

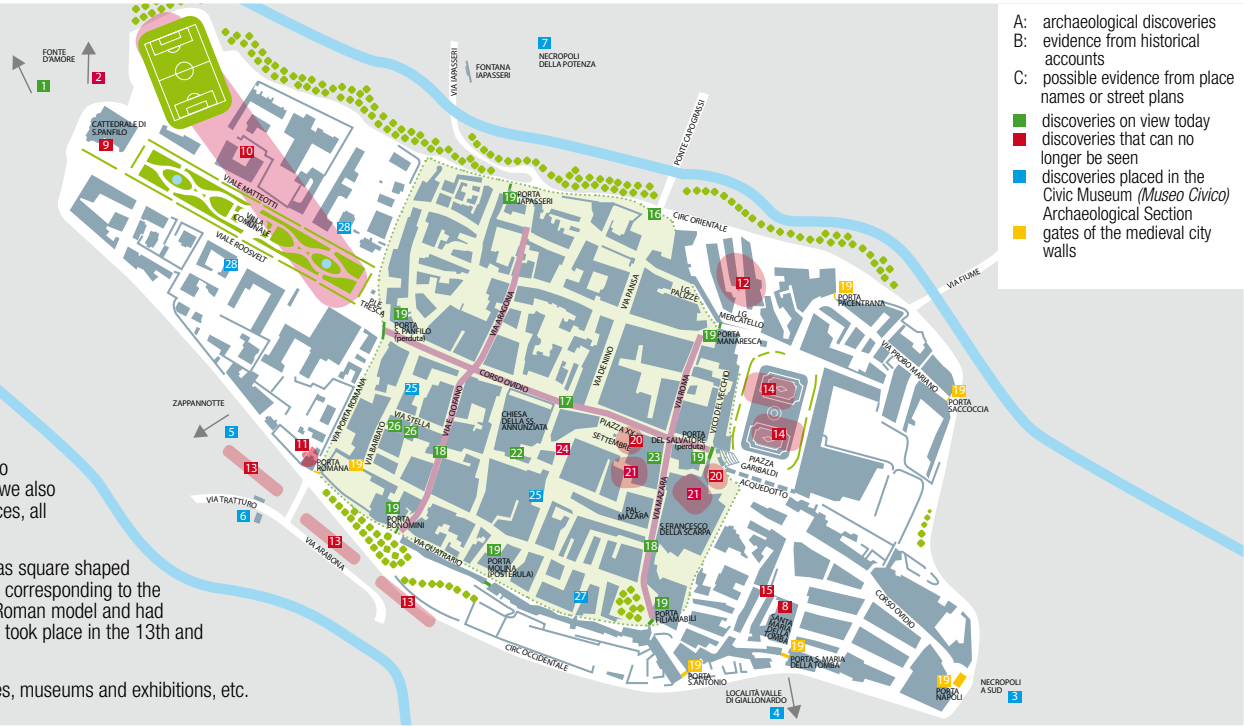
THE STREETS OF ANCIENT SULMONA

The modern city of Sulmona continues to walk in the footprints of the ancient Roman settlement, where the *Sulmo* of Ovid occupied a space of little more than 16 hectares. The old street grid is clear even if it does not coincide exactly with the modern one, while the archaeological remains are partly hidden beneath the modern streets. All the buildings would have remained in good condition, even the necropolis outside the city wall.

Before becoming what the Romans called a *municipium* (a ‘municipality’), a settlement already existed, as attested by ancient burial grounds around the city walls in which graves dating back from between the end of the 4th century BC to the Imperial period have been found. Funeral remains and inscriptions bear witness to the life there. From inscriptions we also have evidence of worship of the gods Ceres and Venus, of the existence of well-known public figures and of chariot races, all indications of a well organised, active society.

The structure of the original settlement, which was in the form of a Roman encampment, is still to be found today. It was square shaped with the main thoroughfare corresponding to the modern main street, Corso Ovidio, and two east-west oriented streets corresponding to the modern Via Mazzara-Via Roma and Via Ciofano-Via Aragona. The later medieval walls closely followed the pre-existing Roman model and had six gates, placed at the end of the major thoroughfares, to which were added five more in the subsequent building that took place in the 13th and 14th centuries.

The map shows the streets and other places in Sulmona in Roman times and also contains many references to galleries, museums and exhibitions, etc.



