

The Path of Rome

From volcano to Roma Continua, read through the Vacuum.Net theory and the genius of the city

J.Konstapel, Leiden, 26-10-2026.

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Introduction

The whole history of Rome, from the first huts of the Bronze Age to today, fits on one rung of the ladder of three: layer 56, the layer of one sign of the precession. Place the turning points at the founding (753 BCE), the peak (c. 150 CE), the low (c. 1000) and the capture (1870), and three steps of just over 840 years appear: rise, fall and the standing city. That is a reading, not a measurement: peak and low are chosen points on a broad, uncertain curve, and other choices dissolve the equality (see How firm is this?).

Occasion. On 19 and 20 May 2026, *Roma Continua* was presented as the winning entry of *A Vision for Rome*, the competition of the Fondazione Roma REgeneration. The team led by IT'S and OMA, with OKRA as landscape architect, was chosen from six finalists. The plan wants Rome to keep evolving without expanding: recalibration instead of growth, 25 years ahead ([Architectenweb](#), [Domus](#)).

Question. What is the path of Rome, from the very beginning to the future? What lives in the city beside the spirit of the age? And what does that path say about the plan?

Method. Four sources are combined. The Vacuum.Net theory as published on constable.blog (formal version, ladder of three, closure rule). The author's own essays on cycles, Bakhtin and the resonant city. The external research literature on Rome: geology, archaeology, demography, urban planning, climate. And the city's own myths and the writers who read them. Every statement carries a status:

- **Source:** stated in a named publication.
- **Computed:** a number, checked with the ladder rule.
- **Reading:** an interpretation through the net.
- **Open:** not yet settled.

The measuring instrument

The ladder of three gives every duration and every size a layer number; the closure rule binds three neighbouring layers. Nothing more is needed to read the path of a place.

The measuring rod. The natural units come from hydrogen: length $S_0 = 45.588$ nm, time $T_0 = S_0/c = 1.52066 \times 10^{-16}$ s. Layer n has length $3^n \cdot S_0$ and duration $3^n \cdot T_0$. The position of a quantity is the number of factors of three between it and the rod; the nearest whole number is its layer. *Source:* [The Vacuum.Net Theory](#), [Geoneutrinos and the Ladder of Three](#).

$$\begin{aligned}\text{position}(t) &= \log_3 \left(\frac{t}{T_0} \right), \quad \text{\\quad} \\ \text{position}(L) &= \log_3 \left(\frac{L}{S_0} \right)\end{aligned}$$

The closure rule. Every rung carries a state: +1, 0 or −1 (a trit). Three neighbouring trits form a window; the window closes when their sum is 0, modulo 3. If two successive windows close, $T(n+3) = T(n)$: every third layer carries the same state. The layers fall into three families. *Source.*

- Family A: layers 52, 55, 58, 61 ...
- Family B: layers 53, 56, 59 ...
- Family C: layers 54, 57, 60 ...

The place. A place is an address: a depth plus a number. History is what closes at that address. The ground (crust, mantle, volcano) is the *given* side; water on one's own land and the surface are the *adjustable* side. In the geoneutrino essay Italy carries the state +1 (the highest mantle signal of the three measuring sites). *Source.*

The three rules of arising. In *The Way Before the Net* the axioms are reduced to three: R1, a movement leaves a place through a crossing; R2, return gives birth; R3, mutual support builds the ladder. These three rules describe the path of Rome almost literally. *Source for the rules; reading for Rome.*

How the numbers were made. Every duration in this document is converted into years of 365.25 days and placed on the ladder with the formula above. The table in *The path as a whole* gives all results. *Computed.*

The ground: volcano, tuff and river

Rome stands on the ash of two volcanoes and in the valley of one river. The hills are tuff half a million years old; the plain on which the city arose was raised by metres within a single century shortly before the founding.

Two volcanoes. The Colli Albani (Alban Hills), 20 to 30 km south-east of the centre, have been active for about 600,000 years; the great explosive phase left a caldera of about 10 by 12 km ([INGV](#)). The Monti Sabatini to the north-west last erupted about 70,000 years ago; their current repose is longer than their mean recurrence of about 39,000 years ([Marra et al. 2019, Scientific Reports](#)). *Source.*

The hills are volcano. Beneath the city lie the Palatino unit (533,000 years) and the Tufo Lionato of the Capitoline (about 355,000–366,000 years), next to layers from the Sabatini ([De Rita & Zarlenga, Sovraintendenza; Mindat](#)). Roman concrete owes its durability to volcanic ash from the Alban Hills ([Jackson et al. 2014, PNAS](#)). The standard work is Heiken, Funicello & De Rita, *The Seven Hills of Rome* (2005). *Source.*

Dormant, not extinct. The last eruption of the Alban Hills was about 36,000 years ago, at the Albano maar. Marra et al. (2016) compute a recurrence of about 31,000 years over the last 100,000 years and measure uplift of 2–3 mm a year above magma a few kilometres deep; INGV sees no eruption in the short or medium term ([INGV, 2016](#)). Marra & Karner (2005) earlier gave a mean repose of about 45,000 years (*Il Quaternario*). At Cava dei Selci (Marino/Ciampino) an average of 12 tonnes of CO₂ a day escapes from the soil; one person and dozens of animals died, and homes were evacuated ([Tarchini et al., EGU21](#)). Holocene activity is debated: Funicello et al. (2003) see lahars and an overflow of Lake Albano around 398 BCE, after which the Romans dug a drainage tunnel; Marra & Karner question the dates. *Source, with debate.*

The river. The Tiber is 406 km long and carries on average about 239 m³/s through Rome. In the ice ages the valley cut tens of metres below present sea level. About 2,600 years ago, close to the founding, 4 to 6 metres of silt were laid down in one century; by the late 3rd century BCE a fairly stable plain lay 6–8 m above sea level ([Marra et al. 2018, PLoS ONE](#)). The Forum was a marshy basin raised with up to 20,000 m³ of fill in the regal period (Ammerman 1990; [Hopkins](#)). *Source.*

