

NOTES FROM ROME 2022–23

by Christopher Siwicki

This gazette presents to the reader outside Rome news of recent archaeological activity (July 2022–June 2023) 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 (luglio 2022 – giugno 2023) tratte da conferenze, convegni, mostre e relazioni su giornali.

Openings

Almost a century after it was first excavated, the Area Sacra di Largo Argentina is open to the public and its cats are forced to share the space with visitors. Since being inaugurated on Rome's birthday in 1929, the archaeological area with its four Republican-era temples has been a conspicuous presence in the cityscape, but visible only from the modern street level, with access to the site itself requiring special permission. This changed in June 2023 with the completion of a major intervention designed to make it accessible to all.¹ A ticket office and small bookshop is installed on the ground floor of the medieval Torre del Papito. Pilaster capitals from the church of San Nicola de' Cesarini and the architrave of Palazzo Aquari (both demolished in the 1920s) have been placed in the adjoining loggia, itself built in 1940 from *spolia*. Visitors enter the site from via di San Nicola de' Cesarini and descend to a sensitively designed walkway which runs just above the ancient paving and in front of the four temples. The route extends under via Florida, meaning that it is now possible to see the full width of temple D (impossible from the street above). The storerooms under via di San Nicola de' Cesarini have been converted into an antiquarium. This has the double advantage of allowing for the display of various objects found on site and of also making accessible the tuff portico of engaged columns that fronted the sacred precinct. The exhibition space contains an array of finds including two large marble heads of female deities, one of which was part of an acrolith statue and is hypothesized to be that of Feronia. Also displayed is an arrangement of octagonal-shaped, marble floor tiles from the church of San Nicola de' Cesarini, the reverse of which shows that they were recut in the seventeenth century from various ancient inscriptions and

¹ https://roma.repubblica.it/cronaca/2023/06/20/news/largo_argentina_area_sacra_apre_roma_archeologia-405136185/; for further images, see <https://artemagazine.it/2023/06/22/riaperta-larea-sacra-di-largo-argentina-grazie-al-sostegno-di-bulgari/>

sarcophagi. As reported in Notes from Rome 2021–22, the works were sponsored by the Italian fashion brand Bulgari, who have been commendably restrained in attaching their name to the project now complete.² A small publication details the history of the site and the recent intervention.³

In other news that might be placed under the heading ‘Openings’, if only ironically, from July 2023 an entrance fee has been introduced for admission to the Pantheon. This sets a concerning precedent for other currently free churches in the capital.⁴

Excavations

The surprise discovery in January 2023 of a male portrait statue in the guise of Hercules was widely reported in the international press.⁵ A mechanical digger ploughing through the ground around an old sewer pipe in Parco Scott, just west of the second mile of the via Appia Antica, unexpectedly hit the marble statue (the body appears to show fresh wounds from the scoop) some 20 m below present surface level. Up to that point, the soil was reportedly free of archaeological material and the statue was out of its original context, seemingly having been inadvertently deposited under the park during the construction of the sewer duct in the early twentieth century. Following conservation, the statue went on display in the exhibition ‘L’istante e l’eternità. Tra noi e gli antichi’ at the Baths of Diocletian (see below), which allowed for closer inspection. The statue is a little over life-sized (205 cm including the base) and carved from white marble. Given its rather brutal recent history, the statue is remarkably complete, missing only its right shin, both hands, peak of the lionskin cap and part of the leg support. The wide forehead, close-cropped hair balding on top and short beard led to the suggestion that the statue depicted the Emperor Decius.⁶ However, busts of Decius show him with a tuft of hair at the front, lacking in the new statue, and a heavier brow ridge; moreover, Decius is clean-shaven around the mouth, while the Hercules figure has both a moustache and wispy facial hair under the bottom lip. Instead, the statue likely represents an otherwise unknown person of the second or third century AD. Even if the precise context of the statue cannot be recovered, the idea that it belonged to a funerary monument seems very plausible given its proximity to the via Appia,

² C. Siwicki, ‘Notes from Rome 2021–22’, *PBSR* 90 (2022), 333.

³ V. Ascenzi, M. Ceci, S. Palladino et al., *L’Area Sacra di Largo Argentina e la Torre del Papito*. Rome, 2023.

