

## Notes from Rome

by Robert Coates-Stephens

The present newsletter follows that published in the last volume of *Papers of the British School at Rome*,<sup>1</sup> whereby archaeological activity in the city and suburbs as presented at public lectures, conferences, exhibitions and in newspaper reports for the year April 2008–April 2009 is summarized, primarily for a readership outside Rome. As before, the chief sources of information are available via the internet, at <http://www.beniculturali.it> (notably, the ‘*comunicati stampa*’ section) and <http://www.patrimoniosos.it> (especially in the ‘*rassegna stampa*’). An excellent online journal of up to date excavation reports is <http://www.fastionline.org>.

The major development this year has been administrative. With the election of Gianni Alemanno, of the Alleanza Nazionale party, as the new mayor of Rome in April 2008, all ‘political appointments’ of the previous regime were replaced, including the Sovrintendente Archeologica, Eugenio La Rocca, who had filled the role since 1993. Umberto Broccoli, formerly an archaeologist and more recently a presenter of radio and television programmes, took over in July 2008. With substantial cuts in the budget of both civic and state cultural bodies, it was often stated that the conservation of sites, monuments and museums would take precedence over new excavations.<sup>2</sup> With all of this in view, it is no surprise that what Lanciani used to term the ‘archaeological balance-sheet’ for 2008 is considerably shorter than that of 2007.

Before summarizing new findings, several of last year’s notices can now be updated. Some discoveries and restorations for which only newspaper references were available have now been published. The new reconstructions of the initial Caesarean and the late antique phases of the Forum of Caesar, based on excavations completed last year, have appeared in provisional form;<sup>3</sup> a conference

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<sup>1</sup> R. Coates-Stephens, ‘Notes from Rome’, *Papers of the British School at Rome* 76 (2008), 299–307.

<sup>2</sup> *La Repubblica*, 27 June 2008; *Il Tempo*, 8 August 2008. In October 2008, Broccoli raised the possibility that art-works from archaeological storerooms might be rented out to foreign exhibitors (*La Repubblica*, 3 October 2008).

<sup>3</sup> A. Delfino, ‘Il foro di Cesare nella fase cesariana e augustea’, in G. Gentili (ed.), *Giulio Cesare. L'uomo, le imprese, il mito* (Milan, 2008), 52–4; E. Bianchi, ‘Il foro di Cesare tra Domiziano e l’età tardoantica’, in G. Gentili (ed.), *Giulio Cesare. L'uomo, le imprese, il mito* (Milan, 2008), 55–6. See also slightly longer pieces by the same authors in *Forma Urbis* 14 (1) (2009), 28–47.

treating the entire forum from the prehistoric to the medieval periods, held at the Ara Pacis auditorium in November 2008, will be published in a forthcoming issue of *Scienze dell'Antichità*. Claudio Parisi Presicce's redating of the bronze equestrian statue from vicolo dell'Atleta has appeared in the *Bullettino della Commissione Archeologica Comunale di Roma*.<sup>4</sup> The fragmentary but unique marble equestrian statue discovered beneath the piazza of the Colosseum is now on display inside the monument. Trial excavations for the urban section of the new Metro C underground railway have come to an end. Archaeological investigations for the projected Metro D, set to take place at piazza Fiume, piazza Mignanelli, piazza San Silvestro, piazza Mastai and piazza Sonnino, are not now expected to start until 2010.<sup>5</sup>