Flood. Aldrete (2007) collects 42 reports of floods between 414 BCE and 398 CE ([BMCR](#)). The record at the Ripetta gauge is 19.56 m at Christmas 1598; in December 1870 the water stood at 17.22 m. Since the *muraglioni* (designed for 18 m) the river has overtopped its banks only three times, last in December 1937 ([Engineering Rome](#)). *Source.*

Coast and soil. The river mouth advanced on average about 6 metres a year, between 1569 and 1744 even 9; the harbours of Claudius and Trajan ended up on dry land ([Bellotti et al. 2011, The Holocene](#)). Today the soft delta sinks: up to 15 mm a year at the Fiumicino runway and up to 19 mm a year along the motorway to Rome ([Delgado Blasco et al. 2019, Remote Sensing](#)). Rome has no major fault of its own; the earthquakes of 1349 and 1703 came from the Apennines and reached intensity VII in the city, heaviest on the young river deposits ([Galli & Molin 2014, summary](#)). *Source.*

Reading through the net.

- *Two sides, two directions.* The volcano pushes the land up (+2–3 mm a year), the delta sinks (down to –15 mm a year). The given side beneath Rome tilts: high to the south-east, low towards the sea. The city lies on the hinge between them. *Source for the measurements; reading for the image.*
- *Volcano on layers 58 and 61.* The start of the Alban Hills (600,000 years, position 60.98) and their tuff lie on layer 61; the recurrence of 31,000 years on layer 58 (58.28), that of 45,000 years just on layer 59 (58.62). The family decides between the estimates: A for 31,000 years, B for 45,000. *Computed; open.*
- *The city arises where the ground just became firm.* The rapid raising of the plain about 2,600 years ago coincides with the founding and with the filling of the Forum. In the language of R2: the river gave back its silt, and from that return came the building ground. *Reading.*
- *Water and fire.* The two strands of the place are the volcano (the given side, which supplied the hills and the building stone) and the river (the adjustable side, which people tamed again and again). All later history plays out between these two. *Reading.*

The beginning: the crossing

Rome did not begin on a hill but at a crossing: a ford in the Tiber, on the salt route. That is exactly the image in the oldest sign for the way, 衛: a person at a crossroads.

People before people. West of Rome, at Castel di Guido, hominins butchered straight-tusked elephants about 400,000 years ago and made 98 bone tools, a record for the period ([Villa et al. 2021, PLoS ONE](#)). La Polledrara di Cecanibbio (c. 325,000–310,000 years) preserves an elephant trapped in mud, with more than 500 stone tools ([Turismo Roma](#)). The two Neanderthal skulls of Saccopastore in the Aniene valley have been redated to about 250,000 years, among the oldest in Europe ([Marra et al. 2015, INGV](#)). Casal de' Pazzi (c. 200,000 years) yielded a skull fragment beside elephant, aurochs and hippopotamus. *Source.*

Bronze Age on the bank. Cores at Sant'Omobono, at the foot of the Capitoline and close to the Tiber Island, hit occupation layers from c. 1200–1000 BCE, alternating with thick flood deposits. Settlement was therefore not only on the hills but also at the river ([Brock & Terrenato 2016, *Antiquity*](#)). On the Capitoline lies a terraced Late Bronze Age settlement with metalworking from the 9th century ([Musei Capitolini](#)). *Source*.

Salt and ford. From the salt pans at the Tiber mouth the Via Salaria ran inland. Herders crossed the river at the Forum Boarium, where the water was shallow and slow; according to Coarelli that crossing grew into a market for cattle and salt ([Waarsenburg, *Ostia Antica*](#)). Around 750 BCE Greek craftsmen settled there. That salt and ford were the reason for the site is an interpretation, not a proof. *Source, with debate*.

A founding or a growing together? Varro reckoned the founding back to 21 April 753 BCE. Carandini defends a real act of founding with a wall on the Palatine; Fulminante (2014) sees a gradual coalescence, with a step in the 10th–9th century and a bigger one in the mid-8th ([BMCR](#)). The Lapis Niger (c. 570–550 BCE) carries the oldest Latin with the word for king. *Source, with debate*.

Reading through the net.

- *R1 literally.* "A movement leaves a place through a crossing": the herders with their flocks, the river, the salt road, and the Tiber Island as a fixed point in the stream. Rome arose as the sign 衛: crossing (行), place (首), foot (止). *Reading*.
- *The given and the adjustable side.* The hills are the given side (volcanic tuff); the bank and the water are the adjustable side, where people first set to work. *Reading*.
- *People and hills on one layer.* From the oldest hominins at Castel di Guido (400,000 years, position 60.61) to Casal de' Pazzi (200,000 years, position 59.98), early humans lie on layers 60–61; those are the same layers as the tuff of the hills (Tufo Lionato 365,000 years, position 60.53). Here people and hill arose on the same rung. *Computed; the link is reading*.
- *The city on layer 56.* From the Bronze Age on the bank (c. 1225 BCE) to now is 3,251 years, position 56.23; from Varro's founding 2,778 years, position 56.09. However the beginning is placed, the city lies on layer 56: one sign of the precession (2,148 years, position 55.85). *Computed*.

Rise (753 BCE – c. 150 CE)

From village at the ford to the first city of about a million people took just over 900 years. What carried that growth was a closed loop: grain and water in, waste out.

How large did the city become? This is debated. Morley (1996) and most scholars (Scheidel, Lo Cascio) hold 850,000 to 1 million inhabitants under Augustus. Storey (1997) works from the housing densities of Pompeii and Ostia and arrives at about 450,000 ([Storey, *Antiquity*](#); [Morley, *BMCR*](#)). D'Eramo names a peak of 1.5 million in the 2nd century. *Source, with debate*.

Grain. Augustus set the number of recipients of the grain dole (*annona*) at about 200,000. Imports are estimated at 150,000 to 272,000 tonnes a year; according to Josephus the grain came eight months a year from Africa and four from Egypt ([Cura annonae](#)). The harbour moved to Portus: Claudius began in 42 CE, Trajan added a hexagonal basin of 715 metres across between 100 and 112 ([Ostia Antica](#)). *Source*.