⁴ Discussed in greater depth at <https://hyperallergic.com/815954/why-charging-admission-for-rome-pantheon-is-a-bad-idea/>

⁵ https://roma.corriere.it/notizie/cronaca/23_gennaio_26/roma-parco-scott-statua-ercole-appia-antica-eee40199-e760-4f53-87c8-991a2924dxlk.shtml

⁶ <https://www.reuters.com/lifestyle/oddly-enough/roman-sewer-works-reveal-statue-emperor-posing-hercules-2023-02-02/>; <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/ancient-marble-statue-of-emperor-dressed-as-hercules-discovered-in-roman-sewer-180981602/>

and it can be added to the catalogue of humans representing themselves as gods in this period.⁷

Between summer 2022 and January 2023, a large pit appeared in the patch of grass in front of the Baths of Caracalla, northwest of the Basilica dei Santi Nereo ed Achilleo. This excavation by the Soprintendenza Speciale di Roma aimed to find the ancient via Appia and establish its relationship with the Severan-era via Nova, which according to the author of the *Historia Augusta* and Aurelius Victor was built by Caracalla adjacent to the *Thermae Antoninae*, and either ran parallel to or supplanted the via Appia at this point.⁸ Excavations went 8 m down before a torrent of groundwater (uncontrollable even with mechanical pumps) forced digging to stop, still an estimated 1 to 1.5 m above the ancient street level. Nevertheless, the results when fully published promise to provide an important insight into this area of the city, particularly in the late antique and medieval periods. The earliest structures reached by the excavators are Hadrianic and Severan and appear to be of a residential and commercial nature. Scholars have proposed that the width of the via Nova was an immense 30 m (100 Roman ft), based on a fragment of the *Forma Urbis*.⁹ Interestingly, the imperial-era buildings uncovered in the excavation apparently correspond to this distance measured from the row of still visible vaulted *tabernae* which front the Baths of Caracalla. The *Forma Urbis* fragment also shows this area outside the *Porta Capena* to have been densely urbanized in the third century AD. The recent excavation suggests that this trend continued into the early medieval period, with the structures being converted for various types of production (either washing, or glass- and ceramic-making activity have been proposed but await further analysis).¹⁰ Evidence of the collapse of the structures in the ninth century is followed by the construction of a new rammed-earth or cobbled street (reports vary) being laid over the top of them in the tenth.¹¹ Notable finds that were presented to the press include a small Julio-Claudian-era bust of a boy, later reworked, a sixth-century seal ring with the monogram ‘Antonius’, and a square seventh-century coin from the mint in Rome featuring the portrait of a Byzantine emperor.

Further along the road, outside the Porta San Sebastiano, the Appia Antica 39 project is an excavation run by the University of Ferrara focused on community engagement and which organizes visits throughout the dig season for members of the public.¹² The site (via Appia Antica, 39) is adjacent to the so-called

⁷ Also see the catalogue entry by Francesca Romana Paolillo in M. Osanna, S. Verger, M. Catoni et al., *L'istante e l'eternità. Tra noi e gli antichi*. Milan, 2023: 285.

⁸ For details of the project, see https://www.soprintenzaspecialeroma.it/eventi/uno-scavo-di-ricerca-appia-regina-viarum_307; SHA M. *Ant.* 9.9; Aul. Vict. *Caes.* 21; J. Patterson, ‘Via Nova’. *LTUR V* (1999), 142.

⁹ *FUR* 1; for discussion, see <http://formaurbis.stanford.edu/fragment.php?record=1>

¹⁰ <https://www.finestresullarte.info/en/archaeology/appia-antica-new-archaeological-discoveries-in-research-excavation>

¹¹ https://www.ilmessaggero.it/video/roma/appia_antica_vita_segreta_rione_caracalla-7188164.html

¹² <https://www.eccc.unife.it/portfolio-item/appia-antica-39-progetto-archeologico/#>

‘Tomb of Geta’ in between the first and second mile of the road. The results of the 2022 campaign, reported in October, include the discovery of a funerary complex measuring 80 m² and comprising two structures which cover about a third of the site. A columbarium dating between the first and third century AD also came to light. Constructed in *opus latericium*, the design contains space for 22 clay cinerary urns grouped in pairs and sunk into quadrangular and curved niches. Four individual inhumations, including at least one *cappucina*-type tomb, were found outside the columbarium and are dated to the late antique period, by which time the monument had gone out of use.¹³

On the opposite side of the city, in August 2022, a Roman bridge at the seventh mile of the ancient via Tiburtina was uncovered during work to widen the modern via Tiburtina where it crosses the Fosso di Pratolungo, a small tributary of the Aniene river. The excavations exposed one of the arches of a bridge, which has been dated to the imperial era and is built of large ashlar blocks of travertine covered with a layer of concrete to further reinforce the structure.¹⁴ The absence of a keystone in the arch is apparently the result of alterations made to the bridge in the medieval period, when it was partially dismantled and two walls over 3 m high were added at one end, possibly as part of a smaller bridge over the ditch.¹⁵ A relationship between this bridge and the earlier discovery in February of a Republican-era (third- to second-century BC) bridge of ashlar also crossing the Pratolungo some 25 m away has been hypothesized but remains unclear.¹⁶

In October, workers laying telecommunication cables at piazza Pitagora in the Parioli district came across a stretch of the via Salaria vetus.¹⁷ The basalt paving, 4 m in width, was exposed at approximately 1–1.5 m below the modern asphalt. Adjacent to the ancient road an imperial-era funerary monument was also found. Apparently renovated in antiquity, the tomb contained bone fragments and two oil lamps datable to the third century AD. The discovery further helps to chart the uncertain course of the via Salaria vetus north of Monte Parioli.¹⁸

