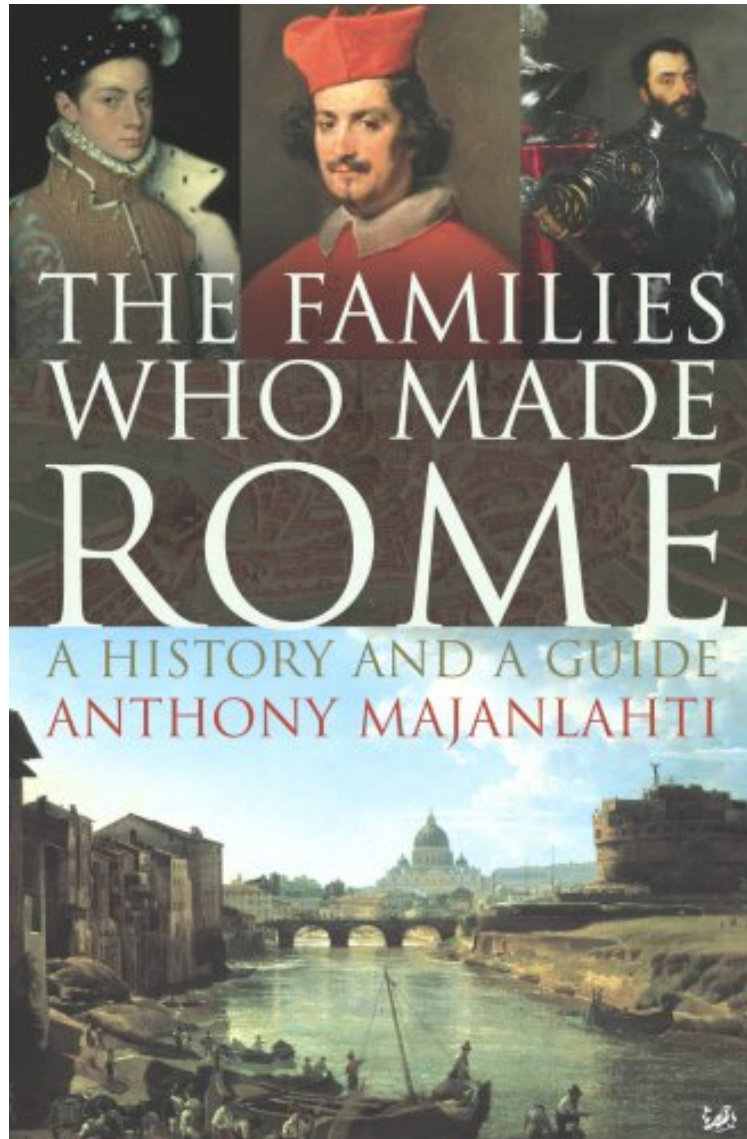


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The Families Who Made Rome: A History and a Guide

Anthony Majanlahti

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Anthony Majanlahti : The Families Who Made Rome: A History and a Guide before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Families Who Made Rome: A History and a Guide:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A treasure in itself and extremely useful while in Rome. By Carol H. JohnsonMajanlahti's book is one of the best guidebooks I've used for any city. I've lived in Rome for over a month each year for the past two decades, but there is still a great deal to learn about and enjoy of this astonishing city. His

book is a marvel of organization, his writing is clear, warm, engaging, and best of all, is carefully researched without it all feeling as if the book were merely a re-cooked doctoral dissertation. This book is the highly crafted effort of someone who loves and who knows Rome. He also connects great art and buildings with the histories not only with the sponsoring families, but you also sense his weaving in the various threads of Western Civilization. I'm in Rome now and consult this wonder nearly every day. I read it before coming, but find it indispensable while here. This is not a general guidebook to Rome. You are spared wading through sections of gushing about shops, restaurants and hotels (usually paid for by businesses themselves). It is almost physically impossible to have ONE guidebook that covers absolutely everything about every period of Rome. Although the Renaissance and Baroque cover only a small slice of Rome's time span, the buildings, artwork, institutions all launched then are still important today. Several of these "Great Families" have survived and still play an important role in modern Rome. If you don't know Rome even moderately well, I would suggest you also use a general guidebook as a supplement to this fine work. The nature of his topic precludes much mention of ancient Rome, so you may find that a standard guidebook focusing on that to be helpful too. If someone has never, ever been to Rome and has only the barest thread of western European history, this book would still be enjoyable and very helpful. By centering on individual great families, it can give the reader a focal point through the multi-faceted history of Rome. Unless you know Rome well, having on hand a very good, detailed map while reading or merely consulting the book would help. He does have some small reference maps in appropriate places. If you can find one of the fold-up into pocket sized Rome maps published by "Touring Club Italia", I heartily recommend that for its detail, accuracy and durability. If this book ever is available as an e-book, I would buy that at once. I'm occasionally asked for information about what to see in Rome, or what to do, and can usually help my friends. One time, a friend of an acquaintance wanted info on Rome but she declared she had no interest in the churches (there are over 450 of them still), she strongly preferred modern art and architecture, and wanted especially to know about luxury shopping and the fancier restaurants. I could not help her, and someone like that might not be interested in reading any book about a city. But if you have an imagination, or even if you are only curious about things you don't immediately understand, I think you will enjoy Rome even more for having read this wonderful book.

