

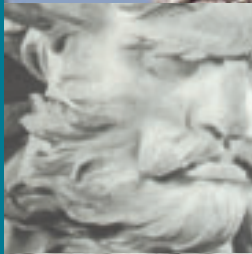
Rome, Caput Mundi, the Eternal City, the Queen of the Waters, are all tributes which refer to the perpetuity of this city deriving from her capacity to continually renew herself. Rome breathes life into her ruins, which continue to live and breathe that uniqueness of both the past and present, that aside from historic pauses, continues to flow in this great outdoor museum which remains very much a part of our contemporary world. Roman citizens as well as tourists speak, breathe, eat and sleep surrounded by the warm tones of the palaces, roaming the streets, in the golden light of sunset and in the soft patina of Rome's architectural monuments, without ever suffering a "time warp syndrome", because Rome belongs to herself. It is as though we, in the year 2000, are able to live in the Rome of the Caesars'. In keeping with this theme, the "Guided Tours of the Imperial Waters of the Caesars" seek to radiate throughout the urbs mirabilis following as a tangible sign the dynamic story of Rome's fountains, true urban **SPRINGS**, festive epiphanies. They are their own permanent art exhibits which, through art and culture, bring us closer to that natural element of which Rome was once, and still remains, queen. The key to properly understanding the symbolism of the water and fountains lies within the fact that the water derives from the same spring. It is an invisible underground path that we will trace above ground by following a route marked by Roman fountains. It is both a physical and allegorical journey created by our forefathers, depositories of symbols and signs that are universal and do not belong only to Rome, but to the entire world.

*Tourism Office Municipality of Rome*

# VIRGIN WATER

Guided Tours of the Imperial Waters of the Caesars





According to ancient legend Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa, the great sea admiral who created the powerful Roman fleet and also the hydraulic engineer of

Caesar Augustus, decided one day to build a temple to Neptune as well as create free public baths. He proceeded to send out his sappers to hunt for a spring to consecrate in honor of the sea god and to carry water into the city. While in the process of searching for this spring near Tribium (the present-day town of Salone) the soldiers encountered a young maiden, most probably a shepherd girl, who directed them towards a spring of clear water. They tasted the water and discerned that indeed this was the water they had been seeking. They named the spring Aqua Virgo, in honor of the young girl who guided them to the site, and after having constructed a long path of subterranean canals made of tuff rock, they finally brought the water to the temple in the square where the Pantheon still stands today.

What the imprudent Agrippa should have known was that the spring was already sacred to Neptune, as were all freshwater springs in the world. However, Neptune also considered the Aqua Virgo a lover and the god did not appreciate her capture by the Romans. Cesare Malpica, an erudite poet specializing in mythology who lived in the 1800s, narrated that one day Neptune, accompanied by his tritons, dolphins, and the rest of his entire court, went to find his love and found her a prisoner. “Agrippa has

done this to me,” the spring wailed in desperation, “his soldiers drank me and then imprisoned me. This is all the fault of that meddlesome young girl who revealed my existence to them.” The god, infuriated by such a blatant offense, swelled the spring and mounting his chariot stormed Rome, setting off a citywide panic. Neptune's tritons, dolphins, and seahorses unleashed the might of their fury in a square of the city, flooding it and terrorizing the citizens.

That square, recounts Malpica, is the square where the Trevi Fountain now sits, and is actually the main fountain where the “Virgin Water” flows. Many centuries have passed since that day, and the old gods gave way to the new Christian God, but evidently a distant echo of Neptune's wrath survived.

In this manner, when various popes between the 1500s and the 1700s, decided to restore the ancient Roman aqueduct that carried the “Virgin Water”, which incidentally never ceased to function, they wanted to construct 18 fountains marking the water's path through the city and accentuate them with statues of Neptune, tritons, dolphins, seahorses and other creatures from the sea god's court. Perhaps this was a small tribute to placate the wrath of a divinity, though already gone, never completely forgotten.

### A FEW WORDS ON THE ACQUADUC

As previously stated, Agrippa constructed his aqueduct entirely underground in the tufaceous terrain which was quite different from the typical Roman aqueducts constructed gene-

rally above ground on arches of stone, many of which still stand today. Only in very few locations does the water actually break through to the surface. In order to be certain of creating an aqueduct which would stand the test of time, the engineers carefully chose the terrain the water would cross with the end result being that the aqueduct takes an extra long route around the city before reaching its final destinations. This however was the defining characteristic which allowed the aqueduct to survive until the present day.

