Alternative Sources for studying Roman architecture

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It is not easy to see how many historical buildings and urban communities must have appeared at the time they were constructed. Such buildings have not only been exposed to the effects of the weather and other forces of natural erosion but also the far more damaging impact of human interventions. Much of our cultural heritage has been damaged through the irrational acts of humans, destroying our legacy both of monumental buildings reflecting our desire leave a mark of our existence and of more modest structures reflecting lifestyles at specific place and times. Often it is the very desire to emphasize power through creations that leads to the destruction of previously created works, ignoring the fact that in this way we erase part of our past and our own history.

When talking about architectural buildings from Antiquity we rely on archaeological finds and written sources. Even coins can provide information about the look of ancient Roman architecture.

Rome's buildings not only reflect developments in culture but in science and technology, economic power and religious and social relations. They are witnesses to historical events in the development of humanity.

An additional rich source of clues to the original appearance of buildings and their condition at certain times, however, can be found in paintings, drawings, engravings, etchings, prints, watercolours, old reconstructions and other artistic works of different periods in the past. Many painters, engravers, architects, travellers and diplomats interested in architectural remains have left works that serve as alternative sources for the study of cultural history and the architectural monuments which form a part of that history.

This article is not intended to highlight the artistic value of the achievements of famous artists inspired by Roman buildings but to emphasize the significance of these works as historical documents—as evidence of their existence, of changes in their appearance over time, of their ruin or of their recovery. And these in turn attest to the level of care or negligence shown at different times towards the cultural heritage.

Architects during the Renaissance and Neoclassical periods, as well as in the present day, have been inspired by the wealth of ancient history to create original works. Often such inspiration has been replaced by imitation of what was characteristic of the past and very far from what exists today. But many painters have also employed their artistic

talent to create works that tell us about buildings in the past and enable us to extract data to form a more accurate picture of their appearance and function in past periods.

The vision of the Renaissance was based on new concepts of spiritual and intellectual freedom of the individual, the power of human reasoning and liberation from dependence on a superhuman. These concepts take us back to Antiquity as a time when man was the measure of everything and the power of reason the greatest gift of nature, when each individual created their own authority with the values of their rational power. [1]

The Renaissance was a creative rebirth of Roman antiquity, whose classical tradition in Italy had never been completely forgotten. The new art was not a support or repetition of the past, but a new growth culminating in an outpouring of productivity that saw the emergence of a number of major artists. [2]

Although these works of art cannot be taken as a photographic record of Roman buildings at a certain period of their existence, they are valuable sources for the study of ancient Roman architecture.

Let us start with the Colosseum in Rome, the largest amphitheatre in the Roman world, which has long attracted the attention of lovers of antiques. The construction of Flavian amphitheatre was begun by Emperor Vespasian in 70 AD and completed up to the third storey before his death in 79 AD. The top level was finished by Vespasian's son, Titus, and the completed building was inaugurated in 80 AD. [3] The Colosseum was repaired extensively a number of times and has undergone many changes in its long existence. The loss of its original function as an amphitheatre led to its progressively falling into ruin. Throughout the dangerous years of the Early Middle Ages, this mighty monument served as a fortress for some of the most powerful families of Rome. Between the 12th and 13th century it was incorporated into the fortress of the Frangipani family, [4] and in the 16th century the amphitheatre was consecrated. By this time the historical role of the building as a Flavian amphitheatre had been lost and it had become a monument for all ages—the Colosseum. [5] The first systematic excavations began in the 19th century.

Many artists studied the skills of their craft by practicing on the remains of Roman architecture, leaving numerous drawings, sketches, watercolours, engravings, and oil paintings that have remained as sources to testify for the existence of such buildings. These buildings can be seen even on coins. The Colosseum appeared as a motif on coins from a very early date —as on a coin from the reign of Titus from 79–81 AD (fig. 1).



