



RADICI DEL PRESENTE
COLLEZIONE ARCHEOLOGICA
ASSICURAZIONI GENERALI



GENERALI



THE RADICI DEL PRESENTE MUSEUM



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Photo by Giuliano Koren

Italy's cultural, artistic and archaeological heritage is a priceless legacy, fruit of the country's thousand-year-old history: a wealth to safeguard and nurture, a source of teaching for the difficult challenges faced by today's society and a stimulus for future growth. "A people that ignores its own past will know nothing of its present" justly asserted the famous journalist Indro Montanelli. We believe that the Generali Group – leader for almost two centuries in the protection and improvement of people's quality of life, a concept that is cultural before being economic – has the job of carrying out a crucial role in the support of this heritage, above all with respect to the younger generations. And this lends significance to the identity and *raison d'être* of the Generali Group.

The idea of the museum grew out of the success of some didactic exhibitions held in 2007 to celebrate the company's 175th anniversary, centered on the ancient artifacts unearthed at the beginning of the twentieth century during the construction of the company's seat in Rome. A productive dialogue established with the world of education encouraged us to take it further. Consequently the original nucleus of the collection was enriched by the absorption of two other noteworthy archaeological collections formed in the nineteenth century and acquired for permanent show, to enhance Generali's concrete and lasting contribution to historical awareness. The palazzo in Piazza Venezia that hosts the company offices therefore also became the natural home of the *Radici del Presente (Roots of the Present) Museum*, a window onto the world of culture (in a real sense as well as a figurative one, given the suggestive view from various windows onto Trajan's Column and the Imperial Fora nearby) for the benefit of pupils, students and every guest of Assicurazioni Generali.



Gabriele Galateri di Genola
Chairman of Assicurazioni Generali

A Museum Worth Visiting

Andrea Carandini

Archaeologist, President of FAI - Fondo Ambiente Italiano (the National Trust of Italy)

Over two days in November 2015 more than two thousand children visited the Radici del Presente Museum as part of the “*Mattinate FAI per le scuole*”, an annual event organized by the Fondo Ambiente Italiano and example of the second point on its mission statement: “to promote education and a love for the environment and the historical and artistic heritage of the nation.” It was a great success both for

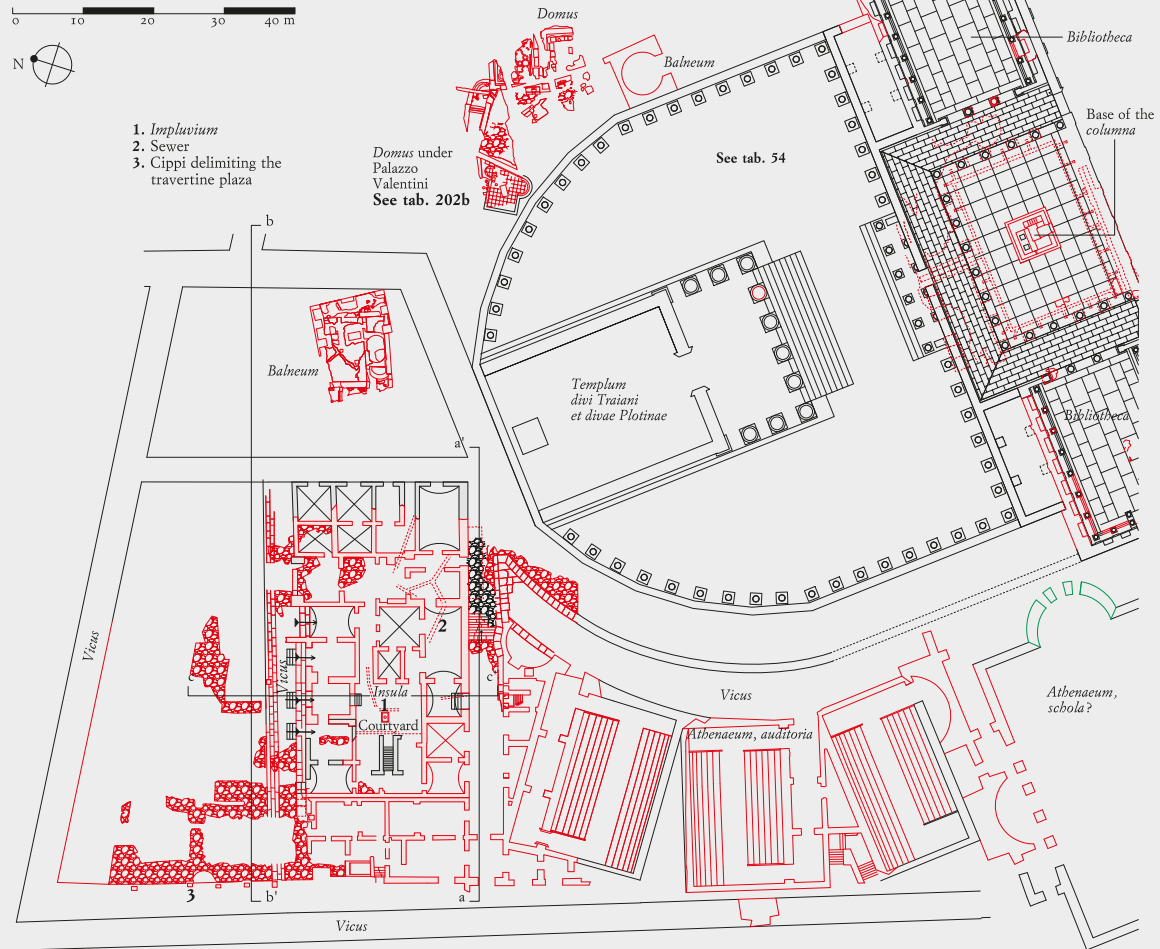
the museum and for FAI, of which I am president, but one that I also particularly enjoyed as an archaeologist. Indeed I cannot but appreciate the Radici del Presente Museum, beginning with the name, and its aim to reconnect the story of ancient Rome with the present, because it is needed by the living, the citizens of today and above all the young, to enable schoolchildren to get to know a corner of their city through the historical

Assicurazioni Generali's so-called *insula* in an image from *The Atlas of Ancient Rome* (fig. 1).

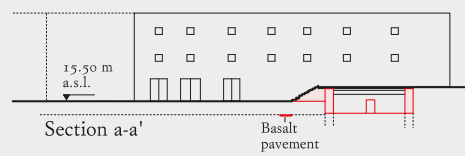
Image taken from A. Carandini, P. Carafa (eds), *The Atlas of Ancient Rome: Biography and Portraits of the City*, Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford 2017. Image edited by F. De Stefano and L. Cucinotta.

Tab. 203 Region VII • *Insula* of the Assicurazioni Generali. AD 117-138

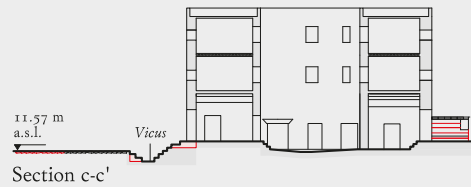
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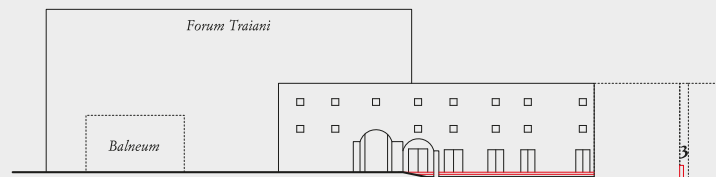
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Section a-a'



Section c-c'



Front view b-b'

- Archeological data
- Archeological data, foundations and underground structures
- *Forma Urbis*
- Reconstruction

dynamic of change in a place, which is the very stuff of archaeology.

Proceeding from the present to the past helps anyone promoting historical-archaeological heritage to establish a link with today's visitor, beginning the journey from what he/she already knows and recognises – being able to appreciate a new dimension, in this case the subsoil – to re-emerge at the end of the itinerary with a new way of looking at their own city, which should be the ultimate aim of every city museum or at least part of it.

In this museum, one of the nerve centres of the capital, Piazza Venezia – walked across, frequented and visited every day by thousands of locals and tourists – is laid out and explained over the passage of the centuries by means of the evidence excavated from the subsoil, in other words starting from the archaeological layering that is at the centre of the museum's narrative.

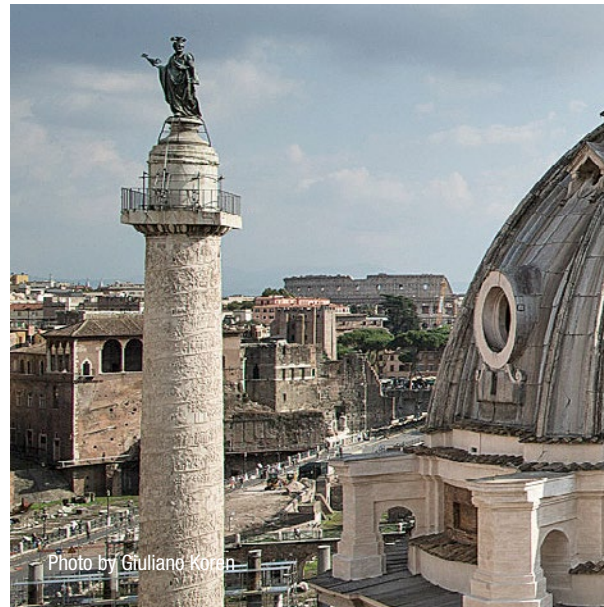
For young students, lacking archaeological method, it is a discovery to be able to visualise in the first room's huge simulated setting what lay beneath their feet – in the place they find themselves now, but centuries ago – and not only through documents or objects found in the digs, which are sometimes mute relics, but above all in the raised reconstruction of the buildings that succeeded one another over time.

Alongside the reconstruction, never losing the historical thread, for anyone wanting to find out more, the museum's corridor is dedicated to reproductions of material and documentary testaments of this central part of the city: maps, some of which are unpublished and rare, and documents show an exhaustive and detailed palimpsest of the historical representation of the city: the *forma urbis*.

I would like to add to the collection The Atlas of Ancient Rome (fig. 1) that Paolo Carafa and I curated: the first attempt, after Rodolfo Lanciani's *Forma Urbis Romae*, to weave together known and documented archaeological facts in a scientific synthesis and systematic elaboration, to produce a 'flying and swooping' image of ancient Rome, in which the details of a find or wall structure are integrated and completed in the re-composition of a building, a district, and finally the whole city, century after century. I have chosen to display in figure 1 the very image of the building from Hadrian's time discovered beneath that belonging to Assicurazioni Generali.

The search for completeness – favoured by the rich and heterogeneous patrimony of artefacts found in the excavations for the building in Piazza Venezia, but also by other collections of antiquities belonging to Generali – can be found in the succession of rooms displaying the life of the ancient Romans through objects of daily

The museum enables visitors to appreciate figures and details on the relief of Trajan's famous column from very close up thanks to the enlargement provided by a video camera that can be swivelled by members of the public.



use and fragments of typical architecture from the ancient city, divided into areas of interest and themes. It is something of a manual, aimed particularly at young students, who find a useful glossary of the ancient world, its domestic and public life, from architecture to art, through shapes, materials, uses and traditions. The high point of the tour, in my opinion, is finding oneself face to face with Trajan's Column: reason

alone to visit the Radici del Presente Museum. Never has it been possible to look in direct drive from so close a position. The relief of the famous column in Trajan's Forum comes alive when one is clearly able to see the figures and details of a portion thanks to enlargement through a video camera that can be directly swivelled by the public, and thereby follow the carved story as if it were a scene in a film; always a forceful metaphor to describe that work. Above all it serves to engage a young public that can marvel and develop a passion through such direct references to contemporary shapes linking the past to the present. A coup de theatre to attract queues of tourists and visitors, a new view of a monument that we have always had before our eyes, that the young will find it hard to forget, taking away with them a correct and thorough reading.

The Radici del Presente Museum makes use of new tools such as this to valorise our cultural heritage, focussing on the involvement of young people, indeed putting itself forward as a tool to learning, while never forgetting the complexity of archaeological research, in fact representing it, so that young students are made aware that it all comes from knowledge, from lengthy and untiring investigation deep down, to discover treasures and to change our vision of reality, beginning with the city in which we live.

“The high point of the tour is finding oneself face to face with Trajan's Column.”

The Past as Memory of the Future

Carlo Sini

Philosopher, Member of the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei

The conscious memory is the most indispensable part of the human condition, but it is also the most fragile. Without a memory of the past the present is expunged in the ephemeral and the future suffers the same vacuous sort. Without memory of the past we no longer know who we are, why we are here, the point of the present or the responsibility the future may hold for us. To nurture memory, to remember,

is the basic aim of culture and a civilised society: I believe it is easy for anyone to convince himself or herself of this. And yet, if we consider the invitation to remember with a careful and deeper attention, it sounds slightly ambiguous and disorienting. Indeed such an invitation implicitly shows two things. The first is that if we need to remember we have forgotten; the second, that memory will nonetheless always remain in debt

Naples, National
Archaeological Museum,
inv. 6727.
Marble relief, *Orpheus and
Eurydice*, from Villa Sora,
Torre del Greco.
Roman copy of late 5th c.
BCE Greek original.

Image taken from A. Bottini (ed.),
*Il rito segreto. Misteri in Grecia
e a Roma*, exhibition catalogue
(Roma, Colosseo, 22 July 2005 -
8 January 2006), Electa, 2005,
p. 27, fig. 8.





Photo by Giuliano Koren

Carlo Sini is the author of the texts and images exhibited in Room I of the Radici del Presente Museum.

to oblivion. In other words: to remember one must have forgotten, but every memory inevitably carries with it an insoluble ring of deepest oblivion.

Telling the famous fable of Solon in *Timaeus*, Plato imagines that his renowned fellow citizen and distant relation, after reforming the law in Athens, travelled to Sais, in Egypt, in voluntary exile. Here he began a dialogue with the priests in the temple about the origins of humanity. The eldest of the priests, once he had listened to Solon's opinions, burst out laughing: «You Greeks – he said – are always such children. There is no such thing as an old Greek, hoary with wisdom.» Whereas in Egypt, continued the priest, everything that happens from the dawn of history is recorded and written in our hieroglyphs on columns and temple walls. But what was Plato really saying? Perhaps he wanted to exalt the ancient culture of the Egyptians? In part this is true, but it was also clearly a criticism. To translate the memory of the past in a great temple tomb, as does the grand culture of death and mummies, that is to take the mere conservation of the exterior as a simulation for life, in fact leads the past to die a second time. While Solon, like all the Greeks, kept the memory of the past in the writing from the soul that the alphabet enables. Writing that unites two virtues: both that of conserving the living voice of the oral word transcribed into a particular sign system;

and through those signs the enduring possibility for everyone to become the creators of new discourses and new knowledge, which the early writings, namely hieroglyphics, could not do.

