

NOTES FROM ROME 2021–22

by Christopher Siwicki

This gazette presents to the reader outside Rome news of recent archaeological activity (August 2021 – June 2022) gleaned from public lectures, conferences, exhibitions, and newspaper reports.

Questa gazzetta ha lo scopo di presentare ad un lettore fuori Roma notizie della recente attività archeologica (agosto 2021 – giugno 2022) tratte da conferenze, convegni, mostre e relazioni su giornali.

MUSEUMS, EXHIBITIONS, OPENINGS

Rome has two new archaeological museums. Opened to the public in November 2021 and located on Piazza Vittorio, ‘Museo Ninfeo’ is built into part of the *horti Lamiani*, excavated between 2006–09 and 2010–15.¹ It is the result of almost two decades of work, involving the construction of a carpark below the archaeological area and a multi-storey building – the Rome headquarters of the National Insurance and Assistance Body for Doctors and Dentists (Enpam) – above it. Although much of the media attention around the site focused on it having at one time been the suburban residence of the emperor Caligula, the museum chronicles a much longer history of this specific part of the Esquiline Hill, from the fourth century BC to the ninth century AD.²

In its earliest historical phase, the area was given over to agriculture, which then changed in the second century BC with the opening of pozzolana quarries. Lucius Aelius Lamia transformed the terrain between the end of the first century BC/beginning of the first century AD by covering over the quarries and laying out a luxurious garden estate. After Lamia’s death, the *horti* became imperial property. Belonging to this phase is a marble staircase linking the garden terraces, as well as a lead water pipe stamped with Claudius’ name, which was part of an expansive irrigation system. A small nymphaeum decorated with blue and glass mosaics and shells also dates to the Julio-Claudian period, as does a 15-m-long wall embellished with frescos in Pompeian Third Style, painstakingly reconstructed from 90,000 fragments.

The complex was monumentalised in the third century under Alexander Severus, when a large, open-air square was constructed, paved with marble slabs and surrounded by walls decorated with *opus sectile* of exceptional quality. Between the fifth and ninth centuries, the building was stripped of

¹ For the official website <https://www.museoninfeo.it/>

² Although press releases about the museum were made in early 2021, it was not opened until later that year.

much of its marble and what were probably rudimentary agricultural structures were erected within the monumental space.

Over 3000 of the approximately 100,000 objects discovered during the excavations are placed throughout the museum in thoughtfully arranged and interpreted displays. ‘Museo Ninfeo’ generally eschews an overemphasis on the lavishness of the *horti*, as can already be appreciated from the extraordinary sculptural finds made in this area in the nineteenth century and which are now in the Capitoline Museums.³ Instead, cabinets of ceramics, foodstuff, and glassware focus on what might be termed the ‘everyday’ (although the museum itself is only open at weekends).

‘Museum’ is perhaps a slightly misleading title for the new ‘Museo dell’Arte Salvata’, opened in June 2022; in actuality, it is more a rolling exhibition installed within the octagonal hall (the old planetarium) of the Museo delle Terme di Diocleziano.⁴ The initiative is dedicated to showcasing ancient artefacts which have been rescued from at-risk contexts, including trafficking and natural disasters. Conceived as a transitory deposit, it allows the public in Rome to see selections of objects before they are then returned to their original locations across Italy.⁵

The first exhibition (16 June–15 October 2022) focused on artefacts that were illegally excavated, exported abroad, and subsequently recovered by the *Comando Carabinieri Tutela Patrimonio Culturale*. Attesting to the widespread practice of looting, the pieces came from a range of sites across Etruria, Latium, Campania, and Magna Graecia. Ceramics dating from the seventh to fourth centuries BC made up the majority of the exhibition and included red impasto jars from Cerveteri (one of which depicts the earliest known Etruscan version of the blinding of Polyphemus), sixth- and fifth-century red and black figured attic vases, Falerian and Apulian ware, a number of late sixth-/early fifth-century antefixes from one or more sites in Etruria, and votive heads from a now unknown fourth-/third-century shrine.

The ongoing nature of the problem of looting was highlighted by including a selection from the recent repatriation in December 2021 of over 200 items from museums and private collections in the United States,⁶ as well as earlier operations, such as the seizure of a large cache of antiquities in Basel, and museum thefts going back to the 1980s. Providing an important and uncomfortable perspective on issues surrounding recently acquired collections of ancient art, ‘Museo dell’Arte Salvata’ lays emphasis on the international nature

³ R. Lanciani, *The Ruins and Excavations of Ancient Rome*. Boston and New York, 1897: 103–4; 406–9; M. Cima and E. La Rocca, *Le tranquille dimore degli dei*. Venice, 1986.