Some new discoveries relating to the Metro investigations, however, have been made. In February 2008 the final test trench for an exit at the projected Metro C station at piazza Venezia, situated in the small garden immediately to the left of Santa Maria di Loreto near the taxi rank, lighted on what at first appeared to be a large marble and granite staircase. When the excavation was enlarged (causing some fine pines and palm trees to be felled) it was found that this was in fact the floor of a vast public building (c. 15 m wide), laid out in shallow steps like the Curia: the central 'nave' was paved in granite and *giallo antico*, the steps in white marble.<sup>6</sup> During a lecture at the Pontificia Accademia Romana di Archeologia on 26 March 2009 Eugenio La Rocca raised the possibility that this might be the Athenaeum of the sources, built by Hadrian (Aurelius Victor 14.1.3; *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, *Pertinax* 11.3, for example). Amanda Claridge had already drawn parallels between what is probably a continuation of this structure, found in 1902–4 during construction of the Assicurazioni Generali building, and the library at Nysa.<sup>7</sup> The modernization of the Metro A network, described in last year's newsletter, was completed at Manzoni station in via Emanuele Filiberto near the Lateran. In an area adjacent to the residential remains described last year, an immense *opus reticulatum* wall was found beneath the paving of via Emanuele Filiberto, running at right angles to it. Its date (late first/early second century AD), size (c. 1.5 m thick and excavated to c. 5 m of its elevation), and location (aligning with the remains excavated nearby in 1885–9) allowed its tentative identification as the boundary wall of Trajan's *Castra Equitum Singularium*, the barracks of the household cavalry later reorganized by the Severans.<sup>8</sup>

Also referred to last year were projects for underground car parks. The most controversial was to be built beneath the Pincio, with entrances at piazza del Popolo. The long-drawn-out battle to

<sup>4</sup> 'Un cavallo di bronzo per più cavalieri. La riscoperta di un originale greco a Roma', *Bullettino della Commissione Archeologica Comunale di Roma* 108 (2007), 33–53.

<sup>5</sup> *Il Sole 24 Ore*, 6 August 2008; *Il Giornale*, 29 November 2008.

<sup>6</sup> Excavation directed by Roberto Egidi. Most detailed report in *Il Corriere della Sera*, 16 September 2008.

<sup>7</sup> A. Claridge, 'Hadrian's lost Temple of Trajan', *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 20 (2007), 76–80.

<sup>8</sup> D. Colli, M. Martines and S. Palladino, 'Roma. Viale Manzoni, via Emanuele Filiberto. L'ammodernamento della Linea A della Metropolitana: nuovi spunti per la conoscenza della topografia antica', <http://www.fastionline.org/docs/FOLDER-it-2009-154.pdf> (last consulted 17.08.09).

have the works stopped was finally successful after a commission decreed in September 2008 that there was a strong likelihood that Valadier's park would be harmed by the seven-storey project. It was, moreover, pointed out that the slightly older underground car park beneath the *galoppatoio* of the nearby Villa Borghese had set a bad precedent: it is rarely used today and has greatly disfigured the gardens with intrusive concrete ventilation shafts. A large area of the Pincio had already undergone archaeological investigation when the works were halted. Extensive remains of a first-century BC private residence were found (rooms paved in black-ground mosaic, a cryptoporticus, network of cuniculi), and identified as belonging to one of the *horti* known to have occupied the general area from the late Republican period onwards. The proprietor Lucullus was frequently named in the newspapers.<sup>9</sup> Trial excavations for another, much smaller, underground car park were reported on the Janiculum near the Bambino Gesù hospital, and therefore in the general area investigated during 1999's construction of the Vatican coach park, which had revealed remains of a *horti* complex displayed at the *I colori del fasto* exhibition at the Palazzo Altemps in 2005/6.<sup>10</sup> A frescoed wall was recorded before works were halted.<sup>11</sup>

The bulk of other discoveries reported in the media related to excavations in the suburbs. Tombs predominated, with roadside necropolises encountered on the via Portuense near Ponte Galeria (c. 300 inhumations in a humble first-/second-century AD cemetery associated with a nearby settlement of salt-pan workers) and on the Flaminia near San Valentino (tombs similar to those at the Isola Sacra, found during rebuilding work at the Stadio Flaminio).<sup>12</sup> A frescoed columbarium was found (and reburied) during construction of a new aqueduct on the border of the Villa Borghese.<sup>13</sup> The most impressive of the funerary discoveries, which also received the greatest attention in the press due to the identification of its occupant, was a vast marble *monumentum* found dismantled (due to medieval spoliation) between the via Flaminia and the Tiber on via Vitorchiano, 8.5 km outside Rome. The epitaph was of M. Nonnius Macrinus, proconsul of Asia under Marcus Aurelius, recalling for eager journalists the protagonist of the film 'Gladiator'. Striking photographs published on the Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali's website showed numerous marble fragments, including columns and a tympanum, spread directly over the paving of the ancient Flaminia.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>9</sup> For the excavations, directed by Maria Antonietta Tomei, see *Il Corriere della Sera*, 12 June 2008 and 31 July 2008. For the decision to abandon the project: *La Repubblica*, 6 September 2008. The remains will be preserved beneath a reinforced concrete cover (*La Repubblica*, 7 April 2009).

