

Antiquity

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The haunting

Mary Lukas & Ellen Lukas

Archaeological retrospect 5

Stuart Piggott

The development of Belizean archaeology

Norman Hammond

J. S. Weiner and the exposure of the Piltdown forgery

G. Ainsworth Harrison

The future of Ancient Rome

David Whitehouse

The tabula Contrebiensis

Guillermo Fatás

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The future of Ancient Rome

DAVID WHITEHOUSE.

Dr David Whitehouse, Director of the British School at Rome, here describes the new proposals suggested by Professor Adriano La Regina, Archaeological Superintendent of Rome, to deal with the damage being done to the remains of ancient Rome by pollution and neglect. These include an archaeological park in Rome, new museums, and the urgent protection of marble monuments disfigured by pollution.

Every year, on the traditional anniversary of the founding of Rome, the Mayor reviews the events of the last twelve months and outlines his plans for the future. Last year (the 2,735th anniversary), he began by describing work in progress on conservation and *mise-en-valeur* in the ancient city. It was wholly appropriate, for the future of classical Rome is a subject which concerns, or should concern, not only the Romans themselves, but all Italian taxpayers (who will foot the bill), town planners and conservation groups throughout Europe—not to mention all readers of ANTIQUITY. The proposals, promoted by the Archaeological Superintendent of Rome, Professor Adriano La Regina, include the creation of an archaeological park extending from the Capitoline to the Appian Way, new museums and—as a matter of extreme urgency—the protection of marble monuments disfigured by pollution. The plans involve both local and national authorities, and in March 1981 Parliament made available over a five-year period the staggering sum of 180,000 million lire (£75 m): 168,000 m for Rome itself, 10,000 m for South Etruria (the area north of Rome) and 2,000 m for Ostia.

MARBLE

Augustus boasted that, at the beginning of the Principate, Rome was a city of brick; at the end, a city of marble. In and after the Middle Ages, the marble monuments of Augustus and his successors served as quarries until, today, only a handful remain. It is a tragic irony that one of the most conserving generations in history—our own—is responsible for the pollution that is causing the disintegration of the survivors. The list of monuments at risk reads like the contents of a textbook

on Roman Imperial art: Trajan's Column, the Column of Marcus Aurelius; the Arches of Titus, Septimius Severus and Constantine; the Hadrianum, the Temple of Saturn, and so on (La Regina, 1981a, 8).

The problem is simple to describe. Rome has more than three million inhabitants who, despite the high cost of fuel, are inseparable from their cars and their central heating. Combustion of petrol and oil produces sulphur dioxide and this, when combined with moisture in the air, becomes sulphuric acid. The effect of sulphuric acid on marble is to turn it into plaster of Paris. It is estimated that 300 tonnes of sulphur dioxide are released into the Roman atmosphere annually, together with 60 tonnes of nitric oxide and 35 tonnes of dust (Cederna, 1982, 92-4).

The result is calamitous. A black, tar-like crust forms on the surface of the marble, behind which the rock turns to powder (PLS. VI, VII). Sooner or later, the crust and the powder fall off and the process begins again. If the present rate of decay continues, most of the sculpture in question may have disappeared by the year 2,000 (La Regina, quoted in *The New York Times*, 16 March 1980).

There is no doubt that pollution is the cause and that most of the damage has occurred within living memory. 'New' nineteenth-century marble is no less vulnerable than 'old' marble exposed to the elements for 1,800 years or more, and pre-war photographs show little of the corrosion we see today. Moreover, the Ara Pacis and marble statuary kept indoors have not been affected.

But what of the monuments in the open? La Regina began pressing for action in 1978, but with little effect until December 1979, when the full

extent of the damage was revealed by inspection following an earth tremor. One month later, the Ministry of Cultural and Environmental Property established a committee of enquiry under the chairmanship of Professor Cesare Gnudi. In May 1980, the Minister obtained Cabinet approval of a seven-point master plan for the antiquities of Rome. Point 1 went into effect immediately, and the marble monuments were put under wraps. Scaffolding was erected to provide access for conservators who are investigating the process of decay and, on the Arch of Constantine, already are experimenting with methods of treatment. The scaffolding also supports plastic roofs and polythene mesh, which provide protection from the 'acid rain' (PL. VIIIa). The measures are essential and the visitor who looks with dismay at these un-gainly parcels (which will remain until a means has been found to prevent further decay) should take comfort from the knowledge that the battle has begun to save some of the most important examples of Roman sculpture. Students, incidentally, are less dismayed, for the scaffolding affords a virtually unique opportunity to examine *all* the monumental sculpture of ancient Rome, face to face.