⁴ <https://museonazionaleromano.beniculturali.it/museoartosalvata/>; for images, see <https://www.artibureau.com/arti-visive/archeologia-arte-antica/2022/06/roma-museo-arte-salvata/> and <https://artemagazine.it/2022/06/15/nasce-a-roma-il-museo-dellarte-salvata-allinterno-del-museo-nazionale-romano/>

⁵ Including museums at Cerveteri, Tarquinia, Taranto, and Cerite.

⁶ For the story, see <https://www.thelocal.it/20211216/new-york-returns-200-stolen-antiquities-to-italy/>

of the problem and the process whereby the artefacts are laundered through markets in Switzerland and London. That the usually closed octagonal hall of the *terme* – which contains a number of fine sculptures from the baths of Caracalla and Diocletian – will now be open on a regular basis is also very welcome.

A particularly interesting new exhibition space is ‘FOROF’ in Palazzo Roccagiovine, the nineteenth-century building constructed over the north-eastern end of the basilica Ulpia. Excavations in the basement of the Palazzo between 2001 and 2004 uncovered significant and well-preserved remains of the marble paving of the Trajanic-era monument, and this is now incorporated into the FOROF exhibition space.⁷ Established by Giovanna Caruso Fendi, FOROF invites contemporary artists to install work amid, and responding to, the archaeology.⁸ This is a promising initiative, although visitors had to wait to be able to fully appreciate the *pavonazzetto*, *giallo antico* and *africano* marbles of the ancient floor, as the current art installation ‘responded’ to the archaeology by lighting the room entirely in red, thereby obscuring the ancient colours.

Palazzo Roccagiovine was formerly occupied by the offices of Fondazione Alda Fendi, which have now relocated to premises adjacent to the arch of Janus in the forum Boarium. In conjunction with this move, the archaeological area of the arch – closed for 28 years since the bomb explosion in front of San Giorgio al Velabro – has been restored and is open to the public on Saturdays.⁹

Another site reopened after many years is the Barberini Mithraeum.¹⁰ Located near Palazzo Barberini, under Palazzina Savorgnan di Brazzà, it was discovered in 1936. The shrine reuses a second-century AD, barrel-vaulted building, and the benches for worshipers, as well as the fresco of Mithras, remain *in situ*.

An exhibition on Giacomo Boni was held at the Parco archeologico del Colosseo. Like other exhibitions in the park, ‘Giacomo Boni. L’alba della modernità’ was spread across several locations.¹¹ The temple of Romulus was used to display objects relating to Boni’s early life, as well as the hot air balloon that was used to take aerial photographs of his excavations in the forum. On the Palatine Hill, the two aviaries of the *horti Farnesiani* were arranged using original furnishing to recreate the apartment-cum-studio where he lived and worked. In Santa Maria Antiqua there was a sparse display

⁷ On the excavation, see L. Scaroina and A. La Regina, ‘Resti della basilica Ulpia sotto il Palazzo Roccagiovine,’ in: *LTURS* 7 (2014) 167–181.

⁸ Information about the project can be found on the FOROF website <https://www.forof.it/en/who-we-are>.

⁹ <https://www.archaeoreporter.com/2021/11/13/arco-di-giano-a-roma-riaperto-alle-visite-dopo-28-anni-il-video-e-gli-orari-per-la-visita/>.

¹⁰ Details at https://www.soprintendenzaspecialeroma.it/schede/barberini-mithraeum_3016/.

¹¹ 15 December 2021–30 April (extended to 3 July) 2022, curated by Alfonsina Russo, Roberta Alteri, Andrea Paribeni with Patrizia Fortini, Alessio De Cristofaro, and Anna De Santis: <https://parocolosseo.it/evento/giacomo-boni-lalba-della-modernita-apre-il-15-dicembre-la-mostra-diffusa-tra-palatino-e-foro-romano/>; an accompanying catalogue with the same title and editors as the exhibition and curators, respectively, is published by Electa.

relating to the seventeenth-century church of Santa Maria Liberatrice, which was demolished during the course of his excavations.

