

NOTES FROM ROME 2016–17

by Robert Coates-Stephens

This gazette presents to the reader outside Rome news of recent archaeological activity (primarily in 2016, but also in the first part of 2017), 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 (principalmente per il 2016, ma anche per gli inizi del 2017), tratte da conferenze, convegni, mostre e relazioni su giornali.

As has been the case for much of the last ten years, the most notable archaeological discoveries in 2016–17 have concerned the works for the new Metro C, which has now reached the city walls and is working its way beneath the Caelian from San Giovanni to the Colosseum.¹ In Via Sannio the remains of a suburban garden property were encountered, dating to the mid-first century AD. A portico bordered a small watercourse, parallel to which was a triple row of *olle perforate*, that is, pots buried in the soil for the planting of shrubs or small trees. In the Severan period a wall was built, dividing the portico from the watercourse. No remains of living quarters were encountered, which raised the possibility that the garden may have formed a part of the property whose residential zone is represented by the houses which survive beneath the basilica of S. Giovanni in Laterano, just 100 m to the north.² In Via Amba Aradam, near the junction with Via della Ferratella, the excavation of an air shaft brought to light two rooms of a Trajanic building in *opus mixtum* whose first floor had collapsed in a fire.³ Exceptionally for Rome, the timber ceiling of the first-floor chamber was preserved, together with two wooden furniture legs. The bones of a dog, trapped at the moment of the building's collapse, were found. The initial hypothesis is that this is a part of

¹ Notices in R. Coates-Stephens, 'Notes from Rome', *Papers of the British School at Rome* 76–84 (2008–16). Finds have included the so-called Athenaeum in piazza Venezia (2009, 292 and 2012, 326–7), the Stagnum of Agrippa (2010, 291), a suburban irrigation complex and a 'lost' stretch of the Aurelian Walls (2015, 285–6), and a second-century AD barracks at Porta Metronia (2016, 299).

² The excavations were illustrated in a lecture by the site director, Rossella Rea (Special Superintendence for the Colosseum and the Archaeological Heritage of Rome (SSCol)), at a conference on the Lateran held at the British School at Rome in September 2016. Dott.ssa Rea also furnished more details on the barracks found last year at Porta Metronia. The conference will be published as: Lex Bosman, Ian Haynes and Paolo Liverani, *The Lateran Basilica* (forthcoming).

³ The news emerged as these Notes were going to press, at a press conference held by the site director, Simona Morretta (SSCol). See *La Repubblica* 26 June 2017; *Corriere della Sera* 27 June 2017 (newspaper reports cited here may be found at www.patrimoniosos.it in the Rassegna Stampa section).

the same complex of barracks found nearby last year, perhaps the officers' quarters, or part of a thermal wing.⁴

The most exciting find in the new stretch of tunnelling was made during the excavation of an air shaft on the Caelian, directly in front of the Military Hospital in Piazza Celimontana. Due to the nature of the works an exceptional depth was reached, leading to the discovery, a full 18 m beneath current ground level, of an ancient underground aqueduct, built of *cappellaccio* blocks.⁵ The remains encountered ran in a westerly direction for 32 m, with a *specus* of *c.* 2 m in height. The channel abutted (and partially demolished) a large tufa water basin, also built of *cappellaccio*. The pottery from the aqueduct's foundation trench suggested a date for its construction in the early third century BC — broadly consonant, therefore, with that of the Anio Vetus (*c.* 272 BC). However, given its great depth and, above all, its location, the hypothesis of the excavators is that the monument is Rome's oldest aqueduct, the Aqua Appia, which according to Frontinus was completed in 312 BC.⁶ The remains were dismantled and are now in storage, awaiting reassembly and eventual display in a museum space yet to be assigned.

The new metro line will effect interchanges with Linea A at San Giovanni and Linea B at Colosseo stations. During works for the latter, the remains of a fountain basin were found, in an excavation below the colonnades of the Temple of Venus and Rome.⁷ The new station at San Giovanni is expected to open in autumn 2017, but two open days were held in the spring, during which the public was able to admire its integration of archaeology and architecture, whereby the visitor descends three levels to the platforms, each laid out with the finds and explanatory panels relating to the stratigraphy encountered during the building's construction.⁸ The displays in the ticket offices feature objects found at the upper, post-antique levels (such as Renaissance pottery), including much reused and redeposited ancient material (marble architectural fragments). The intermediate, or interchange, level contains the important finds from the late Republican and first-century AD agricultural site.⁹ Arrowheads and fish

⁴ See R. Coates-Stephens, 'Notes from Rome', *Papers of the British School at Rome* 84 (2016), 299.