MARCUS AURELIUS

Marble is not the only substance attacked by pollution. A few years ago, the four bronze horses on the façade of San Marco in Venice were removed for treatment and now Rome's traffic has claimed another famous victim: the bronze equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius, for more than four hundred years the focal point of the Campidoglio. This, too, was corroding and in January 1981 horse and rider were removed to the Central Institute of Restoration for observation and treatment (PL. VIIIb). Like the horses of San Marco, Marcus Aurelius is unlikely to return to the open air and two corollaries of his removal—which, again, was essential—are the questions: what should one put in his place and where should one find him a home?

OTHER MONUMENTS

Time, neglect and the incessant vibration of the traffic also take their toll and several major monuments require attention (point 2 of the master plan). The monuments include the Colosseum (built largely of travertine, which is relatively resistant to the effects of pollution) and the Golden House of Nero, imperial residences on the Palatine, the

Temple of Venus and Rome, the Baths of Caracalla, the Baths of Diocletian and the Basilica of Maxentius, all of which are brick (La Regina, 1981a: 8). Of particular concern are the Tabularium and the Servian Wall, both built of tufo, a soft sedimentary rock particularly susceptible to weathering. By March 1982 La Regina was able to report that work was in progress on the Colosseum, while preliminary surveys and excavation had begun on the Palatine and in the Forum.

MUSEUMS

Points 3 and 6 of the plan concern private collections and museums, and in particular the Museo Nazionale Romano. Housed in the Baths of Diocletian—and consequently often known as the Museo delle Terme—it is a long-standing bone of contention (La Regina, 1981b). The museum was founded in 1889 and at first received objects not only from Rome, where suburban expansion was revealing archaeological material at an almost unprecedented rate, but also from farther afield. In 1901, it acquired the surviving part of the great Ludovisi Collection of classical sculpture, assembled in Rome in the seventeenth century. Subsequently, it became a repository for finds simply from Rome and the vicinity. Nevertheless, the holdings are enormous. The building itself is in need of repair; indeed, for this reason parts of the collection have been inaccessible for years.

The problem of congestion will be alleviated by removing all but one of the Ludovisi marbles—the Throne—to the Quirinale, the official residence of the President of Italy, part of which will become a museum. A renaissance palace, say supporters of the scheme, will provide an appropriate setting for collection assembled by princes, which for historical reasons should be displayed as a unity. The plan, however, is not without opponents, some of whom deplore the invasion of the President's residence, others the dismantling of the Museo Nazionale or, as in the case of the art historian Professor Federico Zeri, the apparent return to the court collections of the *ancien régime* (La Stampa, 23 March 1982).

Another collection, much discussed in the last few years, is that of the Torlonia family: more than 600 pieces of sculpture, assembled in the eighteenth century under the direction of Winckelmann. It is the finest collection of Roman sculpture still in private hands. However, despite its importance, the collection is not readily accessible and there is con-

cern about its condition. The State, therefore, proposes to purchase the collection *en bloc* and for this the Palazzo Altompe, near Piazza Navona, has been mentioned as a likely destination.

The Vatican apart, the other great repositories of Roman art in the city are the Capitoline Museums, at the Campidoglio. The Campidoglio also contains the offices of the Mayor, the City Council and part of the administration of Rome. While the Mayor and the Council will remain, the master plan foresees the removal of the bureaucracy to other premises and the expansion of the museums.