As part of the exhibition the refurbished ground floor of the Antiquarium del Foro Romano was opened. The burials and cremations from the Iron Age Necropolis, which Boni discovered near the temple of the Divus Antoninus Pius and Faustina, have been moved to new cases and are now accompanied with informative and detailed interpretation. From the archaic period, material (mostly ceramics) from the areas of the Lapis Niger, the Regia, the temple of Vesta, and the votive deposit found on the Clivus Capitolinus between the temples of Vespasian and Concordia were arranged in their respective clusters. Also on display were the so-called ‘Doliola’ – the assemblage of five seventh-century BC vessels that were found carefully placed within the concrete core of an imperial-era monument in the forum square. Among other pieces included in the exhibition from the Boni excavations were the marble reliefs which depict scenes of Rome’s foundation story and the torsos of the Phrygian warriors from the basilica Aemilia/Paulli, as well as the epigraphic and sculptural finds relating to the Lacus Juturna.¹²

It is fantastic to see part of the Antiquarium open and work appears to be continuing on turning it into the new Museum of the Roman Forum.¹³ However, the former appearance of the Antiquarium – the clutter of marble and wooden display cabinets – had charm when compared to the now rather sterile whitewashed walls and bare cloister of Santa Maria Nova.

A small exhibition was held at Mercati di Traiano Museo dei Fori Imperiali. ‘L’elefante e il colle perduto’ detailed the destruction of the Velian Hill in 1931, during the construction of via dell’Impero (via dei Fori Imperiali).¹⁴ Distressingly illuminating drawings made at the time show the extent of the ridge which was removed – some 200 m ranging in height between 40 m and 60 m, running from the top of the rear of the basilica of Maxentius to the villa Rivaldi. On display also were designs by Antonio Muñoz for the architecture of this part of the via dell’Impero, as well as detailed watercolours of the geological stratification by Maria Barosso, who had earlier worked with Boni in the forum.

Antonio Maria Colini oversaw the excavations on the Velia, but the pace of the demolitions meant that there was much which was not properly documented.

¹² The recent (re)discovery in the Antiquarium del Foro Romano of the heads which relate to these bodies is mentioned in A. Claridge and C. Siwicki ‘Notes from Rome’ *PBSR* 87 (2019) 311–12.

¹³ Although whether the design presented in 2014 by Mario Bellini Architects is still being followed is unclear; for the design, see <https://bellini.it/portfolio-articoli/new-museum-of-the-forum/>.

¹⁴ 8 April–2 October 2022, curated by Claudio Parisi Presicce, Nicoletta Bernacchio, Isabella Damiani, Stefania Fogagnolo, and Massimiliano Munzi: <https://www.mercatiditraiano.it/it/mostra-evento/1932-l-elefante-e-il-colle-perduto?fbclid=IwAR1IXXS38LXUxTOXW110gRZ-qZhDjxlQPlcOfIu9F5Pl6U-FTd-8I-ICHBo>; an accompanying catalogue with the same title and editors as the exhibition and curators, respectively, is published by Campisano Editore.

A couple of cabinets contained an assortment of fragments of marble architectural decoration, frescos, statues, and ceramics, but again it was the contemporaneous illustrations in the exhibition that provided the best indication of the richness of the archaeology that was destroyed. This included a large imperial-era *domus* built on two levels with a colonnaded court on the upper one and a nymphaeum and cryptoporticus on the lower one.¹⁵ Watercolours of the latter feature show that there were two distinct phases of wall frescos dating to the late first/early second century AD and the late second/early third century AD, respectively. The residence is suggested to have become the property of the family of Attius Insteius Tertullius, urban prefect in AD 307, and it continued to be modified into the fifth century. The sixteenth-century Villa Rivaldi incorporated parts of the ancient structure into its garden design, although this too was victim to the clearances. The remains of the early-modern palazzo have been in a state of abandonment since the 1980s, but further funding for its restoration was announced in 2020¹⁶ and Minister for Culture Dario Franceschini touted it – perhaps over-optimistically – as a possible permanent location of the Torlonia marbles collections.¹⁷

The elephant of the title of the exhibition was discovered between the basilica of Maxentius and the temple of Venus and Roma in a palaeontological deposit, having once wandered along what was to be via dei Fori Imperiali some 370,000 to 460,000 years ago. Surviving are part of the skull and a tusk. As with the rest of the finds from the ‘excavation’, the elephant was moved to the Caelian Antiquarium, but after this museum closed at the end of the 1930s, it was boxed up and placed in storage. In 2021, conservation work on the skeleton was carried out and it was first displayed again in the exhibition ‘La scienza di Roma. Passato, presente e futuro di una città’ at Palazzo delle Esposizioni.¹⁸

