

NOTES FROM ROME 2010–11

by Robert Coates-Stephens

This gazette presents to the reader outside Rome news of recent archaeological activity (primarily in 2010, but also in the first part of 2011), 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 2010, ma anche per gli inizi del 2011), tratte da conferenze, convegni, mostre e relazioni su giornali.

Rodolfo Lanciani's *Notes from Rome*, which recorded excavations and discoveries in the city and its surroundings from 1876 to 1913 for the readers of London's *Athenaeum* magazine, were not concerned exclusively with classical antiquity. The post-antique phases of the central spaces of the Roman Forum, the Basilica Aemilia, Lacus Juturnae, Pantheon, Isaeum Campense and the Domus Flavia featured strongly, and included valuable data on the monuments' collapse and abandonment.¹ Lanciani recorded contemporary excavations in Rome's early Christian churches, such as Santi Giovanni e Paolo, Santa Cecilia, San Saba and Santa Maria Antiqua.² Finds in the catacombs of Cyriaca, Priscilla, Domitilla and Commodilla likewise were reported.³ Even genuinely medieval monuments attracted his attention: the destruction of the apse of Saint John Lateran, the excavation of a Cosmati marble workshop, the stripping of Santa Maria in Cosmedin's baroque fripperies, and the discovery of a thirteenth-century portico beneath the Palazzetto Venezia.⁴ In like manner, thanks to a rich harvest of similar finds in Rome over the course of 2010–11, the current report is able to dwell at more than usual length on medieval matters.⁵

Ongoing restoration works at Santa Sabina, related to the updating of the Museo Domenicano, have revealed an exceptional early medieval fresco in the narthex, immediately to the right of the church's great central door (Fig. 1). The panel, measuring 2.80 × 4.35 m, depicts the Virgin holding Christ on her knee, flanked by Saints Peter and Paul, with Saints Seraphia and Sabina to either side. Represented in smaller format are three living patrons, each depicted

¹ R. Lanciani, *Notes from Rome* (ed. A. Cubberley) (London, 1988), 3, 99, 137–9, 258, 305, 307, 320, 327, 414–15, 429–30.

² Lanciani, *Notes from Rome* (above, n. 1), 202–3, 289–90, 293–4, 310, 311–12, 323, 379.

³ Lanciani, *Notes from Rome* (above, n. 1), 3–5, 219–20, 290, 323, 370, 397–9.

⁴ Lanciani, *Notes from Rome* (above, n. 1), 18–19, 24, 190, 290, 370–1.

⁵ Most of the newspaper reports referred to here can be consulted at <http://www.patrimoniosos.it> (in the 'Rassegna Stampa' section). For previous reports, see *Papers of the British School at Rome* 76 (2008), 299–307; 77 (2009), 291–7; 78 (2010), 289–95.



Fig. 1. The early medieval fresco in the narthex of Santa Sabina, Rome, with the Virgin holding the Christ Child, flanked by Saints Peter, Paul, Seraphia and Sabina. (Reproduced courtesy of the Soprintendenza per il Patrimonio Storico-artistico ed Etnoantropologico e Polo Museale della Città di Roma.)

with a square nimbus: an unidentified pope to the far right, and two clergymen, shown standing and kneeling to the left. The latter are identified by a painted inscription running down the left border of the panel, which reads ‘Thodorus archip[re]s[b]iter] unacum Georgio P[re]s[b]itero] botum so[lvit]’. Initial studies suggest these are the two Roman priests who attended the sixth Ecumenical Council in Constantinople in 680. If so, the pope might be any of those reigning towards the end of the seventh and in the early eighth centuries. On the same day in July 2010 that the discovery was revealed to the press, a small volume documenting the project, edited by the chief restorer Claudia Tempesta, was presented.⁶

For the completeness of its preservation, and above all for its historical importance (the identification of the patrons of a medieval fresco, especially from the Byzantine period, is an extremely rare event), the painting at Santa Sabina is perhaps the most important discovery of the year. But a wealth of pictorial art has emerged over the last twelve months in Rome, spanning the

⁶ C. Tempesta (ed.), *L'icona murale di Santa Sabina all'Aventino* (Rome, 2010).