<sup>10</sup> Catalogue edited by F. Filippi (Milan, 2005).

<sup>11</sup> *La Repubblica*, 5 July 2008 and 25 July 2008. For other proposed underground car parks, see *La Repubblica*, 22 September 2008.

<sup>12</sup> Sites directed by Laura Cianfriglia (*La Repubblica*, 10 June 2008) and Marina Piranomonte (*La Repubblica*, 17 October 2008).

<sup>13</sup> *La Repubblica*, 4 August 2008. Funerary urn sent to the Museo Nazionale Romano.

<sup>14</sup> *La Repubblica*, 16 October 2008. See the report of the site director, Daniela Rossi: [http://www.beniculturali.it/pdf/CartellaStampa16102008\\_Flaminia.pdf](http://www.beniculturali.it/pdf/CartellaStampa16102008_Flaminia.pdf) (last consulted 17.08.2009).

In comparison with the productive decade of the 1990s, which saw excavations at the Crypta Balbi, Imperial Fora, and in many of the city's ancient basilicas and extramural shrines, there is nowadays less archaeological information coming to light regarding the early Middle Ages. The conference held at the Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana on 1 April 2009, summarizing the results of recent excavations at San Paolo fuori le mura, was therefore especially welcome. A full and thorough programme, covering all aspects from palaeochristian topography to palaeopathological analyses of the burial remains, was succinctly summarized in a paper by the site's co-director, Lucrezia Spera. The works were carried out in 2007–8 during the construction of a new monastery, in a relatively small (61 × 22 m) trench immediately south of the basilica, and recovered substantial remains of two eighth-/ninth-century structures separated by an open space containing traces of agricultural installations. These were identified as belonging to one of the monastic complexes recorded at the basilica from the late sixth century, some of which were known to have been rebuilt by the popes of the eighth and ninth centuries. Projecting at 90° from the south corner of the façade of the basilica were the foundations of a late eighth-century portico, intriguingly linked to the famous late antique colonnaded road leading from the city walls to the basilica. This is known to have been rebuilt by Pope Hadrian I (772–95; *Liber Pontificalis* 97.74), but was not hitherto thought to have continued beyond the basilica.<sup>15</sup>

The one major exception to these suburban notices was the news that a late Republican *domus*, known and referred to briefly in the past,<sup>16</sup> had been rediscovered beneath the Domus Tiberiana on the extreme western edge of the Palatine. At a press conference held by Francesco Maria Giro and Angelo Bottini (Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali) on 16 October 2008, Maria Antonietta Tomei described a sequence of *opus reticulatum* chambers with substantial traces of first style 'zonal masonry' frescoes overlooking the slopes above San Teodoro. The rooms had subsequently been backfilled during the Augustan phase of restructuring that affected the entire area.<sup>17</sup>

When the new mayor was elected newspaper reports made much of suggestions floated during the electoral campaign that Richard Meier's pavilion of the Ara Pacis would be dismantled, or at least that a referendum might be held on the question. After Gianni Alemanno took office, this was played down — although some adjustments were requested to be made to the structure's boundary wall in order to allow greater visibility of Valadier's façade of San Rocco.<sup>18</sup> Works have continued all around the controversial monument, however, in the form of the 'Urbs et Civitas' project, directed by the architect Francesco Cellini, which will bring the Mausoleum

<sup>15</sup> The excavation report is in press: L. Spera (ed.), *Lo scavo nell'orto dell'Abbazia di San Paolo flm.*

<sup>16</sup> E. Papi, 'Domus: M. Antonius', in M. Steinby (ed.), *Lexicon Topographicum Urbis Romae* II (D–G) (Rome, 1995), 34.