- A: archaeological discoveries
- B: evidence from historical accounts
- C: possible evidence from place names or street plans
- discoveries on view today
- discoveries that can no longer be seen
- discoveries placed in the Civic Museum (*Museo Civico*) Archaeological Section
- gates of the medieval city walls

OUTSIDE AND AROUND THE WALLS from the archaic period to the *Sulmona* of the Roman Empire. Necropolises, places of worship and recreational spaces.

In the area around or not far from the city walls, on the ancient north-south road axis linking Via Claudia Valeria with the southern end of the plateau area called *Altipiani Maggiori*, numerous artifacts of various kinds have been found (e.g. funeral objects, articles from daily life, building remains, inscriptions) either through organised excavations or by chance. Here are some of the most interesting.

- Sanctuary of Hercules Curinus (*Santuario di Ercole Curino*)** **A**: a magnificent terrace-built architectural complex on Mount Morone. It goes back originally to the 4th century BC, was extended in the 2nd century BC and was clearly of great importance as a place of worship and a hub for the whole region. Among numerous finds, the one most worth mentioning is the precious bronze statuette of Hercules (Farnese style) recently attributed to the Greek sculptor Lisippo or his workshop and currently kept at the National Archaeological Museum of Chieti. A reproduction is to be found in Sulmona in the Civic Museum (*Museo Civico*).
- Villa of Ovid** **A**: for centuries popular tradition held that the poet's country residence was what is now known to be the Sanctuary of Hercules Curinus. Some scholars believe that the residence was in fact in a foothill area in the Marane district where the *Casino Pantano* is to be found today. Walled remains from the Roman era which are still visible seem at least to prove the existence of a residence in Ovid's time.
- Necropolis to the South**, outside of today's Porta Napoli (*Naples Gate*) **A** (dating back to the era of the Roman Republic, through to Imperial period and then into the Middle Ages): numerous funeral artifacts are kept today in the Civic Museum (*Museo Civico*) **A**, giving evidence of the middling level of wealth reached by the city. The craftsmanship, metalwork, weapons and votive bronze statuettes are a clear sign that ancient Sulmona had commercial and cultural contacts with the major centres of production in the ancient world.
- Valle di Giallonardo area** **A**: tombs dating back to the pre-Roman (Italic and Greek) periods **A**.
- Zappannotte area**: deep tomb **A**, in which was found a bronze belt dating from the 4th-3rd century BC **A**.
- Church of Santa Maria di Roncisvalle** **A**: various finds suggest

- that this was probably a holy area, dedicated to the goddess Miner-va, with a fountain **A**, that gives evidence of ancient beliefs linked to health-giving properties.
- Necropolis of Potenza** **A**: discovery was made of an important epigraphic text with a testament alluding to aspects of public life in the 2nd century, including references to the corn market and chariot races **A**.
 - Temple dedicated to Jove** **B**: tradition places the temple in the same spot as today's Church of Santa Maria della Tomba.
 - Temple of Apollo and Vesta** (on the site of the city's cathedral) **BC**: information on this given by ancient writers has been lost. It is known, however, that these two divinities, who were the protectors of the arts, leisure and well-being in a city, often had their resting places in areas where games took place and so can be associated with arena activities.
 - Arena ('Circus' in Latin)** **AC**: this was presumably in the large area to the north facing the Cathedral up as far as Piazzale Tresca. The arena is attested in the city by an inscription with the words "MUSS.../CIRCU" founded in another area.
 - Theatre** **B**: some sources have identified remains of the seated sections of a theatre in a private garden in the Porta Romana ('Roman Gate') area of the city, with the stage at a lower level to the right of the Gate.
 - Amphitheatre** **C**: there are various theories about where this was situated. One of these sites it in the shelter of the old walls in the *Borghetto* quarter of the city.
 - Spaces dedicated to body care** **C**: we can presume these were in the north-western part of the city, in an area which always had good access to water supplies.
 - Campus and swimming pool** **C**: these may have been in the modern large square Piazza Garibaldi. The name 'Valle della Pescara' ('Valley of the Pool') found in the medieval period may indicate a distant memory of the swimming pool.
 - House of Ovid** **C**: its probable location was close to the Church of Santa Maria della Tomba.

INSIDE THE WALLS beneath the city. The streets, the houses.