When the Barbarians who conquered Rome cut off the water supply by sabotaging the aqueducts, (a relatively useless move since the Tiber River runs through Rome, and was far less polluted than it is today) the “Virgin Water” duct survived, even if damaged. This isn't to say that the invaders did not know of its existence, in fact, they tried to enter Rome through its underground passages. The Byzantine General Belisarius, who was in charge of defending the city, had the passages guarded. When enemy torches were sighted by the sentinels, they were initially mistaken for the eyes of wolves. In order to avoid being discovered, the barbarians had to retreat back through the passages. The following day, the general sent guards back to explore the duct. They found traces of ashes and bits of wood from the torches, thereby clarifying the misunderstanding of the wolves. The passage was immediately sealed off.

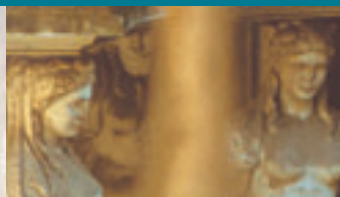
So far on our journey we have seen the mystery of Neptune and his tritons as well as the mystery of the “wolf in the water duct”. However, these aren't the only enigmas surrounding the most ancient functional Roman aqueduct.

## Villa Giulia 1



## NYPHAEUM AT VILLA GIULIA

**LOCATION:** VILLA GIULIA  
**AUTHOR:** BARTOLOMEO AMMANNATI  
**YEAR:** 1555  
**COMMISSIONED BY:** GIULIO III



Our journey on the discovery of the "Virgin Water" begins at Villa Giulia, very near to the Via Flaminia.

Pope Julius III (1550-1555) had this complex expressly built above the conducting canals of the "Virgin Water" spring piercing it (illegally) to create a magnificent, yet mysterious Nymphaeum, the first "water theatre" of Rome, where for the first time we have sculptural depictions of sirens. This spring was so important to the pope, that we can say that the rest of the complex was built as a corollary to the Nymphaeum. The villa was loved by Pope Julius III, even though it had a difficult inception, beginning with the project that the hard to please pope had revised first by Vignola, then Vasari,

Michelangelo, and Ammannati, this last one being the author of the arcade of the Nymphaeum. What would prompt a Catholic pope to venerate a virgin water source to such a point, especially since this "Virgin" had nothing to do with the Celestial Mother, is the first of the enigmas of this mysterious spring.

## THE TRIDENT

The adjacent Via Flaminia is the ideal "handle" for what in Rome we commonly call "The Trident" - as it turns out, the weapon of Neptune. The "Trident" consists of three streets (Via del Babuino, Via del Corso, and Via di Ripetta) that all converge on Piazza del Popolo and are literally surrounded by "Virgin Water"

## Piazza del Popolo 2



## FOUNTAIN OF PIAZZA DEL POPOLO

**LOCATION:** PIAZZA DEL POPOLO  
**AUTHOR:** GIUSEPPE VALADIER  
**YEAR:** 1823  
**COMMISSIONED BY:** LEONE XII



The point of departure of the "Trident" is without a doubt Piazza del Popolo, and right here, is the first of the eighteen fountains planned by the popes for this aqueduct, built by architect Giacomo Dalla Porta.

It was the year 1572, when Pope Pius V decided to definitively restore the aqueduct, after his predecessor Pope Pius IV had the ancient springs of Salone rejoined, at the eighth mile of the Via Collatina, in the Trivium area of the city. The task was assigned to the Camera Capitolina (Capitoline Administrative Office), which then hired Giacomo Dalla Porta to design the fountain. It was to be a large basin with two smaller basins and four dolphins placed in the center of the piazza. Dalla Porta appointed four Florentine sculptors to create the tritons mounted on shells. Could it be perhaps a tribute to Neptune, to whom water was sacred in antiquity? Or maybe it is simply that Humanism had rediscovered mythology and therefore it was logical to

pay homage to the fountains with water divinities, especially if one no longer risked being sent to the stake? The fact remains that the fountain was too small for those tritons, which would have been too heavy for the structure. They were therefore stored in a warehouse and later used for the Fountain of the Moor in Piazza Navona. But that's another story. Next to the fountain, in the center of the piazza, an obelisk was erected.