This fable teaches us one fundamental lesson, which I would summarize thus: memory, in its effort to reconstruct the *knowledge* of the past, cannot give life back to us. The passage through existence is a complex and unfathomable threshold. Every time knowledge seeks to examine this passage and hold it back, Eurydice vanishes, sinking into Hades from where nothing and no one can call her back to life. Rather than embark on an impossible mission to restore and resuscitate life, memory should interpret the copious and necessary signs that life leaves as it goes along. In other words, use the life of the interpreter in order to build, not exactly the memory of the past, but the memory of the future so to speak: the infinite recreation of the meaning of life that, forever newly interpreting its provenance, takes upon itself the destiny of the project of a humanity to come.

This eternal task of culture required the offices of the Muses, earthly protectors of museums and similar enterprises. Orpheus, says the myth, continues to sing even after his head has been cut off and thrown into the Hebrus. Myths are wise. The living head is no longer, but the marks it leaves are conserved and in

the song they continue to resound through the mouths of innumerable poets throughout history: used by the poets to carry on their traditional job of educators and civilizers. Behind each testimony and each artefact the song performs the task of root and seed of the present. It shows how to frequent the rooms of a museum in lasting and constructive ways and, beforehand, how to conceive and build those rooms. Wherever memory is stimulated it is urged to activate itself, in the sense of returning to the heart; in other words of restoring to the living moment of our journey as visitors and observers the dream of how life can be, of how it still is, of how it will be.

**To nurture memory,
to remember,
is the basic aim
of culture
and a civilised
society.**

1.1

Three Men and a Palazzo

Roberto Rosasco

Assicurazioni Generali, Corporate Heritage & Historical Archive

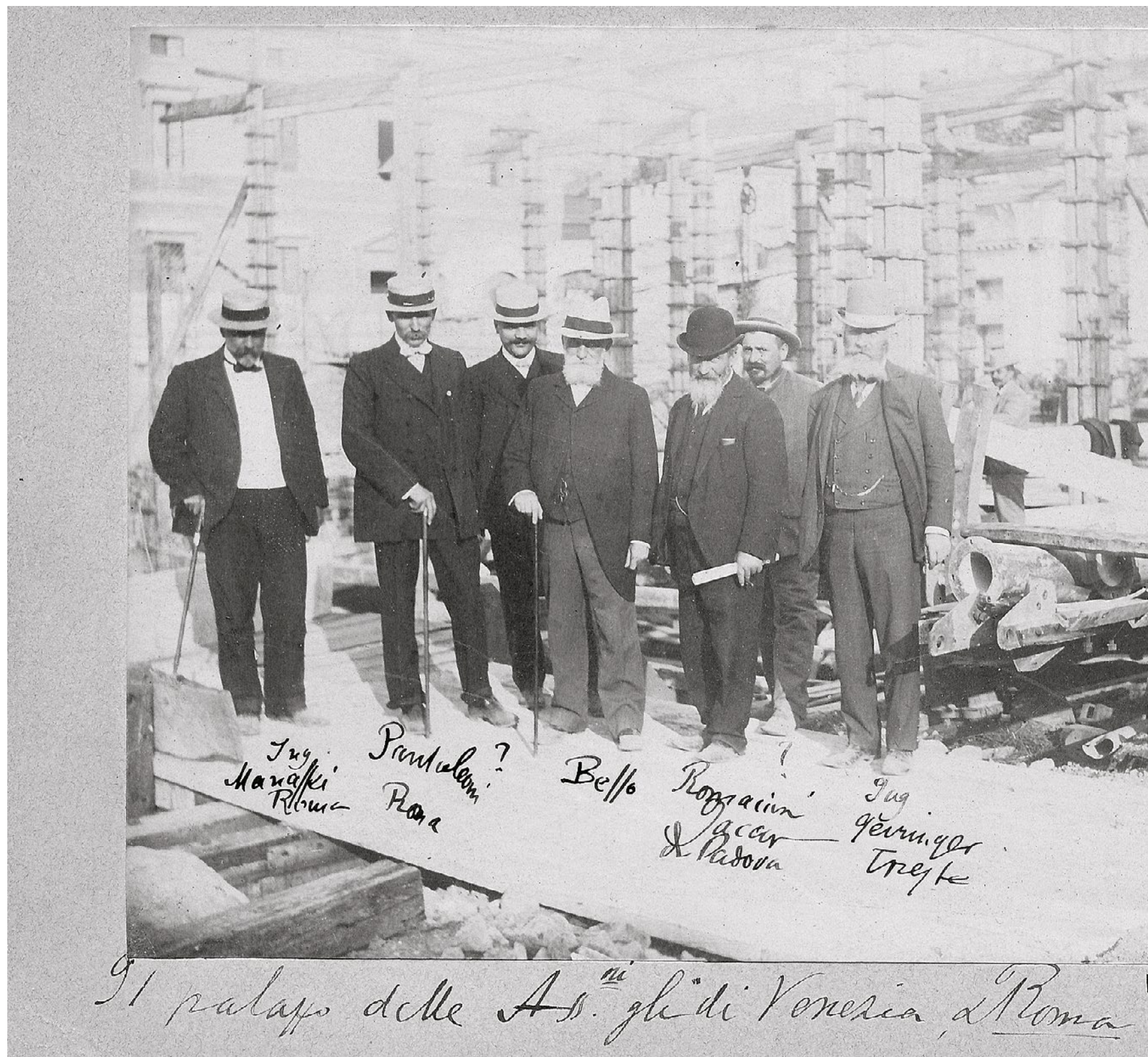
In the corridor of the museum there is a particularly significant period photograph. Among members of Assicurazioni Generali's management and the people responsible for the project immortalized in 1903 during a visit to the building site in Piazza Venezia, there are three men who made decisive contributions to the construction of the palazzo: Marco Besso, Eugenio Geiringer and Emanuele Romanin Jacur. Here are brief accounts of their lives.

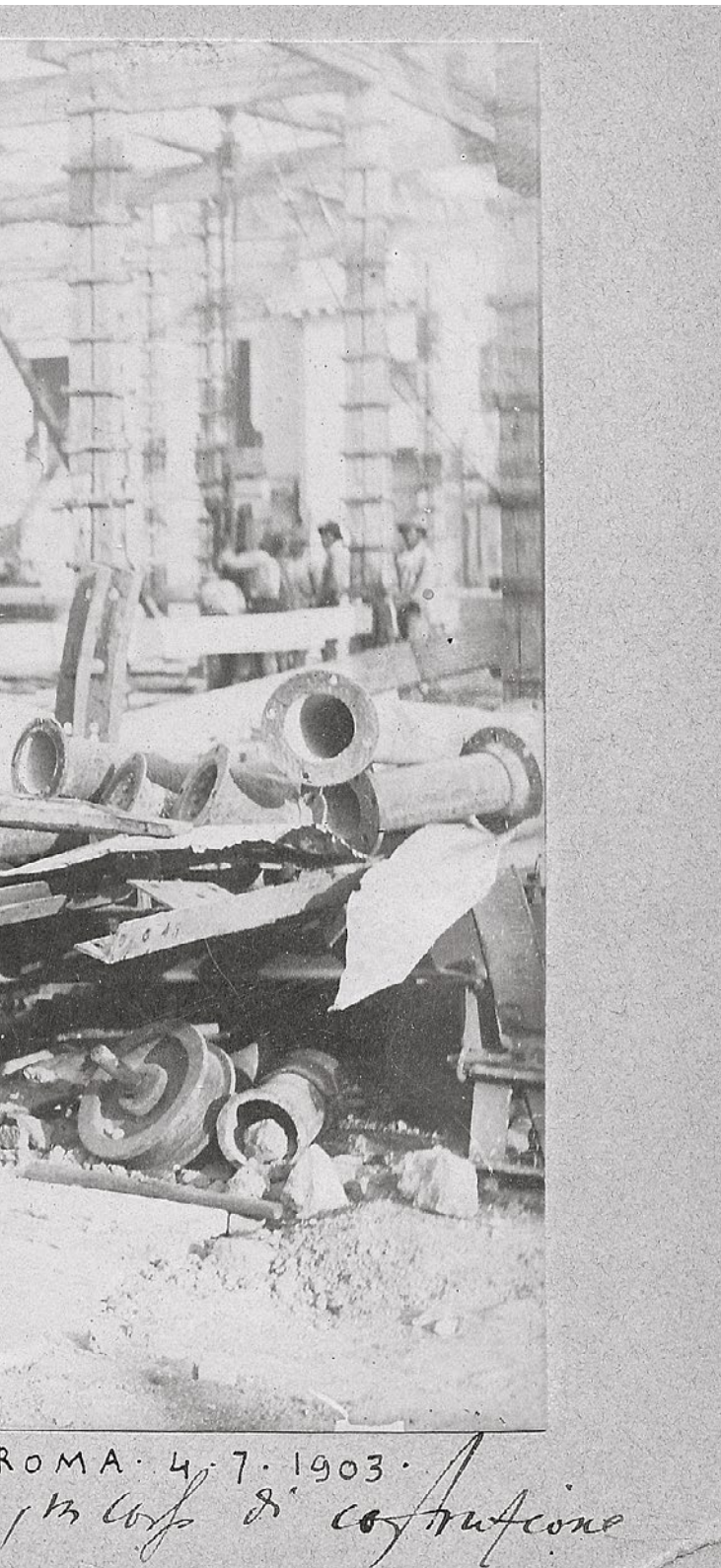
“... so, as I say,
I wanted
Assicurazioni
Generali
to choose the most
conspicuous
positions
in major cities
to build
its premises.”

Marco Besso

Marco Besso (1843-1920) began working in the field of insurance in his native Trieste at only sixteen years of age. He was taken on by Generali in 1863 and made a name for himself as a pioneer in actuarial research. Called to central management in 1877, Besso gave a substantial boost to investments in real estate, with the aim of providing the company with its own premises in many major cities and at the same time spreading visibility of the company's financial power. Indeed in his autobiography he wrote, “One of the pages in the book of my life for which I have the honour to take credit is the initiative that led the company to build its own premises in all the major centres of Europe. Just like the centurion returning to Rome after fighting the Gauls, planting his stick and exclaiming, as Livy would have it, hic *manebimus optime*, [this lodge will suit best], so, as I say, I wanted Assicurazioni Generali to choose the most conspicuous positions in major cities to build its premises, all decorated by our dear lion.”

In 1886 the new seat of central management in Trieste was completed, in less than two years. Then, at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth, the company's assets were enriched with many other prestigious buildings in Italy and abroad; among the most important was undoubtedly the building constructed in Rome, in Piazza Venezia,





On 4 July 1903 Marco Besso, Eugenio Geiringer and Emanuele Romanin Jacur visit the site at Piazza Venezia. Also present, among others, are the site manager Alberto Manassei and the general manager of Immobiliare Raoul Pantaleoni, as can be seen hand written on the photo.

Courtesy of Marco Besso Foundation.

which was part of the project to reorganize the piazza put forward by Architect Giuseppe Sacconi, winner in 1884 of the international competition to design the monument dedicated to King Victor Emanuel II and the epic deeds of the Risorgimento. The site destined for the new building was initially bought by Società Generale Immobiliare, a Roman construction company presided over by Besso himself; in 1902 Assicurazioni Generali took over ownership of the land and appointed Sacconi to design the building's main façade and the construction company to carry out the building works.

With the exception of the facade, it was Generali's trusted technicians who designed the palazzo and in particular Engineer Eugenio Geiringer (1844-1904), who, as company consultant, had already overseen works for the construction of the abovementioned Triestine offices and the radical restructuring of other illustrious buildings in the capital of Venezia Giulia. On the other hand, as a railway engineer, he also designed the electric tramline that links the city with the Karst plateau. In the latter years of his life he changed the spelling of his surname to Gairinger: which corresponded more closely to the Italian pronunciation; a change that was also adopted by his children, one of whom, Riccardo, would in turn become manager of Generali's real estate office and



“I had the good fortune to be able to add an authentic ancient lion to the façade, to illustrate the power and art of Venice.”

Marco Besso

Left: image taken from the collection of photos *Novo incepto saeculo*, printed around 1931.

Assicurazioni Generali
Historical Archive, Versamenti,
OGG001062047.

Right: the lion on the façade of the building is a sixteenth-century bas-relief in Istrian stone, originally located on the walls of Porta Portello in Padua.



Photo by Pierfrancesco Giordano

handle the construction of important buildings, most significant of all being the complex made up of two buildings and a connecting loggia (the Protti Gallery) designed for the company in Trieste in the nineteen thirties by the famous architect, Marcello Piacentini. Finally, the Paduan Emanuele Romanin Jacur (1849-1916) was above all known as an enthusiastic scholar of agricultural problems, to the extent that he was appointed a member of the Agricultural Council. Member of Generali's board of directors from 1878, he was appointed deputy director in 1891 and director in 1898. Romanin Jacur actively followed every phase in the building project for the company's new seat in the capital and on 11 November 1902, exactly a week after the contract was signed for the purchase of the site in Piazza Venezia, as a member of the Supervision Commission for the construction of the palazzo he had the task – as can be seen in the correspondence conserved in the company Historical Archive – “of going periodically to Rome to monitor the development of the project and to host the Commission meetings as often as necessary.”

The palazzo was unveiled in December 1906, on the 75th anniversary of the company's foundation. “I had the good fortune to be able to add an authentic ancient lion to the façade, to illustrate the power and art of Venice,” wrote Marco Besso with great sat-

isfaction. The lion is a sixteenth century bas-relief in Istrian stone, removed from the walls of Porta Portello in Padua by the Napoleonic troops and thrown into the River Bacchiglione; where it was found in the middle of the nineteenth century and later purchased by Generali.