Water. Eleven aqueducts, from the Aqua Appia (312 BCE) to the Alexandrina (226 CE), delivered a nominal 1.1 million m³ a day; hydraulic studies put the real flow at about two thirds of that ([Frontinus, list of aqueducts](#); Aicher 1995). The Cloaca Maxima carried it away to the Tiber. The Aurelian Wall (271–275) enclosed 13.7 km² with 19 km of wall ([Aurelian Walls](#)). *Source.*

Cycles in the rise. In *Secular Cycles* (2009) Turchin and Nefedov distinguish two Roman cycles: the Republic (350–30 BCE) and the Principate (30 BCE–285 CE), each with population growth, elite overproduction, fiscal crisis and a phase of disintegration ([Project MUSE](#)). *Source.*

Reading through the net.

- *One step on layer 55.* From Varro's founding to the peak around 150 CE is 903 years, position 55.07. One step on layer 55 lasts 840.6 years; the rise is one full step, with state +1. *Computed; the state is reading.*
- *Turchin on layer 54.* The Republican cycle (320 years, position 54.12) and that of the Principate (315 years, position 54.11) both lie on layer 54, the same layer as a phase of the Bakhtin cycle (250 years, position 53.90). Two independent cycle models, one rung. Three layer-54 steps make one layer-55 step: precisely the rise. *Computed.*
- *Water as closure.* The aqueducts are the loop that closed the city: water comes in from the volcanic hills and leaves through the Cloaca to the river. This is the knot in its most literal form: windings that hold each other in three directions (water, grain, people). *Reading.*
- *R3, mutual support.* City and empire carried each other: the provinces supplied grain, the city supplied order and law. As long as that support ran, it built the ladder. *Reading.*

Fall (c. 150 – c. 1000)

In about 850 years Rome shrank from an estimated million to 20,000–30,000 inhabitants. The fall came in waves: plagues, a colder climate, sacks, and finally the cutting of the water.

Plagues. The Antonine Plague (165–180) reached Rome in 166; Cassius Dio reports up to 2,000 deaths a day in 189. Empire-wide estimates run from 2 to 33 per cent mortality, mostly around 10 ([Antonine Plague](#)). The Plague of Cyprian (c. 249–262) reached Rome in 251 ([Harper 2015, JRA](#)). The Justinianic Plague (from 541) is sharply debated: from a third to half dead, against "an inconsequential pandemic" in Mordechai et al. 2019, *PNAS* ([Princeton](#)). *Source, with debate.*

Climate. Kyle Harper (*The Fate of Rome*, 2017) explains the fall along three lines: the end of the Roman Climate Optimum, the pandemics, and the Late Antique Little Ice Age (536–660). Newfield calls this too deterministic and points to the uncertainty of the climate records ([BMCR 2019.10.21](#)). *Source, with debate.*

Sacks and siege. Alaric sacked Rome in August 410, the Vandals in June 455. The siege by Vitiges (2 March 537 – 12 March 538) began with the cutting of the aqueducts; the mills on the Janiculum stopped and Belisarius built floating mills on the Tiber ([Siege of Rome](#); [Oxford, Janiculum](#)). According to Bury, the Romans then had to draw their water from the Tiber and from wells for a thousand years ([Bury via LacusCurtius](#)). When Totila took the city on 17 December 546, only about 500 citizens were left according to Procopius. *Source.*

The curve. About 800,000 under Constantine, about 500,000 in the late 4th and 5th centuries, perhaps 60,000 in the early 6th century ([Van Dam, BMCR](#)), and 20,000–30,000 around 1000 (Wickham). Ward-Perkins (2005) sees a real material collapse: roof tiles and coins disappear, and even cattle become smaller. Wickham (2005) places the break at the end of the Roman tax state; Scheidel (2017) calls it a case of state failure as a "great leveler". *Source, with debate.*

Reading through the net.

- *One step on layer 55, now downward.* From the peak around 150 to the low around 1000 is 850 years, position 55.01: almost exactly one step of 840.6 years. Rise (903 years) and fall (850 years) are two equal steps on the same rung, with opposite states: +1 and –1. *Computed; the states are reading.*
- *The knot loses a closure.* The theory knows two ways in which energy is released: a mesh lets something through, or a knot loses a closure. Rome lost one in 537: the water loop was cut and the city fell back from knot to loose windings, scattered cores in the Tiber bend. *Reading.*
- *Tension from outside, no single cause from inside.* In a net of one strand there is no arrow of one cause; plagues, cold, raiders and the loss of the tax state are four forms of the same open tension. That fits the debate: no single explanation settles the account on its own. *Reading.*
- *Bakhtin.* On constable.blog the Bakhtin cycle places the destruction of the Roman Empire between 450 and 700, the start of the cycle of Western culture. *Source:* [The Worldwide Carnival](#).

The standing city (c. 1000–1870)

After the fall Rome became neither imperial city nor ruin, but a third thing: the city that stood. For a long time it had 20,000 to 35,000 inhabitants, and it grew again only when the water came back.

The low. Around the year 1000, according to Wickham, 20,000 to 30,000 people lived in the *abitato* in the Tiber bend; around it, up to the Aurelian Wall, lay the half-rural *disabitato* ([Tognetti on Wickham; Carleton](#)). The Saracen raid of 846 led to the Leonine Wall (848–852); the Normans sacked the city in 1084, although Hamilton (*Speculum*, 2003) argues that the destruction was mostly a later memory. In 1143 a Senate rose again on the Capitoline; in 1347 Cola di Rienzo seized power by appealing to ancient law. *Source.*

The centre leaves and returns. From 1309 to 1377 the pope resided in Avignon; the Western Schism lasted until 1417, and Martin V entered Rome in 1420. In 1300 Boniface VIII proclaimed the first Jubilee: the pilgrim became the city's new circulation ([Western Schism; Jubilee](#)). *Source.*

The water returns. Nicholas V restored the Acqua Vergine (Trevi) in 1453. Sixtus V built the Acqua Felice (1585–87), Paul V the Acqua Paola (1612) ([Karmon, The Waters of Rome](#)). With it the population rose from 55,035 in the papal count of 1526–27 to about 110,000 around 1600 ([Demografia di Roma](#)). The Sack of Rome of 6 May 1527, with 6,000 to 12,000 dead, was followed by recovery to the earlier level around 1560 (Partner 1976). *Source.*