Also in October, it was reported that 5 m of the ancient via Latina had been uncovered adjacent to the Mausoleo di Campo Barbarico (also known as the Casaccia), a quadrangular, brick-faced temple-tomb in the suburbs near Tor Fiscale.¹⁹ The discovery has overturned the prevailing assumption that the via

¹³ <https://www.iltabloid.it/2022/10/11/via-appia-antica-39-i-risultati-della-prima-campagna-di-scavo.html>

¹⁴ For pictures, see <https://www.avvenire.it/agora/pagine/scoperti-resti-di-un-ponte-romano-lungo-la-via-tiburtina>

¹⁵ https://www.info.roma.it/monumenti_dettaglio.asp?ID_schede=10638

¹⁶ <https://www.romatoday.it/attualita/scoperta-ponte-romano-di-pratolungo.html>

¹⁷ https://www.ansa.it/canale_viaggiart/it/regione/lazio/2022/10/19/roma-nuove-scoperte-archeologiche-a-piazza-pitagora_bb14c7a7-c249-48aa-a1b8-ebb0aa526e8b.html

¹⁸ For pictures, see <https://www.romatoday.it/foto/zone/scavo-piazza-pitagora-basolato-salaria-vetus-foto/#via-salaria-vetus-lo-scavo-foto-f-caricchia.html>

¹⁹ https://www.ilmessaggero.it/roma/tuscolana/roma_via_latina_antica_scavi_manto_stradale_appia_antica_parco_archeologico_scoperta_news_oggi-6966399.html?refresh_ce

Latina lay directly underneath via di Campo Barbarico and shows instead that it appears to have run a few metres to the north.²⁰ A continuous wheel rut runs through the basalt paving stones, suggesting they have not been rearranged since the road fell out of use, and the recycling of a piece of marble architrave in its surface is taken as evidence for late-antique repairs. The road is separated from the entrance of the tomb by a 2-m-wide, cobbled sidewalk. Excavations inside the funerary monument earlier in the year have allowed a Hadrianic date to be assigned to the structure (previously it was thought to belong to the second half of the second century AD). The tomb was used for mixed burial practices, with niches for inhumation in the lower register and ones for cinerary urns above.²¹ Although now stripped of its ornament, drawings of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, some of which are part of Cassiano Dal Pozzo's Paper Museum, reproduce its once rich interior.²²

Nearby, within the confines of the Parco archeologico delle Tombe di via Latina, excavations were carried out in early 2023 by the Parco Archeologico dell'Appia Antica at the villa variously known as that of the Anicii or of Demetriade.²³ The latter name refers to the aristocratic woman who according to the *Liber Pontificalis* converted part of the her private residence into a basilica to Santo Stefano during the papacy of Leo I.²⁴ That there are several earlier phases to the villa has long been known and one suggestion is that it previously belonged to the Silani, two of whom Commodus executed before then appropriating the villa, in a similar manner to the fate of the Quintilli brothers and their property.²⁵ Stamped bricks discovered in the recent excavations confirm a second-century AD, Hadrianic date for the pre-Constantinian phase of the villa, but not its ownership.

Over on the via Prenestina, in front of the Villa Gordiani, preparations in December for a new outdoor fitness area in the park encountered the perimeter wall of a Roman tomb constructed in *opus mixtum*, not half a metre below the surface. Also found was a partially preserved marble funerary altar.²⁶ Although the top of the altar is missing, photographs show it with decorative scenes on two sides, the best preserved of which has two figures, one seated (?), at the top of a flight of stairs and attending to two altars (?). Carved columns on the corners frame the scenes, and the representation of a garland hangs above.

Further afield, news was released in May that 11 km out of the city on the via Cassia, plans to construct a new service station necessitated the excavation of a site with a chronology from the seventh century BC to the eleventh century AD,

²⁰ For other recent excavations along the via Latina in the environs of Rome, see C. Siwicki, 'Notes from Rome 2021–22', *PBSR* 90 (2022), 331.

²¹ https://roma.repubblica.it/cronaca/2022/08/09/news/scavi_appia_antica_sei_tombe-360883551/

²² <https://www.parcocarheologicoappiaantica.it/luoghi/mausoleo-di-campo-barbarico/>

²³ <https://www.stilearte.it/una-villa-romana-sotto-unaltra-villa-nuove-scoperte-a-roma-attorno-alla-via-latina/>

²⁴ Lib. Pont. *Leo* XLVII. 2 (65).

²⁵ *SHA Comm.* 7.5.