The Capitoline Museums put on a small exhibition in Palazzo dei Conservatori, ‘Cursus Honorum: Il governa di Roma prima Cesare’.¹⁹ Focusing on the political career route for Republican-era politicians, the exhibition was narrated by voiceovers relating to five portrait statues: three anonymous magistrates carved in travertine and dated to the mid-first century BC from Villa Celimontana; the famous Togato Barberini; and a woman and daughter

¹⁵ On the *domus*, see G. Pisani Sartorio, ‘Una *domus* sotto il giardino del Pio Istituto Rivaldi sulla Velia’, *Anal. Rom. Inst. Dan. Supp* 10 (1983) 147–68.

¹⁶ https://roma.corriere.it/notizie/cronaca/20_agosto_24/roma-palazzo-silvestri-rivaldi-tanti-annunci-delusioni-de04ed00-e5d0-11ea-943c-b2c77e7530c9.shtml

¹⁷ <https://www.agenziacult.it/politica/museo-torlonia-franceschini-stato-metter-risorse-palazzo-silvestri-rivaldi-possibile-sede/>

¹⁸ 12 October 2021–27 February 2022, curated by Fabrizio Rufo and Stefano Papi: <https://www.palazzo-esposizioni.it/mostra/la-scienza-di-roma-passato-presente-e-futuro-di-una-citta>; an accompanying catalogue with the same title and editors as the exhibition and curators, respectively, is published in Italian and English by Azienda Speciale Palaexpo.

¹⁹ 24 March–2 October 2022, curated by Claudio Parisi Presicce e Isabella Damiani: <https://www.museicapitolini.org/en/node/1010481>; there is no accompanying print catalogue.

group carved in marble belonging to a funerary monument. Many of the other pieces were from the Capitoline collections and most are on permanent display. An interesting inclusion in the exhibition was a set of sixteenth-century marble *rostra* relating to the inscription from the base of the *columna rostrata* of Duilius put up after his naval victory over Carthage in 260 BC. These *rostra* were part of a replica column sculpted by Marchionne Aretino and erected atop the ancient base in 1574 following its discovery, but which was taken down in the 1920s.

Also at the Capitoline Museums was the exhibition ‘I Colori dell’Antico. Marmi Santarelli ai Musei Capitolini’.²⁰ Occupying two rooms next to the medallion and coin gallery, this modest but informative installation comprised an assortment of some 660 cut and polished tiles, as well as some architectural and sculptural fragments of coloured marbles, alabasters, and granites from both the permanent Capitoline Collections and the Fondazione Dino ed Ernesta Santarelli, as part of a ten-year loan.

A selection of frescos from the imperial-era *domus* discovered underneath the terme di Caracalla were on display at the baths for the first time in thirty years. Excavated between 1860–67, the *domus* dates to the Hadrianic period and was partially destroyed and buried in order to build the Antonine bathing complex.²¹ The frescos, which were removed from their walls in the 1970s due to preservation concerns, belong to a *triclinium* and what is plausibly interpreted as a *lararium*.²² The high-quality frescos of the *triclinium* are from the ceiling of the room and depict Dionysiac figures and motifs in red cinnabar and Egyptian blue. The so-called ‘lararium’ is a small, barrel-vaulted chamber, the walls and ceiling of which were decorated with two phases of frescos. The initial cycle dates to the first half of the second century AD, before then being adapted a few decades later. The frescos of the latter phase are notable for the inclusion of images of the Capitoline triad, Isis, and Anubis within a single space.

Finally, a museum and library on the history of food, ‘Garum: Biblioteca e Museo della Cucina’, has been installed behind the unusual seventeenth-century ‘mano di Cicerone’ façade on via dei Cerchi, which once formed part of a farmhouse connected to the Farnese property on the Palatine Hill.²³ Although the collection primarily concerns cooking from the early-modern period onward, upon entering the museum it is possible to see the *opus latericium* walls of a multi-storey ancient *insula* into which the later structures have been built.

²⁰ 13 April 2022–30 April 2022, curated by Vittoria Bonifati: <https://www.museicapitolini.org/en/node/1010560>.