In 1823, Giuseppe Valadier was commissioned to renovate the piazza, and for starters he dismantled Dalla Porta's fountain (reconstructed after World War II in Piazza Nicosia) installing in its place four Egyptian style lions resting on pyramidal supports constructed around the obelisk. Once again a "tribute to Neptune" is not lacking, with Giovanni Ceccarini's fountain sculpted on the western semicircle.

However the obelisk, as we shall see later, is not merely a decoration and conceals yet another mystery.



## FOUNTAIN OF CANNON BALL

**LOCATION:** VIALE DELLA TRINITÀ DEI MONTI  
**AUTHOR:** ANNIBALE LIPPI  
**YEAR:** 1589  
**COMMISSIONED BY:** CARD. FERDINANDO MEDICI



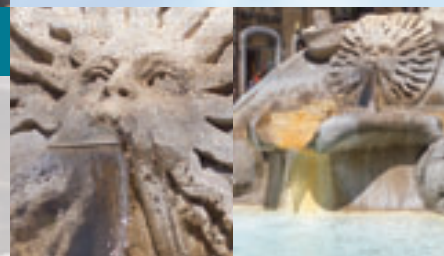
## FOUNTAIN OF BARCACCIA

**LOCATION:** PIAZZA DI SPAGNA  
**AUTHOR:** PIETRO E GIAN LORENZO BERNINI  
**YEAR:** 1629  
**COMMISSIONED BY:** URBANO VIII



From the Piazza del Popolo, we ascend the sweetly sloping Via Gabriele d'Annunzio towards the Pincio Hill and we follow Viale della Trinità dei Monti until we reach Villa Medici, which is the current seat of the French Academy. Underneath the gardens of the villa we can see a pool which acted as the settling basin for the "Virgin Water" aqueduct, and also not too far away, we can also see the Fontana della Palla di Cannone. This fountain is also supplied by "Virgin Water".

This fountain was originally conceived with a purely ornamental function and was commissioned by Cardinal Ferdinando Medici in 1589. However, legend has it that a "goddess Diana" of sorts, the queen Christine of Sweden, who arrived in Rome in 1655, joked one day that she could strike the Villa Medici with a cannonball from the Gianicolo Hill's cannon. She apparently succeeded and the ball of stone was then placed in the center of the fountain, thus giving it its nickname.



*«Tenuis iuncus, salix erratica, alnus, vitex heder, aliaque quae eius modi sunt, quae non possunt nasci per se sine umore»*  
 (Vitruvius, parlando della sorgente).

*"The tender rush, the wild willow, the alder, the chaste-tree, the ivy, and other similar plants could not be born without humidity."*

Next, we descend the great staircase of the Trinità dei Monti and we arrive at the Piazza di Spagna right in front of the "Barcaccia", which Gian Lorenzo Bernini sculpted along with his father in 1627. This fountain, along with many other of Bernini's fountains, is entirely devoid of sea statues. In fact, one can say, and this could be yet another enigma, that this great architect and sculptor was one of the few, if not the only one, to almost completely ignore the sea gods. The only exceptions to this are the Fontana del Moro (the Fountain of the Moor) of Piazza Navona, as we will see later on, and for the Fontana del Tritone (the Triton Fountain) of Piazza Barberini, whose water is actually supplied by another aqueduct.

Yet Neptune reigned over all waters, even rivers, as is symbolized by the trident he carries (the three prongs represent the seas, lakes, and springs he rules over) and the "Virgin Water", as we have seen, was his best loved water. Why did Bernini decide to blatantly snub him? After all, Bernini labeled himself the "Architect of the "Virgin Water"". Did he consider the imagery per-

haps too commonplace for his skill? Or was it a decision purely based on his artist's whim? For the fountain in Piazza di Spagna, the news chronicles of the time state, the two Berninis were inspired by the old boats used to transport wine to the city. They however sculpted the boat as it is apparently sinking and is entirely overflowing with water and is level with the ground. This position would make it appear as though this type of design were chosen due to the lack of water pressure in this particular point of the city (hence the proximity of the fountain to the ground). It is important to note that the "Virgin Water" has just entered the city in this place. A few meters away in the Via San Sebastiano we can see the main drain of the water. The water from this drain proceeds to supply some twenty or so other fountains (including the Trevi Fountain and the Fontana dei Quattro Fiumi (The Fountain of the Four Rivers)) which oddly enough don't seem to suffer any difficulties with water pressure. Bernini must have had other factors in mind that influenced his decision.