⁵ The find was announced by the site directors, Simona Morretta and Paola Palazzo, during a conference held in April 2017 devoted to recent research on Middle Republican Rome organized by the British School at Rome in collaboration with the Sapienza University of Rome and the city's archaeological superintendencies. For a provisional notice, see *Corriere della Sera* 4 April 2017.

⁶ Frontinus, *De Aquaeductu Urbis Romae* 5–6 and 21. The Appia ran from Spes Vetus towards the Porta Capena, and was also Rome's deepest aqueduct; Frontinus says nothing about the Anio Vetus (which, although subterranean, ran at a higher level than the Appia) crossing the Caelian. See T. Ashby, *The Aqueducts of Ancient Rome* (Oxford, 1935), 49–56.

⁷ *La Repubblica* 9 March 2017.

⁸ Explanatory notes and photographs may be found at <http://metrocsa.it/allestimento-positivo-stazione-san-giovanni/>.

⁹ See R. Coates-Stephens, 'Notes from Rome', *Papers of the British School at Rome* 83 (2015), 285.

hooks, fragments of wicker baskets and wooden garden tools, even peach stones and pine cones, are displayed, as well as an unusual assemblage of fragments of terracotta animal statues. Most impressive is the elaborate irrigation system used to supply the estate: over 60 m of terracotta channels and pipes were found, some with their bronze sprinklers still intact. The plan of the great open water basin (originally measuring c. 70 m × 35 m) is marked out in the modern pavement. Finally, at the lowest, platform level, the visitor reaches the Pleistocene strata, whose characteristics inspire the decoration and text of the modern walls.

Other excavations inside the city received less attention in the media. Building works to convert the former *Il Messaggero* printing press in Via Urbana, next to S. Pudenziana, into apartments revealed second-century AD insulae fronting onto the Vicus Patricius.¹⁰ Overlying Republican terracing walls some 8 m beneath modern ground level, two blocks of a Hadrianic complex divided by a courtyard were encountered, with Severan additions. The structure survived up to its first-floor level, with pavements in mosaic and *opus spicatum*. In January 2017 a polychrome floor mosaic representing gardens and landscapes was found in piazza Dante on the Esquiline during building works in the Cassa Depositi e Prestiti edifice.¹¹ The ancient complex to which it belonged had already been investigated by Giuseppe Gatti in 1909, but the building's original pavement level had not been reached till now.¹² The apsed hall is perhaps a nymphaeum belonging to the Horti Lamiani. A plan to re-lay the mosaic in a specially constructed building in the piazza was rejected by local residents, who prefer the space's current function as a (real) garden.

In the suburbs, discoveries comprised tombs and aqueducts. Additional research on the important necropolis at the fifth mile of the Via Flaminia, wherein was discovered the remains of the mausoleum of M. Nonnius Macrinus (so-called Tomba del Gladiatore) in 2008, revealed that the entire funerary zone was devoted to the tombs of the military.¹³ Many stelae of Praetorians have been found, and remains of a finely decorated marble tomb of

¹⁰ *Il Messaggero* 20 October 2016. The project, which started in 2012, was directed by Mirella Serlorenzi (SSCol) in collaboration with the Cooperativa Archeologia. For a useful preliminary report, see M. Serlorenzi, S. Morretta, G. Ricci and R. Bianco, 'Appendice. *Domus e horrea lungo il vicus Patricius*', in A. Carandini and P. Carafa (eds), *Atlante di Roma antica* (Milan, 2012), 474–6.

¹¹ *Corriere della Sera* 2 February 2017. The precise location is on the corner of Via Ariosto and Via Galilei. The news was announced by Mirella Serlorenzi at Palazzo Massimo.

¹² G. Gatti, 'Notizie di recenti trovamenti di antichità in Roma e nel suburbio', *Bullettino della Commissione Archeologica Comunale di Roma* 37 (1909), 290–318, at pp. 290–2. Some fresh information, including archival material, in E. Castillo Ramírez, 'Excavaciones arqueológicas en la via Ariosto. IIIª zona del Esquilino (1874–2006). Primera parte: restos arquitectónicos', *Bullettino della Commissione Archeologica Comunale di Roma* 113 (2012), 97–155, at pp. 142–4.