Finally, negotiations are in progress to acquire the Collegio Massimo, a large building near the Museo Nazionale Romano, which would become a museum of the pre-classical archaeology of Rome and the area to the south-east and south (ancient Latium): the equivalent of the Villa Giulia, which contains an incomparable collection of material from the area to the north (ancient Etruria). The wealth of the iron age communities of Latium has been recognized for a century or more, thanks to the discovery of the Barberini, Castellani and Bernardini tombs at Palestrina. In the 1970s, Latium and the origins of Rome became the focus of renewed attention, through the excavation of the rich cemeteries at Castel di Decima, Osteria dell'Osa, La Rustica and elsewhere (Colonna *et al.*, 1976; Bietti Sestieri, 1979; Ridgway, 1979). Indeed, our knowledge of ancient Latium has increased enormously in the last ten years and the highly successful exhibition, entitled *Civiltà del Lazio primitivo* (Rome, 1976), offered a glimpse of the impact we should expect from a well-arranged museum of Latium and early Rome.

THE FORA

Point 7, the most controversial proposal of all, concerns the heart of the classical city and the road known as *Via dei Fori Imperiali*. Planned for Mussolini as a triumphal boulevard, well suited to parades, *Via dei Fori Imperiali* runs from the Colosseum to Piazza Venezia (Cederna 1980, 167-94). It was constructed at the expense of a rather ramshackle part of the *centro storico*. Today, it is virtually an urban motorway, carrying heavy traffic between the southern suburbs and the city centre. To the south-west lies the Roman Forum; to the north-east, the Forum of Trajan. The road, and the green areas between the road and the Fora, conceal a unique complex of buildings: none other than the civic centre of ancient Rome. The centre,

constructed over a period of some 150 years, had maximum dimensions of 600 × 200 m and occupied 9 ha. It was the largest architectural complex in Europe before the eighteenth century (FIG. 1).

Apart from the Roman Forum, where excavations began in 1803 and which is almost entirely open to the public, the components of the complex are (Coarelli, F. in La Regina *et al.* 1981):

1. *Forum of Caesar*. Begun in 54 BC, by which time the Roman Forum had become too small for the needs of an expanding population. Dedicated in 46 BC, but not completed until after Caesar's death. Restored by Trajan and Diocletian. A long, narrow piazza (160 × 75 m), with double porticoes on three sides. On the north side, the temple of Venus Genetrix, mythical ancestor of the Gens Julia, the family of Caesar. One-third of the Forum was uncovered in 1930-2; the rest has never been excavated.
2. *Forum of Augustus*. Begun in 42 BC and opened in AD 2. A squarish piazza, measuring 125 × 118 m, dominated by the Temple of Mars Ultor ('Mars the Avenger', sc. of Caesar). Adorned with statues of Augustus in a chariot and of victorious generals. In times of crisis, the Senate met here to discuss declarations of war. Otherwise, like the other Fora, it was used for commercial purposes.
3. *Temple of Peace*. Although later known as the Forum of Peace, in fact the precinct of the Temple of Peace, erected by Vespasian in 71-5 to celebrate his victory over the Jews and to contain booty from Jerusalem. Destroyed by fire in 192, it was rebuilt by Septimius Severus. Our knowledge of the plan derives almost entirely from the *Forma Urbis*, the marble map of Rome made in the third century; the temple itself is under the road.
4. *Forum of Nerva*. The piazza, measuring 120 × 45 m was begun by Domitian and opened by Nerva in 97.
5. *Forum of Trajan*. The final, most ambitious extension to the complex, which required the demolition of part of the Velia, a ridge of high ground between the Oppian hill and the Capitoline (Mussolini demolished the rest). Financed with booty from the Dacian war, the Forum was begun by Trajan in 107 and inaugurated in 112. The scale was immense: the buildings measure 300 × 85 m and include a basilica as large as San Paolo fuori le Mura. A large part of the Forum is exposed already; architecturally, it is regarded as a masterpiece.