At the time of the inauguration Besso had been living in the capital for some time, carrying out important roles in major Italian economic institutions and also dedicating himself to literature. He wrote essays on Dante, Erasmus of Rotterdam and the city of Rome. In 1909 he became chairman of Generali, an appointment that had not been made since 1835 and was recreated in his honour. He died on 7 October 1920, only a few days after finishing his autobiography. His home in Rome, with its well-stocked library, was turned into a cultural foundation bearing his name, according to his wishes.

Palazzo Generali portrayed by the famous painter Dyalma Stultus in a fine watercolour, presumably painted in the late 1940s.

The watercolour is taken from the volume *Assicurazioni Generali Trieste e Venezia. La proprietà immobiliare urbana e agricola*, published by the company in 1951, and reproduced courtesy of the artist's daughters.

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SEE ALSO

CORRIDOR – THE HISTORY OF PIAZZA VENEZIA
CH. 2.2, P. 64



1.2 | The Palazzo, the Archaeological Finds and the City

Pietro Storti

Architect, designer of exhibition itinerary and didactic activities of the museum

The energy of a place: promoting the links between archaeological finds, the building that houses them and the city that generated them, laying bare the roots of the present for the visitors.

Photo by Giuliano Koren



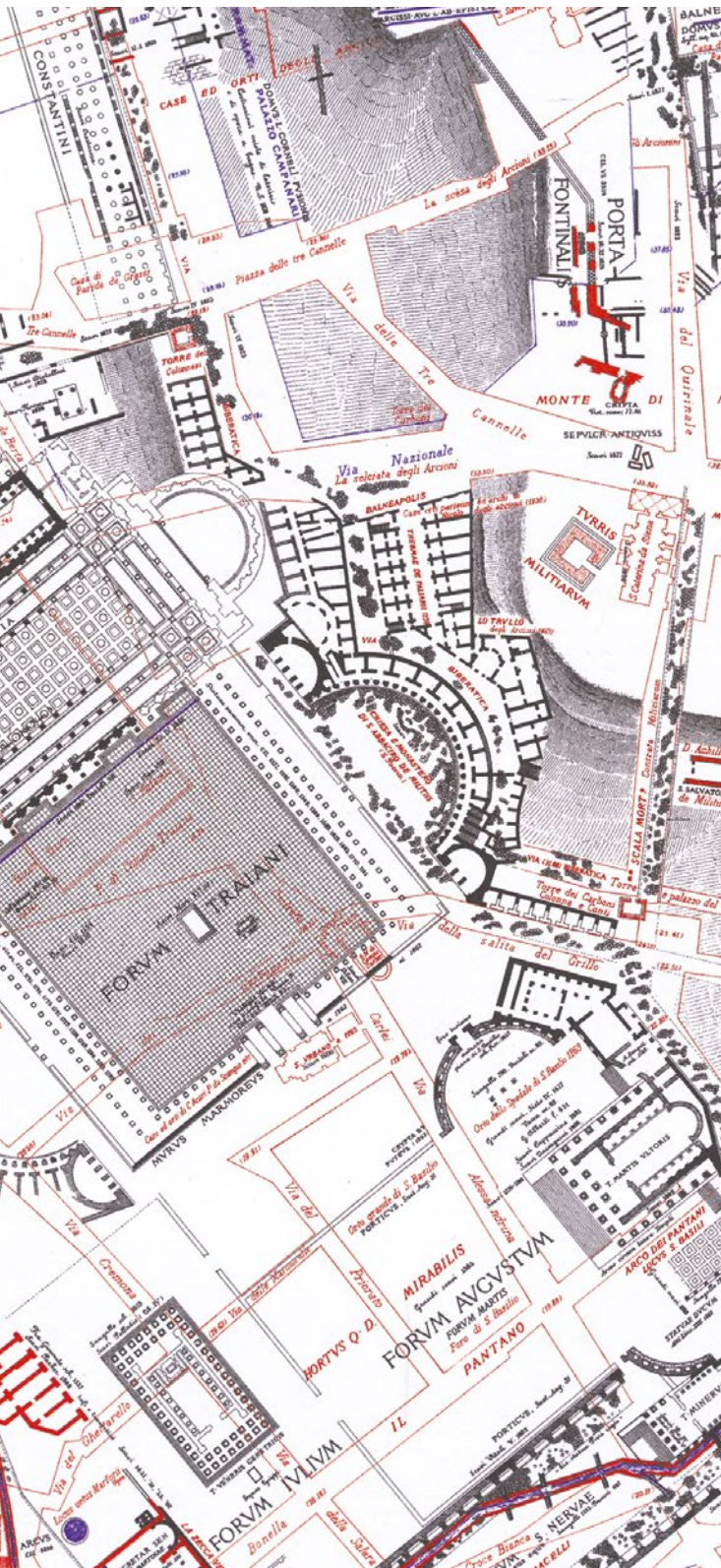
It is as if, right in the centre of the city's chaos, resonant spaces were created and the memories of the past managed to isolate themselves from the surrounding maelstrom.

The value of the Radici del Presente (Roots of the Present) Museum lies in great part in its location. It is in Piazza Venezia in Rome, surrounded by ancient, medieval, renaissance, baroque and modern buildings wedged in one beside the next. This area of Rome is never flat; hills and millennial stratifications create continuous ups and down: the ground level rises from the Imperial Fora to the piazza and then continues to rise up the Quirinal Hill, while on the other side there is the Capitoline Hill and the Palatine in the background towards the south.

This constant movement up and down leads the eye into a labyrinth of perspectives full of fragments of buildings that exist from times long gone. Everywhere there is a flow of people, buses, cars and scooters, a noisy swarm that is constantly in movement as in any other big modern city but the sights that date back to so long ago have a sound of their own that surprises and bewilders because it is silent.

It is as if, right in the centre of the city's chaos, resonant spaces were created and the memories of the past managed to isolate themselves from the surrounding maelstrom.

The Maritime pines punctuate the view like gigantic, cheerful musical notes in the sound frame of the city; columns, capitals and fragments of ruins, by contrast, bring out the silence of eternity. As we are unfamiliar



The ancient fragments exhibited in the museum constantly recall their surroundings and what generated them. So it is that via Flaminia naturally enters the first room...

Archaeological map of ancient Rome, detail of Trajan's Forum and the Capitoline Hill.

Rodolfo Lanciani
Forma Urbis Romae,
1893-1901, fragments 21 and 22.



Photo by Mauro Mezzarobba

with silence and eternity, adding the silence of the past to the chaos of daily life generates a sense of abstraction. The combination is alienating and enchanting. Learning to listen to the silence that Rome harbours takes time, care and uncommon skill. When it happens, one learns to love the beauty of man's creating that is deposited, stratified and left on view for those to come.

"The ancient Romans worked for eternity;"¹ Rome teaches us to love life's continuity and to listen to the most hidden part of the word culture. Thus the ancient fragments exhibited in the museum constantly recall their surroundings and what generated them. The job of giving shape to the exhibition itinerary was inspired by the desire always to bring the visitors' perception back to that surrounding labyrinth of silence and chaos, both ancient and modern; to induce them to do as Alberto Savinio urged: listen to the heart of the city.²

So Via Flaminia, today Via del Corso, naturally enters the first room at the museum, on the north side of the palazzo, extending onto the large table and taking the ancient name of Via Lata (as the urban part of Via Flaminia was called until 1466) and following its normal course towards the south going the full length of the corridor that crosses the main body of the building parallel to the façade looking onto Piazza Venezia.

NOTES

1. W. Goethe, *Viaggio in Italia*, Mondadori, 1983.

2. A. Savinio, *Ascolto il tuo cuore, città*, Adelphi, 1944.

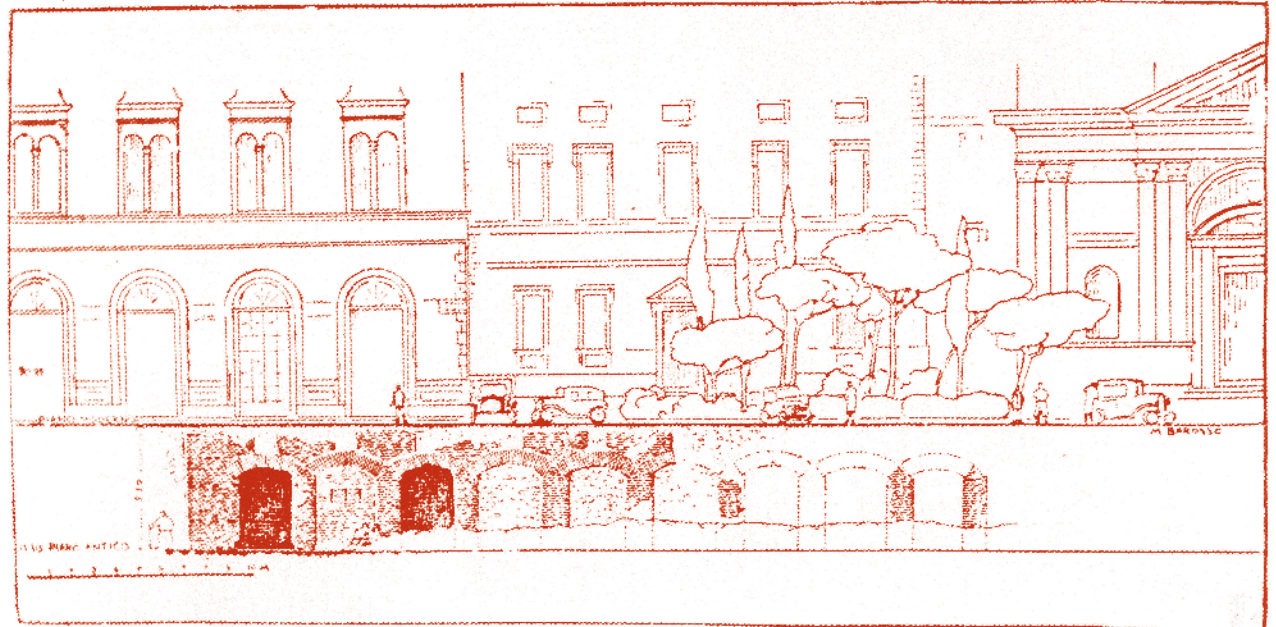
Left: detail of the layout printed on the surface of the table in Room A, displaying some of the artefacts found during the excavation of the foundations of Palazzo Generali.

Right, above: aerial view of Piazza Venezia (1890) exhibited in the corridor of the museum.

Martin G. Conde Collection.

Right, below: façade of the building with *tabernae* discovered during the 1932 excavation of Piazza Venezia outside Assicurazioni Generali.

Architect's drawing, Maria Barosso, 1932, from *Il Palazzo delle Generali a Piazza Venezia*, Editalia, 1993, p. 37.



Right: view to the south from the terrace of Palazzo Generali in Piazza Venezia, Rome. From left: Trajan's Column, dome of the Church of Santa Maria di Loreto, Monument to Victor Emmanuel II.

Below: façades of the buildings facing onto Via del Corso and Piazza Venezia (detail of Room A).

Watercolour by Aldo Ghirardello.
Relief and façade drawings by Giovanni Zevolino and Giovanna Masciadri.

In this corridor, city and palazzo are on show: the left wall has reproductions of historical documents going gradually backwards in time to recount the layering of the area that encircles Palazzo Generali and how it has been represented over the centuries. Starting from Giuseppe Sacconi's architectural designs, continuing with images that illustrate the demolition of the urban fabric, followed by reproductions of historical plans; then images of some fragments of the *Forma Urbis*, a marble map from the third century CE where the time line concludes on that side of the corridor. On the opposite wall are large black and white photos taken between 1902 and 1906 during the construction

of the palazzo one of the earliest photo reportages made to document with precision the various spatial and temporal phases of the building site undergoing work in progress.

The point of arrival of this linear route coincides with the end of the ancient Via Flaminia where, from the windows on the south side of the museum, you can see the Imperial Fora, Trajan's Column and the Capitoline Hill with the monument to Victor Emanuel II designed by Sacconi. These visuals amplify the play between real and narrated, content and container, between ancient finds, palazzo and city.

By bringing to light the links between single fragments



SEE ALSO

ROOM A – THE FIRST NUCLEUS OF THE COLLECTION
CH. 2.2, P. 56

REPRESENTATION OF THE CITY
CH. 3.2, P. 108

and the world that originally generated them, safeguarded and gave them back, we have tried to emphasize the roots of the present for visitors, with particular attention shown towards the younger members of the public, for whom the museum was mainly created.



1.3 | The Roots of a Great Past in the Present

Federico Rausa

Lecturer in classical archaeology, scientific curator of the museum

The palazzo belonging to Assicurazioni Generali in Piazza Venezia sits on the foundations of an area that was at the heart of ancient Rome and the objects found during its construction reflect the complex historical stratigraphy of the site. The Radici del Presente Museum offers the public a selection of artefacts taken from among the discoveries made in this original nucleus of the company's archaeological collection as well as two other collections that were acquired later, carefully amalgamated in a didactic itinerary.

The construction of the new flagship premises was to provide the extraordinary opportunity to reconstruct a piece of urban history, until then unknown.

Left: “Excavation in the last section on the corner of Via dei Fornari and Via Nazionale and several blocks of Travertine and Peperino found in the ancient subsoil. 22 January 1904.”

SGIS, serie A, b. 88, fasc. A 555, s.fasc. 7, foto n. 44.
Courtesy of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities (hereafter MiBAC) - ACS (State Central Archive) n. provv. 1418/2016.
The photo to the left and other

images in this volume identified by the acronym SGIS come from the Società Generale Immobiliare Sogene archive, conserved at the State Central Archive (Rome). Captions in inverted commas relay the hand-written notes on the back of each photo.

Novo incepto saeculo. The title of the volume dedicated to Assicurazioni Generali’s real estate holdings, which came out in the thirties on the occasion of the company centenary, is particularly appropriate for the events of the Roman headquarters, built in Piazza Venezia on the site previously occupied by the sixteenth century Palazzo Bolognetti, then Torlonia, demolished between 1902 and 1904. The construction of the new flagship premises, whose volumes were defined within the project of reorganization of the piazza by Architect Giuseppe Sacconi (1854-1905), was to provide the extraordinary opportunity to reconstruct a piece of urban history, until then unknown.

The building work in Piazza Venezia was one of many that contributed in those years to change the face of the capital of the new unified State, then celebrating just over forty years. Following the erection of the monument in honour of Victor Emanuel II, the demolition of Palazzo Torlonia definitively changed the look of the piazza as it had been developing over the course of the centuries. But the consequences of the undertaking did not only affect the urban aspect, they also had an important archaeological significance.

