

## NOTES FROM ROME 2015–16

by Robert Coates-Stephens

*This gazette presents to the reader outside Rome news of recent archaeological activity (primarily in 2015, but also in the first part of 2016), 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 2015, ma anche per gli inizi del 2016), tratte da conferenze, convegni, mostre e relazioni su giornali.*

The year's most surprising discovery was made in late 2015 during the construction of the new Metro C underground station at Amba Aradam, immediately outside the Walls in via Ipponio, between Porta S. Giovanni and Porta Metronia.<sup>1</sup> A large barracks, of Hadrianic date, was found 9 m beneath modern ground level, covering an excavated area of 1,753 square metres, and formed of parallel corridors (over 100 m in length) from which 39 rooms opened. The rooms, whose walls had been cut off at the height of 1.5 m during the construction of the Aurelian Walls in the 270s, were decorated with simple fresco and black-and-white geometric floor mosaics. Twelve burials of fifth-century date were found amongst the fill, together with two statue heads and various small finds (amphorae, coins, animal bones). No obvious textual references to the barracks have been noted, but the wider area of the Caelian is well-known for the presence of the two *Castra* of the *Equites Singulares* (horseguards) at the Lateran, as well as those of the *Peregrini* (foreign auxiliaries) and *Vigiles* (night watchmen) towards S. Stefano Rotondo. At the time of writing, the intention is to dismantle the structures and relocate them in a new archaeological area inside the projected underground station.

Important information continues to emerge from the site of the early temple beneath the former Istituto di Geologia on the Quirinal near S. Susanna, mentioned in the 'Notes' for 2013–14. Shortly after the results of the first phase of excavations had been published with admirable speed, intriguing new discoveries were made, and announced to the media in September 2015.<sup>2</sup> In an

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<sup>1</sup> The discovery was revealed at a press conference held by the director of the excavations, Rosella Rea (SS-Col), in May 2016. See *Corriere della Sera* 17 May 2016; *La Repubblica* 17 May 2016 (newspaper reports cited here may be found at [www.patrimoniosos.it](http://www.patrimoniosos.it) in the Rassegna Stampa section).

<sup>2</sup> M. Arizza, M. Serlorenzi (eds), *La scoperta di una struttura templare sul Quirinale presso l'ex Regio Ufficio Geologico* (Rome 2015). The temple podium (measuring 42 m × 29 m) dates to the late sixth/early fifth century BC, with a rebuilding phase in the third century BC. For the new discoveries, see *Corriere della Sera* 10 September 2015; *La Repubblica* 10 September 2015.

area just inside the Servian Walls, an early sixth-century house has been found, immediately next to the temple. The building preserves three courses of its stone footings, and fragments of tile from the collapsed roof. The full plan was estimated to be *c.* 3.5 × 10 m. Loom weights and pottery were found. With the construction of the temple (or a little earlier), the house was put out of use. The interpretation of both house and temple, and especially their relationship, is awaited.<sup>3</sup>

Another major discovery of recent years to be substantially elaborated in 2015–16 was that of Nero's round dining room on the Palatine, identified in 2009 during excavations carried out by the École Française de Rome in the Vigna Barberini.<sup>4</sup> At a conference illustrating old and new work on the Palatine, held in January 2016 at the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, the École Française and Palazzo Altemps, Françoise Villedieu revealed that in enlarging the excavation the basement of the round structure was found to have had a circumference of 26 m, and not the 12 m reported previously.<sup>5</sup> A spiral staircase discovered inside the central 'spindle' of the substructure was investigated, enabling the full height of the basement to be revealed as *c.* 20 m. The overlying circular hall would therefore have risen to a similar height as the nearby Colossus. Additional fragments of the metal mechanism for turning the dining room were recovered, although most had been spoliated prior to the burial of the basement in an enormous embankment wall during the Flavian period.