period from the fourth to the fourteenth centuries. Restoration work in a *cubiculum* at the catacombs of Saint Thecla near San Paolo fuori le mura is now complete; and to the *clipeus* depicting Saint Paul revealed to the press in 2009 have been added three more apostles from the other corners of the same vault: Peter, John and Andrew. The *cubiculum* served as the tomb of an anonymous matron and her daughter, who are depicted in an *arcosolium*, dating to the late fourth century.⁷ The restoration of the Mamertine Prison by the Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma under the direction of Patrizia Fortini was completed in the summer of 2010, and the building now reveals to the public important traces of its afterlife as a Christian monument. In addition to the early medieval (seventh/eighth-century?) fragment of fresco showing a haloed saint (probably Peter) beneath the Hand of God, visible in the lower chamber (the so-called Tullianum), there have been uncovered now two large frescoes from the upper chamber, composed of several layers of paintings dating to the later Middle Ages. Above the staircase leading down to the Tullianum are two panels depicting (at the left) the ‘Madonna della Misericordia’ and (on the right) Christ flanked by Saints Peter and Paul (shown seated, to the left), with a small-scale offerant below. The latter scene is overlaid by a later fresco showing Christ benedictive with a border in the form of city walls. To the left of the modern doorway is a second panel showing Christ with Saint Peter and an offerant. Preliminary notices suggest a date between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries for the group.⁸

Rome’s patron saints also predominated in the frescoes discovered during restoration works in the medieval Palazzo del Senatore on the Capitol — indeed, the uncanny tendency for news of their appearance to emerge in the run-up to their saint’s day on 29 June suggests that they might possess miraculous powers relating to research funding. A much-damaged group of Christ flanked by Peter and Paul, here dating to the late thirteenth/early fourteenth century and executed in the style of Cavallini, came to light when modern floors inserted in the so-called Tower of Boniface IX were removed. Only the figures’ shoulders and the lower portion of the heads survived, together with a fragment of a Virgin and Child on an adjoining wall. A coat of arms of the Colonna family provided a clue to the patron, possibly Pietro Colonna, cardinal in Rome from 1288 to 1297.⁹ Scattered notices in the press referred in addition to the discovery of frescoes of similar Cavallinian date in the roof space of Sant’Agnese fuori le mura, and offered the hope that the restored Temple of Portunus, converted to a church under Pope John VIII

⁷ *La Repubblica*, 23 June 2010. The entire monument has now been published: B. Mazzei (ed.), *Il cubicolo degli apostoli nelle catacombe romane di Santa Tecla, cronaca di un restauro* (Vatican City, 2010).

⁸ *La Repubblica*, 24 June 2010; *Il Giornale dell’Arte* 28 (no. 300, July–August 2010), 45. The site is now managed by L’Opera Romana Pellegrinaggi, and the visit demands a degree of forbearance.

⁹ *La Repubblica*, 15 June 2010; *Avvenire*, 16 June 2010.

(872–82), might open to the public in October 2011, with its ninth-century wall-paintings and recently-discovered apse fresco of a late medieval, haloed Virgin cleaned and reintegrated.¹⁰

Discoveries relating to the Middle Ages did not consist only of frescoes. A conference held at the *École Française de Rome* in January 2011, devoted to the cult of Saint Agnes in Rome, was the occasion for the first public notice of excavations carried out in Sant'Agnese in Agone, the baroque church in Piazza Navona overlying the west side of Domitian's stadium.¹¹ The earliest Christian building on the site, first recorded in the *Einsiedeln Itineraries* of the mid-eighth century, survives in fragmentary form in the crypt of the modern church, and it was here that a team led by Paola Di Manzano of the *Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma* carried out a small, but precisely directed, excavation campaign revealing sixteen tombs — of which seven were opened —, dating to the seventh–eighth centuries. One in particular, around which several others were oriented, appeared the most prestigious: it was revetted in *pavonazzetto* marble and contained a shaft communicating with the pavement level of the earliest church. The tomb contained two primary depositions, to which had been added a further eight burials. Initial palaeopathological analysis revealed that all individuals (men, women and a child) had enjoyed reasonable health and diet, and showed no signs of exhausting manual labour. In short, this was a tomb of the élite of early medieval Rome, perhaps even of the patrons of the church. A study by Federico Guidobaldi reconstructed the aspect of the first church and its twelfth-century rebuilding using the detailed manuscript description of Pompeo Ugonio and Renaissance *vedute*. His conclusion matched the data from the excavations, at least as regards the foundation of the cult-space — that is, the church was installed in the substructures of the Roman stadium some time between the seventh and eighth centuries.

