The Palazzo della Signoria was built between the late 13th and early 14th centuries, and its design is attributed to Arnolfo di Cambio. By that time, its buildings, baths, theatre, amphitheatre, etc., had been transformed and adapted to the new needs of an impoverished and demographically reduced population.

The theatre underwent the same transformations; part of the complex was used as a burial area, while the rest was subjected to heavy spoliation. The materials removed were probably sent to the only building works active in the city at that time, the churches. Perhaps it is due to the continuous plundering of the structure that caused the cavea to collapse, filling up the burellae underneath and thus partially levelling the natural slope on which it had been built. According to data from the excavations, between the 7th and 10th centuries, the theatre was partially buried, although still partially visible. At the end of the 10th century, the city started showing signs of recovery, witnessed by the works to level the pavement of Piazza della Signoria. At least two towers were built in this area, one atop the ruins of the theatre and the other on the south side of the square.

The tower on the theatre would take the name of gardingus, a fortification in what had been one of the strategic defensive positions of the ancient Roman colony.
Roma) and the decumanus maximus (from east to west, corresponding to the Via del Corso, Via Apothecaries and Via Strozzi). The city was built following an orthogonal grid traced by these two main roads along with seven minor cardini and six decumani, splitting the colony into about fifty blocks. The final design of the Roman city was set during the great renewal of the Hadrian era, during the first decades of the 2nd century AD. The appearance of the city was substantially changed with the construction of a large number of public buildings, like the amphitheatre, along with the refurbishment of existing buildings, such as the theatre. Thus, Florentia became a flourishing city of the empire, with landmarks and public works of remarkable architectural quality such as the forum, the baths, the aqueduct, the theatre and the amphitheater.

The foundation of Florence can be traced back to the Augustan age, even though the decision to found the colony is unanimously attributed by historians to the lex Iulia, an agrarian law created by Julius Caesar in 59 BC. This law allowed for the allocation of plots of land to veterans of war as compensation for services rendered to the Empire. There are also accounts from the Florentine chroniclers that tell us that Julius Caesar, after the war against Fiesole, founded a city in the plain through which the river Arno flowed, and welcomed “the best people of Rome”; in this case, war veterans. The establishment of the colony follows the classical Roman model, encomprising a rectangular area of about 20 hectares, aligned to the cardinal points and surrounded by defensive walls and towers. The colony was entered through four gates oriented along the two main roads: the cardo maximus (from north to south, the existing streets of Calimala and via Roma) and the decumanus maximus (from east to west, corresponding to the Via del Corso, Via Apothecaries and Via Strozzi).

The Palazzo della Signoria, or Palazzo Vecchio, was built on the ruins of a theatre from the time of the Roman Empire. A natural slope of about 5 meters at the south-eastern part of the Roman colony of Florentia was used as foundation for the construction of the theatre, which began in the first century BC. The excavations have revealed the theatres two main construction phases. During the first phase, the stage, the orchestra and the first rows of seats were built in stone; while the rest of the cavea consisted of wooden bleachers. In the next phase of construction, between the first and second centuries AD, during the reign of Emperor Hadrian, the entrance to the theatre and the cavea, were rebuilt in stone. This late-imperial architecture, enriched by stones coverings, follows the principles dictated by the famous roman architect, Vitruvius. The diameter was about 100 meters and with a height between 24 and 26 meters, for about 8/10.000 spectators. The historical sources of Upper-Middle Age don’t mention the theatre of Florentia, but the area was fortified at the time of the Byzantine domination. With the arrival of the Longobards (554-774 AD) a time when the theatre was subjected to further spoliation, almost all the architectural evidences vanished and the theatre was used for long time also as jail. The first documents relating to the presence of the monument date back to the 9th century, using the term Perilasium, which designated buildings for public spectacles. In subsequent years, the area of the monument was known by the names of burellae and gardingus.

Archaeological excavations underneath Palazzo Vecchio have made it possible to bring to light the remains of some of the parts of the Roman theater of Florentia. The excavations were conducted by “Cooperativa Archeologia”, under the scientific direction of Superintendent for Archaeological Heritage of Tuscany.

**Roman Florence**

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The historical confirmation of the location of the theatre dates back to 1375, but it was only in 1875 that architect Corinto Corinti excavated part of the cavea. This discovery made it possible to reconstruct the structure and the dimension of the building. The remains of the foundations visible today and the on going excavation allow us to estimate the orientation of the theatre with the cavea oriented towards Piazza Signoria and the scene covering the area of the present Via dei Gondi and via dei Leoni. Moreover at present a more precise architectural reconstruction of the building can be drawn.