²¹ On the *domus*, see A. Pellegini, ‘Orti di Asinio Pollione’, *BdI*, 1867: 109–119; R. Lanciani, *The Ruins and Excavations of Ancient Rome*. Boston and New York, 1897: 533–4.

²² The *domus* itself is some 10 metres underground and was not visitable; only the detached frescos were on show in a separate space.

²³ For information, see the museum website: <https://www.museodellacucina.com/en/libray-and-museum/>.

Excavations

In January 2022, works by Rome's water company Acea ato2 along via Luigi Tosti in Quartiere Appio Latino unearthed the remains of three tombs, dating to between the first century BC and the first century AD.²⁴ The tombs relate to the necropolis which lined the adjacent via Latina and are a little over one and a half kilometres from the Parco archeologico delle Tombe di via Latina. Excavated under the auspices of the Soprintendenza Speciale di Roma, the structures were found approximately half a metre below the current street level and had been 'partially compromised' by previous construction and utilities works. While one building has been reduced to its *opus caementicium* base, the other two are constructed, respectively, with walls of ashlar Grotta Oscura tuff and *opus reticulatum*. At a lower depth of one and a half metres were an intact cinerary urn and an inhumation burial of a young man. The tombs were built into the face of an abandoned pozzolana quarry and among the finds from this earlier context, an otherwise unremarkable dog-shaped terracotta antefix garnered international media interest.

Further work by Acea in via Luigi Tosti led to the discovery in May of a small *columbarium*, which had also been badly damaged by construction in the first half of the twentieth century.²⁵ Cut into the natural tuff and likely a *hypogeum* it measures 4 × 3 m, with walls of *opus latericium* coated with red and yellow painted stucco imitating marble ashlar. Fragments of a marble sarcophagus of the *lenòs* type showing a hunting scene of a rider, dog, and lioness were uncovered, as well as a well-preserved marble funerary altar. Dedicated to a thirteen-year-old girl and dated to the second century AD, the inscription reads VALERIA / P F / LAETA / VIXIT ANNIS / XIII M VII.

Staying on the via Latina, in October 2021, Sapienza Università di Roma reported the excavation of a small stretch of the road in the archaeological area of the Villa of Sette Bassi.²⁶ Although heavily disturbed, the basalt paving was found to measure 3.8 m in width and the excavation confirmed the hypothesised straight route of the via Latina for this stretch.

The Danish–Italian 'Caesar's Forum Project' continues to excavate in the first of the imperial fora. Inaugurated in 2017 (digging began in 2019), the stated aim is to study the urban development of a section of the south-eastern end of the

²⁴ For images of the excavation, see <https://www.romatoday.it/attualita/reperti-archeologici-romani-appio-latino-via-tosti.html> and <https://www.artribune.com/arti-visive/archeologia-arte-antica/2022/01/nuove-scoperte-archeologiche-a-roma-emergono-tre-mausolei-lungo-lantica-via-latina/>.

²⁵ For images of the excavation, see <https://www.romatoday.it/zone/sangioanni/appio-latino/appio-latino-ritrovamento-sepolcra-via-tosti.html> and <https://www.archaeoreporter.com/2022/05/04/lara-della-tredicenne-valeria-laeta-nuova-scoperta-archeologica-a-roma-in-via-luigi-tosti-dalla-necropoli-della-via-latina/>.

²⁶ The excavation was a collaboration between Sapienza, Roma Tre and the Parco Archeologico dell'Appia Antica; for details, see <https://www.uniroma1.it/it/notizia/ritornato-alla-luce-un-tratto-della-antica-latina-roma>.

forum from the archaic period to the twentieth century.²⁷ In previous years, the project explored the modern and early-modern remains of the former Alessandrino neighbourhood and in 2021/2022 medieval and ancient layers were reached.²⁸ As known from prior excavations of the imperial fora, much of the space was given over to agriculture in the early Middle Ages and the project found further evidence of this activity, including remains of single-room farm buildings (*domus terrineae*) built of *spolia*. Although some architectural fragments were discovered, including granite columns from the portico of Caesar's forum, in places it appears that the medieval farmers removed the imperial-era layers from this area of the forum in order to access the soil underneath. The excavators came down directly onto traces of the archaic city, including the floor and walls of a sixth-century BC building and four infant burials dated to the first half of that century.²⁹ An update on the project this May reported that a drainage channel directly relating to Caesar's forum was also explored in early 2022 and yielded a variety of finds from the first century BC to first century AD, including dice, jewellery, ceramics, and over 1,500 shards of high-quality glass.³⁰

