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Modern Pollution Threatens Ancient Monuments in Rome

By CLARA HEMPHILL
ROME (AP) — Some of Rome's most famous marble monuments have disappeared behind green cloth cages to help protect them from the automobile pollution which is turning them to dust.

And city officials say the Arch of Constantine, the Trajan Column and the Arch of Septimius Severus, among others, may remain at least partially hidden from public view for as long as 20 years until Rome finds the money — and the technology — to preserve them. Many of the delicately carved faces on the Arch of Constantine, the official entrance to Rome built in 315 A.D., have already been destroyed — their noses, eyes and cheeks completely eroded in the past 20 years.

The Trajan Column, built in the 2nd century with friezes describing the triumphs in battle of the emperor Trajan, is also in danger. Some of the soldiers' faces and helmets carved on the column have crumbled and disappeared.

"Acid rain" causes the damage. The exhaust from automobiles mixes with rainwater to form sulfuric acid. This eats away at the marble and turns it to a chalky substance which crumbles easily.

The scaffoldings and cloth don't stop the pollution, but they protect the monuments from the wind and rain and slow the deterioration.

The city superintendent of archeology, Adriano La Regina, has asked parliament for 180 billion lire (\$215 million) to clean the monuments, called them *monumenti* to keep the design from getting worse by covering them with various protective coatings.

But the bill to grant the money, introduced in May, is stalled in long debates, and La Regina is afraid the monuments will be ruined before the legislature does anything about it.

"It's absurd that the whole world should lose these things because of the ignorance of the people," La Regina said in an interview. "The preservation of monuments should be one of the first aims of any public administration. This bill is urgent — it's ridiculous that it should be considered along with all the other little laws," he said.

Officially, traffic is banned in many parts of the historic center, including the area around the Trevi Fountain, the Spanish Steps and Piazza Novona — but motorists routinely ignore the ban and the streets each day are clogged with automobiles.

People live and work in the center — it's not an isolated site for historic landmarks. Taxis, buses, residents of the zone, doctors, artisans and journalists with passes are allowed to drive in the center.

It's also a problem of city planning. Much of the pollution comes from cars on Via dei Fori Imperiali, the wide street built by Italy's World War II dictator, Benito Mussolini, to connect the Colosseum to Piazza Venezia with the Roman and Imperial Forums on either side. He sought to reconstruct the grandeur of ancient Rome.

The street, which La Regina calls "a disaster of urban planning" has become one of the major thoroughfares of the city.

So the pollution continues. At rush hour, the carbon-monoxide level is 500 parts per million in downtown Rome, eight times the level considered hazardous to human health and to stone and metal works of art.

And the preservationists look



ENDANGERED ART — Archeologist Adriano La Regina is pressing parliament to provide \$215 million for the preservation and restoration of Rome's marble monuments, which he says are crumbling from the pollution of city traffic. Above, detail of marble decorations on the Arch of Con-

stantine, the Arch of Septimius Severus, the Trajan Column, the Column of Marcus Aurelius and the Temple of Saturn, among others, will stay on for 10 or 20 years. La Regina hopes the covers can come down in five years.

If nothing is done, La Regina predicts 80 percent of the Roman sculpture made from the first to the fourth century A.D. will be wiped out by the year 2000.

Some restoration experts predict the green cloth coverings and scaffoldings, which cover

for ways to keep the monuments from crumbling. Some restoration experts say the techniques are still experimental and the plastic-like protective coatings must be replaced every year.

Although the green cloth coverings prevent tourists from seeing the monuments, scholars are permitted to climb up on the scaffoldings and get a rare close look at the decorations. The scaffoldings also allow workmen to clean the works.

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