The newspapers gave scanty details of two other archaeological finds from the city centre. On the Aventine, works to convert the old Banca Nazionale del Lavoro in piazza Albania into apartments uncovered floor mosaics and fragments of standing walls, assigned to a *domus*, which had been partially destroyed by the bank's original construction in the 1960s.<sup>6</sup> It is planned that the mosaics will be lifted and placed on display on the ground floor of the new residential complex. On the Esquiline, a large unexcavated ancient chamber decorated with two layers of fresco came to light during roadworks in via La Marmora off piazza Vittorio Emanuele.<sup>7</sup> Initial explorations suggested the hall, some

<sup>3</sup> The following tentative identifications of the temple have been proposed to now: Hora-Quirini (Arizza, Serlorenzi 2015 ([cit. n. 2], 147–65); Silvanus (A. Carandini, P. Carafa (eds) *Atlante di Roma antica*, Milan 2012, 452); a sanctuary of the Argei (F. Coarelli, *Collis*, Rome 2014, 33). Quirinus is sure to be suggested sooner or later – see, for example, the topographical conclusions reached even before the new excavations by G. Manca di Mores ('Terrecotte architettoniche e problemi topografici: contribute all'identificazione del Tempio di Quirino sul colle Quirinale', *AnnPerugia* 20 (1982–3), 323–60) and R. Paris (*Dono Hartwig*, Rome 1994, 40)).

<sup>4</sup> F. Villedieu, 'La "coenatio rotunda" neroniana e altre vestigia nel sito della Vigna Barberini al Palatino', *BdA* 96, ser. 7, n. 12 (2011), 1–28; R. Coates-Stephens, 'Notes from Rome 2011–12', *PBSR* 80 (2012), 327–8.

<sup>5</sup> The conference was fruit of a collaboration between the SS-Col and the relevant foreign academies.

<sup>6</sup> *La Repubblica* 26 June 2015 and 22 October 2015.

<sup>7</sup> *La Repubblica* 24 November 2015.

6 m in length, belonged to the early first-century phase of the *Horti Lamiani*, encountered many times in the area (most recently at the southern end of the piazza).<sup>8</sup>

Of recent restoration works communicated to the public, the most substantial have been those of the so-called Temple of Minerva Medica, related at two lectures at the Finnish Academy and the British School at Rome.<sup>9</sup> The majestic monument, which preserves the largest (partially) surviving ancient dome in Rome after the Pantheon, lies marooned on the Esquiline between the railway lines and the tram-tracks. In order to prevent further damage from these unfortunate surroundings, the bold decision was made to reconstruct the missing portion of the drum, comprising three windows and piers in the void at the monument's south-western side. During the works, which started in 2012, many more early fourth-century brickstamps were found *in situ*, which confirmed the building's original construction date. Excavations carried out both inside and outside the decagonal hall revealed levels charting the evolution of the site prior to its construction. Foundations of storage structures were found, as well as a cryptoporticus, flanked by vases set into the ground for regimented planting. Most of these belonged to the Flavian period. Small finds included coins, oil lamps, and a fine intaglio decorated with the figure of Mars Gradivus.

Long-term restoration works were also completed at S. Maria Antiqua, which re-opened to the public, together with the adjacent Domitianic ramp to the Palatine.<sup>10</sup> The new itinerary was inaugurated with an exhibition devoted to the newly cleaned frescoes of S. Maria and the Oratory of the Forty Martyrs, and their historical context in the Rome of the Byzantine Reconquest and the pontificate of John VII.<sup>11</sup> Amongst the well-chosen objects on display were five of the last marble three-dimensional imperial portraits from Rome (the 'Galla Placidia' and 'Anastasius' from the Museo dell'Alto Medioevo and the three versions of the empress Ariadne from the Capitoline, Vatican and Louvre), and the complete collection of mosaics from the demolished Oratory of John VII at Old St. Peter's. Pertaining directly to the church itself were newly discovered fragments of fresco (the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste, a head of S. Agatha) and opus sectile wall decoration from the pre-Christian phases of the monument, as well as the building's original icon, saved from the earthquake of 847 and now kept at S. Maria Nova on the other side of the Forum, from which it was brought in procession.

<sup>8</sup> R. Coates-Stephens, 'Notes from Rome', *Papers of the British School at Rome* 76 (2008), 303.