Sixtus V redraws the crossings. In five years (1585–90), with Domenico Fontana, he drew straight streets between the great basilicas and set the ancient obelisks back up at the nodes: the Vatican in 1586, the Esquiline in 1587 ([Vatican obelisk; Culture and Cosmos, Masi](#)). A priest who returned in 1595 said he could no longer find Rome in Rome. *Source.*

A city at rest. After that Rome hovered around 150,000–185,000 inhabitants; under French occupation it fell from 185,000 (1789) to 135,000 (1814) ([Davis, Encyclopedia of Modern Europe](#)). In 1870 Rome was only the fourth city of Italy (D'Eramo 2017). *Source.*

Reading through the net.

- *The 0 between two directions.* This step is neither rise nor fall. Rome held itself as the holy city, with pilgrims as the stream flowing in and out. In trits: a step with state 0, the meeting of the rising (+1) and the falling (–1) direction. With the first two steps (+1, –1, 0) the window on layer 55 closes. *Reading.*
- *Water is the strand.* Where the water loop closed (aqueduct in, Tiber and sewer out), the city grew; where it lay open, the city shrank. From the cutting in 537 to the Acqua Felice in 1585 is 1,048 years, position 55.20: one step on layer 55. *Computed; the link is reading.*
- *Recovery on layer 52.* From the Sack (1527) to recovery (c. 1560) is about 33 years: layer 52 (31 years), the layer of the Kondratiev wave and of the term of Roma Continua. The papal exile in Avignon (68 years) lies on layer 53, the layer of a human life. *Computed.*
- *Sixtus V as R1.* Straight lines between places, an obelisk at every crossing: the city was redrawn as a net of nodes. *Reading.*
- *Bakhtin.* This step coincides with three chronotopes of the Bakhtin cycle on constable.blog: the Greek romance (1200–1450), the adventure (1450–1700, Renaissance) and the biography (1700–1950). *Source:* [The Worldwide Carnival](#).

The Third Rome (1870–1981)

In just over a hundred years Rome went from 213,633 inhabitants to 2.8 million: the fastest growth in its history, and the first time in almost 2,000 years that the city regained its ancient level.

Capital. On 20 September 1870 the bersaglieri broke through the wall at Porta Pia; in 1871 Rome became the capital of Italy. Three months after the capture, at the end of December 1870, the Tiber stood more than 17 metres high: the worst flood in almost three centuries. The law of 6 July 1875 fixed the *muraglioni*, designed by Raffaele Canevari and built from 1876 to 1926 ([Turismo Roma](#); [Giannetti & Casini 2022](#)). *Source.*

Growth, census by census. Residents according to ISTAT ([Liseo & Teodori 2016](#)): 213,633 (1871), 275,637 (1881), 386,626 (1891), 435,432 (1901), 522,123 (1911), 663,848 (1921), 937,177 (1931), 1,403,307 (1941). Other sources give up to 245,000 for 1871; the difference is residents versus people present. Then 1,626,793 (1951), 2,155,093 (1961), 2,739,952 (1971) and the peak of 2,797,337 at the 1981 census ([tuttitalia, censuses](#)). D'Eramo speaks of an almost tripling between 1945 and 1970, but the censuses give 1.7 times between 1951 and 1971; planners then counted on 5 million ([D'Eramo, NLR 106, 2017](#)). *Source.*

Plans and what came of them. The Viviani plan (1873) never became law; the Esquilino and Castro Pretorio quarters arose through separate agreements. The plan of 1883 became law for 25 years; the Sanjust plan (1909) was the first to let the city grow beyond the Aurelian Wall; then came the plan of 1931 ([Archivio Storico Capitolino](#)). *Source.*

Fascism cuts. The Via dell'Impero (1932) removed the Alessandrino quarter and much of the Velia. The Via della Conciliazione (begun 29 October 1936, finished for the 1950 Jubilee) displaced 1,236 families, 4,992 people, according to a municipal count of 1937. Twelve *borgate* were built in the Agro Romano between 1930 and 1937; for the E42 world exhibition 400 hectares were requisitioned in 1938, and the exhibition never took place ([Moure Cecchini, Selva; Kallis 2014; Baxa 2010](#)). *Source*.

After the war: building without a state. Social housing remained marginal in Italy: public bodies own 2.7 per cent of the housing stock. Much of the growth ran through *abusivismo*, building without a permit, from an enclosed balcony to whole districts of ten-storey blocks (D'Eramo 2017). *Source*.

Reading through the net.

- *The fourth step begins.* From the capture (1870) to the peak at the 1981 census is 111 years: position 53.16, layer 53. That is the rising first third of the first step on layer 54, within the fourth step on layer 55. *Computed; the division into steps is reading.*
- *Water first, again.* The city began its new growth by closing the river: embankments instead of aqueducts, but again the water deciding the loop. The price: the city lost its river as a living edge. *Reading.*
- *Cutting against the grain.* Sixtus V drew lines between existing nodes. Fascism drew lines through the nodes and moved the residents to loose spots outside the city. In the language of the theory: a seam between two directions, with open windows carrying tension. The borgate became the districts with the longest post-war problems. *Reading.*
- *Post-war growth on layer 52.* From 1951 to the peak of 1981 is 30 years, position 51.97: the same layer as the Kondratiev wave (50 years, 52.43) and the term of Roma Continua (25 years, 51.80). *Computed.*

The present (1981–2026)

Since 1981 Rome has stopped growing. The city has 2.75 million inhabitants, is ageing, and is losing its growth to the edge, while more visitors come than ever.

Standstill and ageing. The municipality had 2,747,395 inhabitants on 1 January 2025; the Città metropolitana 4,222,648 at the end of 2024 ([tuttitalia](#)). The share aged 65 and over rose from 19.0 per cent (2002) to 24.0 per cent (2025); the mean age from 42.9 to 47.0 years. Meanwhile the labour-market area around Rome grew from 3.48 million (2001) to 4.08 million (2023) ([Politecnico di Torino, Airmap Roma 2026](#)). *Source*.

