

Layout of the Capitol Square

We do not know exactly when Michelangelo set to work on the project for the Capitol Square: it is very likely that the statue of Marcus Aurelius was placed on Michelangelo's base in 1538, whereas it seems that the design of the square was carried out no earlier than 1546. The difficulty that scholars have in establishing an exact chronology is due to the fact that many of Michelangelo's projects were actually realized long after the master's death and with modifications introduced by other architects, such as Giacomo della Porta and Martino Longhi the Elder. Buonarroti conferred a particularly majestic appearance on the Senatorial palace, founded in the twelfth century, with the double staircase at the front and the two monumental statues of rivers set at the base. In 1563, the facade and portico of the fifteenth century Conservators' Palace were rebuilt, with arches interspersed with very tall pilaster strips that correspond to two superimposed orders (colossal order). The New Palace, which is no more than a screen to conceal the church of Santa Maria d'Aracoeli and create a structure symmetrical to the Conservators' Palace, dates from the seventeenth century. The paving, which is based on a late sixteenth century engraving made from a design by Michelangelo, was not laid until 1940.