparte Palace during our study visit to Rome, we remember Letizia Ramolino and her role in shaping Napoleon's development and the influence on Europe. Famously known as Madame Mère Napoleon, Letizia was born in Corsica in 1750. She clearly exceeded the title of merely being Napoleon Bonaparte's mother by embodying resilience, political insight and strengths. Despite encountering personal and political difficulties, she showed remarkable determination as well as pride in all situations. Napoleon used to write her frequent letters, simultaneously sharing personal news about siblings, relatives and his love life as well as discussing serious matters of politics and his military career. Her resilience shone brightest during times of adversity, such as Napoleon's exile. Her ability to maintain composure and dignity in the face of political upheaval underscored the indispensable role that women often played behind the scenes in historical dynasties.

Letizia's influence was mostly in shaping her son's character and political ambitions, instilling in him a drive for success and ability of strategic thinking. Well in his adult life, she kept advising him concretely, always advertising strong opinions on various matters. Beyond her political endeavors, Letizia was renowned for her commitment to education, ensuring that her children received a comprehensive and cultured upbringing. Her emphasis on knowledge and culture left an enduring imprint on Napoleon, nurturing his intellectual pursuits and shaping his worldview that he went on to share with great parts of Europe.





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Letizia's narrative is that of a woman who exemplified resilience, exerted significant influence, and demonstrated unwavering strength. Her legacy serves as a poignant reminder of the underestimated yet indispensable contributions of women in shaping the destinies of powerful dynasties and the pivotal role motherhood has in forming upcoming generations. Still, through her story, Letizia Ramolino emerges not only as Napoleon's mother but as a figure of enduring significance in her own right, embodying the timeless strength and wisdom of women throughout history.



As we ascended towards the historic Campidoglio, our exploration delved into the presence of female figures in Roman politics. One name that echoed through the ancient streets was Virginia Raggi, who etched her place in history as the first female mayor of Rome between 2016 and 2021. Her candidacy represented a paradigm shift in the male dominated political landscape of Italy. Even when she was rumored to be too young, too inexperienced and accused of functioning as a frontal figure operating for more experienced, male politicians she proved them wrong by employing an honest and straightforward access to politics. Her tenure as the mayor of Rome offered a fresh perspective and a new approach to governance, trying to break out of traditional, patriarchal structures.

Policies and initiatives implemented under her governance reflect a departure from the conventional methods that had defined political leadership. As we stood on the historic grounds of the Campidoglio, it became evident that the ascent of Virginia Raggi was more than a personal triumph; it was a chapter in the ongoing story of women challenging societal expectations and reshaping the narratives of power. The significance of her role extended beyond the boundaries of Rome, inspiring women in politics globally to pursue their ambitions without constraints imposed by gender.



The revelation that Rome is in fact being personified as a woman acts as a profound symbolic layer during our journey through its ancient streets. As we reach Teatro Marcello, close to the Jewish neighborhood, the Portico di Ottavia reminds us of her role in the city's development.

Octavia was, just like Plotina, a figure in Roman history that remains to be remembered as the wife and/or sister of successful Roman leaders despite holding an immense power in her time. As the sister of the Roman Emperor Augustus, also known as Octavian, and the fourth wife of Mark Antony, Roman general and politician of high status, she played a significant role in Roman politics and society during the transition from the Roman Republic to the Roman Empire

After her first husband Marcellus died in 40 BC, Octavia married Mark Antony, who was a close ally of Caesar and later became one of Rome's rulers, along with Augustus. Octavia's marriage to Antony was a strategic alliance aimed at strengthening the political bond between Octavian and Antony. Despite Antony's previous relationship with Cleopatra, the Queen of Egypt, Octavia remained loyal to him and continuously fought for peace between Antony and her brother.



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However, Antony's affair with Cleopatra led to political tensions and eventually to the famous Battle of Actium in 31 BC, where Octavian's forces defeated Antony and Cleopatra. After Antony's death in 30 BC, Octavia took care of Antony's children and played a role in reconciling Rome with Cleopatra's children, particularly with her son from Julius Caesar, Caesarion.

Octavia was respected for her loyalty, dignity, and diplomatic skills, even when that meant putting her own interest behind. She is known to have been generous and kind, acting with great foresight in the interest of the Roman Empire.