The new building would lay its foundations in the heart of the ancient city – at the crossroads between the slopes of the Capitoline Hill, the entrance to Campus

Martius and Trajan's Forum – where the political and administrative activities of the Imperial city were performed. The soil of this part of Rome had not been explored in depth until that moment.

The construction of an impressive building in neo-quatrociento style was the occasion for the launch of one of the most important urban archaeological excavations of the early nineteenth hundreds, precursors of a new methodological approach. They were conducted by Giuseppe Gatti (1838-1914), and moreover, were the first of their kind to be documented by photography. The remains of buildings and objects unearthed in the excavation, carried out in order to lay the foundations of the new palazzo, represent a source of rare value for the history of a nodal sector of the city, and offer an important testimony of the continuity of life after the end of the ancient world as well. A value that has certainly increased due to the results of recent surveys made for the construction of the new Metropolitan Line C nearby.

The artefacts found at the beginning of the twentieth century, whose varied typology mirrors the complex historical stratigraphy of the location, constitute the original nucleus of Generali's archaeological collection. Indeed, since there was no regulation to control the finding of the works of artistic interest, the company could legitimately exercise its right



... one of the most important urban archaeological excavations of the early nineteenth hundreds

Left: “Ancient Pavement found in the excavation of the foundations of the wall that runs parallel to the façade on Via Nazionale. 21 November 1903.” Photo taken during the excavation led by Giuseppe Gatti from 1902 to 1904 in the area where Generali's building rises. The pavement slabs and the steps, all re-used architectural elements, are engraved with *tabulae lusoriae* and figures of pugilists accompanied by Latin inscriptions.

SGIS, serie A, b. 88, fasc. A 555, s.fasc. 7, foto n. 31. Courtesy of MiBAC - ACS n. provv. 1418/2016.

Opposite: female bust in white marble (second half of II century CE) found during the excavation and donated by Assicurazioni Generali to Chairman Marco Besso.

Courtesy of Marco Besso Foundation.

A SIGNIFICANT GIFT

In early 1910 the female bust reproduced on the right, found in Piazza Venezia during the excavations for the foundations of the building, was presented by Generali's management to Chairman Marco Besso, in recognition of his fifty year career in the insurance sector and of the "efficient job" he carried out in the building of the new headquarters. Today the sculpture can be seen at the Besso Foundation, located in Largo di Torre Argentina in the stately palazzo that was the chairman's home in Rome and at his wish turned into a foundation in 1918 in order to continue the spread of culture; just as he loved to do himself, in his economic, financial, humanistic and literary studies.

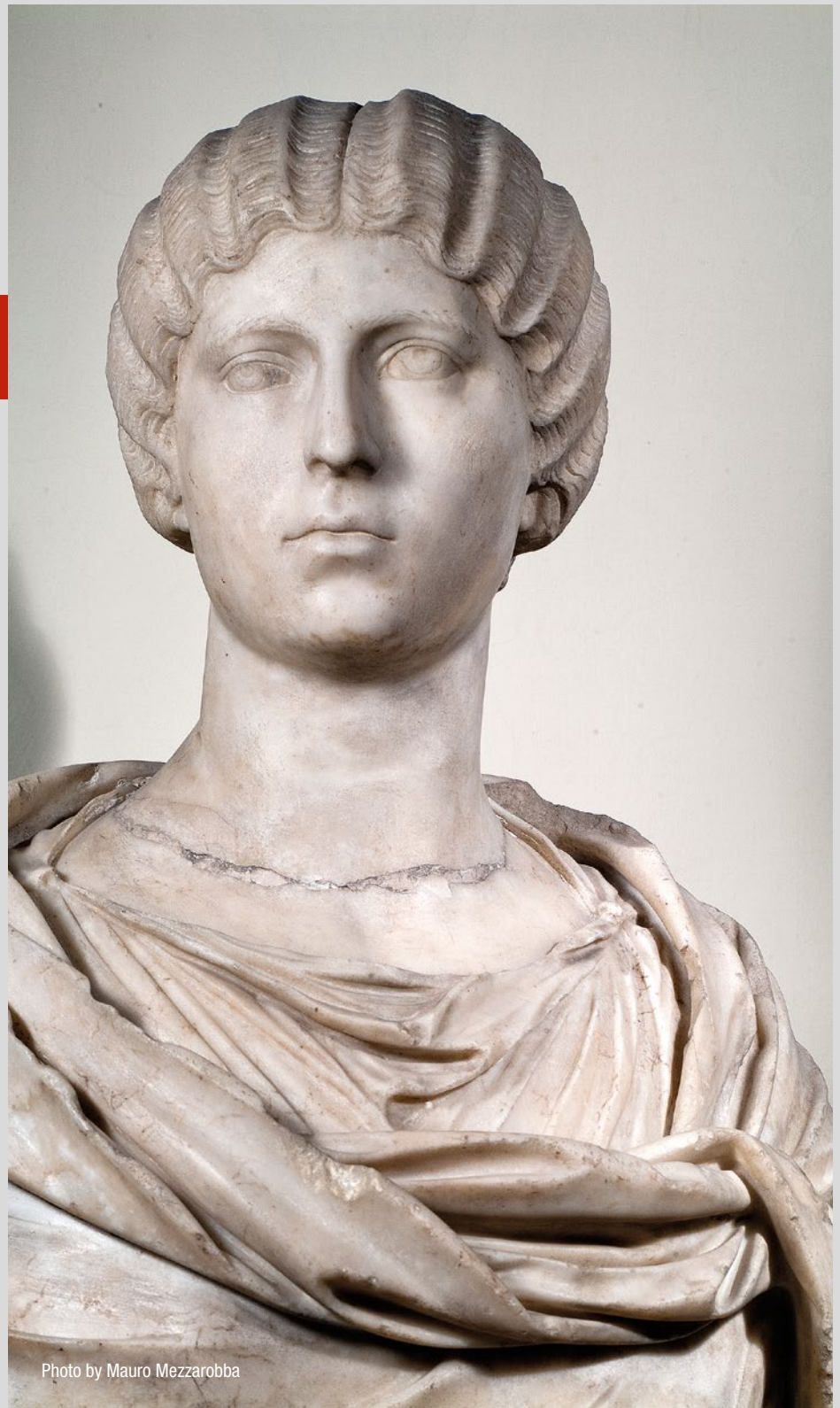


Photo by Mauro Mezzarobba

of property on the discoveries. Standing out among them is the head of a woman from the second century CE (today conserved at the Besso Foundation, also in Rome) and the marble slabs with images of athletes, immortalized in a photo taken during the excavation works in their function of threshold, which was their latter use, in the post-antiquity era, in a building beneath the palazzo.

For the most part objects of every kind of antiquity – unearthed over the course of the numerous post-unification excavations carried out in Rome’s soil – were passed around various temporary spaces in search of a definitive home in a museum, whereas Generali’s ownership of the ancient marbles found in the excavation of Piazza Venezia guaranteed the conservation of a solid link with the site of discovery. It was an isolated case in the private collecting of Roman antiquities of the time and also rare in preceding centuries. The original nucleus of the collection of ancient marbles has been successively added to, over time, by the incorporation of archaeological collections from Palazzo Poli, near Piazza di Spagna, and Palazzo Biondi-Merolli, not far from the company’s Roman headquarters. Both collections had nineteenth century origins: the first (62 pieces) belonging to the restorer and art dealer Pietro Camuccini (1761-1833), the second (161 pieces) to the Merolli family, member of the

high Roman bourgeoisie at the end of the nineteenth century. Both collections have a heterogeneous make up both in quality and typology of objects.

As a result of these purchases, elements of undoubted interest entered Generali’s archaeological collection. Among the most salient pieces are the relief of Aeneas and Ascanius leaving Troy, a celebration of the myth of the origins of Rome; the portrait that echoes the facial features of Nero adapted, probably in the eighteenth century, from one thought to be of Emperor Gallienus (253-268 CE); and a votive relief of Greek origin (see p.74), most likely illustrating the interest aristocratic collectors of ancient Rome held in Greek originals.

The Radici del Presente Museum in the palazzo at Piazza Venezia, promoted with great sensitivity to bring out the educational potential of these ancient objects, provided the occasion to show the public the material consistency of all three parts of the collection, carefully amalgamated into an educational itinerary. In the new museum the visitor can see the entirely special relationship that the city of Rome has had with its past for centuries.

The white marble fragment partially reproduced here originally belonged to a relief frieze of an historical-mythological subject. Two male figures, an adult and a child, are seen running impetuously to the right. The scene may be interpreted as Aeneas fleeing Troy in flames, with his son Ascanius and father Anchises, a mythical episode connected with the foundation of Rome. (Palazzo Poli Collection).

SEE ALSO

ROOMS B-C – URBAN DWELLINGS AND LUXURY ABODES
CH. 2.2, P. 70

THE IMPERIAL PORTRAITS
CH. 3.4, P. 124



Photo by Giuliano Koren



G. Vori del. sc.

Palazzo S. Marco della Sereniss. Rep. di Venezia
1. Palazzo Bolognetti, 2. Torre sul Campidoglio, 3. Strada di Macel di Corvi, 4. Partè del Palazzo S. Marco con Giare



dino pensile, 5. Cappella della Bfs Vergine 65.

PALAZZO TORLONIA, FORMERLY BOLOGNETTI

Roughly in the place where the massive building belonging to Assicurazioni Generali sits there was previously an equally imposing construction that was sacrificed in the early twentieth century to the restoration plans for Piazza Venezia. The last owners were the princely Torlonia family, who had bought it in 1807 from the Bolognetti family, transforming it into one of the Roman nobility's most sumptuous residences. Among other works of art displayed inside was the famous sculptural group of *Hercules and Lichas* by Antonio Canova, exhibited in its own dedicated exedra.

The palazzo – whose façade ran in line with the Via del Corso, in a position that was much further forward than today's construction – was built on the foundations of a property that in Renaissance times belonged to the Del Nero family and then to the Frangipani. Count Giovanni Antonio Bigazzini bought the building from them around 1679 and appointed Architect Carlo Fontana to oversee its enlargement and the restoration of the facade. Architect Nicola Giansimoni carried out further changes over the course of the eighteenth century when the property had passed into the hands of the Bolognetti family.

Thanks to engravings of the period we are familiar with the eighteenth century aspect of the facade, which remained substantially unaltered even after the significant changes made by the Torlonia family.

Piazza Venezia with Palazzo Venezia on the right, Palazzetto di Venezia and Palazzo Torlonia on the left, etching.

G. Vasi, *Delle magnificenze di Roma antica e moderna*, IV, Rome 1754, tav. 65.

1.4 Devising Paths to Learning

Maria Rispoli

Archaeologist specializing in classical antiquities, curator of the museum's artefacts itinerary

To bring back to life places transformed by the passage of time and events, to re-tie the broken historical thread: the archaeologists' mission finds full application at the Radici del Presente Museum, whose set up has involved research into the past of Piazza Venezia, and particularly the area of Generali's building, over a period of twenty centuries.

When artefacts and material remains from ancient civilisations become part of the historical account, they are given back their power of communication.

It is not like to think that Pausanias, the second century CE historian, faced with the numerous derelict cities of Greece that had once been famous and opulent, rather than responding to the needs of the Roman readership in the Antonine era, was inspired to describe that decaying land by the desire to bring back to life places that events, transformations and time would remove from historic memory. The *Description of Greece* by Pausanias could be read as an imaginary museum set – made up of places, artefacts, historical fact and fable – exhibited to resuscitate a moribund civilisation.

When artefacts and material remains from ancient civilisations become part of the historical account, they are given back the power of communication that had been harshly interrupted by removal from their context. This was one of the main objectives in setting up the displays at the Radici del Presente Museum: the need for a suitable organization to exhibit the objects in Assicurazioni Generali's collection for the benefit of the public was an opportunity to repair the historical thread that had been broken by events at the beginning of the twentieth century. Every element was embraced as representing an extraordinary chance to bring together and explain the history of Piazza Venezia, and in particular the area beneath Palazzo Generali, over the last two millennia.

In the foreground, altar in Proconnesian marble with depictions of divinities. In the background, a photographic reproduction of the Lararium fresco, Villa 6, Terzigno, courtesy of MiBAC - Archaeological Site of Pompeii.



Photo by Mauro Mezzarobba

Above: in the foreground, altar in Proconnessian marble with carvings of divinities; in the background, amphorae for transporting wine.

Right: students looking at a photographic reproduction of the garden fresco from the House of the Golden Bracelet in Pompeii, courtesy of MiBAC - Archaeological Site of Pompeii.

The story begins at the excavation of archaeological finds in the area where the palazzo was built, enriched by remarkable discoveries in archival documents that came to light more than a century later as part of research undertaken during the museum's design process. The narrative continues, with the help of period photos and an unprecedented graphical reconstruction of the various phases of settlement in Piazza Venezia, with a depiction of the transformations that, often paradoxically, are responsible for the custody of our past. In order to render this complex interpretation clear we used the principle of stratigraphy or the "art of layering," inverting the direction of the sequence of events in the knowledge that the results of more recent actions cover and often hide those that are more ancient. It is the objects themselves that accompany us on the tour and act as cultural intermediary, however, although declared by MiBAC (Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities) to be of "exceptional archaeological interest," they represent a modest collection in scale and prestige beside those to be found in the archaeological museums of Rome. From here comes the intuition into the intrinsic educational power of some objects to show a cross section of the lifestyles and habits of the inhabitants of ancient Rome, seen, wherever possible, in continuity with lifestyles of the present day. Alongside intuition came imagination,



Photo by Lorenzo Pesce

allowing the youthful public, the most important museum visitors, to get closer to the objects displayed in the collection that belonged to people of times past. In this way, a visit to the museum is transformed into the research required with regard to a find, akin to the job of the archaeologist when faced with an unknown or recently unearthed artefact, looking for answers by means of the fundamental tools of archaeological research: historical and iconographic sources, the study of space-time relations between anthropic actions and context, associations, relationships and different chronological sequences of events, but also identifying the cultural heritage of the past in the present. Thus objects become part of the identity of the men who produced or commissioned them, whether the things were used in great actions or simply in everyday life. Along the exhibition itinerary the perspective of portraits, on slabs engraved with the figures of pugilists, on the *tabulae lusoriae*, on the altars and in inscriptions takes into account the historical context of the individuals who generated them: people who displayed their own portraits in their splendid homes, but also in the necropoli at the gates of the city where people wished to be remembered after death; from those who loafed about in the forum, playing gambling games on the steps of buildings, to those who asked favours of the gods by offering libations on

public and domestic altars; and finally, the men who celebrated themselves in the *dedicatio* (consecration) at monuments in public spaces or had their portraits engraved in reliefs on funerary monuments.