In addition to pieces of basalt from the ancient streets, chips of floor mosaic have also been found in several streets in the modern historic centre allowing us to locate various town houses (*Domus*) dating back from between the 2nd/1st century BC and the 4th century AD. We still have surveys of some of the buildings from the first archaeologists or scholarly hypotheses about others. There are a large number of artifacts in the Civic Museum (*Museo Civico*).

- City Walls** **C**: the sections still visible show the extension of the original Roman structure that took place in the 13th -14th century **C**. Remains of a part of the wall no longer visible in diamond-shaped Roman brickwork, so-called *opus reticulatum*, were found in the south-east corner; other remains have been found inside Palazzo Mazzara near Porta Filiamabili as well as in a rampart near Porta Romana. **History of the walls**: standing on Mitra hill (*colle Mitra*), to the south of Sulmona, a fortification existed from the earliest times but not until the 4th century BC is there evidence of a settlement in the area of the modern city. The Latin historian Livy records that there was already a defensive wall surrounding the town at the time of the passage of Hannibal (218-202 BC). The walls were certainly damaged at the time of the Italic Social War (91-88 BC) and then destroyed completely by the Roman leader Sulla, who then rebuilt them in 80 BC. Destroyed many times over the centuries, they have always been rebuilt on top of the pre-existing walls.
- Main thoroughfare** **C**: this ran in the traditional north-west to south-east direction between the medieval city gates of Porta San Panfilo e Porta del Salvatore, which are no longer standing. In 1901 some important with portico structures were found close to Porta del Salvatore on a line along the ancient thoroughfare **A**.
- East-west oriented streets** **C**: **1**. Presumably Via Aragona - Via Ciofano. Traces of basalt street paving and polygonal stones have been found in Via Ciofano **A**. **2**. Via Roma - Via Mazzara **A**.
- City gates** **C**: the modern gates in the most ancient parts of the internal walls correspond more or less to the original gates in the Roman walls **C**.
- Forum** **C**: some scholars place the Forum nearby Porta del Salvatore gate (no longer standing) or, on the basis of archaeological evidence, in the area of the today's large square Piazza XX Settembre.

- Basilica** **C**: some see it as positioned somewhere around Piazza XX Settembre, others prefer a location beneath today's Church of San Francesco della Scarpa, close to the Forum.
- House of Arianna** **A**: 1st century BC - 2nd century AD. The house has been made into a museum divided into various areas with floor mosaics, remains of dividing walls in diamond-shaped brickwork (*opus reticulatum*) and fragments of wall frescos representing the *Marriage of Dionysus and Ariadne* and the *Dispute between Eros and Pan*. Everything is well made and in what is known as the Pompeian Third Style.
- House in Via Mazzara** **A** (currently a private residence): second half of the 2nd century AD. Remains of walls and mosaic floors have been found, as well as many-coloured wall decorations.
- House in Piazza Salvatore Tommasi** **A**: 1st-2nd century AD. This has many-coloured mosaic floors with geometrical and plant-like motifs; also walled remains with fresco traces.
- Houses in Via San Cosimo and Via Barbato** **A**: mosaics with chess board motifs have been found in Via San Cosimo, while in Via Barbato there is a mosaic fragment with a swastika design **A**.
- Church of San Gaetano and Via Stella** **A**: beneath the remains of the original medieval building there are still visible traces of a large building (2nd half of 2nd century AD) which extends as far as Via Stella. It has seven distinct areas, six of them with mosaic floors decorated in geometric motifs and one, beneath Via Stella, in inlaid multi-colored patterns, so-called *opus sectile*, from the 3rd-4th century AD.
- House in Via Acuti** **A**: 1st-2nd century BC. What must have been a wealthy residence has yielded a fine floor mosaic decorated with a Medusa face inside a geometric framework (now kept in the Civic Museum) **A**.
- Houses in Viale Matteotti and Viale Roosevelt** **A**: in the first of these there are mosaic floor remains with many-coloured geometric designs showing various figures **A**; the second has a mosaic with a white and blue circular crown surrounded by a braid.