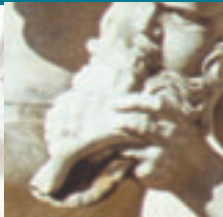






## TREVI FOUNTAIN

**LOCATION: PIAZZA DI TREVI**  
**AUTHORS: NICOLA SALVI - GIUSEPPE PANNINI**  
**DOPO LA MORTE DI SALVI**  
**YEAR: 1732-1762**  
**COMMISSIONED BY: CLEMENTE XII - BENEDETTO XIV**



One of the greatest mysteries lies in the actual name of this fountain, which is the main showcase of the "Virgin Water": the Trevi Fountain. You are probably asking yourself why a fountain that is located in Piazza di Trevi would be called anything but the Trevi Fountain... don't be fooled by appearances, however, the facts could be much more interesting!

We know that the area where the spring is found, present day Salone, was once called "Tribium". This according to some, might have been the origin of the "waters of Tribium" or of Trevi. It is eventually the water which gives the name to the piazza and not vice versa. But let's look at this with greater care. Right next to the fountain, on the left side as you look at the basin, is the tiny church of Santa Maria in Trivio, that at one time housed canopic jars containing the entrails of the deceased popes ("Church of coratelle and ciccioi" as humorously described by Roman poet Belli Translator's Note: coratelle and ciccioi are actually terms used to described traditional Roman dishes, which include animal viscera). By acknowledging the most common meaning of the word trivium, we realize that both the fountain and the church are located at the crossroads of three streets. Consequently, is Trevi the fountain of water that comes from Tribium or the fountain that flows at the crossroads of three streets? The mystery deepens! "Tribium" is similarly related to Trivio and trivium. Therefore we have on our hands a water that is born near a crossroads of three streets and that coincidentally has its principal fountain in Rome on another crossroads of three streets. This is too curious to be mere coincidence.

And the virgin? What figure does she really represent? The Virgin, eternally and stubbornly virgin, in antiquity, was the goddess Diana, sister of Apollo, who coincidentally loved to bathe in the fountains along with her fellow nymphs to acquire new strength after the hunt. A sylvan divinity, she was therefore the daughter of Jove - and also the niece of Neptune. She was also in charge of driving the moon's chariot, as her brother Apollo was for the sun's chariot. And the moon, as we know, regulates the tides, and is therefore closely related to water.

Up until now the story might seem a little tenuous, if it were not for another particular detail.



### DIANA

*Daughter of Jove, and twin sister of Apollo, god of the Sun, she usurps the position of the older moon goddess, Selene. Always a great hunter, when Diana finishes guiding the moon's chariot, she spends most of her time in the woods with her fellow nymphs. Having taken a vow of chastity, she becomes the protector of young virgins and the Amazons. She is also short tempered, having had only two loves (platonic): Endymion, whom Jove cursed into a deep sleep to ensure the purity of his daughter, and Orion, son of Neptune, and therefore her cousin. Diana, who is incited by her wicked brother Apollo, erroneously kills him, then transforms him into a constellation. Identified also as Hecate and Trivia, she often is represented with three heads, the same as the lunar decades, and is depicted guarding the crossroads. As Hecate, she is also considered a personification of Proserpina, wife of Pluto, patron of the underworld - which places her in contrast with her chastity. Orpheus attributed three faces to her: the moon in the sky, Diana on earth, and Proserpina in the underworld.*

*«Currit aqua virgo sub delectatione purissima...  
 Nam cum aliae pluviarum nimietate terrena  
 cummixtione violentur, aec aerem perpetue  
 serenum purissime labens unda mentitur»*

(Cassiodoro)

Diana was also known as Trivia, sometimes also represented with three heads and guardian of the crossroads. According to the historian Giuseppe Riva in 1838, the Trevi area took its name from the temple of Diana Trivia, which once stood where the Church of Trivio is located.

The waters of Trevi, which we have already said supplied the temple in Campo Marzio, are therefore not only sacred to Neptune, but also to Diana, as they once supplied her temple as well. Were these waters discovered thanks to her help or that of one of her nymphs? We cannot know with certainty, but there are clues and they are quite convincing.