²⁶ <https://www.romatoday.it/zone/centocelle/centocelle/villa-gordiani-scavi-capitello-romano.html>

although at the time of writing details remain limited.²⁷ A monumental cistern was dug into tuff hillside, as was a burial chamber accessed by a long corridor or *dromos*, within which were over 60 intact *bucchero* vessels. A substantial stretch of an ancient road coming off the via Cassia with well-preserved basalt paving was exposed, and at the junction a small waystation for travellers was also found. Given the vaguely related purpose of the new service station that is to be built over the site, it is in some way fitting and welcome that the developer is planning to incorporate parts of the ancient remains within the design.²⁸

In July 2022, the Sovrintendenza Capitolina announced they would begin excavating at Largo Corrado, a small grassy area where via Cavour meets via dei Fori Imperiali, in front of the Torre dei Conti.²⁹ The excavations abut the exterior face of the wall of the *forum Transitorium* and will presumably come down onto part of the northernmost paving or colonnade of the precinct of the temple of Peace. The works continue a trend of digging up public spaces at various spots along via dei Fori Imperiali in an effort to uncover as much of the imperial forums as possible, regardless of how unsightly the ‘holes’ left from previous digs over the forums of Augustus, Trajan and the Temple of Peace now appear.³⁰ Alongside the excavation is a new and welcome initiative, ‘Scavi in Comune’, designed to open the archaeological site to visits by members of the public on select days, although places on the tours are very limited and have for now ceased. In January a conference was held to report on progress, and further details about the finds will presumably emerge at a later date.³¹

At the other end of via dei Fori Imperiali, ground was broken in June 2023 for the creation of the Metro C station at Piazza Venezia.³² Like the Metro C stations at San Giovanni, Metronia and Fori Imperiali (due to open in 2025), it will be a ‘museum-station’, incorporating archaeological finds and structures within the layout. Buildings already excavated in the previous decades as part of the preparatory work for the metro line, including the so-called ‘Athenaeum’ and the road and *tabernae* of the via Flaminia, will feature within the complex.³³ Likewise, a route through the station is planned to take commuters into the space to the rear of the column of Trajan. Achieving this will involve partly dismantling and temporarily removing the archaeological remains so that the

²⁷ <https://www.stilearte.it/strada-romana-tomba-sotterranei-e-una-locanda-di-2000-anni-fa-trovati-nellarea-della-via-cassia-che-ospitera-distributore-di-benzina/>

²⁸ As with the McDonald’s drive through on the via Appia, <https://www.ilpost.it/2017/02/21/mcdonalds-marino-resti-romani-appia-antica-archeologia/>

²⁹ <https://sovrintendenzaroma.it/content/scavi-comune-lo-scavo-di-largo-corrado-ricci-un-cantiere-aperto>

³⁰ A. Claridge and C. Siwicki, ‘Notes from Rome 2018–19’, *PBSR* 87 (2019), 309.

³¹ <https://www.museodiroma.it/didattica/lo-scavo-archeologico-di-un-settore-del-foro-della-pace>

³² <https://www.artribune.com/progettazione/architettura/2023/06/nuova-stazione-metro-piazza-veneziana-roma-museo/>

³³ See R. Coates-Stephens, ‘Notes from Rome’, *PBSR* 76 (2008), 300–2; ‘Notes from Rome’, *PBSR* 77 (2009), 292; ‘Notes from Rome 2011–12’, *PBSR* 80 (2012), 326–7.

lower levels of the station can be constructed, before then placing them back above, *in situ*, sort of.³⁴ Given the immense projected cost and length of disruption for the construction of one station — 700 million euros and ten years at the moment — one cannot help but wonder about the viability of an improved tram system as an alternative means of public transportation in the area. However, the wisdom of such a scheme is far beyond the scope of this gazette to comment on knowingly and the necessary further excavation of the area will no doubt provide ample material to fill the pages of future editions.

In other news related to Metro C, in February newspapers reported that work near the planned station at Porta Metronia uncovered a particularly fine base of a glass cup depicting the helmeted figure of Roma in gold.³⁵ Suggested to be a product of the early fourth century AD, the piece will go on display in the museum that is to be installed in the station when completed in 2025.

Two excavations were carried out at the Colosseum in the last year. In November 2022, finds were presented from an exploration of the sewer and drainage channels underneath the amphitheatre, a story which received considerable media attention.³⁶ The project had been underway since January 2021 and was carried out in collaboration with Roma Sotterraneo. The items which were displayed in the *Curia Iulia* included dog, bear and big cat bones; peach, fig, grape and blackberry pips and seeds; and 53 coins, as well as other small finds one might anticipate from the drains of a popular entertainment venue.