23 of 23 people found the following review helpful. Magnificent book, but with a few flaws

By A reader

I'm often critical of books about Rome, because so many are full of inaccuracies, or are superficial, or just poorly written. This book has none of those flaws. In terms of the sheer amount of fascinating information conveyed, the readable writing style and the originality of its approach, this book really OUGHT to receive five stars from me. So what's wrong with the book? It has three flaws, all of which could be corrected if the author is ever able to publish a second edition. One is trivial, but annoying: the author grossly overuses the word "great." I know, I know-- an awful lot of things in Rome seem to require that adjective; so much in Rome IS great. But an editor should red-pencil out about three-quarters of the instances where this word appears. The second problem is that the book lacks any useful maps. The author shows the buildings discussed in his text against what look like portions of an 18th-century map of Rome. In any case, it's printed very faintly. The map illustrations are therefore difficult to see properly and are pretty much useless if you're actually using this book on-site as a guide in Rome. The third problem is inexcusable. The author has obviously done an absolutely prodigious amount of research, but doesn't include a bibliography. He casually mentions half a dozen works in his Acknowledgments, and that's all. Clearly he must have consulted dozens, if not hundreds, of other works, but not a word about what they were.

Now that I've gotten these gripes up front, I want to emphasize that this is among the best and most informative books I've ever read about Rome, and I've read a LOT on the subject. Seeing Rome in terms of the families whose building programs-- or random constructions-- have determined the appearance of Rome is a fascinating and useful approach to understanding the Eternal City. Majanlahti is the only author I've ever read who makes the peculiar and seemingly irrational linear arrangement of rooms in Rome's noble palaces comprehensible in terms of the way these rooms were originally used. And despite the huge amount of information conveyed, the writing is never dull or dry and is occasionally enlivened with bits of dry humor. This isn't a guidebook for the casual tourist-- it's for serious lovers of Rome, the kind of book to bring with you on repeated and extended visits.

6 of 7 people found the following review helpful. An amazing book on the history of Rome

By Nick

Good history books are hard to write. They can be filled with information and yet be dry or be a great read and lacking information, so it's difficult to strike the balance and make a book a good read and yet fill it with information. I've been to Rome a few times now, and am starting to get a sense of the city and a grasp at the context in which what you see and how that fits into place. After you've done main tourist sites, a book like this will help you dive deeper into Rome's rich history. A previous reviewer is correct: This is not a book you'd pick up if you're planning your first visit to Rome. If you're a return visitor or even just a history buff, this book is for you. I think the overlooked strength of this book is that despite the source material, it's a really easy read and is filled with great nuggets of information. When you have someone who knows their history, it's very easy to write in a tone that is belittling or dry and boring. Very few authors can do this well, and it's a tribute to Mr. Majanlahti's strengths as a writer and a historian.

5/5 - it's a great historical book to read, and I'm glad I was told about this book.

Rome is famous for its buildings and architecture, but just who built its noted and beautiful structures? This distinctive

account—part history and part travel guide—explores the families and individuals who built Rome from the ground up. Each of the districts dominated by the fabulously rich families of the Popes—including the Colonna, della Rovere, Farnese, Borghese, Barberini and others—are explored and paired with a vivid account of the family's history, including their scandals and intrigues as well as their relationships with artists like Bernini and Michelangelo. An itinerary with maps and engravings provides a detailed guide to each family's monuments. Famous sites such as the Trevi Fountain, the Spanish Steps, and St. Peter's Cathedral take on new significance as the history of the Roman nobles who placed their stamp on the city is unveiled.

"[An] intriguing and original book...even the armchair tourist can benefit" -- Tim Blanning * Sunday Telegraph *
"Elegant and informative...an entertaining mix of travelogue and history...we flit agreeably through the chequered history of the papacy" -- Charles Nicholl * Sunday Times * "Anthony Majanlahti wears his scholarship lightly and tempers his enthusiasm with humour; he has a thousand tales to tell... Enormously entertaining" * Times Literary Supplement * "Marvellous... For anyone interested in delving further into one of the world's most beautiful and extraordinary cities, this is essential reading" * Tablet * "Fascinating... A fine account of a decadent age and place" * RA Magazine *
From the Inside Flap Both history and guide, this fascinating book tells the stories of the noble clans who built the piazzas, palazzos and fountains we see today. Famous sites take on a new significance as the author tells the family histories with all the scandals, intrigues and power grabs.
About the Author Anthony Majanlahti is an urban historian and was a researcher at the British School at Rome.