More visitors than ever. In 2025 there were 22.9 million arrivals and 52.9 million overnight stays, a record ([Turismo Roma](#)). The 2025 Jubilee drew 33.4 million pilgrims from 185 countries ([Italpress](#)). There are 47,090 Airbnb listings, 48 per cent of them in the historic centre (Polito, 2026). *Source*.

Housing. Between 2011 and 2022 there were 69,000 eviction orders for arrears; of 1.44 million dwellings about 162,000 stand empty; social housing is 5.7 per cent of the stock; some 114,000 households are at high risk ([Sapienza/MEMOTEF 2025](#)). *Source*.

Big works finally move. Metro C opened the Porta Metronia and Colosseo stations on 16 December 2025; the full 29 km line follows around 2035, at about €7 billion ([ABC News](#)). The Santa Palomba waste-to-energy plant (600,000 tonnes a year) has been under construction since May 2026, with first waste in

November 2029 ([AGI](#)). A second line of the Peschiera aqueduct (€1.5 billion) starts in 2027; water losses in the network fell from 43 to 27 per cent ([Affaritaliani](#)). *Source*.

Rejected and regrouped. For Expo 2030 Rome received 17 votes on 28 November 2023, against 119 for Riyadh and 29 for Busan ([Wanted in Rome](#)). The city then had Stefano Boeri make the Laboratorio Roma050 (June 2025): the Tiber as ecological axis, archaeology, and the GRA ring road as magnet, with more than 250 "micro-cities" ([Idealista](#)). A constitutional amendment giving Roma Capitale its own legislative powers passed the Chamber at first reading on 29 April 2026 ([Pagella Politica](#)). *Source*.

Roma Continua. The competition *A Vision for Rome* began in March 2025 at MIPIM in Cannes, drew 35 teams with almost 1,000 professionals, and chose Roma Continua from six finalists on 20 May 2026 ([Il Sole 24 Ore](#)). The plan covers the whole Città metropolitana (5,352 km²) and works with five principles: care, beauty, knowledge, movement, and reuse and integration. Five green corridors along the Tiber and its tributaries carry as many mobility hubs ("forums of innovation"), five knowledge clusters spread work, cycling networks reach five kilometres from each forum, and vacant heritage is reused. The horizon is 25 years; the core is "recalibration instead of expansion" ([Domus](#); [designboom](#); [OKRA](#)). *Source*.

Reading through the net.

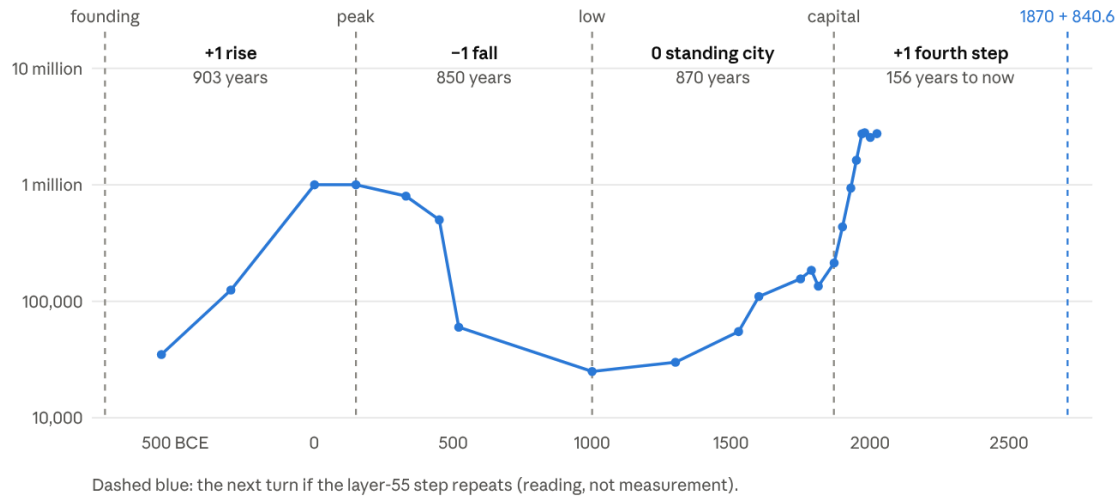
- *The turn within the fourth step.* Counted from 1870 in steps of 93.4 years (layer 53), the first third runs to 1963 and the second from 1963 to 2057. In that second third the censuses show exactly a turning point (1981) and then standstill. *Computed; the division is reading.*
- *The city as pilgrimage site, again.* With 2.75 million inhabitants and 52.9 million overnight stays, Rome becomes again what it was in the standing step: a city that lives from those passing through. The 2025 Jubilee is the same loop as the Jubilee of 1300. *Reading.*
- *Water first.* Precisely now the investments in the water loop (Peschiera, network losses) and in the outflow (waste-to-energy) are getting under way. In the reading of this document that is the condition for what comes next. *Reading.*
- *Roma Continua is R2.* "Return gives birth": a palimpsest that writes on over what exists is, in the language of *The Way Before the Net*, the second rule of arising. Without knowing the net, the plan chooses the form the theory prescribes. *Reading.*

The path as a whole

With the chosen turning points, Rome's steps are 903, 850 and 870 years long: on average 874 years, 4 per cent above the ladder step of 840.6 years on layer 55. Three such steps make one step on layer 56, the rung on which the whole history of the city lies.

With these turning points Rome falls into three steps of about 850 years

Inhabitants, log scale; turning points chosen, not measured; ladder step 840.6 years (layer 55)



Population: Storey/Morley (debate 450,000–1 million under Augustus), Van Dam, Wickham, Demografia di Roma, Davis, ISTAT censuses 1871–2021, ISTAT 2025 · turning points: reading

The table places every duration and size in this document on the ladder. Position = $\log_3(\text{duration}/T_0)$ or $\log_3(\text{length}/S_0)$; layer = the nearest whole number.