It is amazing to see a motive for human deed remain unchanged over the centuries: to leave a tangible trace of life through an action that often materializes in a *sema*, or sign, of human existence. The miracle of the continuous perpetuation of life justifies the need to conserve and safeguard the past; a prerogative that has always belonged to humanity and that is repeatedly underlined in every section of the museum. In this way death obliterates life but not identity, which remains faithfully reproduced on sarcophagi, on reliefs and in inscriptions carved on stone. Here epigraphs crop up out of the earth not as the bearers of messages, but as in the past performing the role of marking graves so that in a later, suggestive location they represent the sign of life that they themselves recount in the words of those who remember them.

SEE ALSO

ROOM M – WORDS SET IN STONE
CH. 2.2, P. 96

THE EXCAVATION IN PIAZZA VENEZIA LED BY GIUSEPPE GATTI
CH. 3.3, P. 116

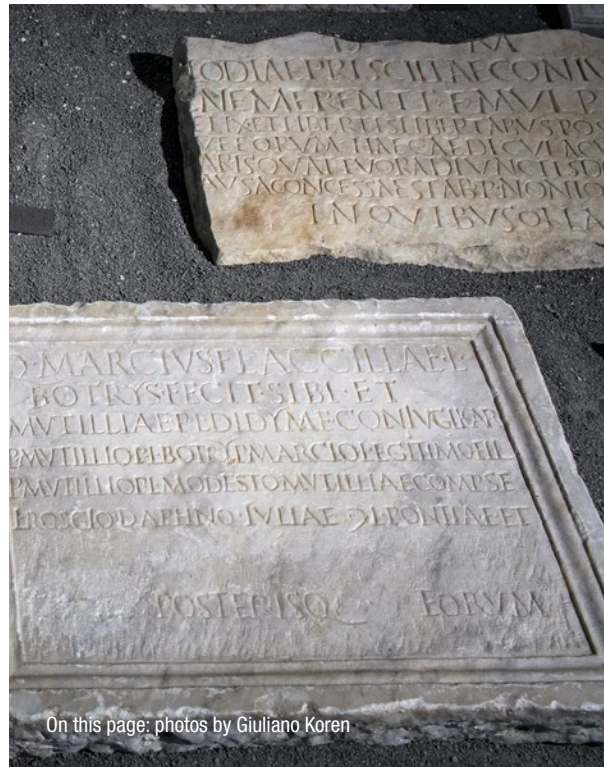
Top left: stele inscribed with the epitaph of the Imperial freedman Tiberius Claudius Athitcus for his brother Claudius (II century CE).



Top right: epitaph, left by the Imperial freedman Tiberius Claudius Philetus for his wife Aphrodite, inscribed on a podial mensa, a slab of stone, located on the benches in the *columbarium* to enclose the cinerary urns, provided with a hole to pass offerings to the deceased (I-II century CE).



Below: Room M is set up to evoke the role that epigraphs played in the past, that of indicating graves.

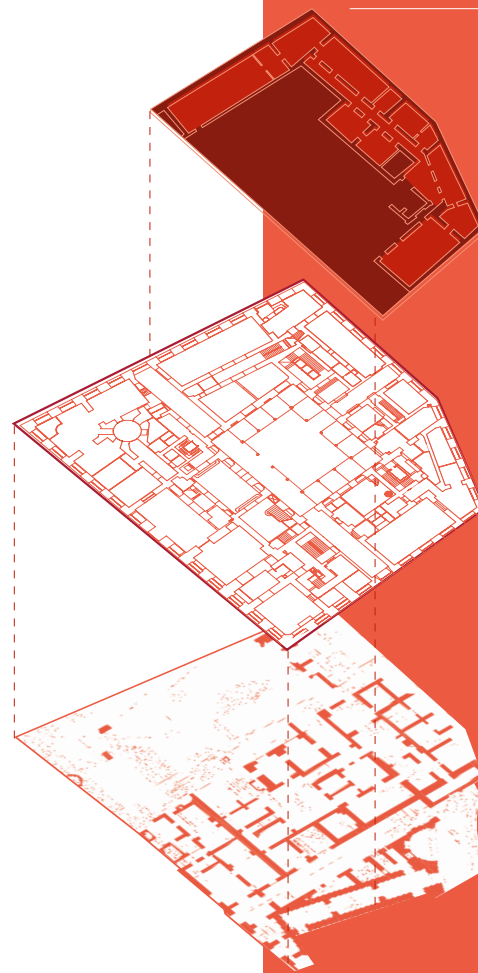


On this page: photos by Giuliano Koren



2.1 | The Museum's Identity

The identity of a place develops from the guiding principles at the basis of a general idea, an overall vision that results in creatively filling a previously undefined space. The following pages summarize some of the elements of planning and design that have produced the Radici del Presente Museum and contributed to defining its main characteristics.



XXI century:
Radici del
Presente
Museum

XX century:
Palazzo
Assicurazioni
Generali

II century CE:
Ancient Rome

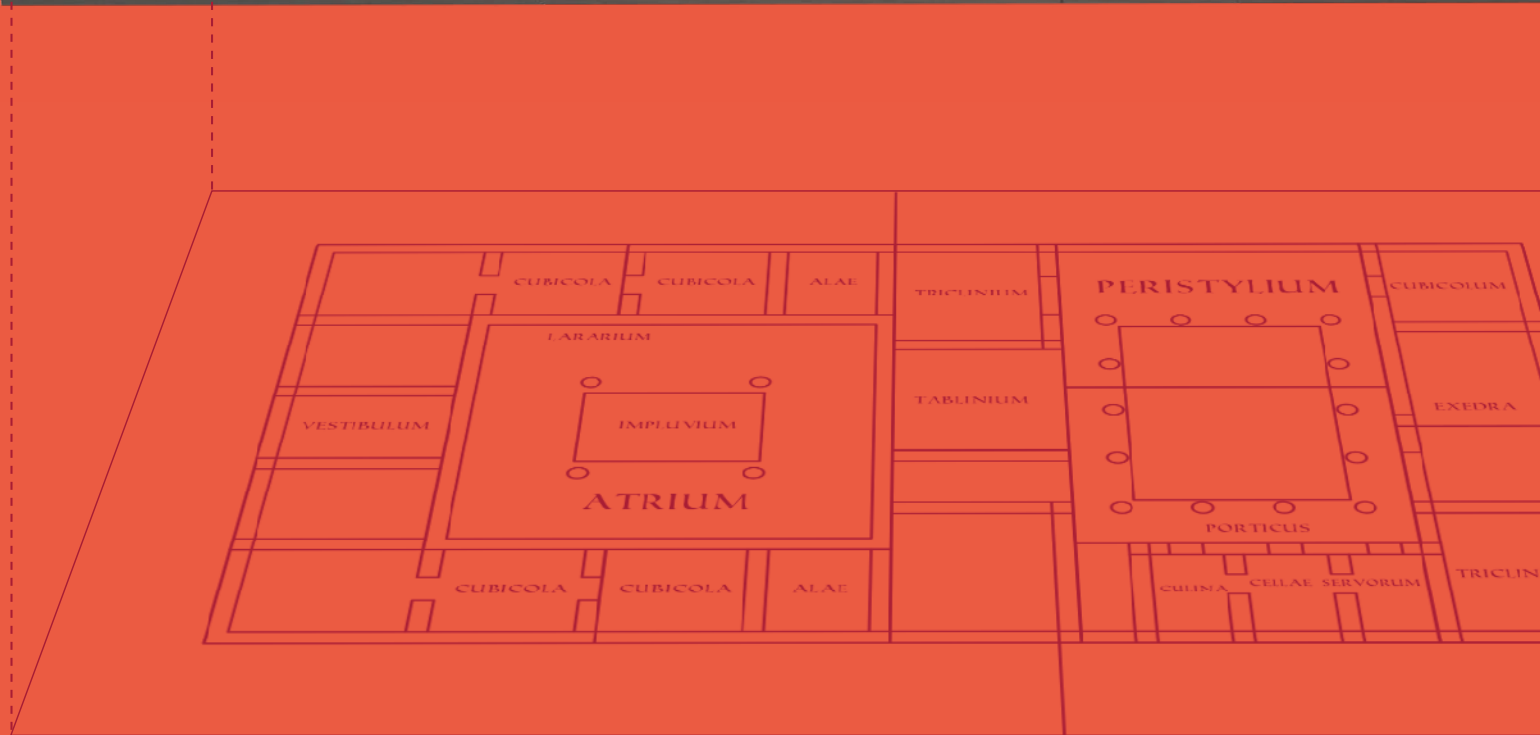
The overlapping of past and present

Ancient fragments maintain a relationship with the place that has generated and safeguarded them before giving them back. In a game of the real and the narrative overlapping, the museum reveals the roots of the present.

Moving through history: scenes the visitor can be part of

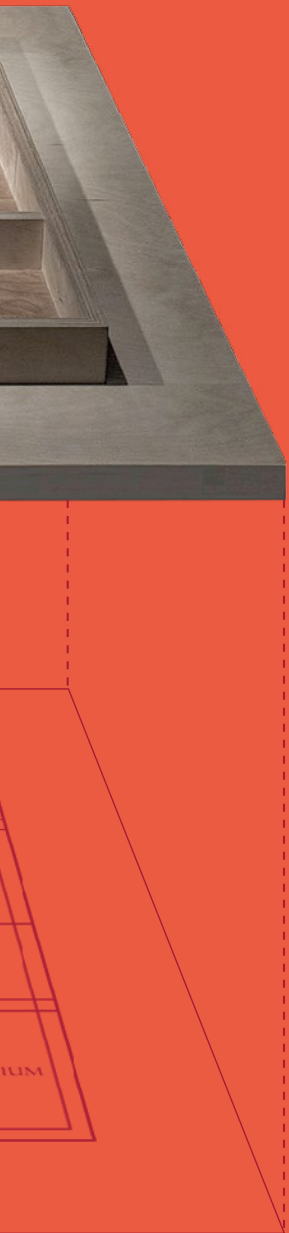
Artefacts and archival documents
become actors and interpreters
in a scenographic account
to welcome the visitor.

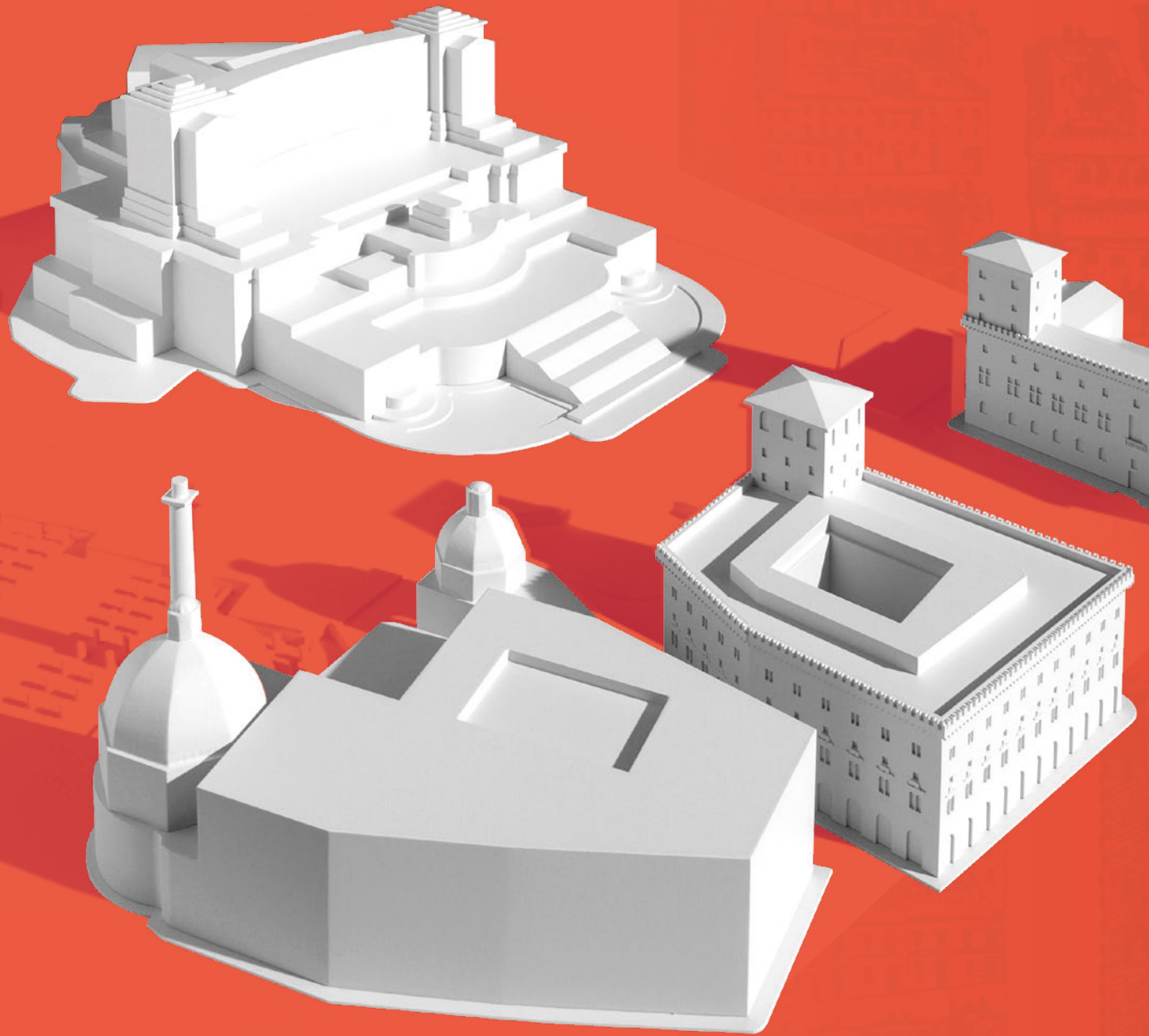




Seeing with your hands: from intuition to knowledge

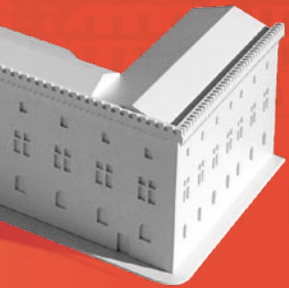
Students become the protagonists of their knowledge through didactic group activities and discover, in a playful and intuitive manner, the world safeguarded by archaeological finds.