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CITTÀ DI SULMONA

Città di Sulmona - Pagina Ufficiale

UFFICIO TURISTICO COMUNALE
Corso Ovidio, Palazzo SS. Annunziata - 67039 Sulmona (AQ)
Tel. +39 0864.210216 - Fax +39 0864.207348
www.comune.sulmona.aq.it - servizituristici@comune.sulmona.aq.it

Informazioni Turistiche - IAT Sulmona

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PROMOTION & PHOTO: D M G Comunicazione

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SULMO MIHI
CULTURA
EST

OVID

and Sulmona in Roman times

SULMONA
L'ABRUZZO
INTORNO



In the Latin poet Ovid we have the most illustrious representative of the Italic tribe known as the Peligni in the Roman period of Italian history.

Ovid has always been a much studied, much discussed and controversial figure, and one who has perhaps never been fully known or understood. However, now as in previous eras, he has always been an emblematic figure and one with whom the city of his birth, Sulmona, still strongly identifies.

SULMO MIHI PATRIA EST SULMONA IS MY HOME

THE NARRATOR OF AMAZING TRANSFORMATIONS

In **3 AD** Ovid, now in his more mature years, left behind love poetry and began writing his *Metamorfosi* ('Metamorphoses'), the work he is best known for. With compelling narrative and strictly regular rhythms it recounts numerous fables from ancient mythology where, through a series of progressive transformations ('metamorphoses'), out of chaos human beings are changed into animals, plants, water and stones, illustrating the profound link that unites all living forms in the Universe.

FROM FAME TO DISGRACE

Ovid is no stranger to political intrigue and it seems he may have been part of a faction opposed to Livia, the powerful and much feared wife of the Emperor Augustus, who was working to smooth the path to power for her son Tiberius. The poet had finished his 'Metamorphoses' and was working on writing a celebration of the rites and festivals in the Roman calendar, the *Fasti* ('The Festivals'). Everything seemed set fair for him, then just at this point, in **8 AD**, something happened that cost him the favour of the Emperor – for ever.

THE MYSTERY OF OVID'S BANISHMENT

All of a sudden, Augustus, for reasons never revealed, issued an order condemning the poet to exile (*relegatio*) in the small village of Tomis (today's city of Costanta in Romania) on the Black Sea.

Though Ovid's existence now underwent a sea change, he did not, and would never reveal the reasons for his banishment, save for a few fleeting references, one in particular to "*carmen et error*" ('a poem and a mistake').

THE FINAL YEARS: SADNESS AND NOSTALGIA

The poet, now forced to live out his years in a distant province of the Empire, fell into sadness and even despair, yet he carried on writing. His verses are now darker reflecting his sad state of mind and this can be seen in his *Tristia* ('Sorrow') and his *Epistulae ex Ponto* ('Letters from the Black Sea'). Nostalgic images of the past mingled with the expression of current hardships emerge from his writings together with a sense of resentment about a fate he considers painful and unjust. Nor does he ever stop hoping that one day he will return home. Ovid died at the age of 60 in the year **17 AD**, far from those he had been close to and forgotten by the Emperor who had banished him.

THEORIES ABOUT OVID'S BANISHMENT

Today, more than 2000 years on, the reasons for Ovid's exile are still shrouded in mystery. But there are numerous theories about. Political motives seem more likely rather than the more traditionally held view that it was something to do with his love life and some grievance associated with this in the Emperor's court or with the licentiousness of some of his poetry. Association with the faction opposed to Livia and Tiberius would seem a more plausible explanation for such a severe penalty to be inflicted upon him and never revoked.

INFLUENCE AND LEGACY

When, from the 15th century onwards, the European Renaissance brought art that was not exclusively religious but allowed painting to treat new subjects of a non-sacred nature, the old Greek and Roman myths portrayed in the magnificent verses of Ovid's 'Metamorphoses' came alive in naturalistic scenes depicting beings and fantastic transformations of living forms. The 'Metamorphoses' was the book that consolidated Ovid's fame not just as a poet but also as a profound inspiration to figurative artists.



Reproduction of the statue of "Resting Hercules" discovered in the temple (which had previously been considered the Villa of Ovid). Civic and Archaeological Museum (Museo Civico)

OVID IN LOCAL LEGEND

The spirit of Ovid lives on in local places, stories and sayings and in the popular imagination.

Ovid's family house in Sulmona is thought to have been in the area around the Church of Santa Maria della Tomba and we know for certain that the family's villa was on the slopes of nearby Mount Morrone. The peasants from this area used to have stories about treasure buried beneath the landslide that later destroyed the villa... Many of them had searched for the villa but found nothing, leading to the idea that Ovid was a miracle worker not only with words!