## THE FOUNTAIN IN PIAZZA COLONNA

**LOCATION:** PIAZZA COLONNA  
**AUTHOR:** GIACOMO DALLA PORTA  
**YEAR:** 1577  
**COMMISSIONED BY:** GREGORIO XIII  
**RESTORATION AND MODIFICATION:** 1830  
**AUTHOR:** ALESSANDRO STOCCHI  
**COMMISSIONED BY:** PIO VIII



In 1575, construction began on the Fountain in Piazza Colonna. It consists of a very large but simple basin adorned with dolphins. However, these dolphins, despite being included in Dalla Porta's original plan, were only added to the fountain in 1830. Why three hundred years had to pass before the completion of this fountain remains a great historical mystery. The Trevi Fountain also had an extremely long construction phase which lasted nearly two centuries, however it certainly isn't as small as the Fountain in Piazza Colonna.

### THE QUINARIA

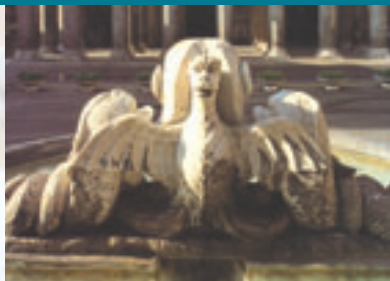
*It would seem that this measurement was invented by Agrippa and it was the unit by which aqueducts were measured. Frontino (1st century AD) the famous Curator Aquarum (Water Curator) maintained that the name derived "from the diameter of the section of five fingerlength quadrants". It is actually a measure of hydraulic flow and the relation between the ancient quinaria and the present day measure of flow was actually resolved by an engineer at the turn of the 1900s, Claudio Di Fenizio. He calculated that the quinaria corresponded to 0.47 liters per second.*

### A BRIEF NOTE ON THE VILLA BORGHESE

*The bizarre use given to the Villa Borghese warrants a brief note. In the 1800s, when sculptures such as the four tritons of the south fountain, the masks of the Pantheon Fountain, and the Fountain in Piazza Venezia began to deteriorate, instead of restoring them, the authorities of the time thought well to commission copies to substitute them. In turn, the originals were then taken and stored in the Villa Borghese, where they can still be found to this day.*

## THE PANTHEON FOUNTAIN

**LOCATION:** PIAZZA DELLA ROTONDA  
**AUTHOR:** GIACOMO DALLA PORTA  
**YEAR:** 1575  
**COMMISSIONED BY:** GREGORIO XIII  
**RESTORATION AND MODIFICATION:** 1711  
**AUTORE:** LUIGI AMICI  
**COMMISSIONED BY:** PIO VII



Finally the "Virgin Water" returns to its originally intended destination. In fact it was here in the Piazza del Pantheon that the Temple of Neptune, which Agrippa commissioned, stood. The "Virgin Water" aqueduct was dug to supply this temple.

According to tradition, this fountain also should have included the presence of masks and dolphins. However, no tritons and no Neptune appear and therefore do not act as reminders of the temple of the sea god, which once dominated the piazza. It seems as though its memory were deliberately suppressed. In compensation, a second obelisk appears.

In fact, in 1711 Pope Clement XI commissioned the architect Filippo Barigioni to substitute the fountain's upper basin with a reef from which was erected the obelisk of Ramses II, and to decorate the base with four dolphins. We will address the mystery of the "Virgin Water" and the obelisks later on. In any case, the fountain, located in the Campo Marzio, could hold yet another meaning in addition to the obelisk enigma, which we will reveal in the coming pages. As many of the present day's larger cities possess a "Chinatown" (and as of late, Rome as well) in the imperial days of Rome the area around the Pantheon was actually an "Egypttown". This section of the city was inhabited by a strong community of people from the land of the pharaohs and was constructed in the Egyptian style. The sphinxes, obelisks, and statues of Nile divinities found here all attest to the presence of this specific style in this location.

Such a detail surely could not escape the eyes of a discerning pope. If we take into consideration the strong aversion which the clergy should have felt towards pagan symbols then we find ourselves in front of yet another enigma. Why did no one protest

this affirmation of pagan "Egyptianness" in the heart of Rome, the cradle of Catholicism and Christianity? One could concede this point to the fact that the Renaissance and Humanism rediscovered classical culture in its Greek and Roman gods, which then cleared the way for their presence in many fountains, which in any case can be considered as "water exhibits" of sorts, but to allow obelisks?