Also in 2011, the Vatican's Christian archaeology body, the *Pontificia Commissione di Archeologia Sacra*, underwent reorganization and renewal, described by Carlo Carletti in *L'Osservatore Romano*.¹² Modelling its structures on those of the Italian state's archaeological institutions, this will now include the new post of a Superintendent and a consultative body charged with the management of Italy's 100 or so catacombs and their decorative apparatus, as well as the impressive archives built up since the days of Giovanni Battista De Rossi, including the original glass negatives of John Henry Parker's pioneering photographic studies of the catacombs of Generosa on the Via Portuensis and Sant'Alessandro on the Nomentana. The addition of the photographic documentation of the catacombs' epigraphic collections to established digital databases is foreseen, as are new display spaces for the marbles from the catacombs of Priscilla and the hypogeum of Trebius Giustus.

¹⁰ *Il Corriere della Sera*, 27 June 2010; *La Repubblica*, 26 March 2011.

¹¹ The conference will be published by the organizers, Claire Sotinel and Massimiliano Ghilardi, in a forthcoming volume in the *Collection de l'École Française de Rome*.

¹² *L'Osservatore Romano*, 9 March 2011.

The discovery of a new catacomb network at San Lorenzo fuori le mura was referred to in the same newspaper report, but no details given.

If the prospects for archaeological research within the Vatican institutions were viewed with sanguinity, those of the Italian state seemed less rosy, to judge from newspaper coverage over the last year. The collapse of the Gladiators' School at Pompeii and a lesser cave-in at the House of the Moralists following heavy rain in November 2010 seemed to crystallize this pessimism, and the supposedly perilous condition of some of Rome's most famous monuments was dwelt on at some length in the press. Depending on which report one read, between 32 and 72 monuments within the care of the Rome and Ostia Soprintendenza were considered either critical or at risk: most frequently mentioned were the Domus Aurea (see last year's 'Notes'), the Palatine, the Colosseum, the aqueducts, the Aurelian Walls, Minerva Medica and the Baths of Diocletian.¹³ How much these notices reflect reality, and how much journalistic exaggeration — or even competition for funding —, remains unclear. On a more positive note, the welcome trend continues of opening to the public long-closed monuments or sectors of monuments. In addition to those parts of the Palatine opened temporarily for the exhibition on Nero (see below), 2010–11 saw visitors return to the eastern cella and precinct of the Temple of Venus and Rome, the House of the Vestals (where mosaic pavements from the pre-AD 64 complex were visible in early 2011) and the so-called Via Nova between the Forum and Palatine (where two *tabernae* are to be adapted as exhibition spaces for finds from the Domus Tiberiana, including the alabaster tiger referred to in the 'Notes' of 2008). The third-floor balcony and a part of the substructures of the Colosseum opened in October 2010, and in the suburbs the recently-discovered *opus sectile* pavements and Severan wing of the Villa of the Quintilii were visible from early 2011. Forthcoming openings are expected to include the Domus Flavia's garden stadium, the ramp linking Santa Maria Antiqua to the Palatine, and sectors of the Baths of Diocletian, including the *natatio* and Halls VIII and IX, closed for the last 30 years.¹⁴

The Palatine continues to yield surprising new archaeological finds. Since our 'Notes from Rome' started in 2008 we have received news of the discovery of a perfectly-preserved nymphaeum-rotunda (the so-called 'Lupercal'), a late Republican *domus*, and even the rotating dining-room of Nero's Domus Aurea.¹⁵ This year the reports continued with the announcement in November 2010 of the unearthing of a Republican temple podium in the out-of-bounds zone behind the Palatine Antiquarium. During works to shore up a Flavian

¹³ *DNews*, 9 November 2010; *Il Sole 24 Ore*, 24 November 2010. On the progress of restoration work at the Domus Aurea, see: *La Repubblica*, 16 November 2010; *Libero*, 5 March 2011; *Il Messaggero*, 12 April 2011.