Fig. 1

The engraved prints of Antonio Lafreri (1512–1577) show the Roman Colosseum as it appeared in 1564 (fig. 2), while other works of this engraver include illustrations of the Pantheon (1564), Trajan's Column, and other monuments in Rome. [6]

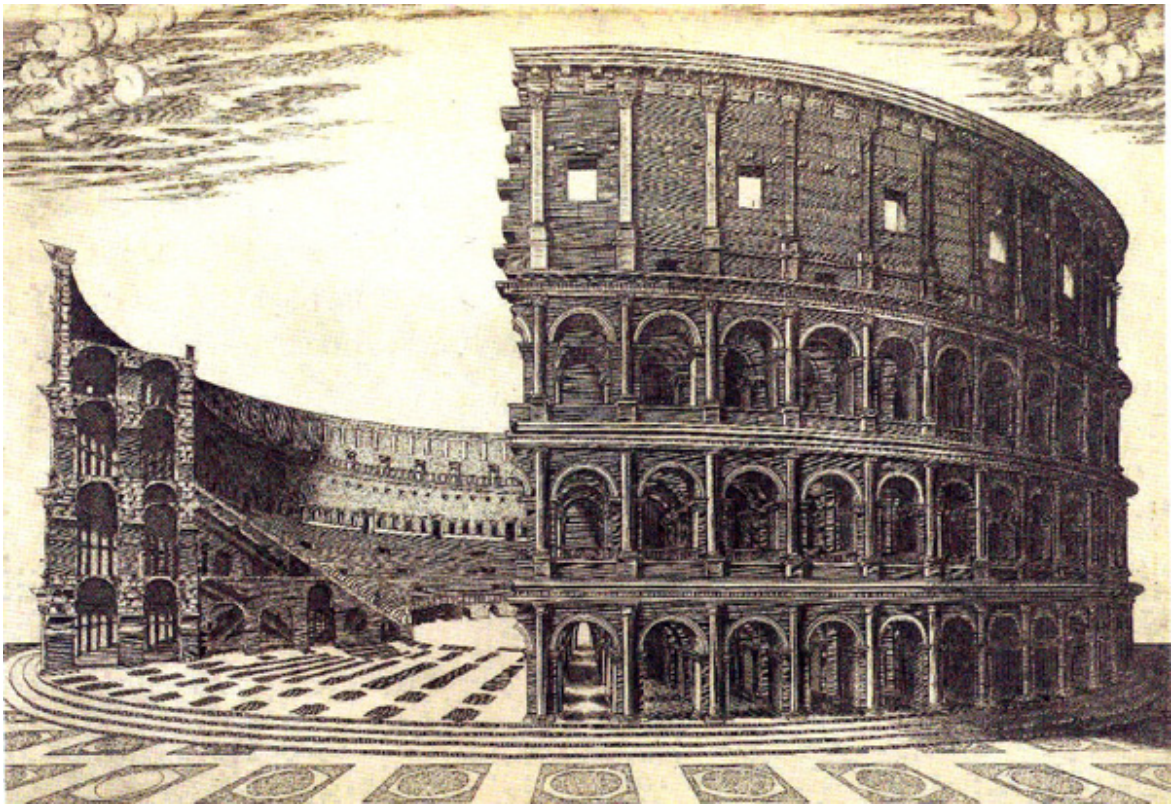


Fig. 2

The Venetian painter Giovanni Antonio Canaletto (1697–1768) studied in Rome from 1719 and his work provides faithful reproduction of architectural details. [7] The appearance of the Colosseum in the first half of the 18th century can be seen in one of his paintings representing the Colosseum and the Arch of Constantine in Rome (fig. 3). Canaletto faithfully reproduced architectural details. (Many of his large-scale topographical views, or *vedute*, were processed in etching. [8]



Fig. 3

The Dutch landscape painter Gaspar van Wittel (1653–1736) went to Rome in 1675 and from the works he painted there we can see a view of the Colosseum in the second half of 17th century (figs. 4 and 5).



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

Italian painter and architect Giovanni Paolo Panini (c.1691–c.1765) was one of the first painters to specialize in views (*vedute*) focusing on the ruins of ancient Rome, earning him the sobriquet 'the painter of the ruins'. [9] Panini's *Panoramas of Rome* came dangerously close to being postcards in everything but their size. [10] Amongst his works are paintings of the Colosseum and the surrounding structures (fig. 6), as well as his *Gallery Displaying Views of Ancient Rome* (1758), which brings together views of well-known Roman buildings including the Colosseum and famous Antique sculptures in an imaginary gallery (fig. 7). In his works can be seen the interior of another well-known construction, the Pantheon in Rome before 1747. His paintings are characterized by good drawing, faithful observation and reliable spatial disposition of architectural elements. [11]