What	Duration or size	Position	Layer	Family
Post-war growth 1951–1981	30 years	51.97	52	A
Term of Roma Continua	25 years	51.80	52	A
Kondratiev wave	50 years	52.43	52	A
Muraglioni 1876–1926	50 years	52.43	52	A
Avignon 1309–1377	68 years	52.71	53	B
Capital to peak 1870–1981	111 years	53.16	53	B
Phase of the Bakhtin cycle	250 years	53.90	54	C
Turchin: Principate cycle	315 years	54.11	54	C
Turchin: Republican cycle	320 years	54.12	54	C
Rise –753 to 150	903 years	55.07	55	A
Fall 150 to 1000	850 years	55.01	55	A
Aqueducts gone 537–1585	1,048 years	55.20	55	A
Bakhtin cycle	1,250 years	55.36	55	A
Sign of the precession	2,148 years	55.85	56	B
Founding to now	2,778 years	56.09	56	B
Bronze Age Sant'Omobono to now	3,251 years	56.23	56	B

What	Duration or size	Position	Layer	Family
Full precession	25,772 years	58.12	58	A
Alban Hills, recurrence	31,000 years	58.28	58	A
Alban Hills, since last eruption	36,000 years	58.42	58	A
Uplift of 50 m around the volcano	200,000 years	59.98	60	C
Tufo Lionato (Capitoline)	365,000 years	60.53	61	A
Tufo del Palatino	530,000 years	60.87	61	A
Height of the hills	c. 50 m	18.95	19	A
Tiber Island	270 m	20.48	20	B
Ancient city ($\sqrt{13.9 \text{ km}^2}$)	3.7 km	22.87	23	B
Cycling reach around a forum	5 km	23.14	23	B
Aurelian Wall (circuit)	19 km	24.35	24	C
Diameter of the GRA ring road	c. 22 km	24.49	24	C
Distance to volcano and sea	c. 25 km	24.60	25	A
Municipality ($\sqrt{1,287 \text{ km}^2}$)	35.9 km	24.93	25	A
Continental crust	35 km	24.91	25	A
Circuit of the GRA ring road	68 km	25.51	26	B
Città metropolitana ($\sqrt{5,352 \text{ km}^2}$)	73.2 km	25.58	26	B
Length of the Tiber	405 km	27.14	27	C

Computed with $S_0 = 45.588 \text{ nm}$ and $T_0 = 1.52066 \times 10^{-16} \text{ s}$; years of 365.25 days.

Four things stand out.

1. **Family A carries the rhythm.** The Kondratiev wave and the plan's term (52), the great steps of rise and fall (55), the volcano and the precession (58) and the tuff of the hills (61) all lie in family A. By the closure rule they carry the same state. The city breathes in the family of its volcano. *Computed; the link is reading.*
2. **The two cycle models coincide.** Turchin and Bakhtin, developed independently, both land on layer 54. *Computed.*
3. **The municipality has the size of the crust.** The municipality (layer 25) is as large as the distance to the volcano and to the sea, and as the thickness of the continental crust. The ancient city and the cycling reach of a forum share layer 23. *Computed.*
4. **What does not fit.** The turning points lie on average 4 per cent off the ladder step, and the dates themselves are uncertain: the founding is a back-calculation, the low "around 1000" is a broad trough. The deviation is small, but this is a reading of data, not a measurement. *Open.*

How firm is this?

The equality of the three steps follows from the choice of peak and low, not from the data. From about 550 to 1350 the population lay on a plateau of 20,000 to 50,000; any year in it can be defended as the low.

Choice of turning points	Rise	Fall	Standing city
Chosen: founding 753 BCE, peak 150, low 1000	903 years	850 years	870 years
Peak 100, low 1000	853 years	900 years	870 years
Peak 150, low 600 (after the Gothic War)	903 years	450 years	1,270 years
Peak 150, low 1300 (before Avignon)	903 years	1,150 years	570 years
Start Bronze Age 1225 BCE, peak 150, low 1000	1,375 years	850 years	870 years

Computed.

- **The mean is fixed by start and end.** $(1870 + 753) / 3 = 874$ years, whatever peak and low are chosen. With the Bronze Age as start it becomes 1,032 years, 23 per cent above the step of 840.6 years.
- **With a low around 600, fall and standing city land on different layers:** 450 years on layer 54 (position 54.43), 1,270 years on layer 55 (55.38).
- **The family patterns are selection.** About 35 quantities were placed on the ladder and the hits picked out; with three families, a third falls into each family by chance.
- **Weak figures.** The population around 550 and 300 BCE comes from a popular source; Avignon and the year 600 are not verified.

What a real test would be. Fix in advance a rule that picks the turning points from the data, for example the extremes of a smoothed population curve. Only then compare with 840.6 years, and apply the same rule to other ancient cities (Athens, Constantinople, Alexandria). If steps of layer 55 come out there too, it is more than a reading. *Open.*

The genius of the city

Beside the spirit of the age (*Zeitgeist*) stands the spirit of the place (*genius loci*), and that idea is itself Roman. Rome's myths do not speak of growth; they speak of passage, of a pair that holds or breaks, of fire kept and water fetched, and of a city that is founded again and again. Read through the net, they repeat the three rules of arising.

What the Romans themselves said

The genius of the city. The Romans worshipped the *Genius urbis Romae*. On the Capitoline hung a shield dedicated "to the genius of the city of Rome, whether male or female" (*sive mas sive femina*): the spirit was honoured without being named (Servius on *Aeneid* 2.351; [Si deus si dea](#)). *Source.*

The secret name. Rome had a hidden name that might not be spoken. Pliny tells that Valerius Soranus was put to death for revealing it (*Natural History* 3.65; [Valerius Soranus](#)). The Romans themselves

practised *evocatio*, calling the guardian god out of a besieged city, as with Juno of Veii in 396 BCE; a city whose name is known can be called away. *Source*.

Janus, the god of the passage. Janus has two faces, one looking back and one forward, and rules gates, doorways and beginnings; the first month bears his name. The doors of his shrine in the Forum stood open in war and closed in peace. Augustus records that they were closed only twice before him since the founding, and three times under him (*Res Gestae* 13). *Source*.