Elsewhere, another fragment of the Severan Forma Urbis has been found. The newly discovered piece was presented at a conference in March 2022 at Palazzo della Cancelleria.³¹ Visible on the fragment are the walls of a structure and the letters NEVM, reconstructed to [BAL]NEVM. The piece was found within the grounds of a property on the Aventine Hill adjacent to Piazza del Tempio di Diana, having been reused face down as a paving slab in the garden.³²

Restoration and Conservation

Restorations continue or have begun on a number of ancient monuments across the city. Scaffolding went up on the arches of Septimius Severus and Constantine, the column of Phocas, the house of the Vestals in the forum, and the villa Gordiani out on the via Prenestina. The project for the latter site involves the installation of a staircase to make the mausoleum accessible. On

²⁷ The project is a collaboration between the Danish National Research Foundation's Centre of Excellence, Centre for Urban Network Evolutions, the Danish Institute in Rome, and Sovrintendenza Capitolina ai Beni Culturali; for details, see <https://cas.au.dk/en/cfp/about-the-project>.

²⁸ J. Kindberg Jacobsen, C. Parisi Presicce, R. Raja, and M. Vitti, 'Excavating Caesar's Forum: present results of the Caesar's Forum Project', *AnalRom* 44 (2019) 239–45.

²⁹ As reported to *The Past*: <https://the-past.com/feature/digging-caesars-forum-three-thousand-years-of-daily-life-in-rome/>.

³⁰ For further details and videos, see the interview with J. Kindberg Jacobsen on the website of the Carlsberg Foundation, who are a sponsor of the excavation: <https://www.carlsbergfondet.dk/da/Nyheder/Nyt-fra-fondet/Nyheder/Boernegrave-gravet-frem-af-jorden-under-Caesars-Forum>.

³¹ The paper was presented by Letizia Rustico; for the conference programme, see <http://www.pont-ara.org/index.php?module=crpCalendar&func=display&eventid=115>.

³² The fragment will be published in *Archeologia Classica* 2022.

the Palatine Hill, water features are operating in the fountain of the sunken court of the Domus Augustana, providing some level of interpretation and enjoyment to visitors. The Mausoleum of Augustus – the opening of which was covered in the previous Notes from Rome³³ – has closed again to allow for further works in piazza Augusto Imperatore; it is promised to reopen temporarily in October.³⁴

Important investments in the archaeological heritage of Rome continue to be made by some of Italy's luxury fashion brands. Fendi sponsored the restoration of the temple of Venus and Roma, and the northern *cella* with its porphyry columns and paving is now accessible.³⁵ After remaining a much looked-at but poorly explained rectangular hole in the ground for almost 90 years, work is underway in Area Sacra di Largo Argentina, known for its four Republican-era temples and invasive cats. Funded by Bulgari, the project will install a visitor path descending to the ancient ground level at the southern end of the site. At the modern street level the medieval Torre del Papito will be turned into a ticket office and bookshop and a small museum installed in the portico displaying finds from the area.³⁶

At the Colosseum landscaping has taken place to try to improve the appearance of the piazza at the southern end, although the worksite relating to Metro C continues to blight the approach from via Fori Imperiali. In mid-2021 the second phase of the multi-million-euro restoration of the amphitheatre sponsored by Tod's was completed, which focused on the *hypogeum*.³⁷ The winning entry for the competition to design a new floor for the Colosseum was also unveiled in 2021. It is designed by a team comprising the Italian engineering practice Milan Ingegneria, the architect Fabio Fumagalli, and the architectural practice Labics. The floor is to be built using slats of sustainably-sourced Accoya wood, the arrangement of which matches the corridors and spaces underneath. These slats are rotational, allowing light and air into the substructures, controlling the humidity, and preventing damage to the archaeology. The floor will also retract, revealing the structures below and allowing for the surface to be used in potentially creative ways. The danger of the accumulation of moisture is to be countered by the installation of a system for collecting rainwater, which then recycles it for use in the toilets. When complete it will allow visitors to experience both walking out onto the arena and also to descend below it, as well as increasing the opportunity to use the space for events.³⁸

Certain restoration works are also being funded by less-expected sources. In 2021, a new agreement was signed between the Azerbaijani Heydar Aliyev Foundation and

³³ R. Coates-Stephens 'Notes from Rome' *PBSR* 89 (2021) 335–36.