¹³ *La Repubblica* 28 November 2016. For the mausoleum of Macrinus, mentioned in 'Notes from Rome', *Papers of the British School at Rome* 77 (2009), 293, and 81 (2013), 345, see D. Rossi (ed.), *Il mausoleo di Marco Nonio Macrino sulla via Flaminia* (Milan, 2012).

the Julio-Claudian period, belonging to an official of equestrian rank.¹⁴ In the late antique period, one of the tombs had been converted to a workshop for the washing and dyeing of textiles (*fullonica*). Excavations at Casal Bernocchi at the fifth mile of the Via Ostiensis, where a new Orthodox church is being built, have revealed a small rural settlement with a bath complex adjacent to a necropolis.¹⁵ The bath and a rectangular columbarium preserved their floor mosaics. The restoration of the aqueduct of the Villa of the Quintilii, whose slender brick arches form such an evocative sight on the road from Ciampino airport, was completed in April 2017. The works revealed the exceptional survival of four chestnut beams, preserved in the piers where they had been embedded during the original construction in the Hadrianic period to support the centring of the arches.¹⁶ One fragment even preserved its bark. On the Via Prenestina, attention was redirected to the Aqua Appia. During building works for the enormous ‘Nuovo Centro Servizi Prenestino’ near the junction with Via Palmiro Togliatti, ancient inspection shafts (*putei*) were found dug into the tufa bedrock, leading to an underground aqueduct, 21 m beneath ground level, running east–west.¹⁷ Speleologists explored the channel for a distance of c. 50 m, noting that the vault of the *specus* was constructed in ancient concrete. The initial hypothesis is that this is either a rebuilt section of the Aqua Appia, or else the Augustan *ramus Augustae*, both of which are recorded here by Frontinus.¹⁸ In the same area (the new *quartiere Prampolini*), the archaeologists encountered what the newspaper described as two fourth-century AD temple tombs, next to the remains of a lime kiln.

As ever, the restoration of major archaeological monuments has been an important theme this year. The investigations carried out over the last eight years at the southern end of the Circus Maximus, which have revealed the remains of the Arch of Titus and partially reconstructed the ground-floor ambulatory, were completed and the site opened to the public.¹⁹ The terrible series of earthquakes which devastated great parts of Abruzzo and Umbria between August 2016 and January 2017 caused little damage in Rome, but when in January 2017 a large portion of the facing of the Aurelian Walls between the Porta Salaria and the Praetorian Camp fell, the authorities were

¹⁴ For the latest batch of Praetorians’ inscriptions, see G.L. Gregori, ‘Altre stele di militari dal V–VI miglio dall’antica via Flaminia’, *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 201 (2017), 297–303.

¹⁵ *Corriere della Sera* 6 July 2016. Works began in the summer of 2015. The excavation was directed by Alessandro D’Alessio (SSCol).

¹⁶ *Il Messaggero* 22 April 2017. The works, which began in 2015, were directed by Rita Paris (SSCol).

¹⁷ *La Repubblica* 16 April 2017. The works were directed by Stefano Musco (SSCol).

¹⁸ Frontinus, *De Aquaeductu Urbis Romae* 5; cf. T. Ashby, *The Aqueducts of Ancient Rome* (Oxford, 1935), 49–51.

¹⁹ See ‘Notes from Rome’, *Papers of the British School at Rome* 79 (2011), 357, and 83 (2015), 286. The monument is open at weekends and during the week by appointment (Tuesday–Friday).

swift to advance the tremors as a cause.²⁰ Polemic was aroused in the press, with the widespread suspicion that the lack of regular maintenance over decades was a more likely reason.²¹ In May 2017 during restoration of the Arch of Janus in the Forum Boarium a discovery made some time ago by a Spanish team was rebroadcast and captured the interest of the Italian media. Archaeologists from the University of Mérida, who have been surveying the monument since 2011, had photographed an inscription in secondary use inside the staircase to the attic storey which bore a dedication to Constantine, thus going some way to confirming the generally accepted hypothesis that the arch is to be identified with the Reginary Catalogues' *Arcus Divi Constantini*.²²

At the Catacombs of Domitilla, major works to clean and restore the complex's rich assemblage of third- and fourth-century frescos have also led to the installation of a small lapidarium, displaying sculptural finds from this and other catacombs.²³ Monumental Attic sarcophagi from the above-ground areas of the Catacombs of Praetextatus (featuring the Seasons, Endymion, and scenes from the life of Achilles) were partially reconstructed, together with inscriptions (including the famous epitaph of Cucumius, the Christian cloakroom attendant, or *capsararius*, of the Baths of Caracalla in the late fourth century) and funerary portraits. Amongst the latter was an interesting case of the reuse of ancient sculpture: in the late fourth century an early imperial herm of a male divinity had its genitals removed and was re-carved to represent a woman.