A journey through space and time

Based in Piazza Venezia,
the centre of Rome
in antiquity as it is today,
the museum connects
the contemporary city
with its thousand-year old
stratified self.



Exhibition Itinerary

2.2

“Stones only talk to those who know how to listen to them”: with this phrase a primary school teacher managed to capture the attention of her young pupils during a visit to the Radici del Presente Museum. The exhibition itinerary set up on the second floor of the Generali building endeavours to do precisely this: induce visitors to listen to the stories hidden in the artefacts, to highlight the inexhaustible need for man to reinterpret and share the tale of his own origins in order to keep their memory alive. In the past, offices occupied the seven hundred square meters now designated to a permanent museum. A careful remodelling of the internal spaces produced the sequence of twelve rooms through which the exhibition itinerary passes; the central axis is made up of a historical-urban account and runs from the northern side of the palazzo, where it looks onto Via del Corso, known as Via Flaminia in ancient times, to the south

Photo by Michele Stallo



E22



E23

side that looks on the Imperial Fora, the Capitoline Hill and Trajan's Column.

Between 2010 and 2012 the three hundred archaeological artefacts that make up Generali's collection were studied, restored and finally exhibited as part of a didactic itinerary divided into six main thematic sections. A multidisciplinary team designed a series of sets that help visitors to interpret the artefacts in a direct and intuitive manner: anyone walking through the spaces is drawn not so much to read answers as to ask questions. There are no captions or protective barriers; the ancient fragments are never randomly placed within the museum sets, sometimes they create articulated stories in the city's space and time, at others they are simply placed alongside reproductions of ancient frescoes, while on occasions they are positioned so as to link the internal narrative directly to the city that is visible through the windows of the museum. As though the floor is passed from one artefact to the next, creating a continuous dialogue between them, linking back to the functions that they once had and the places where they were once located.

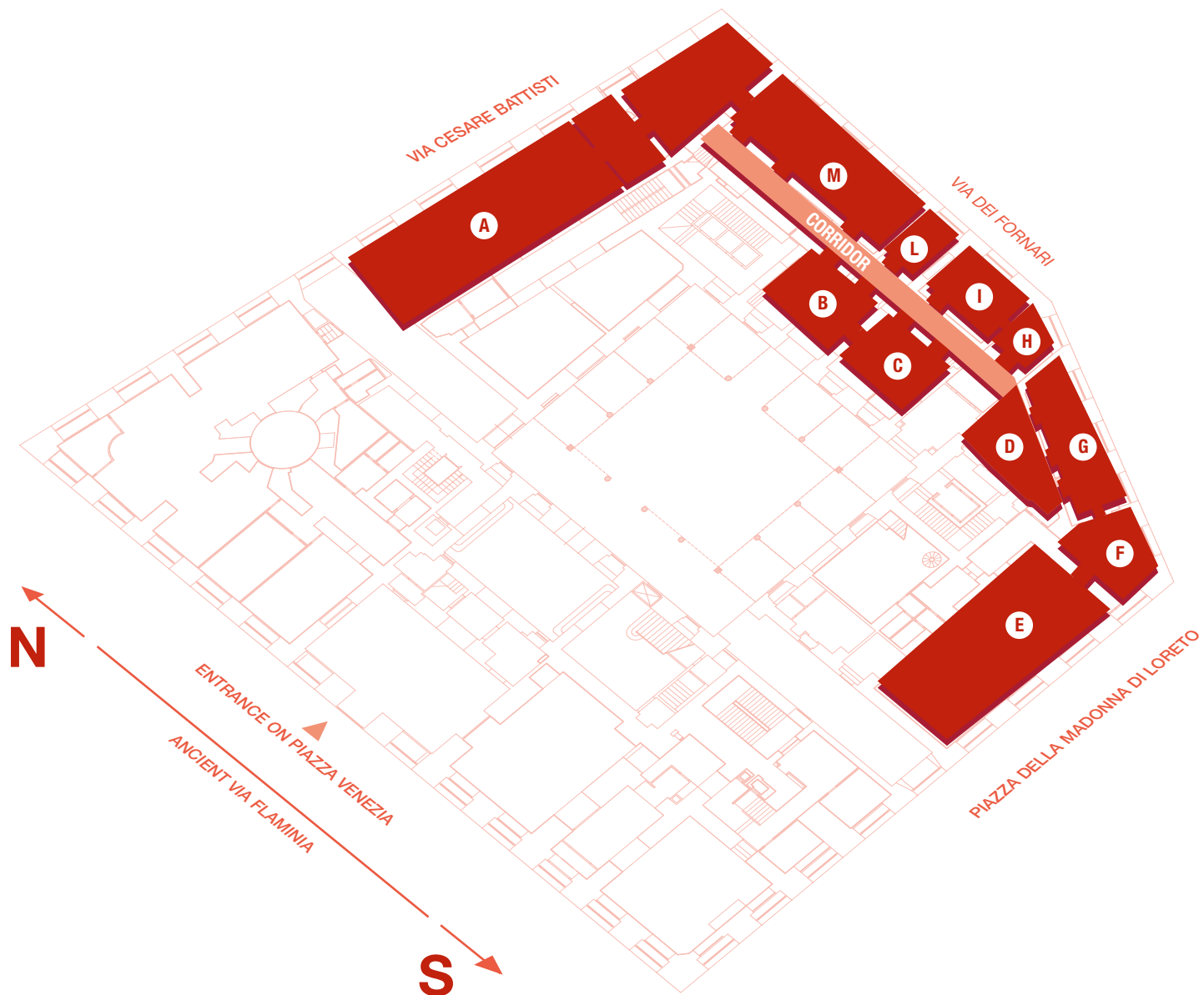
The "room sheets," available in every room, contain the necessary descriptions to understand the various typologies of the exhibited artefacts. Students visiting the museum are invited to keep them for later use at school to continue the learning process. Com-

plementing the information provided for visitors there are panels with summaries that offer an educational description and at the same time clarify the archaeological themes dealt with in each room, as well as iPads to access specific descriptions of single artefacts. Everywhere memory is stimulated and urged to be active, to remember in the real sense of the term – as the philosopher Carlo Sini writes in the introductory pages of this volume – "restoring to the living moment of our journey as visitors and observers the dream of how life can be, of how it still is, of how it will be."

**Suggestive finds
and scenographies
in a didactic museum
with no display labels
or barriers.**



Photo by Lorenzo Pesce



ROOM A - Artefacts found beneath the palazzo

ROOM B - The *domus*

ROOM C - The *viridarium*

ROOM D - Re-use in the Roman world

ROOM E - The Forum, other public buildings and sacred spaces

ROOM F - The historical commemorative bas-relief

ROOM G - Burial rites in ancient Rome

ROOM H - Identity in the funeral world

ROOM I - The past as memory of the future

ROOM L - Sarcophagi from the Merolli-FATA Collection

ROOM M - Funeral inscriptions

CORRIDOR - The history of Piazza Venezia



Photo by Michele Stallo



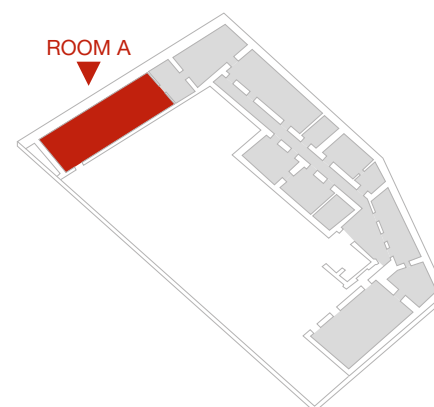
ROOM A

The First Nucleus of the Collection

Exhibited in this room are artefacts found during the excavation of the foundations for the building that houses the museum.

At the entrance, two large black and white photos taken in 1902 and 1904 show the moment when some of the ancient fragments were found; the two images introduce the account told about the historical roots of this area of Rome that provided Generali with the first nucleus of its archaeological collection.

The site plan, printed over thirty square meters on the large table that takes up a good part of the room, reconstructs the portion of Rome where the palazzo



belonging to Assicurazioni Generali is located. Some artefacts are laid over the ample surface area to give the impression that they are emerging from the layout. Along the edge of the table a large rectangular structure floats in space to display a watercolour of a Roman sky showing perspective drawings of the buildings on the layout beneath.

It is as if, setting out from a large three-dimensional model to a scale of 1:100 of this area of the city, we had lifted the buildings from the ground and so doing made the archaeological artefacts emerge. The visuals are aimed at describing to visitors what happened in reality: excavating the foundations to construct the building in Piazza Venezia brought to light archaeological finds belonging to an *insula*, an apartment block built in the time of Hadrian with a *domus* on the ground floor and small apartments on the higher levels, using the same footprint as Palazzo Generali today.

The artefacts displayed in this room belong to a chronological span that goes from the second to the fifth century CE, reflecting the life of the block from the construction of the *insula* to the moment it was abandoned. The table displays a selection of finds that mirror the heterogeneity of the categories of objects found in the dig. Indeed alongside the artefacts that derive from residential contexts such as portraits, statuettes, ceramics, capitals and columns, there are

fragments of objects belonging to the funerary sphere, probably ending up here during the phase of transformation of the area, when in the thirteenth century limestone paving was placed in Piazza Madonna di Loreto and, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, stately homes were built in Piazza Venezia.

At the centre of the table, as in an excavation, the modern site plan becomes historical, highlighting the plan of the *insula* as well as the other ancient buildings of the area: Basilica Ulpia and the two libraries with Trajan's Column in between, Trajan's Forum and the Via Lata, which was the name that Via Flaminia took in the urban stretch.

In order to make this urban and archaeological account even more tangible, the long vertical section hanging above the table is also shown on the wall at the end of the room.

So, as in the layout printed on the large table, the vertical section also "excavates" into the past: beneath

Exhibited in this room are artefacts found during the excavation of the foundations for the building that houses the museum.

Top, clockwise: honorary epigraphs for Emperor Caracalla in white marble with carved and red-painted letters, in part chiselled for later re-use (circa 213 CE) and a white marble Corinthian capital from Imperial times with obvious traces of re-use for a religious purpose (II century CE), both deriving from the 1902-1904 excavation.

Below: detail of the layout printed on the surface of the table in Room A on which a fragment of an Ionic capital is displayed (Assicurazioni Generali Excavation 1902-1904).



Photo by Giuliano Koren

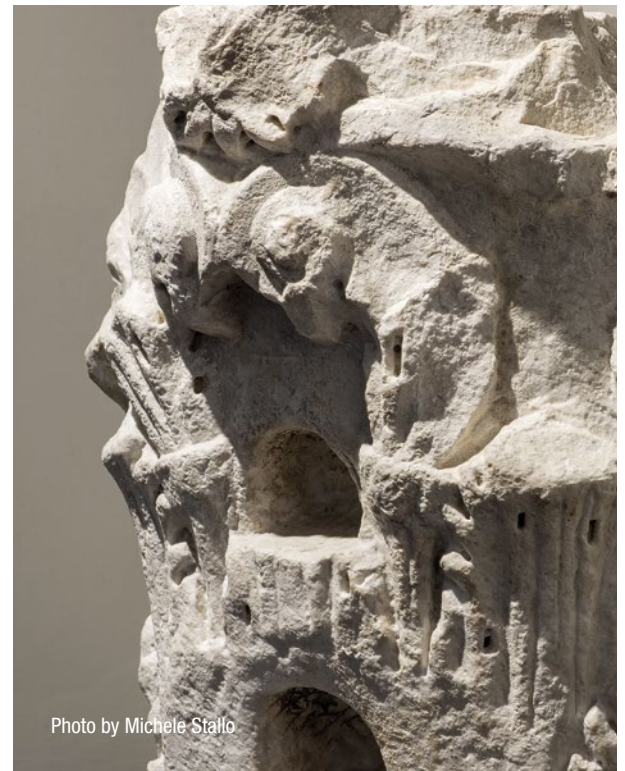


Photo by Michele Staffo

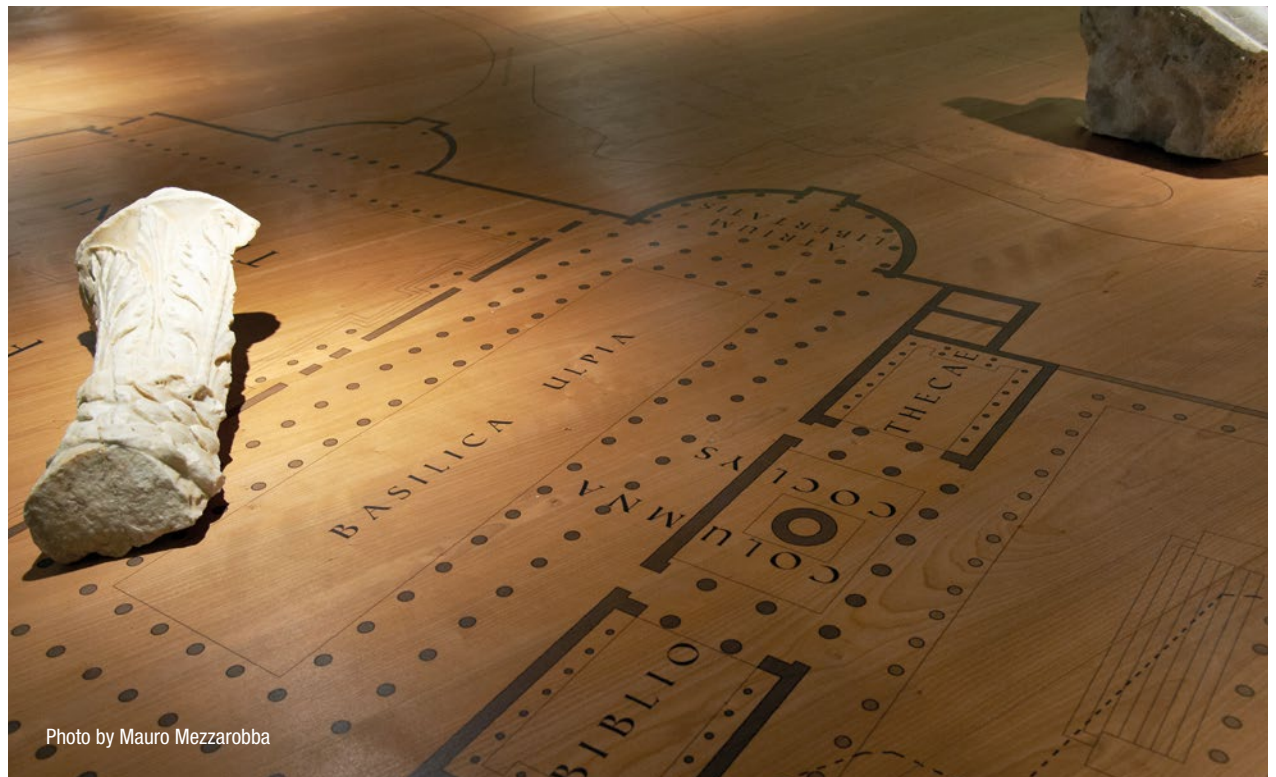


Photo by Mauro Mezzarobba



Photo by Michele Stallo



Female portrait in white marble with hairstyle inspired by those in vogue in the years 160-180 CE; the surface of the face was carved with changes to transform the subject. In the middle ground, the fragment of a small white marble female statue. This is a decorative sculpture inspired by works of art in Greek statuary from the V century BCE (Assicurazioni Generali Excavation 1902-1904).

it are shown the four analogous sections of the zone in chronological order, displaying the buildings in the nineteenth century, then those of the Renaissance period, up to a hypothetical reconstruction for the Middle Ages, and finally the ancient buildings of the II century CE with the reconstruction of the perspective of the *insula* at the centre of the section. In this way the prints on the table and on the suspended structure are in dialogue with those in the vertical sections hung on the end wall, to make obvious to visitors the roots leading to the present of where they are: the heart of Rome, where the stratification over thousands of years seen in this room is real and visible all around Palazzo Generali.