¹⁴ *Il Messaggero*, 3 January 2011; *La Repubblica*, 16 January 2011; *Voce Repubblicana*, 2 February 2011. The possibility was raised of displaying the texts of the Arval Brethren and the *Ludi saeculares* in the seldom-seen Ludovisi cloister.

¹⁵ See above, n. 5.

cryptoporticus, a 13 × 17 m *peperino* podium and columns, which had been demolished during Domitianic building works, came to light. Andrea Carandini, quoted in *La Repubblica*, opined that the remains might belong to either the Temple of Luna or that of Jupiter Invictus, both of which are recorded in the sources but as yet have evaded identification on the ground.¹⁶ On the same occasion, the discovery of an elaborate ‘island-temple’ complex in the middle of the Orti Farnesiani was reported. Belonging to the Domus Tiberiana and dated by an inscribed water-pipe to the reign of Claudius, this survived as foundation walls of a small rectangular structure situated in the centre of a large fountain basin. In early 2011 the area was made visible to visitors attending the Nero exhibition (see below); the marble wings of a statue of Victory, referred to in the ‘Notes’ of 2008, were displayed at the site.¹⁷

There were scanty reports of other ongoing archaeological works in the *centro storico*. Restoration of the late Republican building at the foot of the Arch of Titus, generally identified as the House of Aemilius Scaurus, began in May 2010, with a view to being opened to the public some time in 2011. This reignited the debate regarding the use of over 30 cell-like rooms in the basement, variously identified in the archaeological literature as the *ergastulum* of a *domus*, a tavern and a prison. The opinion of the Palatine Superintendent, Maria Antonietta Tomei, was that this is the cellar of a hostelry that may have offered more specialized services to clients in the form of a *lupanar*, or brothel. Terracotta oil-lamps, plates and mollusc shells were amongst the finds recorded during Boni’s excavations in 1900–12, and a faded fresco of Dionysius’s thyrsus survives on a wall.¹⁸ Excavation for underground car parks, which has featured heavily in past ‘Notes from Rome’, is underway in the via Giulia, between the road and the Tiber near Ponte Mazzini. The excavator, Fedora Filippi of the Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, gave a brief summary of the site in a paper delivered at the Palazzo Massimo as part of a conference commemorating the 1600th anniversary of the Sack of Rome.¹⁹ A substantial ancient town quarter has been revealed, composed of first/second-century insulae running diagonally towards the river, divided by basalt-paved courts and roads. Later phases comprise late third/early fourth-century restructuring, tombs of the sixth or seventh century, with the paved areas continuing in use into the twelfth century.

Projects to improve accessibility to and the visibility of the Mausoleum of Augustus and Circus Maximus, referred to in earlier ‘Notes from Rome’, have

¹⁶ *La Repubblica*, 5 November 2010. Pales would be another possibility.

¹⁷ *La Repubblica*, 5 November 2010. For a preliminary archaeological summary (with no reference to the ‘temple’), see M.A. Tomei, ‘Nerone sul Palatino’, in M.A. Tomei and R. Rea (eds), *Nerone* (Milan, 2011), 118–22.

¹⁸ *La Repubblica*, 27 May 2010. The theory originally was advanced by G. Lugli, *Monumenti minori del foro romano* (Rome, 1947), 139–64. *Contra*: E. Papi, ‘Domus: M. Aemilius Scaurus’, in E.M. Steinby (ed.), *Lexicon Topographicum Urbis Romae II (D–G)* (Rome, 1995), 26.