It is not difficult, therefore, to understand why considerable pressure has been exerted by archaeologists and ancient historians to close the road, so that all five Fora may be excavated and displayed

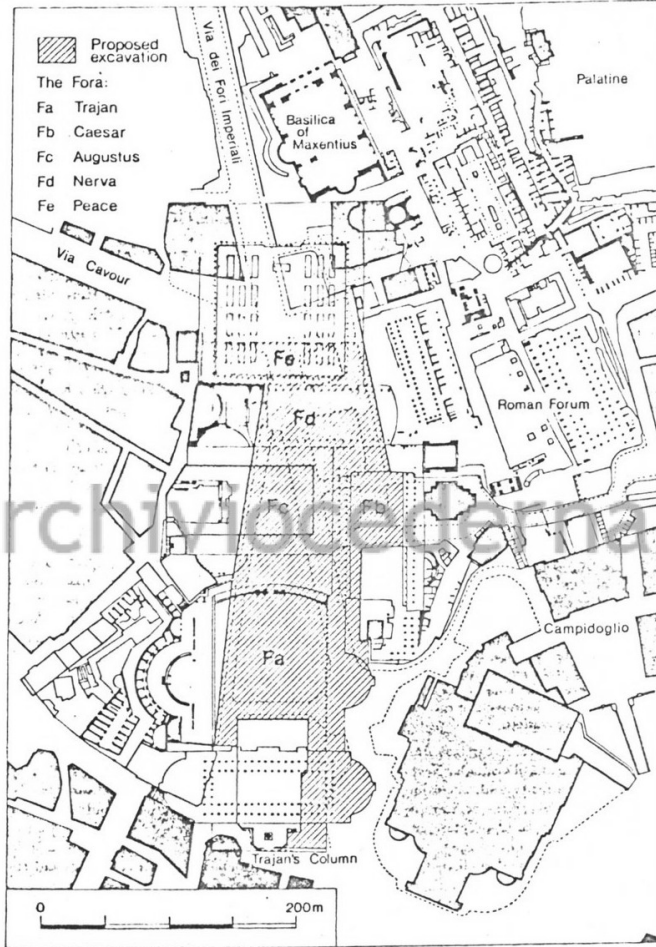


Fig. 1. The Fora, showing the area to be excavated

almost in their entirety. For different reasons, town planners, too, are anxious to see the last of Via dei Fori Imperiali and in February 1981 the City Council established a commission to look into the effects of closing the road. The first meeting was an occasion for both blast and counterblast in the press. The Gruppo dei Romanisti approved a motion regretting the proposed destruction of the road (which they see as an important example of Fascist planning), reminding the authorities that the excavation would have nothing to do with the urgent problem of saving the monuments endangered by pollution, and advising caution (*Il Tempo*, 6 February 1981, quoting Professor Pallottino; *ibid.*, 13 February, signed by Professor Paratore; *ibid.*, 18 February, signed by Professor Colini). From the other side of the fence, Professor Carandini described the arguments in favour of the painstaking—and extremely long—excavation of the Fora and their *mise-en-valeur* as the focal point of Rome's greatest asset: her cultural heritage (*L'Unità*, 4 March 1981).

Exactly a year later, after delays caused by local elections and the death of the Mayor, the commission came down in favour of a phased withdrawal of traffic, closure of the road and total excavation. The proposal, which is not confined to Via dei Fori Imperiali is as follows (*L'Espresso*, 16 March 1982):

- Phase 1. Close Via della Consolazione and Via de' Cerchi.
2. Install instruments to monitor pollution and discover precisely what is happening in the Roman atmosphere.
3. Ban private vehicles from Via dei Fori Imperiali and begin excavations in the green areas at the side of the road.
4. Ban all traffic, remove the road and begin the total excavation.

The scheme is a political hot potato and it is not impossible that changes will be made. Nevertheless, phase 1 has begun already and, according to the press, phase 2—long overdue—is 'imminent'. On 20 July 1982, the Mayor, Sr Ugo Vetere, announced that excavations would begin in 1983 and that Via dei Fori Imperiali would be demolished, two years later.

What is phase 1? Via della Consolazione is (or, rather, was) a minor road at the foot of the Capitoline, dividing the Roman Forum from the Tabularium. Essentially a modern creation, this has been removed and the area is now being

excavated. At the end of the day, the public will have access to almost all of the north-west end of the Forum. Via de' Cerchi, too, is divisive, separating the Palatine and the Circus Maximus. It is a busy road and its removal will cause far greater problems than the suppression of Via della Consolazione. Indeed, plans for the traffic are still being prepared and work has not yet begun. Excavations are under way, however, in another area which used to carry traffic: the site of the Meta Sudans (demolished in 1936!) between the Colosseum and the Temple of Venus and Rome.

