

## The Temple of Vesta in Rome

The Temple of Vesta in Rome is one of the oldest places of worship on the Roman Forum. It was built as a round temple and stood out among the other buildings because of its relatively small dimensions. Researchers conclude from this that the Temple of Vesta could be one of the first structures from the 7th or 8th century BC. It is assumed that the construction method of the first temple building resembled the simple huts of the first Roman settlers. Probably in the 2nd or 3rd century BC, the temple was rebuilt in the style of Greek architecture. Because of its central importance, it was increasingly richly decorated during further reconstruction work.

The temple was dedicated to Vesta, the goddess of the house and the hearth fire. Inside was the eternal sacred hearth fire of the city of Rome. It was tended by six or seven priestesses, the vestal virgins. They were the most highly respected priestesses in ancient Rome and lived in the Atrium Vestae (Vestal House) right next to the temple. Every year on the first of March, the beginning of the year according to the Julian calendar, the fire was rekindled. Since the extinguishing of the fire was considered a bad omen, the vestal virgins had a great responsibility. They were also obliged to remain virgins. If they broke this rule or did not live up to their responsibility, they faced the death penalty. Because of the open fire, there was an opening in the roof as a smoke outlet. In addition, the interior was closed off by a wall to protect the fire from the wind. In addition, the most sacred objects of the city of Rome were kept in the temple of Vesta. According to legend, Rome would remain as long as these objects existed. Since the building was specially protected for this reason, important documents and contracts were also stored there, some of which were not to be made accessible to the public.

Today, only a few columns and a rebuilt wall remain of the former magnificent building. The foundation with a diameter of about 15 metres gives an impression of the overall dimensions of the temple. Similar temple buildings exist in Tivoli and on the Forum Boarium below the hill Aventine in Rome. The temple in Tivoli was probably also dedicated to Vesta. The temple on the Forum Boarium was dedicated to Hercules.