

## Great Fountains of Rome

### The Campidoglio Fountain

If you visit the Piazza del Campidoglio in Rome you will find three fountains of interest. In this imposing square, these fountains each have a particularly interesting history. They haven't actually been in place in their current setting for that long, but each fountain has had a rich and varied background. In fact, the sculptures you'll see on these three fountains can be traced back to the early days of Christian Rome.

The first of the three fountains that you'll probably notice in the piazza is the central large fountain that leads up to the magnificent Palace of the Senators. Although originally planned by Michelangelo when he laid out designs for the piazza, the fountain was only constructed in the reign of Sixtus V who diverted a water supply from the Acqua Felice that could then supply a fountain. Original plans had decreed that this fountain would contain the figure of Jove as its centerpiece; instead it was built around the figure of Minerva who stands as the figurehead of Rome. Minerva's statue has partly been restored in modern times but the torso was brought to Rome from Cori so it is of great historical significance.

In front of the Minerva fountain you'll find the second fountain-decorated with the sculptures of two river gods. These statues are of great historical interest; unlike many lost treasures they have survived without burial in all of the turbulent times since Rome's downfall. Initially they were located in front of Aurelian's Temple of the Sun but they have since been moved around various settings in Rome before settling in their current location. Like the Palace of the Senators before which they stand, much of this fountain is constructed of travertine. This fountain seamlessly melds into the palace, as if it had been placed there at the dawn of time.

You'll find the third fountain at the Piazza del Campidoglio in the gardens of the Palazzo dei Conservatori. This fountain has barely earned its name as it is technically more of a basin with an unusual sculpture attached. The sculpture, which was added to the square in 1903, shows a lion feasting on a horse. Although this fountain may not look significant, the large statuary itself is of crucial historical import. If you look closely at the lion you'll note that it appears to show the effects of being exposed to water for long periods of time. It was primarily discovered in the River Almo more than a thousand years ago. Its history before that remains a mystery.

### Colonna

The fountain that stands in the Piazza Colonna in Rome is one of the oldest fountains in the history of the modern city. The fountain was built three hundred and twenty five years ago, is made from Porta Santa marble, and is of particular architectural and design note partly due to its original water source. The Colonna fountain was built to be fed water by the Acqua Vergine - this water source was not simply used to feed Rome's fountains at the time but was also used as a general water supply. This meant that it was difficult to feed a fountain that required the kind of water pressure for high jets. This basically meant that fountain builders of that time had to rely on their design skills to create beautiful fountain structures rather than just making an impact with high plumes of water.

The designer of the Colonna fountain, Giacomo della Porta, was skilled in harnessing the existing water supply while still creating beautiful structures. In fact, the Colonna fountain is widely held to be one the most magnificent fountains within the city to this day. The fountain is designed in a heptagon shape and was originally to be used partly as a fountain basin and partly as a standard drinking trough. The two sections are combined by straps bearing decorations of lion heads.

The fountain's large water features come from two sources - the first, via a vase sculpture in the center of the structure and the second, by two small jets between the vase and the edges of the basin. The vase currently in place is a replacement to the original vase, which was damaged. During the replacement the current architect, Stocchi, also added some decorative touches of dolphins and shells.

The fountain that stands within the Piazza Colonna is also of interest to historians for reasons other than its design. This fountain has long been used as a pilgrim's fountain due to its proximity to the Column of St Paul. Whether you wish to appreciate its history or its design, this fountain is worth the visit for any traveler passing through Rome.

### About the Author

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