Fig. 6



Fig. 7

In the mid-18th century, the Italian engraver, builder and archaeologist Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720–1778) made a famous series of prints of the monuments of ancient Rome, including the Colosseum. Piranesi studied in Venice and went to Rome in 1740. He is rightly known as the greatest 18th century proponent of magnificent ancient roman architecture. [12] In 1748 he prepared a series of engravings called *Views of Rome*. In the same year he also prepared a series of etchings of triumphal arches and other remains of Roman buildings in Ancona, Rimini, Verona, Pula, and Spoleto. His depictions of the Capitol, forums, gates, bridges, theatres, aqueducts, monumental tombs were published in *The Antiquities of Rome* in 1756. The state of the Colosseum in the mid-18th century can be seen throughout Piranesi's works (fig. 8, 9, 10). His drawings and engravings take us back to the past by registering the remains of the Forum of Nerva, the Theatre of Marcellus, the Portico of Octavia, the layout of the Palatine in Rome and other buildings. With thean architect's he represented the antiques with great accuracy and a strong sense of the sublime. [13] Many publications with his etchings were accompanied with texts about the architectural monuments. Piranesi's work is a real encyclopaedia of the architectural and artistic treasure of the Roman Empire, earning him the title given to him by Bianconi as "the Rembrandt of ancient ruins". [14]

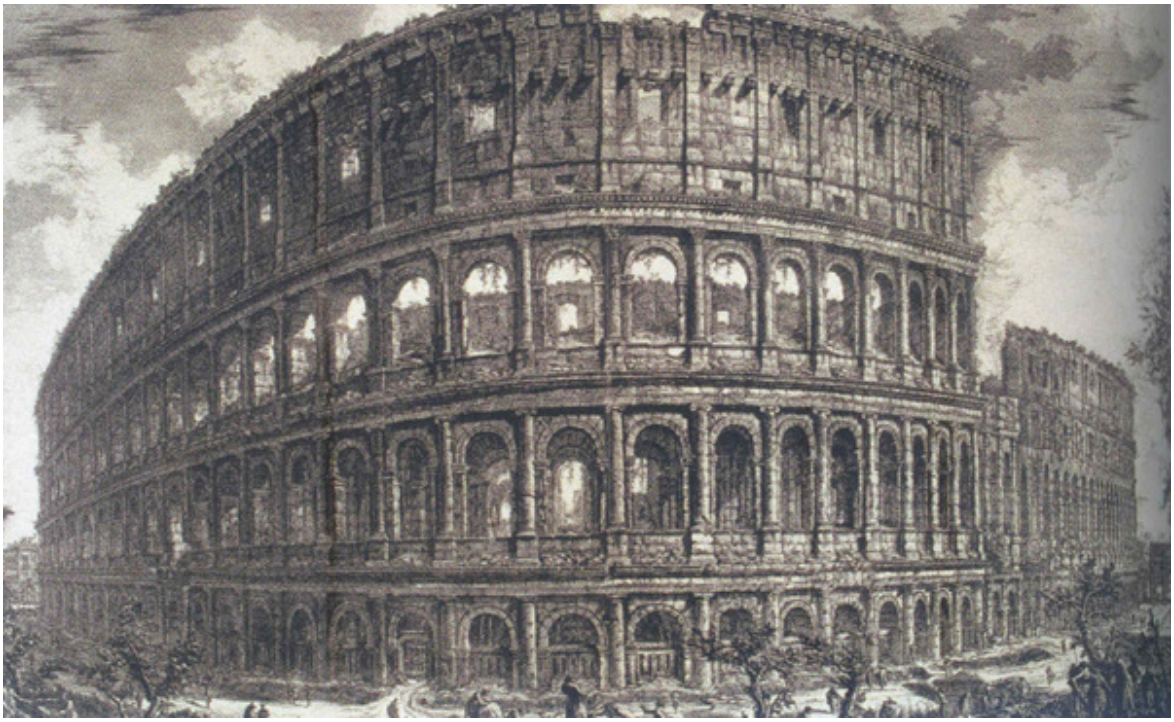


Fig. 8



Fig. 9



Fig. 10

Bernardo Bellotto (1720-1780), a nephew of Canaletto, was a Venetian urban landscape painter and printmaker in etching. [15] In 1742 he moved to Rome where he depicted various views of the city. Bellotto did not show the ancient Roman amphitheatre in its true ancient context, but he added towering ruins from his imagination. In 1742 Bellotto presented the Colosseum and Arch of Constantine in Rome (fig. 11).