This problem was resolved simply by placing a cross atop the obelisks. In fact, all of the obelisks erected at this time, with few exceptions which will be addressed later, were crowned with a bronze cross at their highest point in order to reaffirm Christianity's victory over all other religions.

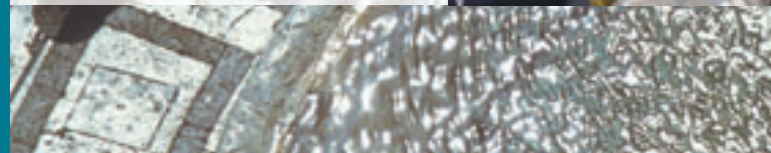
Another peculiar detail can be discovered in the large masks which adorn the main basin of the fountain. On the interior-facing side of these masks one can see the presence of both dolphins and dragons with bent wings. Here we find ourselves before yet another enigma. Why dragons? They are animals typically associated with air and fire and are traditionally considered hellish creatures. What place have they in a fountain? The mystery deepens... Perhaps a quick glance at the geological record on page 16 could shed some light on the matter.

Originally, these masks were slated to decorate the current Fountain of the Triton in Piazza Navona and are in fact identical to those on the opposite Fountain of the Moor. In any case, a sudden lack of funds forced Dalla Porta to reroute the final destination of the masks to Piazza della Rotonda giving birth to yet another mystery: how was the original basin of the fountain supposed to look in the initial project of the great fountain architect?



## FOUNTAIN OF THE MOOR

**LOCATION:** PIAZZA NAVONA  
**AUTHOR:** GIACOMO DALLA PORTA  
**YEAR:** 1575  
**COMMISSIONED BY:** GREGORIO XIII  
**RESTORATION AND MODIFICATION:** 1645  
**AUTHOR:** GIAN LORENZO BERNINI  
**RESTORATION AND MODIFICATION:** 1874  
**AUTHOR:** LUIGI AMICI



Dalla Porta sculpted, for the basin at the southern end of Piazza Navona, a series of tritons that blow water from their bugles as well as a series of masks supported on each side by dragons and dolphins that eject water into the basin below them. They are identical to those that we can see in Piazza della Rotonda.

The structure was modified by Bernini in 1653, who added the center statue of the gigantic triton who dominates the dolphin by gripping its tail. Before its construction, Bernini had proposed a different sculpture: a shell held up by two dolphins, but Pope Innocent X,

a Pamphili pope, thought it was inappropriate and he gave it instead as a gift to his sister-in-law Donna Olimpia. Given the African physical attributes of the triton figure, it was rebaptized the "Fountain of the Moor", however it seems that to play an irreverent prank on the pope. Bernini did not base this figure on an African after all, but rather on the nearby "talking" statue of Pasquino (Translator's Note: this was one of the many ancient statues to which poems critical of the current papacy were affixed by the Roman people), who was always very critical of Pope Innocent X and Donna Olimpia.

## 9 FOUNTAIN OF THE TRITON

**LOCATION:** PIAZZA NAVONA  
**AUTHOR:** GIACOMO DALLA PORTA  
**YEAR:** 1575  
**COMMISSIONED BY:** GREGORIO XIII  
**RESTORATION AND MODIFICATION:** 1645  
**AUTHOR:** GIAN LORENZO BERNINI  
**RESTORATION AND MODIFICATION:** 1873-1878  
**AUTHORS:** ANTONIO DELLA BITTA  
 GREGORIO ZAPPALÀ



The basin on the north side was supposed to host four more similar masks, and the same number of tritons, but as often happens, there was not enough money available to finish the project. The tritons were never finished and the masks were reused for the Pantheon fountain.

The fountain therefore remained unadorned until the end of the 1800s when it was finally decorated by Antonio Della Bitta, who inter-

estingly enough, also sculpted a triton in the act of piercing a giant squid with his trident, encircled by four sirens sculpted by Gregorio Zappalà. This fountain of "Virgin Water" also had to pay tribute to Neptune, despite a delay of a few centuries. The center of the piazza was decorated, if we may use the term loosely, by a horse's water trough which still sits in front of the lake at the Villa Borghese.