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL PARK

The scheme for Via dei Fori Imperiali, although huge, is only part of an even larger programme, which has its roots in the first long-term plan for Rome, drawn up in 1887. This provided for the creation of a park extending southwards from the Campidoglio to the city wall (FIG. 2). The plan, implemented in 1910, saved the area south of the Colosseum from the developer. Today, it contains wealthy villas interspersed with open spaces and monuments, such as the Baths of Caracalla. The only major intrusions are the headquarters of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, which occupies Mussolini's African Ministry, and another busy road, which carries traffic between EUR and central Rome.

In 1965, a new long-term plan extended the 'park' to include some 2,500 ha outside the wall, on either side of the Appian Way. In future, no building licences will be issued and the Council has already acquired one important property. Among the monuments in the park are numerous tombs (such as that of Cecilia Metella) and the great complex of palace, circus and mausoleum, built by Maxentius in 306–12 (Cozza *et al.*, 1980).

EXPLORATION AND COMPULSORY PURCHASE

Points 4 and 5 of the Minister's plan are concerned with archaeological surveys in areas destined for development, and the compulsory purchase of monuments and sites of outstanding importance. On the outskirts of Rome, as in many other parts of Italy, both suburban and rural, the need for survey has reached crisis proportions. Industrial development and new residential suburbs on the one hand, and highly mechanized agriculture on the other, mean that rescue archaeology is assuming ever-increasing proportions. In the case of Rome, the Archaeological Superintend-

ency intends to embark upon the 'systematic exploration of suburban areas for the . . . identification and protection of sites which should not be built on . . .' (La Regina, 1981a, 8). The list of sites destined for compulsory purchase includes the Crypta Balbi in the city centre, where excavations are now in progress, and the imposing Villa of the Quintilii, near the Appian Way.

PROSPECT

The discovery three years ago that the marble monuments of Rome are literally—falling to pieces led to a bold re-assessment of the future of the city's classical patrimony as a whole. This is entirely proper, for 'with its monuments, museums and archaeological sites (Rome) has the greatest concentration of antiquities in existence' (La Regina, 1981a, 5). However, conservation and *mise-en-valeur* on the scale now proposed involve not only the national archaeological service, but also the planning departments of the local authority. This is not simply because of the traffic; the revival of the scheme for a vast archaeological park, extending from the suburbs to the centre of Rome, could not succeed without the approval of the planners, who see it as part of a wider programme of making the crowded city a better place to live in (see, for example, Aymonino, C., in La Regina

et al., 1981, 29–32 and *idem*, *La Repubblica*, 28–9 March 1982). There is, therefore, a great deal at stake: hence the vehemence of the debate, which the proposals have provoked.

From a strictly archaeological point of view, the plan is immensely attractive. One does wonder, however, how long it will take and where the personnel will be found. A city like Rome produces an endless series of chance finds and rescue operations, which tax the Superintendencies, and the burden increases each time work on the Metropolitana (Rome's Underground) requires the construction of a new station. Thus, even with help from the universities and foreign missions (which, I am delighted to say, would be welcome), Via dei Fori Imperiali is a long term project, which may well continue until the year 2000, if not later. But given the uniqueness of the opportunity—it is the last chance to carry out a large excavation in the civic centre of ancient Rome, using modern techniques—the long perspective is probably a very good thing.

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A STUDY OF THE ISSUE OF CONNECTIONS FOR ARCHEOLOGICAL SITES
IN AN URBAN CONTEXT
Final Presentation, March 15, 1983

The Architecture in Rome Program
Rome II, 1983
The University of Washington
College of Architecture and Urban Planning

Professor Astra Zarina
Professor Dennis Ryan

Problem Statement

The Comune di Roma, in cooperation with the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, has commenced a new program of physical interventions aimed at preserving and enhancing the archeological patrimony of Rome. The most daring part of this program is the plan to excavate the Fori Imperiali, with the intention of making it an important and accessible public space. Architect Robert Einaudi, representing X Ripartizione, the Assessorato al Centro Storico and the Soprintendenza Archeologica, has presented an urban plan which sets a framework for the connection of the Fori to the city during and after the period of excavation and considers potential utilization for some of the structures adjoining the area.