¹⁹ The conference is to be published as J. Lipps, C. Machado and P. Von Rummel (eds), 410. *The Sack of Rome. The Event, its Context and its Impact (Palilia)*. See also *La Repubblica*, 23 July 2010.

received some attention in the media. The Mausoleum is due to be opened to the public in the remodelled piazza Augusto Imperatore in time for the bimillenary of the emperor's death in 2014. Photographs published in the newspapers showed an amphorae deposit emerging in excavations next to the monument, which have also laid bare a paved way leading due south from the Mausoleum towards the Pantheon.²⁰ A similar attempt, also under the archaeological supervision of the Comune di Roma, is being made to bring the curved end of the Circus Maximus into closer contact with modern pavement levels. In widening and deepening the area excavated in the 1930s, the ancient ground level of the outward-facing *tabernae* has been reached 3 m down, with the remains of mangers and latrines. A haul of 130 coins found in the overlying deposits awaits analysis. It is hoped that by the end of 2011 a viewing gallery at the curved end will be open to the public.²¹ Whilst no new discoveries relating to the works for the Metro C have been reported, the first monograph concerning excavations carried out up to now has been published.²² Potentially important excavations currently under way for which no notices have been made publicly include those at the Lapis Niger, Sant'Omobono and the Arch of Janus.²³

In the suburbs, the most impressive discovery reported in the newspapers was that of six statues in a well at a villa site on the via Anagnina near Ciampino. Dated to the third century, they included portrait busts of members of the Severan dynasty, a colossal herm and a statue of Zeus.²⁴ Also from the southeastern suburbs came the first public notice of the excavation of an interesting rustic building at the Passo Lombardo villa in the Tenuta di Tor Vergata. The works, under the direction of Andreina Ricci, revealed the ground-plan of a substantial (50 × 17 m) basilica-like building whose form and location bore some similarities to the almost contemporary description of the *cella vinaria* in Palladius (*Opus Agriculturae* 1.18). It dated to the first half of the fifth century AD.²⁵

Developments in the permanent collections occurred behind the scenes and it will probably be some time before they emerge in the public domain. In the

²⁰ *Il Corriere della Sera*, 30 October 2010. Excavations directed by Giovanni Caruso.

²¹ *Il Messaggero*, 9 November 2010; *La Repubblica*, 1 February 2011. The works are directed by Giovanni Caruso and Paola Ciancio Rossetto.

²² R. Egidi, F. Filippi and S. Martone (eds), *Archeologia e infrastrutture (Bollettino d'Arte volume speciale)* (Rome, 2011).

²³ A summary of the Sant'Omobono project, a collaboration between the Sovraintendenza Comunale and the universities of Calabria and Michigan, may be found at fastionline.org (http://www.fastionline.org/micro_view.php?fst_cd=AIAC_2586&curcol=sea_cd-AIAC_3546 (last consulted 28.07.2011)) and on the University of Michigan website (<http://sitemaker.umich.edu/omobono/home> (last consulted 28.07.2011)). The Arch of Janus is being investigated by the University of Mérida: a trench has been opened by the southwestern pier, revealing the paving of an ancient road.

²⁴ *Il Messaggero*, 9 February 2011.

²⁵ The notice was given at the conference *Ricerche in corso sui magazzini romani*, held at the Palazzo Altemps in April 2011, to be published by the organizers, Evelyne Bukowiecki and Camilla Panzieri.

autumn of 2010 the newspapers announced the recovery of a small find stolen from an excavation in piazza Madonna dei Monti in 1982: a first- or second-century AD bronze statuette of Zeus, perhaps originally from a household shrine, due to be displayed at the Museo Nazionale Romano following its restoration.²⁶ Meanwhile, at the Capitoline the rediscovery was announced of as many as 500 boxes containing finds chiefly from the excavations of the via dei Fori Imperiali in the 1930s, which had been ‘misaid’ in the store-rooms of the Museo della Civiltà Romana following the collapse of the old Caelian Antiquarium in 1939.²⁷ The objects (which also comprised material from late nineteenth-century excavations on the Caelian and Palatine) included statues, mosaic and fresco fragments, the celebrated mammoth tusks from the Fori Imperiali and even a linen shroud found in a funerary urn in a *domus* in via Genova. Sorting and cataloguing the items is expected to take at least two years.