If the clearance of the Colosseum's sewers was widely reported in the international press, the highly visible excavation of the exterior of the southern, collapsed external corridors of the amphitheatre received surprisingly little public attention.³⁷ Between October 2022 and June 2023, the entire paved area between the Valadier and Stern brick buttresses (arches 18 to 60) was taken up. The ground was shown to be cut by numerous modern interventions and utility pipes, with much of the historical stratigraphy seemingly disturbed or destroyed. Nevertheless, parts of the ancient travertine paving as well as the footings for the now missing arches were revealed. Evidence for an extensive phase of the spoliation of the travertine paving in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries was uncovered, as were the remains of a mule crushed by fallen masonry, an incident the excavators have cautiously linked to the devastating earthquake of 1347 as reported by Petrarch.³⁸ The progress of the excavation was reported weekly in an excellent online 'dig diary', which remains accessible and provides a fuller account of the complex stratigraphical picture, complete with images.³⁹

³⁴ For a video of the scheme, see <https://www.rinnovabili.it/greenbuilding/smart-city/metro-c-di-roma-gualtieri-da-il-via-allo-scavo-di-piazza-venezia/>

³⁵ <https://www.romatoday.it/politica/reperto-archeologico-metro-c-vetro-dorado.html>

³⁶ <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/rome-colosseum-drains-relics-coins-bones-snacks-2218940>

³⁷ <https://www.artandobject.com/news/new-excavations-romes-colosseum>

³⁸ Petrarch *Fam.* 10.2.

³⁹ <https://colosseo.it/evento/tutela-piazza-colosseo-scavo-settore-sud/>

Museums and Exhibitions

An important story that has flown somewhat under the radar is the planned, 100-million-euro overhaul of the national archaeological museums in Rome: Terme di Diocleziano, Palazzo Massimo, Palazzo Altemps and Crypta Balbi. Titled ‘Urbs, dalla città alla campagna romana’, this ambitious, four-year scheme involves major renovations of the exhibition spaces, reordering of collections, and also temporary closures. Details can be found on the website of Ministero della Cultura, although a brief summary is also offered here.⁴⁰ At Terme di Diocleziano, rooms of the Baths previously off-limits will be opened up to provide a circular route through the museum. Likewise, the upper storey of Michelangelo’s cloister will be remodelled with an increased emphasis on displaying finds from Latium Vetus. The internal courtyard of Palazzo Massimo will be covered, creating an additional exhibition space. Bringing pieces out of the storerooms, the theme will be about Rome as the centre of empire from Augustus to Maxentius. A section on religions of the empire, from Egypt to the Orient, will also be added. New spaces will also be opened at Palazzo Altemps, including the recovery of a second courtyard, and a new itinerary for the collection. This will centre on the interpretation and reception of ‘Greek’ sculpture from antiquity to the Renaissance (and presumably beyond). The Boncompagni Ludovisi collection will remain the core of the museum, although it will be supplemented by moving pieces from Palazzo Massimo, notably the bronze boxer and Hellenistic prince. The Crypta Balbi has already closed for renovation and it is not clear when it is scheduled to reopen. The museum layout is being redesigned to take advantage of currently unused areas of the site (apparently 90 per cent of the internal space was previously inaccessible to the public). Retaining its focus on the history of this specific area of the city from antiquity onward, the revamped museum collections will now go beyond the medieval period up to the twentieth century and the murder of Aldo Moro whose body was found on the adjoining via Caetani in 1978.

In terms of exhibitions, two major ones were held at the Capitoline Museums. ‘Domiziano Imperatore. Odio e Amore’ opened in July 2022 in the villa Caffarelli and, as apparent from the title, centred on the last of the Flavian emperors.⁴¹ It proposed to show Domitian as a ‘complex figure ... misunderstood by contemporaries and later by posterity’, thereby continuing the hardly new trend

⁴⁰ <https://www.beniculturali.it/comunicato/23965>; <https://museonazionaleromano.beniculturali.it/2022/12/urbs-dalla-citta-alla-campagna-romana-il-grande-progetto-del-museo-nazionale-romano/>; also see the interview in <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2023/03/13/revealed-romes-new-100m-culture-masterplan>

⁴¹ ‘Domiziano Imperatore. Odio e Amore’ (13 July 2022 – 29 January 2023) was curated by Claudio Parisi Presicce, Maria Paola Del Moro and Massimiliano Munzi. An accompanying catalogue of the same name was published by Gangemi Editore.

in scholarship of rehabilitating Rome's 'bad' emperors.⁴² Maybe it is time to have an exhibition denigrating the supposedly 'good' emperors instead. The displays were divided into five aspects of Domitian's rule: the emperor and the gods; dynastic propaganda; the administration of the provinces; Domitian's private residences; and his building activity in Rome. In order to illustrate this narrative, many fine sculptural pieces were brought together from across the Capitoline and Roman museums (it was particularly nice to see the relief from the tomb of the Haterii from the Vatican Museums in a new setting), as well as loans from museums elsewhere in Italy, as well as the British Museum, the Louvre and the Monaco Glyptothek, among others. Particularly conspicuous was the number of objects from the Rijksmuseum van Oudheden. This is because 'Domiziano Imperatore' acted as a follow-up to, and was created in collaboration with, the 2021 'God on Earth: Emperor Domitian' exhibition at the Dutch museum.⁴³