<sup>9</sup> The speakers were the project director, Mariarosaria Barbera (MiBACT) and the architect Marina Magnani Cianetti and archaeologist Salvo Barrano (both SS-col). See *La Repubblica* 21 November 2015.

<sup>10</sup> P. Fortini (ed.), *La rampa imperiale. Scavi e restauri tra foro romano e Palatino*, Milan 2015.

<sup>11</sup> The exhibition ran from March to September 2016. Catalogue: M. Andaloro, G. Bordi, G. Morganti (eds), *S. Maria Antiqua tra Roma e Bisanzio*, Milan 2016.

An excellent small-scale exhibition on the history of the Palazzo and Villa Caffarelli and their surroundings on the Capitoline hill was held at the Palazzo dei Conservatori.<sup>12</sup> The focus was on the sixteenth-century residence of the Caffarelli, largely demolished in the 1920s for the excavations of the podium of Jupiter Capitolinus, fragments of whose frescoes had been saved in the store-rooms of the Museo di Roma and were returned to view in the exhibition. An additional, archaeological section presented for the first time a wide range of surviving roof decoration from the early phases of the Capitoline temple, excavated in the garden of the Teutonic Hospital and the area of the Protomoteca building. Amongst the material were painted terracotta eaves tiles and antefixes from the sixth-century building. The fourth- and third-century phases were represented by hanging curtain and sima fragments, and pieces from the pedimental cornice. Even a tiny fragment from one of the enormous marble pilaster capitals, dating to the reconstruction of Domitian, was displayed. The exhibition was supplemented by rarely-seen material from the demolitions of the 1920–40s at the foot of the hill, released from the store-rooms of the Centrale Montemartini (tympanum of a shrine to Juno Caelestis, fragmentary fresco depicting the Dea Roma from a late antique nymphaeum in the Vicus Jugarius).

The Markets of Trajan hosted an exhibition devoted to makers' and owners' marks on a variety of products and artefacts from the empire (marble, bricks, oil-lamps, amphorae etc.).<sup>13</sup> Some material was loaned from outside Rome: glass and surgical instruments from Cologne, amphorae-stoppers ('opercula') from Aquileia, and a slingshot projectile from Perugia. But the majority of exhibits came from the perpetually closed Antiquarium Comunale on the Caelian and, in addition to brickstamps, lead stamps, 'mercury bottles' and oil lamps, there were some fascinating objects relating to Roman topography, such as the fifth-century slave collars mentioning the *domus Pulverata* and the *nimfeum Alexandri*, and a lead aqueduct pipe bearing the name of Septimius Severus' praetorian prefect Fulvius Plautianus, found in his house during the construction of the Quirinal tunnel in 1902.

In June 2015 a new antiquarium was inaugurated at the Catacombs of Callistus. The Museo della Torretta exhibits over 100 freshly restored sculptural fragments from the adjacent Christian cemeteries, some going back to the nineteenth-century excavations of Giovanni Battista De Rossi, others recovered by the *Nucleo Tutela Patrimonio* from recent thefts at a number of different catacombs. Sarcophagi, loculus slabs and epitaphs are displayed in the eponymous farmhouse, a converted excavation store-room by the side of the Via Appia. On the same occasion, the newly restored Cubiculum of Orpheus was briefly opened. Excavation had revealed a surprisingly late burial here, dating to the advanced eighth century. Finds from the excavation were briefly

<sup>12</sup> A catalogue is planned, but has not yet been published.

<sup>13</sup> The exhibition ran from May to November 2016. Catalogue: L. Ungaro, M. Milella, S. Pastor (eds), *Made in Roma. Marchi di produzione e di possesso nella società antica*, Rome 2016.

exhibited in the west triconch in the above-ground area of the Catacomb: on show were coins (including eighth-century issues from the papal mint), fragments of an inscription in opus sectile, and two small pieces of the large Damasian inscription from the Crypt of the Popes, in honour of the *turba priorum* (ICUR IV 9513). The same occasion saw the inauguration of the newly restored permanent display of sculpture and epigraphy in the east triconch, originally arranged by Joseph Wilpert.<sup>14</sup>