<sup>17</sup> *La Repubblica*, 17 October 2008. Photographs and summary: [http://www.beniculturali.it/pdf/CartellaStampa16102008\\_Palatino.pdf](http://www.beniculturali.it/pdf/CartellaStampa16102008_Palatino.pdf) (last consulted 17.08.2009).

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, the piece entitled 'Ara senza Pacis' by the architect Massimiliano Fuksas in *L'Espresso*, 16 May 2008. See also *La Repubblica*, 30 April 2008 and *Il Corriere della Sera*, 16 June 2008.

of Augustus into a closer relationship with the modern street-levels of piazza Augusto Imperatore. With this in view, much excavation has been carried out and a general restoration of the zone started. At a conference held in the Ara Pacis auditorium in January 2009 some preliminary archaeological results were reported by the site director, Paola Virgili (Sovrintendenza Archeologica Comunale). The Augustan and Hadrianic pavement levels in front of the monument have been uncovered and extended, and each found to lie at exactly the same level as those dug by Dott.sa Virgili at the Pantheon some years ago. At the Mausoleum, an intermediate Flavian level exists, and it is on this that the famous 'setting floor' incised plan lies. A large (8 × 8 m) concrete foundation was uncovered c. 30 m to the right of the tomb's entrance, and provisionally identified as the base of one of the obelisks. Features belonging to later periods included a necropolis (as yet unexcavated) and a small late antique apse. The vaulted compartments of the mausoleum's outer ring are being cleared out; it is expected that some strata here may have been undisturbed by building work carried out since the Renaissance. At the close of works, it is intended to encircle the mausoleum with a gallery in which the c. 10,000 objects associated with the monument, discovered in the 1930s and during the new works, may be displayed.<sup>19</sup>

The perennial campaign to rebuild and restore Rome's museums reached a turning-point in December 2008 with the reopening after 30 years of the Museo Nazionale Romano's Aula X at the Baths of Diocletian. The space itself — a vast hall of unidentified function within the early fourth-century complex — was as much a show-piece as the exhibits themselves. The principal monuments on display were three large tombs. That of the Platorini was found in 1880 during work on the embankment of the Tiber in Trastevere and first reconstructed in the museum by Roberto Paribeni in 1911. Of late Julio-Claudian date, it is remarkable for the completeness of its internal decoration and intact sculptural apparatus (life-size marble funerary portraits, busts, epitaphs and finely decorated ash chests). The two other monuments were discovered in 1951 on the via Portuense at Monte Verde, and their removal to the Museo Nazionale Romano was a considerable enterprise given that both are second-century AD rock-cut tombs. One preserves fine white-ground frescoes on all of its internal surfaces; the other is decorated with stucco roundels, and bears some similarity to the celebrated 'triklia' group at San Sebastiano.<sup>20</sup> Restoration has continued at the Palazzo Altemps, where four new halls opened in April 2009 in the part of the palace once inhabited by Gabriele D'Annunzio. Egyptian and Egyptianizing sculpture from Rome predominated, much of it seldom seen on display before (for example, a head of Artemis found in 2009 beneath the tram-tracks of via Marmorata), plus pieces from the gardens of the Villa Mattei that had been transferred to the

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<sup>19</sup> *La Repubblica*, 27 January 2009.

<sup>20</sup> In anticipation of a new catalogue for Aula X, see S. Aurigemma, *The Baths of Diocletian and the Museo Nazionale Romano* (Rome, 1963), 52–4 (the tomb of the stuccoes had yet to be transferred) and B.M. Felletti Maj's original excavation notice in *Notizie degli Scavi di Antichità* (1957), 336–58. See also F. Licordari, 'L'aula X delle Terme di Diocleziano', *Forma Urbis* 14 (2) (2009), 4–9.

museum in 1996 (statue heads and the famous fragmentary Antonine sarcophagus with scenes of the origins of Rome).<sup>21</sup>