The other exhibition at the Capitoline was 'La Roma della Repubblica. Il racconto dell'Archeologia'.⁴⁴ Similar to the 2018/19 exhibition 'La Roma dei Re. Il racconto dell'Archeologia', it contained a fantastic collection of assemblages of material from excavations between the 1870s and 1940s, much of which is not normally (or never has been) on public display.⁴⁵ It included an array of anthropomorphic statuettes from the votive deposit at Minerva Medica, a selection of the 400 objects related to Hercules (the earliest dating to the seventh century BC) from a deposit near the former Pastificio Pantanella at the *forum Boarium*, the sixth- to fourth-centuries BC contents of a series of wells found near the Capitoline in 1941, as well as other finds from the area of the Campidoglio and under the *Tabularium* discovered during that period. On display also were fragments of the pediment and architectural terracottas of the early phases of the temples in Largo Argentina, as well as the temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus. Of particular note were the fragments of a terracotta sculptural group of exceptional quality from the pediment of a temple, possibly located near the fourth mile of via Latina. These include a seated Capitoline Triad, a standing Hercules and a Hercules capturing the horses of Diomedes, dated to the first half of the first century BC. In all, 268 pieces belonging to the group were discovered in 1876 during works on the via Appia Nuova, but they have remained largely unpublished. It is therefore doubly frustrating that, at the time of writing, a catalogue of the exhibition has still not been produced.⁴⁶

⁴² <https://www.museicapitolini.org/it/mostra-evento/domiziano-imperatore-odio-e-amore>; in 2021, the British Museum's 2021 exhibition 'Nero: the man behind the myth' similarly sought to question 'traditional narrative of the ruthless tyrant and eccentric performer', <https://www.britishmuseum.org/exhibitions/nero-man-behind-myth>

⁴³ See the catalogue A. Cominesi, N. de Haan, E. Moormann, C. Stocks, *God on Earth: Emperor Domitian*. Leiden, 2021.

⁴⁴ <https://www.museicapitolini.org/it/mostra-evento/la-roma-della-repubblica-il-racconto-dell-archeologia>

⁴⁵ On 'La Roma dei Re. Il racconto dell'Archeologia', see A. Claridge and C. Siwicki, 'Notes from Rome 2018–19', *PBSR* 87 (2019), 312–13.

⁴⁶ 'La Roma della Repubblica. Il racconto dell'Archeologia' (13 January–24 September 2023) was curated by Isabella Damiani and Claudio Parisi Presicce.

At the Museo Centrale Montemartini extension of the Capitoline collections, the exhibition ‘Colori dei Romani. I mosaici dalle Collezioni Capitoline’, which has been on since 2019, was supplemented in March with an additional sixteen pieces from the storerooms.⁴⁷ These included a series of inscriptions, cinerary urns and mosaics from an imperial-era necropolis on via Portuense near Trastevere station that was discovered in 1926. The haste with which the excavation was carried out resulted in poor documentation of the finds, and the exhibition has provided an opportunity to recontextualize and display some of them for the first time. A nice example of this is a large black and white mosaic with avian and floral motifs from a tomb dated to the late second/early third century AD. Between 1952 and 2005, it decorated one of the floors of Palazzo dei Conservatori and was erroneously thought to have been a mosaic found on the Esquiline Hill in 1880. Also recovered from the storerooms was the small, marble cinerary urn of Gaius Iulius Bathyllus. The piece is from the columbarium of the freedmen of Livia on the via Appia (‘excavated’ in 1726) and carries the interesting detail that the deceased was the custodian of the temple of the Divine Augustus ‘in Palatium’ (*sic*).⁴⁸ Finally, there was a small display of late antique polychrome mosaics from the Baths of Diocletian, executed with distinctively large tesserae, as well as examples of *opus sectile* floor from the third-century house of Octavius Felix, uncovered on via Gioletti in 1872, and a fourth-century *domus* on the Caelian near via Capo d’Africa (1938).⁴⁹

This very welcome trend of exhibiting objects that have long languished in storerooms was also taken up by the Museo Nazionale Romano. Specifically, 2023 saw the launch of ‘Depositati (Ri)scoperti’ which has so far resulted in a series of small exhibitions in the Terme di Diocleziano. The first of these — ‘Ulisse e gli altri’ — had a brief run from 8 December 2022 to 8 January 2023. The exhibition brought together a collection of Roman-era sculptures and mosaics related to the myths of Odysseus.⁵⁰ Among these pieces were a bust of the hero from the area of the tomb of the Statilii and a head of Circe discovered at Circeo in 1928.⁵¹

Following this, ‘Acqua nell’Arte e Arte dell’Acqua. Fontane e nasoni di Roma’ was put on in collaboration with the water company ACEA.⁵² The exhibition displayed a number of bronze and lead taps, spouts and pipes, as well as a selection of decorative marble and bronze fountains. However, two of the

⁴⁷ <https://www.centralemontemartini.org/it/mostra-evento/colori-dei-romani-i-mosaici-dalle-collezioni-capitoline>; <https://www.artandobject.com/news/rarely-seen-ancient-mosaics-show-rome>

⁴⁸ *CIL* VI 20216.