We set out to explore more specifically the problem of connections Mr. Einaudi outlined in his project, concentrating on how the Fori Imperiali could become an integral part of the structure of the city of Rome thirty years from today, when the archeologists' work should be completed and the floor levels of the Fori will be exposed.

In our exploration of the issue of connections we found it necessary to expand beyond the limits of the Fori Imperiali, recognizing other elements of an archeological zone that exists in Rome. We believe the development of any part of the archeological zone depends upon an understanding of its relation to the whole. As a result, we have examined a plurality of possibilities for connecting, physically and spiritually, archeological sites within the city of Rome to the living fabric of the city.

Who We Are

We are seven American students of architecture with diverse backgrounds and interests. Our involvement in this project was preceded by three months of study of urban form in Italy. Each of us has studied and reported on a rione and a quartiere of Rome. By sharing the results of our studies, we have enabled each other to gain a greater understanding of the city of Rome. We have learned to experience the city as a contemporary urban organism rather than as a collection of venerable monuments. We understand Rome extends far beyond the ancient walls of the centro storico, that the vast majority of Rome's citizens do not reside within the historic center.

but depend upon the center as a source for entertainment and cultural activities.

Goals

In studying and exploring the specifics of connecting archeological sites with a city, we perceived the idea of connection as encompassing more than convenient access to a site. Our ideal of connection emerged as the integration of a site with the contemporary structure of the city. This requires vitalization of the site, the encouragement of its active use by the citizens of Rome. It involves the notion of spiritual connection, the recognition by the residents of the city that these sites generated the form of their city and can still actively participate in its life.

The concrete forms and functions of the sites we have explored have been obliterated, but the fabric of the contemporary city around these sites owes the nature of its form to the buildings and activities that once existed there. Reusing these sites, making them serve the needs of the city, provides opportunities to tie together elements of the city separated by the barrier a dormant archeological site can become.

It is our goal to use archeological sites to serve the citizens of Rome, to reconnect them with their city as we connect the past with its contemporary context. We seek to ensure these places are unique and recognizable in the eyes of the world. They should be a symbol and a place to visit for an international community. While they must represent the patrimony of a city and a nation on one level, they should evoke the sense of the place of Rome in the formation of Western culture on another level.

Objectives

Develop and program uses and activities for archeological sites designed to bring people into contact with the sites in a plurality of ways suited to the contemporary needs of the city.

Make the historical and archeological legacy of the archeological sites comprehensible and instructive. Recognize the complex layering of history evident on the sites.

Utilize the development of the sites to relate and connect diassociated elements of the city.

Connect the sites to the structure of the contemporary city. Make them a part of the fabric of the living city.

Connect elements and sites within the archeological zone to each other, physically and symbolically. Give to the archeological zone a distinct identity as a sub-structure of the city.

By bringing the sites back into the framework of the contemporary city, revive the continuity of the sites with the history and growth of the city. Do not seek to freeze the state of being of a site at any point in time.

Develop the sites in a way that considers a recall of the spatial experiences created by buildings that existed on the site in Roman times.

In developing sites, plan progressively rather than simultaneously. Allow for a sequence of growth continually adjustable to the change any development will have on the structure of the city.

Assumptions

In our study, we excluded specific consideration of how city and national politics will affect implementation of our project. We have studied the variety of opinions expressed, publically and privately, on the value of excavating the Fori Imperiali and the place of archeological sites in the structure of the city.

We recognize the vitalization of archeological sites and specifically the excavation of the Fori Imperiali presents an enormous problem in terms of dealing with Rome's already unmanageable traffic situation. We believe the problem must and can be dealt with and assume the intervening thirty years preceding implementation of our project would be enough time for traffic and transit experts to resolve the problem.

The question of funding for the development of archeological sites is an important one, as is the issue of how to manage the sites effectively. We assume money will be made available for the work to be done and that proper administration of the archeological zone is necessary and possible.

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