³⁴ For the dates, see <https://www.mausoleodiaugusto.it/en/booking/>.

³⁵ The restoration and a fashion show held on the temple in 2019 are published in a suitably stylish and high-quality volume *Il Tempio di Venere e Roma* (2022), edited by A. Russo, M. Almonte, and I. Arletti.

³⁶ For more details about the project and some images, see <https://www.artribune.com/arti-visive/archeologia-arte-antica/2021/04/roma-area-sacra-largo-argentina-finanziamento-bulgari/>.

³⁷ On the project, see <https://www.todsgroup.com/en/sustainability/colosseum-restoration-hypogea>.

³⁸ For a video explaining the design, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pxQ2z5YMMFM&t=158s>. Further comment on the merits of the project can be found at <https://www.artandobject.com/news/new-floor-romes-colosseum-what-you-need-know>.

the Pontificia Commissione di Archeologia Sacra to undertake the restoration of the ancient catacombs of Commodilla, which date from the fourth century AD and are located in Rome's Garbatella quarter.³⁹ This donation by the Azerbaijani 'non-governmental' organization (the president of the foundation is the Vice President and First Lady of the country and the vice president of the foundation is the First Lady and the President of Azerbaijan's daughter) follows similar agreements which led to the restoration of the catacombs of Santi Marcellino and Pietro on the via Casilina between 2012 and 2014,⁴⁰ and the catacombs of San Sebastiano on the via Appia between 2016 and 2018.⁴¹

A programme of anastylosis is occurring in the basilica Ulpia, with an architrave and three cipollino columns being installed above a section of the long-re-erected granite columns, thereby restoring the basilica to the height of its second storey.⁴² The origins of the scheme go back to former Mayor of Rome Ignazio Marino (2013–15) and can be seen in the context of a number of initiatives from his tenure regarding the imperial fora, including the creation of seven columns in the temple of Peace⁴³ and the excavation/demolition of the via Alessandrina (paid for by the ministry of culture of Azerbaijan).⁴⁴ The basilica Ulpia project was funded by a 1.5 million euro donation made in 2015 by the billionaire business-magnate Alistair Usmanov, head of the Russian holding company USM. Sanctioned by the EU in 2022 following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, at the time of writing, his name remains on the signage at site.

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³⁹ Details at <http://www.latinitas.va/content/dam/cultura/docs/comunicatistampa/commodilla.pdf> and <https://www.azernews.az/culture/176924.html>.

⁴⁰ Details at <https://heydar-aliyev-foundation.org/en/content/view/104/496/The-Heydar-Aliyev-Foundation-and-Vatican-signed-a-bilateral-agreement-on-restoration-of-Roman-catacombs>.

⁴¹ Details at <https://caspiannews.com/news-detail/heydar-aliyev-foundation-inaugurates-renovated-catacombs-in-rome-2018-9-28-41/> and <https://heydar-aliyev-foundation.org/en/content/view/145/4696/Opening-of-Saint-Sebastian-catacombs-takes-place-in-Vatican->.

⁴² For the original story, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-italy-art-usmanov-idUSKBN0N51Q120150414> and as it was reported in 2022, https://roma.repubblica.it/cronaca/2022/03/06/news/loligarca_russo_e_i_soldi_per_il_quirinale_e_i_musei_capitolini-340441780/ On the funding and delay, also see the comments by former Mayor Marino, <http://www.ignaziomarinno.it/scavi-archeologici-via-alessandrina-parco-archeologico-roma/>.

⁴³ On re-erecting the columns of the temple of peace, see https://www.ansa.it/english/news/lifestyle/arts/2015/02/12/temple-of-peace-to-be-restored-for-rome_1686a4e2-464c-4a22-9fc5-8b9ec17d107b.html#:~:text=With%20reconstruction%20work%20set%20to,Cultural%20Heritage%20Claudio%20Parisi%20Presicce and https://www.ansa.it/english/news/lifestyle/arts/2015/03/20/temple-of-peace-to-get-restored-columns_ec598c9f-f2cd-42b6-9aae-546cbc8ff0b3.html.

⁴⁴ On the via Alessandrina excavation, see A. Claridge and C. Siwicki 'Notes from Rome' *PBSR* 87 (2019) 309.