⁴⁹ ‘Colori dei Romani. I mosaici dalle Collezioni Capitoline’ (27 April 2021 – 3 September 2023) was curated by Claudio Parisi Presicce, Nadia Agnoli and Serena Guglielmi.

⁵⁰ <https://www.turismoroma.it/it/eventi/ulisse-e-gli-altri-depositati-riscoperti> <https://museonazionaleromano.beniculturali.it/evento/depositati-riscoperti-ulisse-e-gli-altri/>

⁵¹ No accompanying catalogue had been published at the time of writing.

⁵² <https://museonazionaleromano.beniculturali.it/evento/acqua-nellarte-e-arte-dellacqua-fontane-e-nasoni-di-roma/>

standout pieces bore only a tangential relationship to the theme, in that they were discovered in water. One was the hind parts of a bronze horse found in the sea near Ponza. The other was the fragmentary gilded, bronze bust of either the Emperor Valens or Valentinian found in the Tiber.⁵³

‘La fanciulla nata con Roma’ began in June and centred on the two large archaic necropolises at Castel di Decima and Laurentina, which were excavated in the early 1990s.⁵⁴ The showpiece is tomb 359, excavated in 1991 and then locked away for the next 30 years. It is the grave of a young woman (between 18 and 24 years of age) dating to approximately 730 BC. The burial contains a remarkable 122 grave goods including numerous bronze fibulae. The exhibition coincides with new efforts to conserve and study this material, which will then go on permanent display following the planned reorganization of the museum, as mentioned above.⁵⁵

In addition to these smaller shows, Terme di Diocleziano also hosted the major exhibition ‘L’istante e l’eternità. Tra noi e gli antichi’.⁵⁶ On display were an excellent, if eclectic, mix of artistic pieces from museums in Rome, Italy and the Greek islands of Delos and Santorini. From the latter was a 2.5-m-tall seventh-century kore, which had been discovered in 2000 but was only displayed to the public for the first time late last year. As mentioned above, the exhibition was also the first opportunity to see the Hercules statue discovered on the via Appia in January. From Pompeii, there was the four-wheeled ceremonial cart decorated with erotic scenes in bronze that was excavated in 2021.⁵⁷ Another recent addition on display was the Tabula Chigi, which features an intricately carved bas-relief in yellow marble depicting Alexander the Great’s cavalry charge at the battle of Arbela and an accompanying epigram celebrating his achievements.⁵⁸ Dated to between the first century BC and first century AD, the tabula was found in 1777 and remained in the Chigi family (briefly vanishing in the mid-twentieth century) until the state acquired it last year.⁵⁹

⁵³ ‘Acqua nell’Arte e Arte dell’Acqua. Fontane e nasoni di Roma’ (7 April–31 May 2023) was curated by Stéphanne Verger and Vincenzo Lemmo. An accompanying small book of the same title was published by Gangemi Editore.

⁵⁴ <https://museonazionaleromano.beniculturali.it/evento/la-fanciulla-nata-con-roma-il-restauro-della-tomba-359-di-castel-di-decima/>

⁵⁵ ‘La fanciulla nata con Roma. Il restauro della tomba 359 di Castel di Decima’ (14 June–3 September 2023) was curated by Francesca Capanna. An accompanying small book of the same title was published by Gangemi Editore.

⁵⁶ With links to press release, <https://museonazionaleromano.beniculturali.it/evento/tra-noi-e-gli-antichi/>

⁵⁷ <http://pompeisites.org/en/comunicati/the-four-wheeled-processional-chariot-the-last-discovery-of-pompeii/>

⁵⁸ <https://www.finestresullarte.info/musei/colpo-del-mic-acquisita-tabula-chigi-per-museo-nazionale-romano>

⁵⁹ ‘L’istante e l’eternità. Tra noi e gli antichi’ (4 May–30 July 2023) was curated by Massimo Osanna, Stéphanne Verger, Maria Luisa Catoni and Demetrios Athanasoulis.

Not to be left out, Parco archeologico del Colosseo also allowed limited access to their storerooms with the initiative ‘Depositum in mostra’.⁶⁰ Every Friday, between April and July, three of the *tabernae* along the via Nova behind the *atrium Vestae*, which are used for the storage and study of material excavated in the forum, were opened to visitors. Many of the objects on display were from Giacomo Boni’s excavations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. These included several of the burials from the necropolis adjacent to the temple of Antoninus Pius and Faustina, a range of mid-Republican-era architectural terracottas, and marble fountains from the area of the *lacus Juturnae*.⁶¹ Also present were the iron and bronze fixtures relating to the doors of the *basilica Aemilia*, as well as the pieces of its floor into which bronze coins were fused when the building was burned in the sack of 410.