In the various reconstructions shown in the room, one vertical element alone is always seen in place, from antiquity to the current day: Trajan's Column, a constant point of reference in the panorama of the area and a pole of attraction in the museum's itinerary.

It is as if we had lifted the buildings from the ground and so doing made the archaeological artefacts emerge.

SEE ALSO

REPRESENTATION OF THE CITY
CH. 3.2, P. 108

The cross section cleverly “excavates” the past in five reconstruction drawings of the area taking us from the present day back to ancient times.

Drawings of the façades of the buildings that today face onto Piazza Venezia and Via del Corso and of the buildings on the same stretch of the city in various historical epochs.

Reliefs and drawings by Giovanni Zevolino and Giovanna Masciadri.

XXI century



XIX century



XVI century

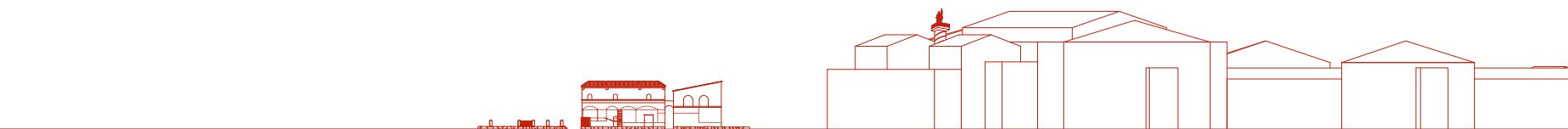
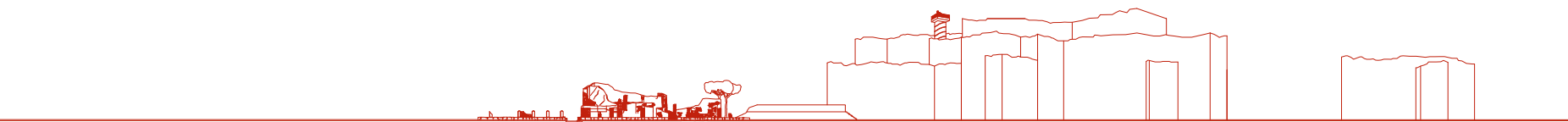


IX century



II century CE







quindi non solo l'opera
quelli ancora da essere
Francesco Partosta, il
mattinatich - un'idea
massa, quello che il
sotto il gale, di chiara
storia. Il Palazzo Va
manti con la sua lo
tutti locali, per il
il progetto presentato
l'incarico di sovve



Photo by Pierfrancesco Giordano

in essere alle egualanze, non
 trarsi con le brighe, per essere
 esse in contatto, cioè a di fare
 del, ma non soltanto come le sue
 improntate a quella forma spaziale,
 cioè, il partito e semplice che ha
 avuto che gli sta di fronte, di in
 cui, con la sua altezza e con la sua
 vista che non si può fare che con
 come si fa in casa. Dal Palazzo
 alle presento.

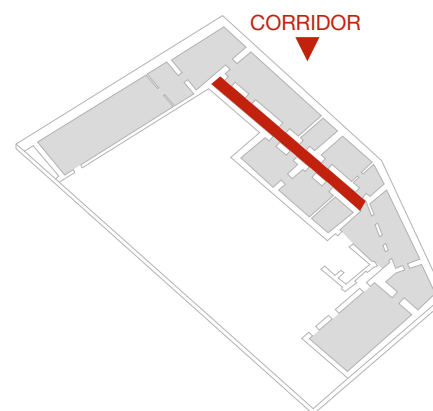


CORRIDOR

The History of Piazza Venezia

The game of relationships between today's city and the "other cities" that overlapped through the course of time, remoulding as they did the area of Piazza Venezia, starts in Room A and continues along the central corridor leading the visitor to the southern end of the palazzo.

In this rectilinear space the thousand-year old evolution of the city and the brief history of Palazzo Generali take up a dialogue of cross-referencing based on parallels and inter-sections.



On the left-hand wall, sections reproduce the buildings displayed in Room A in chronological and vertical order, developing in a horizontal manner and substituted by images of the zone of Piazza Venezia taken from various Roman archives.

Placing side by side reproductions of historical documents that have immortalized the piazza and the city over the centuries, it has been possible to articulate history along a timeline shown on the lower part of the same wall. The chronological itinerary begins with a photo of the Generali building taken in 2012, the year of the museum's inauguration, and then accompanies the visitor's gradual return to the origins of the urban history undergone by the piazza. From the initial photo of the palazzo we see the demolition photos of the eighteen and nineteen hundreds and then move back through the centuries with reproductions of prints from various eras to the end of the corridor where we

find photographs showing fragments of the marble *Forma Urbis* engraved around 203 - 211 CE.

Two relief maps, mounted in niches on the long wall, give a three-dimensional account of how the body of the piazza changed before and after Architect Sacconi's new design was implemented to accommodate the construction of the monument dedicated to Victor Emanuel II.

A rare aerial photo from the nineteenth century (see p. 25) displayed on the same wall provides a two-dimensional view to give the visitor a tangible idea of the disembowelment carried out at the beginning of the twentieth century to make space for the imposing monument dedicated to the king and recently unified Italy.

The history of the Generali building, from its planning and design to construction and completion is told on the corridor's right-hand wall by means of large format

Below: graphic reproduction of the "time line" on the left wall in the corridor of the Radici del Presente Museum.



Palazzo Generali
2012

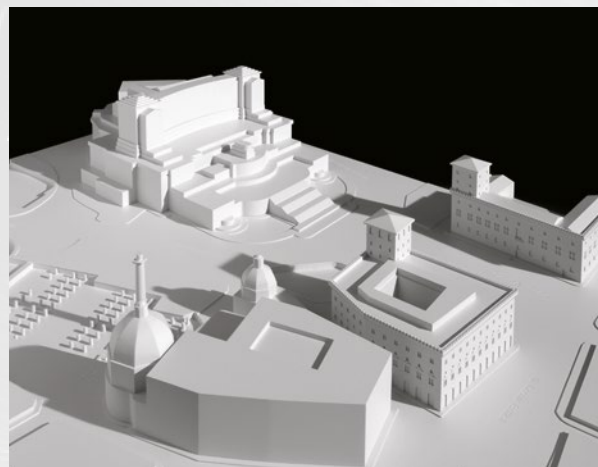
Demolition of Palazzo
della Catena, on the
corner of Via Nazionale
1903

Urban Plan to
reorganize Piazza
Venezia and
neighbouring
area.
1897

Piazza Venezia,
Palazzo and
Palazzetto
Venezia and
Palazzo Torlonia
1839
Luigi Rossini

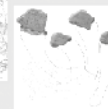
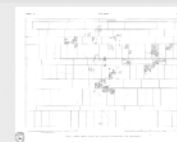
Geometric view
of buildings in
Rome
1835
Alessandro
Moschetti

Piazza Venezia
with Palazzo
Venezia on the
right and Palazzo
Torlonia on the
left (etching)
1786
Giuseppe Vasi



Three-dimensional model of the area of Piazza Venezia in the nineteenth century (left) and after the construction of the Monument to Victor Emanuel II and Assicurazioni Generali's building (to the right).

Model constructed by Enrico Bergonzoni



The centre of Rome with Piazza and Palazzo Venezia
1748
Giovan Battista Nolli

Detail of the area of Piazza San Marco (Piazza Venezia) and Aracoeli
1676
Giovan Battista Falda

Rear of Palazzo Venezia
1593
Antonio Tempesta

Piazza Venezia with Palazzo Venezia and the dwellings opposite
1551
Leonardo Bufalini

Map of Rome from the XIV century
1320
Fra' Paolino da Venezia

Map of Rome VIII secolo
1320
"Einsiedeln Itinerary"
(reconstruction by Christian Huelsen in 1907)

Archaeological map of ancient Rome, area of Trajan's Forum and the Capitoline Hill.
Rodolfo Lanciani, 1893-1901

Forma Urbis marble, fragments of slabs from the Basilica Ulpia (near Trajan's Forum)
203-211 CE



reproductions of architectural drawings, site photos and written documents.

During the four years spanning from the demolition of Palazzo Torlonia (1902) and the final completion of the new building's construction (1906), more than a hundred photos were taken at regular intervals, each annotated on the back to confirm the date it was taken, the point of view and the subject of the photo: it was one of the first Italian sites to be documented using photographs with such attention to detail.

It is for this reason too that the images displayed on the right-hand side of the corridor represent a particularly interesting historical document; they stand as a detailed study in time and space of the thousand-year old history told on the opposite wall: two parallel sequences of archival documents, reproduced in large scale and displayed in this manner for the first time, beginning a rich exchange of information that leads the visitor through an in-depth analysis of this part of Rome.

Left: "From the loggia of the office. The site towards Bonaparte corner. 9 November 1903."

SGIS, serie A, b. 88, fasc. A 555, s.fasc. 7, foto n. 28. Courtesy of MiBAC - ACS n. provv. 1418/2016.

Right: "Barrels to heat tar and workmen constructing the roof of the building. 23 December 1904."

SGIS, serie A, b. 88, fasc. A 555, s.fasc. 7, foto n. 95. Courtesy of MiBAC - ACS n. provv. 1418/2016.

... one of the first Italian archaeological digs accurately documented by the use of photographs.

SEE ALSO

THE PALAZZO , THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDS AND THE CITY
CH. 1.2, P. 20

THE EXCAVATION IN PIAZZA VENEZIA LED BY GIUSEPPE GATTI
CH. 3.3, P. 116





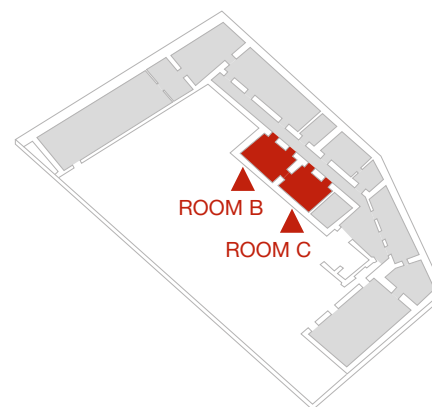
Photo by Lorenzo Pesce



ROOMS B-C

Urban Dwellings and Luxury Abodes

Ancient urban dwellings were places to exhibit wealth; they were used both for private and intimate life and for public functions. Rooms B and C have been decorated with artefacts from ancient domestic contexts in such a way as to represent these two dimensions in the home: public and private. Room B revives the fulcrum at the centre of the Roman house: the atrium where there was often a shrine or *lararium* to worship the household gods. The use of the altar, found in the excavation for the construction of Palazzo Generali, is explained by means of a fresco from Villa 6 of the Moregine complex, in the area of Pompeii, which shows a scene of private worship



of the family's guardian deities, *Lari* and *Genius*. The rites and the offerings placed on the altar, located at the centre of the room, come alive in the wall paintings. The sculptural elements and objects related to everyday life organized by thematic areas in the room and often associated with iconography that describes their use, bear witness to the domestic way of life of the ancient Romans. In this way, the free-standing male portrait, straight ahead as you walk in, attracts the eye from the start, drawing attention in the same way as the portraits arranged in the owner's study (*tablinum*) and visible from outside the house.

Room C is entirely given over to the *viridarium*, the Roman house's enclosed garden, here represented by numerous marble artefacts such as elements with a decorative function: herms, *pinakes* (marble plaques), fountains and puteals (stone curbs surrounding wells). The setting in the room is inspired by ancient Roman gardens we know of in which decorative objects were found *in situ* when the *domus* was discovered. Foremost among these is the House of the Golden Cupids in Pompeii, whose *viridarium* can be seen in the photo at the moment of discovery.

Objects used in everyday life become speaking testimonials of the domestic life of the ancient Romans.

MARBLE ALTAR

Assicurazioni Generali Excavation 1902-1904

Small altar in Proconnesian marble dated to the late Imperial age (III century CE). A divinity is depicted on each side: Isis-Fortuna with the half moon on her veiled head, the horn of plenty and the ship's rudder (photo below); Hercules with the lion's skin and the club; the Genius with the cornucopia performing a libation at the altar (right); and finally Mercury with the caduceus in his right hand. Intended for private worship, perhaps in a domestic setting, it illustrates the propensity of Roman religion to integrate cults of a different origin.