Such were the ways in which the popular imagination fed on the figure of Ovid across the centuries and among the different people who came to know about him. There were fantastic stories about the family villa, about carriages pulled by flaming horses, about the poet's love trysts with beautiful fairies, about love potions and the rest. But then one day, in 1957, during an excavation that took place on the 2000th anniversary of Ovid's birth, much of this vanished. That is to say that, in the place where Ovid's family villa was thought to have stood, the remains of strongly built seemingly cross-linked cement walls emerged which were identified as having been part of a magnificent sanctuary and not a villa – to be precise a place dedicated to the worship of the Roman divinity Hercules Curinus and nothing to do with Ovid.

However, if one views the site from afar, several hundred meters away from it to the south, on slightly lower ground, it is possible to make out the outline of what looks like an old farmhouse, in which area remains of a building from the Roman period have been found. Was this the villa of Ovid of popular imagination?

THE FACE OF OVID IN THE CITY OF HIS BIRTH

Though it is said that the face of Ovid appeared on a coin during his lifetime, the many representations we have of it by artists are a product of the imagination of sculptors, engravers and other craftsmen from later periods. He is depicted in the academic or ecclesiastical attire of the time, sometimes hooded or with long locks of hair tied with laurel, etc. All such images bear witness to how widely his works circulated in Europe and how necessary it was felt to try and show what he looked like. In Sulmona itself, where it is said that, before the great earthquake in 1706, a statue of the poet stood in every street, very few traces of Ovid have remained. There is a well made head from the 15th century, which may have been part of a sculpture commissioned by the town captain, Polidoro Tiberti (photo 01). There is a stone statue also from the 15th century in the entrance hall of the Annunziata Palace (*Palazzo della SS. Annunziata*) depicting Ovid in University dress (photo 02). There is also the face that appears on the municipal seal with the initials S.M.P.E., *Sulmo Mihi Patria Est* ('Sulmona is my home'), sanctioned in 1410 by King Ladislao of Durazzo. And finally there is the small figure said to be of Ovid in the finely carved decoration on the cornice of the Annunziata Palace separating one level of the building from another. The bronze statue in one of the main city squares, Piazza XX Settembre, was cast in 1925 by the sculptor Ettore Ferrari who modelled it on the one he had done some 30 years earlier for the city of Costantia in Romania.



01



02

1ST CENTURY BC

We are in Sulmona, a small settlement in that central part of the Italian peninsula which had already become completely romanized and was an integral part of the troubled Roman republic. In March 43 BC, precisely one year before the killing of Julius Caesar, Publio Ovidio Nasone (Ovid) was born. He was to become a refined love poet with an intimate understanding of the female mind and an astounding narrator of myths and metamorphoses.

This was a critical period in Roman history with the transition from Republic to Monarchy. The new political system was coming into being with the Roman Senate being progressively deprived of authority and the new regime of Augustus, the first Emperor, about to be established, as happened in 31 BC.

...In the meantime Ovid, son of a well-to-do family belonging to the so-called equestrian order, sees a career in law being mapped out for him by his father. But this is a future he does not feel suited to. He much prefers writing and begins the study of rhetoric. Yet he finds himself writing not in prose but in verse saying later "everything I tried to say came out in verse".

In Rome he began to move in republican and then pro-Augustan circles and got to know the famous poets of the time: Horace, Propertius, Tibullus and even Virgil.

THE LOVE POET

"*Tenerorum lusor amorum*"... "*Singer of love's sweetnesses*" Ovid shows himself to be a perfect spokesperson for his time quickly becoming well known with his audacious and innovative writings which reflect a freer and more relaxed moral climate though one definitely at odds with the new politics of Augustus.

His elegies deal with love: the *Amores* ('The Loves') expressing the less inhibited attitudes among women of the time, the *Heroides* ('The Heroines') reflecting the nostalgia of love, and the *Ars Amatoria* ('The Art of Love') having a frankly sensual content.

His short poetic composition, the *Remedia Amoris* ('Remedies for Love'), provides useful suggestions to young men on how to get over the pain caused by love, while the *Medicamina faciei* ('The Art of Beauty') has as its key theme in how women can best preserve their beauty.