Another welcome addition to an older museum was the return to display, in the Pietro Cannonica Museum at the Villa Borghese, of over 80 statues and sculptures which once decorated the gardens. Since 1986 they have been replaced by casts to avoid theft and vandalism, but the originals may now be viewed, free of charge, in the basement and garden of the sculptor Cannonica's former studio. Most of the statues, some of which were bought by Cardinal Borghese from the Ceoli in the early seventeenth century, are second- and third-century versions of classical works, heavily restored between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. They include human and divine figures, animals, sarcophagi and architectural marbles. There are also pieces from more recent times, such as the original Giacomo della Porta masks and tritons from the Fontana del Moro in Piazza Navona, moved to the Villa Borghese's lake-side in around 1900, and the coat-of-arms of Pope Paul V Borghese.

At the Centrale Montemartini, an impressive selection of floor mosaics from the store-rooms of the Capitoline Museums has been returned to permanent display. On the ground floor, three first-century BC works are on show: two *emblemata* (a Nilotic landscape found during the construction of the Palazzo delle Esposizioni in 1882 and a lion with cupids from Anzio) and a large labyrinth enclosed by city walls, found in 1958 during the excavation of a domus in piazza San Giovanni in Laterano. Upstairs in the Boiler Room is a large (c. 3.4 × by 3.0 m) second-century AD floor mosaic from the upper chamber of a tomb on the via Portuense showing the Rape of Proserpina, bordered by the four seasons and floral medallions with wading birds. The names of Pluto's four horses are captioned in Greek. Lanciani left a vivid description of the mosaic in the original 'Notes from Rome' shortly after its discovery in 1886, when it was due to be installed in the Palazzo dei Conservatori.<sup>15</sup> The piece is now exhibited next to the equally monumental late antique hunting mosaic from S. Bibiana.

Our last piece of news regarding Rome's museums is more of a hope than an accomplished fact. In March 2016, it was announced that an agreement had been

<sup>14</sup> Information on the restoration and excavation may be found in: F. Bisconti, M. Braconi (eds), *Le catacombe di San Callisto. Storia, contesti, scavi, restauri, scoperte. A proposito del cubicolo di Orfeo e del Museo della Torretta*, Todi 2015.

<sup>15</sup> R. Lanciani, *Notes from Rome* (ed. T. Cubberley, London 1988), 189. More generally on the four mosaics, see C. Salvetti, *I mosaici antichi pavimentali e parietali e i sectilia pavimentata di Roma nelle collezioni Capitolini (Musiva e sectilia 6 (2009))*, Rome-Pisa 2013, 81–7, 117–20, 196–200, 227–30.

signed between the Italian state and the Torlonia family which would finally return the latter's fabled collection of over 600 statues and sculptures to public view.<sup>16</sup> Closed since 1975, when the original museum in Trastevere was converted into apartments, the collection (which includes numerous imperial portraits and such works as the Torlonia Maiden from Vulci, some bought from the great Roman families and others dug up on their estates on the Via Appia and at Portus) has remained in storage for 40 years. The new accord foresees an initial, temporary exhibition of some 60–90 pieces by the end of 2017 at the Capitoline Museums, which would then tour the United States and Europe before returning to a permanent home in Rome together with the rest of the 600 works. Various sites have been mooted to house the collection: the Ministry of Defence on the Quirinal, palazzo Valentini, or a property of the Torlonia. Of course, this is not the first time that we have heard of plans for a similar re-opening.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> *La Repubblica* 21 July 2015; *Corriere della Sera* 15 March 2016. The most recent catalogue is that of C. Visconti, *I monumenti del Museo Torlonia di sculture antiche riprodotti con la fototipia*, Rome 1884–5. For a succinct description of the Museum at the time of its inauguration in 1880, see Lanciani (cit. n. 15), 83–6.

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, our first 'Notes from Rome' (*PBSR* 76 (2008), 307), where the proposal was aired to exhibit the collection in the restored Villa Rivaldi above via dei Fori Imperiali. The villa remains in ruins.