The pair that breaks. Romulus kills Remus when Remus leaps over the new wall; the city's name is bought with a brother's blood at its boundary (Livy 1.7). In the 5th century Pope Leo the Great preached that Peter and Paul were the true founders of Rome, better than the one "that gave you your name" and "defiled you with his brother's blood" ([Leo the Great, Sermon 82](#)). The founding pair was replaced by a pair that holds. *Source*.

Fire kept, water fetched. In the round temple of Vesta in the Forum burned a fire that must never go out; its extinction was an omen of disaster. The Vestal Virgins drew the water for the rites from a spring outside the walls, not from the aqueducts. Beside them stood the river as a god, Tiberinus, to whom the basket of the twins was entrusted. *Source*.

The mundus. Somewhere near the Forum lay the *mundus*, a pit that connected the city with the underworld. It was opened three days a year, 24 August, 5 October and 8 November: *mundus patet*, "the world is open" ([Warde Fowler, JRS 2, via LacusCurtius](#); [Lapis manalis](#)). *Source*.

Saturn before Rome. The ancient sources say Saturn founded a settlement on the Capitoline long before Rome; archaeology has indeed found Bronze Age settlement there ([Musei Capitolini](#)). Saturn's temple at the foot of the hill held the state treasury; his December feast, the Saturnalia, turned the order upside down, with slaves served by masters. It lived on in the Roman carnival that Goethe described in 1789, and that Bakhtin made the model of his carnival (*Rabelais and His World*). *Source*.

Eternal and always refounded. Tibullus was the first to call the city *Roma aeterna*; Virgil gave it an "empire without end" (*Aeneid* 1.279). Yet every era refounds it: Cola di Rienzo (1347), the Renaissance popes, Mazzini's "Third Rome", Mussolini's capital. *Renovatio*, renewal, is itself one of the city's myths (Kallis 2014). *Source*.

What later readers saw

- **Freud** used Rome in *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930) as an image of the mind: a city in which nothing that once existed has passed away, all layers present at once ([Freud Museum London](#)). That is the palimpsest of Roma Continua, ninety years earlier. *Source*.
- **Jung** writes in *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* that he never managed to visit Rome, and that in 1949, when he wanted to buy his tickets, he fainted. Rome, he said, was too strong for him ([Sententiae Antiquae](#)). *Source*.
- **Pasolini** (*Ragazzi di vita*, 1955; *Accattone*, 1961) and **Fellini** (*Roma*, 1972) found the living city not in the centre but in the borgate and at the edge, in the districts that Fascism had made. *Source*.

Reading through the net

- **R1, the crossing, is Janus.** Rome arose at a ford; its oldest god is the god of the passage. Two faces, one doorway: -1 looking back, +1 looking forward, and the threshold itself as 0. The shrine open in war and closed in peace is a window that is open or closed. *Reading.*
- **R3, mutual support, is the pair.** Romulus and Remus are a pair whose support breaks at the boundary: in the language of the theory, two directions meeting at a seam, with open windows that carry tension, and violence as the discharge. Peter and Paul are the pair that holds. Rome's history alternates between the two: the city prospers when its pairs support each other (city and province, pope and pilgrim) and falls when they break. *Reading.*
- **R2, return gives birth, is renovatio.** A city that is founded again and again from its own ruins is the second rule; Freud's Rome, in which nothing is lost, is memory as shape (N3). *Reading.*
- **Fire and water are the given and the adjustable side.** The myth repeats the geology: Vesta's fire is the volcano, Tiberinus the river. The round hearth that must never go out is a closed loop; the water fetched from outside is the loop that must be kept open. *Reading.*
- **The secret name is the address.** In the net a place has an address (the invariant) and a state. The Romans hid the address and showed the state. A place whose name is known can be called away; a place whose address is hidden can only be met. *Reading.*
- **The mundus opens three times.** Three days a year the city stood open to its depths: the layers below were allowed to speak. *Reading; the number three is source.*
- **Saturn and carnival are the 0.** The Saturnalia set the order to zero for a few days: neither master nor slave. Bakhtin dates the current phase of Western culture as carnival, "folklore" again since 1950; Fellini's *Roma* is its film. *Reading on Bakhtin's own dating.*
- **The Jubilee runs on layer 52.** Since 1475 the Jubilee has come every 25 years (decided by Paul II in 1470): position 51.80, layer 52, the same layer as the term of Roma Continua and the Kondratiev wave. The 2025 Jubilee drew 33.4 million pilgrims; the next falls in 2050, inside the plan's horizon. *Computed; the link is reading.*

What the genius says

The spirit of the age asks Rome to grow, compete and win the Expo. The genius of the city has never been growth: it is the passage, the pair, the fire kept and the city refounded from what is already there. Rome flourished when it was a crossing and a pilgrimage, and fell when it was only a centre of power that took more than it returned. Read this way, the mythic task for the next 25 years is not to build more but to keep the thresholds open and the pairs intact. *Reading.*

For Roma Continua this suggests five concrete additions, each a reading, not a requirement:

1. **A Janus at every forum.** Make each hub a threshold, with a gate that faces both the old city and the periphery.
2. **Hubs in pairs.** Twin each forum in the periphery with a place in the centre, so the support runs both ways and does not break at the GRA.

3. **A hearth and a spring.** Give each forum its fire (a place to gather that is always lit) and its own water (a spring, a cistern, a fountain fed by its own loop).
4. **A mundus.** Leave in each district one place where the layers below may be seen and spoken of: an excavation, a well, an archive.
5. **A Saturnalia.** Give the city a time of reversal, in which the periphery leads and the centre serves, tied to the Jubilee rhythm of 25 years.

The future

If the reading of this document holds, a quiet contraction follows after 2057, not new growth; the fourth great step stays rising until about 2710, but the sub-step we live in now must close with a minus. Roma Continua chooses the right form for that, but lacks water as its first principle and counts in fives where the net closes in threes.

