

Archaeological Ancona

From Imperial Rome to the present day, through the streets, the palazzi and the hidden treasures of the city

The history of Ancona is closely connected with Imperial Rome, from the second century BC onwards. We can see it as we look at the principal archaeological monuments that are still visible. Our tour of archaeological Ancona begins at the port, where the arch of Trajan stands, a gift from the Emperor to the city (115 AD) and a notable example of the constructional work of the period. We are on the Lungomare Vanvitelli, and as we move forward, we encounter a large archaeological area with the remains of the port structure of the Republican period. In places, there are even stretches of the city wall visible.

From the port, we move uphill to the nearby Colle Guasco, to look at the ruins of the Roman amphitheatre, an impressive construction of the Augustan period. It may have held as many as 8,000 people, and attached to it is what many believe to have been a "school for gladiators", housed in a building with mosaics of the same period. Some of the neighbouring buildings arose from structures that were part of the disused amphitheatre and to some extent retain what is believed to have been the original shape of the complex.

Climbing further up Colle Guasco, the ancient Cumerus, we arrive at the Cathedral of San Ciriaco, which rises above the remains of a large temple dedicated to Venus Euplea, the goddess who was the protector of good navigation. The bases of the temple's columns are still visible under the cathedral. It seems that this temple is mentioned in several ancient writers. Below ground level in Ancona, quite a large number of examples of Roman life are preserved: they often come to light when excavations or modernisations are being carried out.

This happened in the case of the domus with mosaics in what is now Via Carducci, below the palazzo containing the Court of Appeal, in Piazza Stamira, where structures of the Imperial period were discovered when work started on building an underground car park. Another instance was in Via Matteotti, where a monumental tomb of the Augustan period can be seen. We conclude this tour of "Ancona in days gone by", with an almost obligatory visit to the National Archaeological Museum of the Marche Region, in Palazzo Ferretti, where there are examples to be seen of all the civilisations which succeeded each other over time in the Marche, from prehistory to Rome, with particular emphasis on the Piceni, the principal civilisation in this area.