As we keep on walking, we arrive at Palazzo Cenci. The haunting tale of Beatrice Cenci resonated through the cobble streets as our study visit approached midday. Her tragic narrative, immortalized by the strokes of Caravaggio's brush, stood as a poignant reminder of the profound challenges women grappled with in a society dominated by rigid patriarchal norms.

Beatrice Cenci was an Italian woman of status who lived during the 16th century. Her story has been widely shared as a symbol of resistance against oppression and abuse. Beatrice Cenci's life is often remembered for the tragic events surrounding her family and home situation. Her dad, Francesco Cenci was a cruel nobleman. Francesco was widely known for his violent behavior towards his family, including Beatrice, her stepmother Lucrezia, and her brothers. Beatrice and her family allegedly suffered years of sexual abuse and mistreatment by Francesco.





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In 1598, the 21 year old Beatrice, her mother and brother conspired to murder Francesco. The murder was an attempt to escape from his tyranny and protect themselves from further abuse. Unfortunately the plan was discovered before it could be executed and Beatrice, along with her co-conspirators, was arrested and sentenced to death. Despite public sympathy for her situation, Beatrice was executed by beheading in 1599.

Interpretations of her story mostly view her actions as a desperate attempt to resist the patriarchal oppression and abuse she faced, making her a symbol of female agency and resistance.





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A few steps ahead, Palazzo Alteri emerges as a backdrop for our next discovery, providing a stage for the compelling story of Anna Magnani. Within its historic walls, we devolved into the life of a woman whose influence stretches far beyond the confines of Rome.

Anna Magnani, a celebrated actress of the 1950's Rome was one of the first women to play characters outside of traditional gender norms in movies, reflecting the complexity and nuances of women's lives on screen. Through her performances as strong, resilient women she remarkably contributed to reshaping society's expectation of what it means to be a woman.



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Thereby her career was not about her success as an actress, it represented a paradigm shift in how women were portrayed on screen. This implicitly challenged what it meant to be a woman and even more so, how women should be.

Through her performances, Magnani contributed to reshaping the narrative around female roles in cinema, showcasing the strength, resilience, and diversity of women's experiences.



Our study visit reached its pinnacle amidst the grandeur of the Pantheon, where we delved into the life of Margherita di Savoie. Her role in the historic Congresso Nazionale delle Donne Italiane in 1908 marked a watershed moment for women's rights in Italy. Margherita di Savoia, as queen consort of Italy during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, held a significant political and social position. Strong involvement in charitable activities, most of which were aimed at improving the situation for women, children and the poor, set her apart from other women in her position. Margherita was also a patron of the arts and played a pivotal role in promoting cultural activities during her reign as queen consort. Her advocacy for education and social welfare indirectly contributed to the advancement of women's independence which laid the groundwork for women's rights in Italy. She was also a symbol for unification in Italy during a period of transition and change as she fostered a sense of national identity and unity in the newly united Italy



Nowadays, women in politics are no longer a rarity. Still, Italian women continue to fight against gender stereotypes and push boundaries with the goal to finally reach gender equality. Nilde Lotti (photo 1) was the first female president of the Italian Chamber of Deputies, known to strongly advocate for women's rights, social justice, and progressive policies. Maria Elisabetta Alberti Casellati (photo 2) is the first female president of the Italian senate and functions as a trailblazer of women's rights in Italy. Giorgia Meloni (photo 3), a prominent leader in the Italian government, started her political career in her early twenties defying all boundaries of what it means to be a politician.

We extend our deepest gratitude to *Marvels of Rome* for their invaluable collaboration in making our study visit an enriching and memorable experience. Their dedication to showcasing the historical and cultural marvels of the Eternal City added immeasurable depth to our exploration.



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fi.r.st.fightgenderstereotype@gmail.com



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info@euromamme.it



[@euromamme](https://www.instagram.com/euromamme)



info@kultur-art.com



[@kulturundart](https://www.instagram.com/kulturundart)



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office@iicbg.org



[@iicbulgaria](https://www.instagram.com/iicbulgaria)



yalcinadnanl@gmail.com



[@marvels_of_rome](https://www.instagram.com/marvels_of_rome)

CATTIVE RAGAZZE



cattive.ragazze2020@gmail.com