Also put on by the Parco archeologico del Colosseo was a small exhibition about the journey of Aeneas, held in the temple of Romulus in the forum.⁶² Among the pieces on display in ‘Il Viaggio di Enea da Troia a Roma’ were a second-century AD marble relief from Gaeta depicting the landing of the Trojans, as well as a piece of the marble frieze from the *basilica Aemilia* showing Aeneas and Ascanius escaping from Troy. Nine of the large terracotta votive statues from the sanctuary of Minerva at Lavinium had been brought in to take centre stage.⁶³

On the via Appia, too, the excellent exhibition ‘Patrimonium Appiae. Depositum Emersi’ put over 250 rarely or never seen objects on public display, 90 per cent of which are unpublished.⁶⁴ Most of the pieces belong to funerary contexts of various tombs along the via Appia and the via Latina, including finds from the columbarium of the vigna Codini and the mausoleum of Gallienus. There was also a section on the early Christian basilica of the via Ardeatina (excavated between 1993 and 1996), as well as material from the villa at Sette Bassi and the bath complex at Capo di Bove. The exhibition was held in the Casale Santa Maria Nova, which is now a visitable part of the Villa dei Quintili. It succeeded in demonstrating the multiple land use and long history of the areas flanking the territory adjacent to via Appia, and also provided visitors with a rich picture of the material culture of Roman funerary practices, something that is difficult to grasp from the now bare tombs themselves.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ <https://colosseo.it/evento/depositum-in-mostra/>

⁶¹ For a video of the exhibition, see https://www.ilmessaggero.it/video/cronaca/foro_romano_le_scoperte_mai_raccontate_tra_monete_necropoli_e_gioielli-7353644.html

⁶² <https://artemagazine.it/2022/12/15/il-viaggio-di-enea-da-troia-a-roma-raccontato-in-una-mostra-al-tempio-di-romolo-al-foro-romano/>

⁶³ ‘Il Viaggio di Enea da Troia a Roma’ (15 December 2022 – 10 April 2023) was curated by Alfonsina Russo, Roberta Alteri, Nicoletta Cassieri, Daniele Fortuna and Sandra Gatti.

⁶⁴ <https://www.parcoarcheologicoappiaantica.it/mostre/patrimonium-appiae-art-crossing/>; https://www.ilmessaggero.it/roma/eventi/patrimonium_appiae_il_21_ottobre_al_via_la_mostra_con_oltre_250_reperti_archeologici_inediti-6997779.html

⁶⁵ ‘Patrimonium Appiae. Depositum Emersi’ (22 October 2022 – 30 June 2023) was curated by Francesca Romana Paolillo, Mara Pontisso and Stefano Roascio. A pdf of the catalogue can

The previous Notes from Rome reported the opening of the new Museo dell'Arte Salvata in the octagonal hall of the Baths of Diocletian.⁶⁶ In late 2022, some additional pieces were added to the existing exhibition of artefacts recovered by the Comando Carabinieri Tutela Patrimonio Culturale, most notably the group of fourth-century BC terracotta statues depicting Orpheus and the Sirens, and which since the 1970s have been held at the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles.⁶⁷ However, for most of 2023 the Museo dell'Arte Salvata has been closed, presumably awaiting the installation of a new display (although neither the note on the door nor the museum staff shed much light on this).

In related news, following the return of a major cache of looted artefacts from the United States to Italy in December 2021,⁶⁸ in January 2023 it was announced that a further 60 ancient works of art had been recovered and were being repatriated, 27 coming from the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.⁶⁹ The pieces were briefly shown to the press in Rome and include bronze helmets and a bronze bust, an array of black figure ceramics, and a fresco of the infant Hercules wrestling a snake from Pompeii.

Finally, the 24 bronze statuettes and statues (five over 1 m in height) that were uncovered at San Casciano dei Bagni in November 2022 went on public display for the first time at Palazzo Quirinale in June.⁷⁰ The superb collection was found in the remains of a Roman-era bathhouse and appears to relate to a healing cult. Deliberately buried in antiquity, the statues were covered by some 6,000 coins.⁷¹

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be downloaded here: https://www.parcoarcheologicoappiaantica.it/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/patrimoniumappiae_2022_lr_2.pdf

⁶⁶ C. Siwicki, 'Notes from Rome 2021–22', *PBSR* 90 (2022), 326.

⁶⁷ <https://www.apollo-magazine.com/getty-orpheus-sculptures-italy-return-art-news/>; <https://www.artpartofculture.net/2022/11/26/comando-dei-carabinieri-per-la-tutela-del-patrimonio-culturale-museo-dellarte-salvata/>

⁶⁸ C. Siwicki, 'Notes from Rome 2021–22', *PBSR* 90 (2022), 326.

⁶⁹ <https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/u-s-authorities-return-dozens-of-looted-artifacts-to-italy-including-27-objects-from-the-met-1234655067/>

⁷⁰ <https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/italy-archaeology-ancient-bronze-statues-tuscany-1234645921/>; <https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/roman-etruscan-statues-found-tuscany-garbage-man-1234670384/>

⁷¹ 'Gli Dei ritornano. I bronzi di San Casciano' (23 June–25 July and 2 September–29 October 2023) was curated by Massimo Osanna and Jacopo Tabolli. An accompanying catalogue of the same name was published by Treccani.