## 10 FOUNTAIN OF THE FOUR RIVERS

**LOCATION:** PIAZZA NAVONA  
**AUTHOR:** GIAN LORENZO BERNINI  
**YEAR:** 1651  
**COMMISSIONED BY:** INNOCENZO X



This fountain, also by Bernini, is totally lacking in reference to the sea gods, unless we choose to consider the presence of an "allegorical Neptune": in the Fountain of the Four Rivers there appears to be a fish swimming in the middle of the basin swallowing water, which is nothing more than an ingenious way to camouflage the fountain's drain.

In one of the first preliminary drawings for the fountain, we discover two large fish that were to be used for the base of the monument, but suddenly this idea was discarded. On the other hand, a good deal of mystery surrounds the figure of the alligator that symbolizes the Rio of the Amazons. What we have is a strange animal that is purely fictitious and almost anthropomorphic. They say that Bernini and his assistants sculpted this figure with some artistic license because they had never actually seen an alligator. A little bit of trivia: alligators look just like crocodiles, only their snout is slightly wider, and crocodiles

have actually been known in Rome since the time of Cleopatra!

Speaking of Egypt, an obelisk was also added to the Fountain of the Four Rivers. It is the 2nd erected in the chronological order of obelisks in Rome, but instead of the classic cross mounted at its apex, Innocent X commissioned a bronze dove carrying an olive branch symbolizing his pontificate to be placed at its summit. This type of dove may be seen above all of the obelisks erected during the Pamphili Pontificate. It is also interesting to note that this is not an Egyptian made obelisk, but a good copy made during the Roman period.

It is also known that although this work is universally recognized as a masterpiece, the artist was never satisfied with the result, so much so that he asked his son to report faithfully in his biography, "Oh, I am so ashamed for having worked so poorly!" Perhaps this was a regret for not having paid tribute to Neptune.



## THE TURTLE FOUNTAIN

LOCATION: PIAZZA MATTEI  
AUTHOR: GIACOMO DALLA PORTA  
YEAR: 1585  
COMMISSIONED BY: FAMIGLIA MATTEI



### THE ENIGMA OF THE "VIRGIN WATER" OBELISKS

*The obelisks represent a separate mystery altogether. The "Virgin Water" aqueduct, allegedly by chance, is the only one whose fountains are adorned with the Egyptian stelae. To be precise, three of its fountains are decorated by an obelisk (Piazza Navona, Piazza della Rotonda, and Piazza del Popolo). Just as three roads form a trivium (a fork in the road that splits three ways) and the trident has three prongs, the three fountains form a triangle which encloses at its center the Mausoleum of Augustus, where Agrippa, the architect behind the "Virgin Water" aqueduct, was buried.*

The last fountain we will address is the Fontana delle Tartarughe (the Turtle Fountain) which is situated in Piazza Mattei, near the Jewish quarter. This is without a doubt the most mysterious of all the fountains and acts as a unifier between the water spirits and the earth spirits. Inaugurated in 1588 according to a project by Giacomo Dalla Porta, this fountain is truly an accumulation of unsolved mysteries. Firstly, this fountain entirely upsets and inverts the balance between the statues and the basin since the water flows into four seashells and has a tiny upper basin. This is in distinct contrast with the other fountains which all possess a rather large basin in which the smaller sculptures seem to frolic. Secondly, this fountain adopts a mixed media approach, which is a rarity in analogous monuments of that time period and even in those built later on. In addition to the traditional stone used to build fountains, this fountain also incorporates bronze. Thirdly, the fountain depicts four ephebes (effeminate male youths) in bronze, who are intent upon

placing all of their weight on four dolphins, which in turn spit water into four relatively small shells. The ephebes in turn support four turtles, and appear almost to help them into the small upper basin.

Originally there were supposed to be four more dolphins where the turtles are now are located, but these were recycled and used for the Fountain in Campo de' Fiori and later on they were lost. The turtles were added later on and were suggested by Andrea Sacchi, the architect behind the Felice Aqueduct in 1658.