What the ladder predicts

Rung	Step	Period	State	What it means
55 (840.6 years)	fourth step	1870 – c. 2711	+1	The long line stays rising: Rome as a living city, not a museum.
54 (280.2 years)	first third	1870 – 2150	+1	The rising third of the fourth step.
53 (93.4 years)	1st sub-step	1870 – 1963	+1	Measured: growth from 213,633 to over 2 million.
53	2nd sub-step	1963 – 2057	0	Measured so far: peak 1981, then standstill around 2.75 million.
53	3rd sub-step	2057 – 2150	–1	Predicted: the window (+1, 0, –1) closes only with a contraction.
55	fifth step	c. 2711 – 3550	–1	Predicted: the series +1, –1, 0 repeats ($T(n+3) = T(n)$).

Computed for the periods; the states are reading; the bottom two rows are predictions, recorded on 25 October 2026.

The predicted contraction matches what demographers already see. ISTAT expects Italy to go from 58.9 to about 54.7 million inhabitants by 2050, with 34.5 per cent aged 65 and over; Lazio loses 185,000 inhabitants between 2023 and 2043 according to a Banca d'Italia workshop ([ISTAT, Italia 2050](#); [Il Sole 24 Ore](#)). No ISTAT projection for the municipality of Rome itself was found. *Source; open for Rome.*

The given side: volcano and heat

- **The volcano.** In the last 100,000 years the Alban Hills erupted about every 31,000 years; the last eruption was 36,000 years ago. Satellite measurements show uplift of more than 2 mm a year, which Marra et al. read as the start of a new phase; others see no new magma ([Marra et al.](#)).

[2016, GRL; Scientific American](#)). On the ladder that recurrence lies on layer 58, in family A, the same family as the city's great steps. An eruption is not a matter of the next 25 years, but monitoring is. *Source; the family is computed.*

- **The heat.** 2024 was Rome's warmest year since 1991, averaging 19.7 °C with 36 tropical nights. For 2050 the CMCC expects +1.5 to +1.9 °C and 22 to 28 more tropical nights ([CMCC](#)). Roma Capitale's climate strategy (October 2024) has four priorities: flooding, water security, heat and coast ([Strategia di Adattamento](#)). *Source.*

The adjustable side: water and surface

The whole history points to one lever: the water loop. Rome grew when eleven aqueducts closed, fell when they were cut in 537, and rose again with the Acqua Vergine, Felice and Paola. Today about 70 per cent of the water comes from the Peschiera system and 27 per cent leaks away. In the net, water is the strand along which the city closes; heat is tension that does not close. The myth says the same: Vesta's fire and the water fetched from the spring (see *The genius of the city*). *Reading on the measured series.*

What Roma Continua gets right

- **Recalibration instead of expansion** is exactly what the step 1963–2057 asks: a city that no longer grows must densify its closures rather than move its edge. *Reading.*
- **A palimpsest** is the second rule of arising, "return gives birth", and the city's own myth of renovatio. Reuse of vacant heritage closes old loops again. *Reading.*
- **Landscape as structure.** OKRA reads the rivers, valleys and plains as older and more resilient than the city. That is taking the given side seriously. *Source for the plan; reading for the link.*

What Roma Continua lacks, and three alternatives

1. **Water as first principle.** The five principles (care, beauty, knowledge, movement, reuse) do not name water; it is hidden in the green corridors. Alternative: make the water loop the first principle and the measure of everything: each hub closes its own loop of rainwater, storage, shade and outflow, and the river becomes an edge again instead of a gutter behind the muraglioni. *Reading and advice.*
2. **Count in threes, not fives.** The plan works with five corridors, five hubs and five knowledge clusters. In the net a window closes only in threes. The measure is already in the city: the ancient city and the 5-kilometre cycling reach of a forum both lie on layer 23, the municipality on layer 25 and the metropolis on layer 26. A layer is a measure of length: two layers is nine times the length and so 81 times the area. The municipality (1,287 km²) has room for about 93 units the size of ancient Rome (13.9 km²), the metropolis (5,352 km²) for about 386. That points to a hundred forums rather than five, in the order of the 250 micro-cities of Roma050, and to the fine mesh of *De Resonante Stad* rather than a ring. *Computed for the scales; the number is reading.*
3. **Use the pilgrim as circulation.** The standing city lived from those passing through; today's tourist (52.9 million overnight stays) is the same stream, but now runs through the centre and not through the districts. The plan wants to spread tourism; the 2050 Jubilee falls inside its horizon and is the moment to test it. *Reading.*

The other visions side by side. Roma Continua (OMA, OKRA and others) chooses five corridors and recalibration. Stefano Boeri's Laboratorio Roma050 for the municipality chooses the Tiber, archaeology and the ring road, with more than 250 micro-cities: much finer-grained. Cellamare describes in *Fuori raccordo* (2016) the self-organised districts beyond the GRA as a force of their own. The 2008 master plan (PRG) remains the legal framework, with new implementing rules since July 2026. *Source.*

Status of the statements

Status	What
Source	All dates, population figures, plans, measurements and myths, with the debates noted (population under Augustus, Justinianic Plague, founding or coalescence, Harper).
Computed	All ladder positions in the tables; the three families; the step of 840.6 years; the division of 1870–2150 into steps of 93.4 years; the sensitivity table.
Reading	The states +1, –1, 0 per step; water as the strand of the city; the three rules of arising applied to Rome and to its myths; family A as a shared rhythm of volcano and city; the five mythic additions to the plan.
Prediction (25-10-2026)	Contraction in the sub-step 2057–2150; a fifth great step with state –1 from c. 2711.
Open	See below.

Open points

- The rule for the state of a step (+1, 0, –1) was read here from the population curve, not derived. A rule that computes the state from the data is still missing.
- The turning points are chosen; with a low around 600 or 1300 the equality of the steps disappears (see *How firm is this?*).
- The family patterns were found by placing about 35 quantities and picking the hits; with three families a third falls into each by chance.
- The state of the place itself: the geoneutrino essay gives Italy +1 for the mantle, but a map of states for layers 25 and 27 beneath Rome does not exist.
- No ISTAT projection for the municipality of Rome to 2050 was found.
- Population figures for Avignon (1309–1377) and around the year 600 are not verified.

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