Temporary exhibitions and provisional rearrangements of previously warehoused remains included much material related directly to Rome. The Palazzo Massimo exhibited the important but fragmentary remains from the Tomb of Patron at the Porta Latina, with its Livia-like garden frescoes, loaned by the Louvre, as well as the entire painted interior of the early Augustan 'large columbarium' of the Villa Pamphilj, not seen since the 1950s. The wonderfully complete décor (frescoes and floor mosaics) from the Antonine insula at Termini, last seen at 1996's *Antiche stanze* show, returned to an exhibition space appropriately overlooking the piazza dei Cinquecento, where it had been excavated in the 1940s. Short guides to each complex were issued.<sup>22</sup> Briefly displayed at the *Giulio Cesare* exhibition at the Cloister of Bramante (23 October 2008–3 May 2009) was the fourth and finest frieze from the Basilica Aemilia, representing the Rape of the Sabines (the others are on permanent show at the Palazzo Massimo).<sup>23</sup> At the end of March 2009, in time for the bimillenary of the birth of Vespasian, a major exhibition on the Flavians opened, held simultaneously at the Colosseum, the Curia and the Neronian cryptoporticus of the Palatine. As well as assembling for the first time monumental statues from all over Rome and farther afield (including the colossal heads of Vespasian and Titus from Naples), much architectural sculpture and epigraphy from Flavian monuments in Rome was released from the storerooms: marble roofing from the Templum Pacis, figured friezes from the Templum Gentis Flaviae, large-scale inscriptions from the Horrea Vespasiani and Largo Argentina, and all surviving fragments of the Severan marble plan relating to the Flavian monuments.<sup>24</sup>

Restoration and excavation at other show-piece monuments is expected to continue next year. The Circus Maximus is currently surrounded by hoardings and digging has commenced at the already pulverized south end.<sup>25</sup> The reinforced concrete flooring around the Lapis Niger in the Comitium is to be taken up and replaced. During the works, the Lapis itself and its underlying

<sup>21</sup> [http://www.beniculturali.it/mibac/export/MiBAC/sito-MiBAC/Contenuti/Ministero/UfficioStampa/News/visualizza\\_asset.html\\_33814561.html](http://www.beniculturali.it/mibac/export/MiBAC/sito-MiBAC/Contenuti/Ministero/UfficioStampa/News/visualizza_asset.html_33814561.html) (last consulted 12.05.2009). The bulk of the Egyptian antiquities has been catalogued in F. Manera and C. Mazza, *Le collezioni egizie del Museo Nazionale Romano* (Milan, 2001). For the Mattei Collection, see M. De Angelis d'Ossat (ed.), *Scultura antica a Palazzo Altemps* (Milan, 2002), 301–17.

<sup>22</sup> L. Blanc and J.-L. Martinez, *Il paradiso in una stanza* (Milan, 2008); C. Garbagna (ed.), *Ut rosa amoena* (Milan, 2008) (with contributions by many authors); R. Paris and M. Barbera, *Le antiche stanze di Termini* (Milan, 2008). The new arrangement meant that the ninth-century frescoes from the 'Temple of Portunus' (see last year's 'Notes') have now been removed from display.

<sup>23</sup> Unfortunately the catalogue pictures the wrong scene (C. Conti and S. Violante, 'Fregio della Basilica Aemilia. Il ratto delle Sabine', in Gentili (ed.), *Giulio Cesare* (above, n. 3), 230–1).

<sup>24</sup> Catalogue: F. Coarelli (ed.), *Divus Vespasianus. Il bimillenario dei Flavi* (Milan, 2009). In April the exhibition was extended with a small display in the Palazzo Nuovo Capitolino relating chiefly to Egyptian cults in the area of the Capitoline Hill.

<sup>25</sup> For the rationale behind the project, see P. Ciancio Rossetto and M. Buonfiglio, 'Circo Massimo: riflessioni e progetti', *Orizzonti* 8 (2007), 19–41.

monuments will be visible from a viewing gallery in the Forum. The possibility of opening to the public the enormous *grottoni* beneath the southern part of the Capitoline Hill — three-storey medieval tufa quarries now used as archaeological storerooms — has been raised.<sup>26</sup> Optimistic notices in the press have even referred to the imminent reopening of the Tomb of the Scipios and Porta Maggiore's Underground Basilica (which was in fact briefly accessible during the Roma Nascosta series of guided tours in May 2009). Perhaps more realistic is the prediction that the Domus Aurea will remain closed until 2011.

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<sup>26</sup> By Anna Maria Sommella, in *La Repubblica*, 21 February 2009.