Two major exhibitions centring to a greater or lesser degree on the antiquities of Rome were held in 2010–11. The Capitoline hosted the second in its ‘Giorni di Roma’ series, an exhibition devoted to the origins of Roman portraiture and its manifestations down to the time of the Antonines.²⁸ To enter the opening display, arranged in the Sala degli Orazi e Curiazi, was to enter a textbook on the origins of the Roman portrait, bringing together Egyptian heads from the Berlin Museum, Etruscan bronzes and terracottas, Hellenistic busts (the Louvre’s ‘Antiochus III’ and ‘Mithridates VI’, a selection of the famous Delos portraits) and such celebrated Republican pieces as the bronze ‘Scipio’ from Herculaneum and the Capitoline ‘Brutus’. The long-standing scholarly debate on the death-mask was represented by plaster and terracotta pieces, generally believed to be inspired by casts taken from the corpse, including a seldom-seen plaster funerary portrait from a second-century tomb on the Via Praenestina. Famous loaned exhibits that originated in Rome included the greywacke bust of Julius Caesar from Berlin, the iconic ‘Sulla’ and ‘Marius’ from Munich (now proposed as belonging to the Forum Augustum’s *summi viri* gallery, perhaps the work of contemporary Rhodian sculptors) and the Grimani Pompey. The Hall of Marcus Aurelius temporarily was filled with a crowd of full-length portraits: in addition to colossal statues of M. Nonius Balbus from Herculaneum and the impressive reconstituted bronze Germanicus from Amelia, a number of pieces from Rome were exhibited — notably, the basanite Agrippina from the *Claudium*, reunited with the Uffizi’s ‘Britannicus’ for the first time since antiquity.

An exhibition on Nero, centred in the Colosseum, displayed fragments and artefacts from the Meta Sudans excavations (illustrating the fire of AD 64), digital reconstructions of the Domus Aurea, sculpture from Oplontis, Anzio and

²⁶ *La Repubblica*, 19 November 2010.

²⁷ *Il Corriere della Sera*, 12 September 2010.

²⁸ The exhibition ran from March to September 2011. Catalogue: E. La Rocca, C. Parisi Presicce and A. Lo Monaco (eds), *I giorni di Roma. Ritratti. Le tante facce del potere* (Loreto, 2011).

Subiaco, and frescoes from Pompeii.²⁹ It also ensured that several monuments, used as subsidiary display spaces, remained open: the Curia (its supposedly permanent display of the Basilica Aemilia historical friezes now proving decidedly temporary), the Temple of Romulus and the Palatine cryptoporticus. The highlight of the latter display was the headless over-lifesize heroic nude statue in Parian marble, discovered in 2007 in an adjoining passageway (see ‘Notes’ 2008 (above, n. 5)). Several other excavation sites on the Palatine were opened to viewers on the same occasion: the foundations of the ‘round triclinium’, visible at close quarters from a walkway (see ‘Notes’ 2009 (above, n. 5)), *opus sectile* pavements adjoining the Domitianic triclinium nymphaeum, excavated by Giacomo Boni at the beginning of the twentieth century and usually covered, and the aforementioned Claudian fountain basin of the Domus Tiberiana.

Although dating to the fifteenth century and discovered in the Viterbese, our last note nevertheless returns us to our starting-point: medieval Rome and her patron saints. In 2010 restoration works in the thirteenth-century parish church of San Giuliano at Faleria, 8 km east of Nepi, revealed a hidden fresco entirely covering the apse. Dating to the last decade of the Quattrocento, the scene shows Saint Julian in the centre, flanked by Saint Peter to the left and Saint Paul to the right. Represented in some detail behind Saint Peter is the Tiber and Castel Sant’Angelo, shown prior to the fortification works of Julius II, whilst behind Saint Paul is a panorama of the principal monuments of the city’s left bank, including the Colosseum, the Pantheon, the Column of Trajan and the Aurelian Walls. The restoration works were carried out by the Comune and Parish of Faleria.³⁰

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²⁹ The exhibition ran from March to September 2011. For the related catalogue, see above, n. 17.

³⁰ A report on the discovery, with colour photographs, may be seen at: http://tusciaweb.it/notizie/2011/gennaio/3_2affresco.htm (last consulted 28.07.2011).