What does this fountain tell us? Perhaps it speaks of the triumph of the forces of the earth over those of the sea, which is further enhanced by the presence of such amphibians as turtles? Or is it of the final victory, in the "Virgin Water's" path, of Diana over Neptune? Is it about man's domination over the elements? Is it the triumph of spirit over matter or, even more cryptically, does it evoke the exact opposite, thereby foreshadowing the Age of Enlightenment, which would occur two centuries later?



If one were able to penetrate with an X-ray apparatus, and view an underground cross-section of the Albani Hills, which look out toward the capital city of Rome, one would notice, at a certain depth, a sort of enormous and unbroken semi-dome of water, enclosed in an extremely permeable volcanic well which soaks up this water like an absorbent sponge. These hills continue their gentle north-westerly slope from the area of the Prati del Vivaro. This is a large water table with an extremely low flow rate. The water table is replenished by rainwater, which wets the chestnut and beech groves surrounding the ancient Laziale Volcano area and gradually penetrates into a semicircular underground water source which then heads towards the Aniene River. Well before arriving at its destination however, a good part of this water supply flows to the surface in both small and large springs which then proceed to branch out into the many tributaries of the Aniene River, which in turn are parallel to the northernmost ramifications of the volcanic Albani Hills.

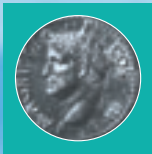
A unique exception is found in the Salone area where, in close proximity of its destination, the remaining portion of the water table's flow is concentrated and comes to daylight to give birth to the most important spring in the Roman countryside, which carries more than a thousand liters of water per second.

This particular trait was not overlooked by the Romans, who had a great knowledge and appreciation of the geometrics of water. They succeeded in capturing and dominating the power of this enormous spring, and directed its flow towards an artificial underground basin, from which the path of the "Virgin Water" still diverges today.

Who knows, if in alternative legendary interpretations, this name does not derive from the knowledge that, in profound depths just above the ancient pliocenic clay, a small amount of "albanic" (from the Albani hills) magma gradually crystallized and "distilled" itself to ultimately generate authentically primary (the experts refer to these pure waters as being *juvenile*) or virgin residual water? This water may have been capable of moving upward through the volcanic fissures and mixing with water tables resulting from rainwater. All of this could be used as proof of the existence of a triangular affiliation between Neptune (god of the sea), Diana (the rain), and Vulcan (representing the force of fire capable of moving subterranean water tables and therefore the ability to draw water from rock), in order to further interpret the origin and name of the spring that has quenched the thirst and fascinated the Eternal City for thousands of years.

#### Marco Vipsanio Agrippa

Agrippa believed that Neptune had given him *carte blanche*. Aside from his country origins, he was probably from the town of Arpino like Cicero. He paved his own way from the rugged mountains of the Ciociaria to the height of neoimperialist politics in Rome under Octavian as well as throughout the vast Mediterranean territory. We can reconstruct his personality by his portrait as seen on various medals and sculptures: a determined man, with a bull-like neck, a proud, stern expression, unified eyebrows, and a powerful jaw. He was a man used to tempering a vivacious soul with discipline. He knew how to work with water, and it seems that by studying the technical aspects of hydraulic systems, he was able to enrich his military strategy. He thought that "navigating is a necessity", but first and foremost, if you will pardon the pun, he felt it is necessary to "embark" upon his more serious venture. He created a secure port, the naval base of Miseno, which was obtained by uniting two lakes, that allowed him to better train his fleet. It was necessary to defeat the pirates and one of these was



no ordinary pirate, but the son of Pompey the Great, Sextus Pompeius, head of his fleet with over 350 ships that reigned over the area of the Straits of Messina. Sextus Pompeius was proud of his illustrious heritage and as well as his naval prowess, which earned him the nickname of "son of Neptune". Agrippa was in fact so devoted to Neptune that he swore to dedicate a temple, in the heart of Rome at the Campo Marzio, with a colonnade of the Argonauts that would be supplied by the best water he could find. And that's exactly what he did. He defeated Sextus Pompeius at Milazzo and Nauloco, and Marc Antony at Anzio, allowing Octavian to become Caesar Augustus. His naval accomplishments won him the highest military honor, the "Naval Crown". Neptune was indeed his ally, as well as Emperor Augustus, whom he served as counselor and benevolent shadow for thirty years. He was forced to marry Augustus' restless daughter Giulia, a spoiled young girl who was half his age, while he continued to love his loving wife Marcella. Though invincible in war, he severely compromised his private life.