Fig. 11

A view of the Colosseum and the Arch of Constantine in the period 1744–1748 is visible in works by the Italian Antonio Joli (1700–1777), who worked as a scene painter in Rome (fig. 12).



Fig. 12

French painter and engraver Hubert Robert (1733–1808) studied his craft in Italy from 1754 to 1765 and the ruins of Roman buildings feature prominently in his landscape and urban panoramas. Capturing the melancholy and magnificence of these ruins was his specialty, earning him the sobriquet "Robert des ruines". [16] The Colosseum was particularly appealing to Robert, as can be seen in his painting of the Colosseum in the mid 18th century (fig. 13). Other paintings include the bridge across the River Gardon, the Maison Carrée in Nimes, the triumphal arch and amphitheatre in Orange—transforming the appearance of these remains with his style.



Fig. 13

The Italian painter, draughtsman and engraver Carlo Labruzzi (1748–1817) made numerous drawings and sketches of ancient Roman monuments along the Via Appia, including ancient tombs, temples and villas (fig. 14).



Fig. 14

The Parisian neoclassical architect, antiquarian, draughtsman and decorator Charles-Louis Clerisseau (c.1721–1820) made many drawings of Diocletian's Palace at Split. His skilful drawings of ancient Roman ruins and architectural details are excellent alternative sources for studying Roman architecture, including numerous depictions of the Colosseum in Rome.

Abraham Louis-Rodolphe Ducros (1748–1810), [17] a Swiss painter, etcher and water-colourist travelled to Rome in 1776 and worked there for thirty years. Ducros was deeply impressed by Roman monuments and painted the Colosseum in 1778 (fig. 15).



Fig. 15

A detail of the Colosseum in the first half of the 19th century is seen in a watercolour (fig. 16) by the neoclassical French architect Joseph-Louis Duc (1802–1879).