Two exhibitions held in 2017 explored and documented the daily life and urbanism of two notable ancient monuments in the post-antique period. '*I fori dopo i fori*', held at the Markets of Trajan from March to September, displayed finds from the medieval and modern settlement of the imperial fora zone: marble architectural furnishings from the early medieval churches, thirteenth-

²⁰ *La Repubblica* 28 January 2017. The damaged curtain is adjacent to Via Montebello, opposite the Palazzo delle Ferrovie dello Stato. In November 2016, after the first wave of earthquakes, the Superintendency of *Roma Capitale* announced that despite cracks appearing in the Walls they remained 'absolutely safe' (*Artemagazine* 3 November 2016).

²¹ *Il Fatto Quotidiano* 29 January 2017; *Corriere della Sera* 16 May 2017 (interview with the architect Rossana Mancini, author of *Le Mura Aureliane di Roma. Atlante di un palinsesto murario* (Rome, 2001)).

²² *Corriere della Sera* 18 May 2017. The inscription thus provides a *terminus post quem* in the reign of Constantine, which would be consonant with a construction date under Constantius. For a preliminary report on the works, with a photograph of the inscription, see P.M. Cruz and A. Pizzo, 'Excavaciones arqueológicas en el Arco de Giano, en el foro Boario de Roma', *Informes y Trabajos del Instituto de Conservación y Restauración de Obras de Arte* 11 (2014), 31–6. An in-depth study by the same authors is in press with the *Journal of Roman Studies*. On the identification of the arch, see P. Pensabene and C. Panella, 'Reimpiego e progettazione architettonica nei monumenti tardo-antichi di Roma II. Arco quadrifonte ("Giano") del Foro Boario', *Atti della Pontificia Accademia Romana di Archeologia: Rendiconti* 67 (1994–5), 25–67.

²³ The works were inaugurated at a press conference in May 2017. A new volume on the complex was presented: F. Bisconti (ed.), *Catacombe di Domitilla. Restauri nel tempo* (Vatican City 2017). For a similar project at the neighbouring Catacombs of Callistus, see 'Notes from Rome', *Papers of the British School at Rome* 84 (2016), 302–3.

and sixteenth-century coin hoards, pottery (including tenth-/eleventh-century *vetrina pesante* and sixteenth-century *maiolica*, some from the large kiln excavated some years ago in the Forum of Trajan), and even everyday objects (spectacles, razor blades) from the last phases of life of the Quartiere Alessandrino prior to the demolitions of the 1920s.²⁴ ‘Colosseo. Un'icona’, held at the Colosseum from March 2017 to January 2018, followed the afterlife of the Flavian amphitheatre through the Middle Ages and into the era of the Grand Tour, focusing in addition on the monument's influence on early modern and modern popular culture.²⁵ The archaeological component of the exhibition comprised finds from the Roma Tre University's excavations of medieval habitation levels in the ground floor *cunei* III, IX and X, mentioned in ‘Notes from Rome’ 2011–12: animal bones, pottery and items of clothing (buttons, studs and a bronze plaque).²⁶

The juxtaposition of the modern and ancient has been the leitmotif of this year's gazette. We started with the display of ancient artefacts in a modern metro station and finish now with a surprisingly modern addition to Rome's Capitoline collections. The train of Pope Pius IX, Italy's first, has become a permanent exhibit at the Montemartini Museum, the former power station which since 1997 has been home to some of the city's most important pictorial and sculptural objects. The papal contraption consists of three carriages, built by a French company in 1858 at a cost of 140,000 francs. The first wagon, the *balconata*, is equipped with its own loggia for papal benedictions. The second is a private apartment with throne room, and the third a chapel painted by Gérôme. Silver-plated angels and button-backed tapestry settees take their place in a new hall reclaimed from the power station's boiler rooms, next to the early Republican finds from the Esquiline necropolis and the Barberini *togatus*.²⁷

²⁴ Catalogue: N. Bernacchio and R. Meneghini (eds), *I fori dopo i fori* (Rome, 2017).

²⁵ A collection of essays accompanied the exhibition: R. Rea, S. Romano and R. Santangeli Valenzani (eds), *Colosseo* (Milan, 2017).

²⁶ R. Coates-Stephens, ‘Notes from Rome’, *Papers of the British School at Rome* 80 (2012), 328. The aforementioned volume includes an introduction to the excavations: R. Santangeli Valenzani and G. Facchin, ‘Il Colosseo nel medioevo tra baroni, preti e mercanti’, 66–75.

²⁷ On the papal train (previously displayed at the Museo di Roma), see E. Ricci, ‘Il treno di Pio IX’, *Rivista Storica del Lazio* 10.5 (2002), 40–5.