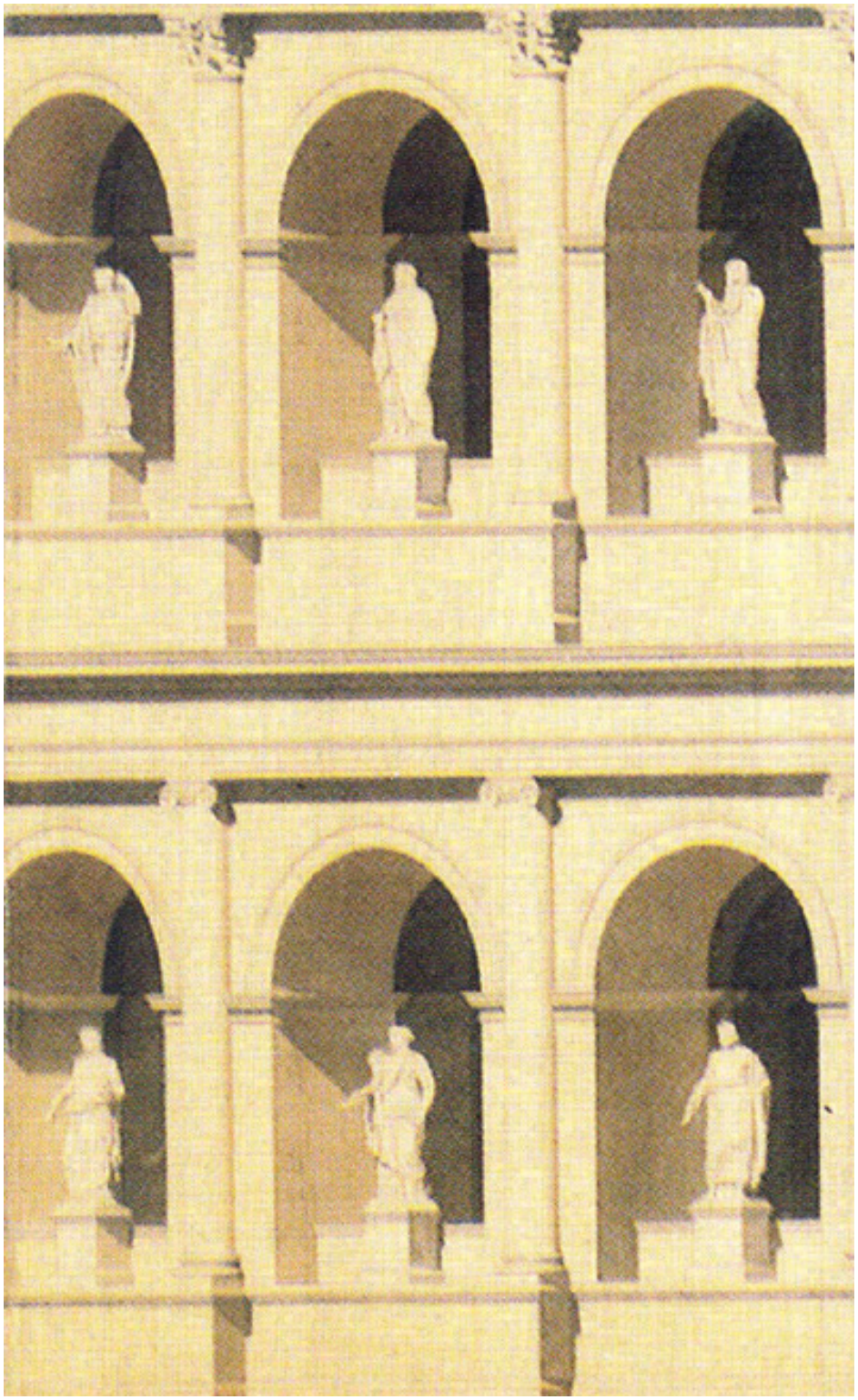


Fig. 16

The Danish painter Christoffer Wilhelm Eckersberg (1783–1853) studied in Rome between 1813 and 1816 and worked on improving his skills as a history painter. In his *View through the Colosseum Arcade* (fig. 17) of c.1815, this high-minded education seems to be jettisoned in favour of a close-eyed look at the contemporary topography of the remains of ancient Rome. [18]



Fig. 17

The interest of artists in the Colosseum as a motif for their works continued into the second half of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. The German painter Rudolf Wiegmann (1804–1865) depicted the Colosseum at the time of his stay in Rome in the mid 19th century (fig. 18). The works of the Austrian landscape and architectural painter Rudolf von Alt (1821–1905), including views of the Arch of Constantine and the Colosseum in 1872/73 (fig. 19) are works of documentary significance, together with those of the German landscape painter Oswald Achenbach (1827—1905) (fig. 20).



Fig. 18



Fig. 19



Fig. 20

Following the changing appearance of the Colosseum in the works of artists over the centuries, we face this well known monument of culture today in an entirely different condition as a result of numerous conservation projects and partial restorations (figs 21, 22).



Fig. 21



Fig. 22

Rome has a rich diversity of architectural buildings, including building with religious, social, and entertainment functions, from the Colosseum to tombstones, buildings that glorify the triumphs of emperors, bridges and aqueducts, and luxurious residential buildings. The wealth of forms based on the development of technique, the use of various construction materials and many decorative elements led to the raising of such monumental buildings many of which remain today, though altered from their original form. Their evolution has been recorded in many works of lovers of Roman culture and art.

Notes:

[1] Traktenberg-Hajman 2006, 277.
[2] Пискел 1974, 124.
[3] Claridge 1998, 276.
[4] Claridge 1998, 278.
[5] Bomgardner 2000, 2.
[6] Hartt 2006, 18.
[7] Umetnost 2012, 256-257.
[8] Enciklopedija 1, 571.
[9] Amery-Curran 2002, 149.
[10] Levi 1975, 230.
[11] Enciklopedija 3, 626.
[12] Robinson 1994, 261.
[13] Umetnost 2012, 142.

[14] Enciklopedija 3, 680.
[15] Enciklopedija 1, 571.
[16] Levi 1974, 268.
[17] Enciklopedija 2, 123.
[18] Rosenblum 2005, 181.

Illustrations:

1. Coin from the reign of Titus depicting the Colosseum, Museo Nazionale Romano (Palazzo Massimo alle Terme), Rome.
2. "A View of the Colosseum" from A. Lafreri's "Speculum Romanae magnificentiae", 1564, (after Hartt-Wilkins, fig. 1.3., p. 18).
3. "The Colosseum through the Arch of Constantine" in a painting of G. B. Canaletto (after Gabucci, fig.6, p.8).
4. A View of the Colosseum, by G. van Wittel.
5. A View of the Colosseum and the Arch of Constantine, by G. van Wittel.
6. A View of Colosseum and surrounding buildings in a painting of G. P. Panini.
7. Gallery displaying Views of ancient Rome (1758), painting of G. P. Panini.
8. View of the Colosseum in a drawing by G. B. Piranesi, 1776. (Umetnost…, p.252)
9. The Interior of the Colosseum (Veduta Interna del Colosseo) by G. B. Piranesi.
10. View of the Colosseum and the Arch of Constantine in an engraving drawing by G. B. Piranesi.
11. Colosseum and the Arch of Constantine by B. Bellotto, c.1742.
12. Views of the Colosseum and the Arch of Constantine by A. Joli.
13. Excavations in the Colosseum in a painting by H. Robert (1733-1808), (after Gabucci fig. 8 p. 9)
14. Roman Landscape with the Colosseum from the Palatine by C. Labruzzi (Eight Views of Rome).
15. Detail of the Colosseum by A. L. R. Ducros.
16. Detail of the Colosseum in watercolour by L. J. Duc (after Gabucci, fig.1, p.6).
17. View through the Colosseum Arcade of the Roman Amphitheatre (c.1815), by Ch. W. Eckersberg (1783-1853) (after Rosenblum-Janson, fig 168, p.181).
18. View of the Colosseum and the Forum (c. 1835) by R. Wiegmann.
19. View of the Colosseum (1877) by O. Achenbach.
20. A View of the Colosseum by R. von Alt.
21. The Colosseum in 2010 (photography by D. Gerasimovska).
22. The interior of the Colosseum in 2010 (photography by D. Gerasimovska).

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Алтернативни извори за проучување на римската архитектура

РЕЗИМЕ

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Клучни зборови: градби, архитектура, Колосеум, уметници, споменици, амфитеатар

Кога говориме за архитектонските градби од античкиот период, најчесто се потпираме на археолошките наоди и на пишаните извори. Римските градби како дел од материјалната култура го отсликуваат степенот на развитокот на културата во државата, развитокот на науката и техниката, економската моќ, општествените и религиските односи во државата.

Информации за изгледот на римските и општо земено, античките архитектонски дела, може да се добијат и од претставите на монетите. Многу често други уметнички дела, настанати во определен дел од минатото, сведочат за состојбата и изгледот на архитектонските градби во времето во коешто биле создадени определени слики, цртежи, гравури, бакрописи, графики, акварели, принтови, стари реконструкции или други уметнички дела што му припаѓаат на дел од минатото.

Така, многу сликари, гравери, архитекти, патеписци, дипломати, заинтересирани за архитектонските остатоци од минатото, оставиле дела коишто служат како алтернативни извори за изучување на културното минато и градежните споменици како дел од него. И покрај тоа што овие уметнички дела не може да се земат како фотографска снимка на римските градби во определен период на своето постоење, тие, сепак, претставуваат драгоцени извори за проучување на античката римска архитектура. Некои од нив, како, на пример, панорамите на Рим од Џ. П. Панини, во голема мера се приближуваат кон поштенски разгледници по сè, освен по големината.

Колосеумот во Рим, амфитеатар од времето на Флавијците, е добар пример низ којшто може да се проследи менувањето на една римска градба во долгиот период на своето опстојување. Низ делата на повеќе уметници, коишто истовремено се занимавале со повеќе гранки во уметноста, пред очите ни протекува сликата на Колосеумот во текот на минатите векови. Да споменеме неколку од генијалните мајстори како А. Лафрери, Џ. А. Каналето, Џ. П. Панини, Б. Пиранези, К. Лабрузи, Ш. Л. Клерисо, Л. Ј. Дук, Б. Белото, А. Јоли и А. Л. Р. Дукрос, од чиишто раце произлегле уметнички дела, што служат како алтернативни извори за проучување на римската архитектура низ сликите, цртежите, гравурите, акварелите и други нивни дела.