Photo by Giuliano Koren





Photo by Giuliano Koren



Photo by Mauro Mezzarobba
Drawing by Cinzia Morlando

VOTIVE RELIEF

Palazzo Poli Collection

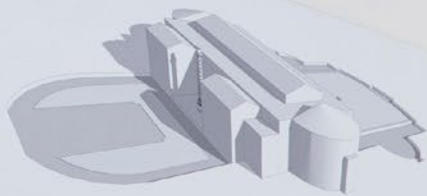
The votive relief in white marble is a Greek original from the early Hellenistic period (IV century BCE), perhaps displayed in a sanctuary. It is likely that it was transported to Rome for use in a private context as a valuable ornament for a garden. The relief shows a nymph and a male figure sitting on a rock, one in front of the other, in a chiastic position. The woman, with covered head and draped in a pleated cloak, has her left arm resting on a vase (*stamnos*) from which flows a rivulet of water; while the man, bearded and wearing a garland on his head, is leaning on a stick with his left arm and his back to the spectator. The scene is thought to recall an episode of a myth tied to the worship of water.



The garden's sculptural decoration also shows the great attention paid by the ancient inhabitants of the house towards religious aspects connected with nature and divinities intimately tied to them, in particular to Dionysus and his retinue depicted on herms, masks and *oscilla* (round, hanging marbles). Hence, these elements also carry out the function of evoking the ideals of the bucolic or happy life to those people using the spaces to stroll, study, converse or receive guests. Sometimes the theme of the garden was transferred onto frescoes that decorated private rooms inside the house: here the garden is given the aspect of an exotic and distant place much like the Persian *paradisos* that inspired the fresco from the House of the Golden Bracelet in Pompeii (see p. 39). The photo of this fresco is a fundamental element of decoration of the room as it conjures up the imaginary and wild dimension of the garden that inspired the displayed artefacts as well.

SEE ALSO

DEVISING PATHS TO LEARNING
CH. 1.4, P. 36



La Colonna Traiana racconta gli episodi della guerra dacica e dalla nostra finestra sono visibili le scene finali della campagna militare condotta dall'imperatore Traiano.



Traiano, grande generale romano di origine iberica, nominato imperatore nel 98 d.C., avviò nel 101 d.C. le operazioni militari nella Dacia. I famosi Romani, già evviate dall'imperatore Domiziano.

La guerra fu combattuta in due campagne militari, con la seconda (105-106 d.C.) la Dacia fu definitivamente sconfitta e ridotta a Provincia romana.

La Colonna Traiana era circondata da due edifici che ospitavano la biblioteca greca e quella latina.

È molto probabile che alle terrazze di copertura della nuova libreria della Basilica Ulpia e dei nuclei delle due biblioteche fosse possibile accedere a una visuale più elevata sulla Colonna, che doveva fornire il lettura del rilievo scultoreo che si dispiega lungo il suo fusto.

Oggi la Colonna è visibile solo dal basso e le immagini scolpite nella parte superiore sono praticamente invisibili.

Contro alle ricostruzioni che è collegata ai nuclei sotterranei per più alta della Colonna da un punto di vista prospettivo.

Ingrandendo le immagini con il mouse si visualizza il monumento e si può vedere il rivale che nell'immagine era possibile avere dai piedi degli edifici che circondavano la Colonna Traiana.

LA PORTATA DEL FUSTO DELLA COLONNA TRAIANA

IL SACERDOTE DI TRICHALO



Al centro, davanti al gruppo di truppe, si affrettava una popolazione barbara di uomini della donna. I Romani, che non gli altri operanti in appreso al gruppo, il loro silenzio e alla loro sventura.

IL TESORO DEI DACI



I cavalieri romani erano per raggiungere Decebal. L'esercito dei Daci, ingrandito ai piedi di un fiume, si accingeva a tagliare la gola tra lo agguato dei soldati romani accorsi alla via stratta, tra i cavalieri, corpe il secondo libro. Claudio Massimo che lo raggiunge per ottenere la sua testa da portare come trofeo all'imperatore.

LA TRAVERSATA DI UN FIUME



Sulla sinistra le truppe romane sfilano davanti al disonore dell'imperatore Traiano che è floga per l'ultimo successo militare ottenuto sul fiume dei tralci il nuovo re dei Daci, Debal, di guerra da inviare a Roma. Sulla destra, Debal, il re dei Daci, riceve un altro disonore alle truppe romane parteggiando la fuga.

LA FUGA E IL SUICIDIO DEI DACI



I Romani hanno espugnato la città i Daci, sottomessi, reagiscono in modi differenti: a sinistra alcuni si suicidano, altri cercano di fuggire verso la foresta rappresentata dal grande albero. Sulla destra un gruppo di legionari circonda l'imperatore Traiano davanti al quale si inginocchiano i Daci sconfitti per chiedere clemenza.

L'ASSEDIO DELLA CAPITALE DACICA



Le truppe romane assediano una città fortificata dei Daci, probabilmente la capitale Sarmizegetusa, durante la seconda guerra dacica. L'evento si svolge sul confine della città muraria. I Romani tentano invano di aprire un varco nelle mura per entrare in città. Così un gruppo di legionari comincia ad abbattere alberi per costruire macchine da guerra utili per l'ultimo assedio.

Ora premi un tasto, e ascolta la storia...

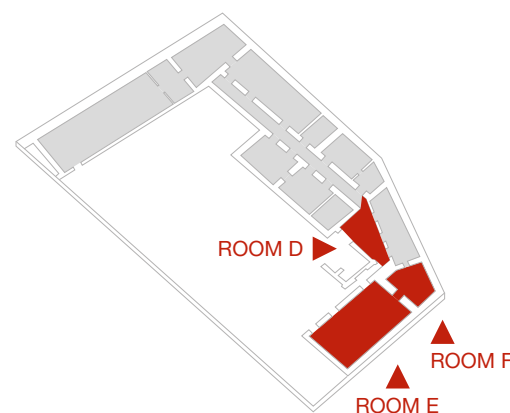


From the window of Room F the top bands of Trajan's Column can be seen. A long-focus lens, situated in the window and operated by visitors by means of a joystick, allows the images carved on the column to be framed and observed on the large screens mounted on the surface of the tables. It is possible to zoom in and enlarge the details of single scenes that would not be visible to the naked eye.

ROOMS D-E-F

Public Buildings and Holy Spaces

At the end of the long central corridor, you reach Room D. This small space linking the rooms in the exhibition itinerary, focused on public contexts, aims to illustrate the well-structured re-use of ancient materials. The crisis and consequent fall of the Roman Empire bequeathed an enormous quantity of monuments and works of art that gradually lost their meaning and function due to the cultural change that marked the end of the ancient world. A cross-section of artefacts showing traces of re-working, when adapted for a different use or purpose from the original one, give examples of some of the principal aspects of the practice of re-use.





Rooms E and F have been set up to show illustrative examples of the main architectonic designs favoured for public spaces, the variety of urban ornamentation and the role and significance of official representation. The activities of the ancient Romans that went beyond the domestic sphere took place in urban areas that were very often characterized by the presence of impressive monumental structures. The buildings of the forum, the colonnades of the temples, the vast bulks of the baths and amphitheatres all marked the panorama of the city and constituted the backdrop for the most important events on the religious and civil calendars.

In Room E the visitor will find a route leading towards the end wall, where there is a niche flanked by two columns, evoking the location for a religious statue within sanctuaries or holy places. The images of divinities, the Imperial female portrait (p. 126), the altar and the inscribed slabs, like the many other examples of architectonic elements, demonstrate the extraordinary decorative wealth of monumental buildings and spaces intended for use by citizenry, for the most part fruit of constant works of munificence donated by the élite in power with a propagandistic intent.

Here, half way through the visit, students encounter the museum's first installation involving didactic activities. In a sort of miniature theatre that inhabits its

own space at the centre of the archaeological finds, students can play games involving construction, taking part in activities using their hands. Within this lab space the students find the contents that they previously saw in the rooms of the *domus* and the *viridarium*: having learnt how such places were structured, they are invited to do a speed reconstruction, much like fitting together the pieces of a puzzle, of a three-dimensional model of a Roman *domus* that at the same time becomes the scene of a brief video projected in the background.

The audiovisuals explain how the spiritual life was lived in the homes of the ancient Romans and concludes with a set-up of a passage taken from *Aulularia* by the playwright Plautus. It is a comedy about an avaricious old man who hides his treasure

Room E re-evokes the scenario of areas for public, sacred and civil use, as well as hosting a laboratory space for didactic activities.



Photo by Giuliano Koren

Above: In the foreground the model of the *domus* reconstructed by the students at the centre of the miniature amphitheatre; in the background a video-projected image.

Right: reconstructing the model of the *domus*.

near the domestic altar, entrusting it to the care of the guardian spirit of the house; and it turns out to be the very marble altar exhibited at the Radici del Presente Museum that is at the centre of the brief story: these games of interaction with the archaeological artefacts on show and the direct involvement of the students express the didactic identity of the museum.

The smaller space in Room F complements the previous public context, acting at the same time as a focal point for the entire exhibition itinerary. This room contains some notable fragments of historical celebratory reliefs, among which the slab with the carving of Aeneas fleeing Troy (see page 33), a mythical episode tied to the foundation of Rome. The spreading of images was a formidable means of communication, and the possibility of making figures and objects emerge from a two-dimensional slab meant that monuments could be covered with depictions that offered a visual account of events with a strong political and religious significance. On which note, the opportunity to take advantage of a special view of some of the scenes of Trajan's Column, through a high definition optical instrument, is a popular attraction for the visitors, who are suddenly immersed in some of the most exciting events in Trajan's Dacian expeditions, thanks also to the audio contributions.



Photo by Lorenzo Pesce





Photo by Giuliano Koren

Trajan's Column is without doubt one of the most famous ancient Roman monuments. The column is entirely sculpted; the bas-relief extends over approximately 200 meters and recounts episodes from Trajan's two military campaigns against the Dacians between 101 and

106 CE in today's Rumania. As in a papyrus rolled into a spiral around the full length of the column's shaft, are a succession of scenes showing sieges, battles and the movements of military troops. From the window in Room F some of the most significant scenes from the campaigns can be seen.

The column stands not far outside the window of Room F, inside which, with the help of technology, one of the city's symbolic monuments is in a sort of dialogue with the exhibited artefacts; and among them, significantly, there appears a portrait of Trajan himself. Moreover, the building housing the museum is located in the heart of ancient Rome, very close to the Imperial Fora, whose presence beyond the walls of the building is inevitably highly suggestive, particularly when related to the internal spaces dedicated to public contexts, seen in all their glory just outside the windows of the two rooms.

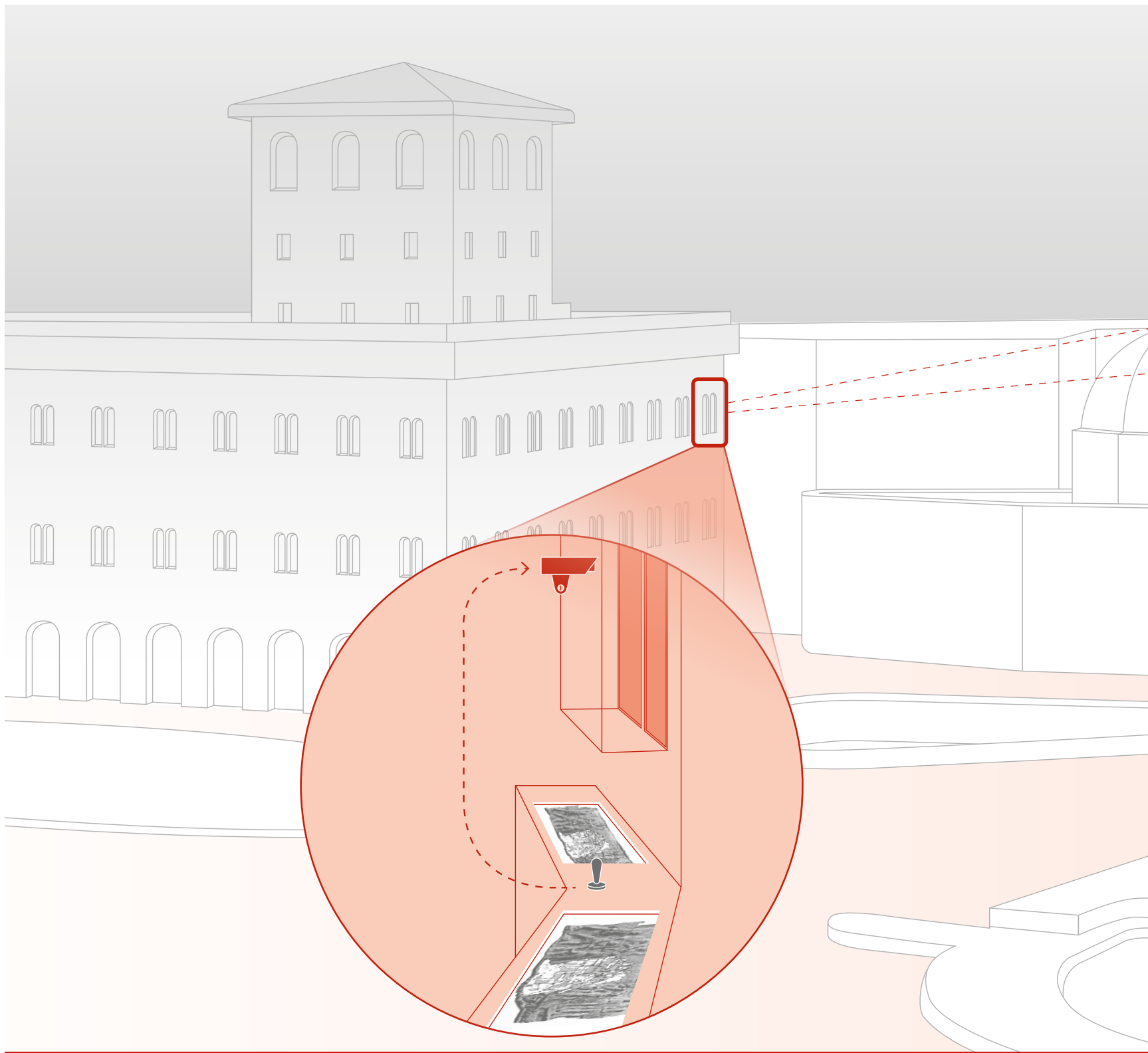
SEE ALSO

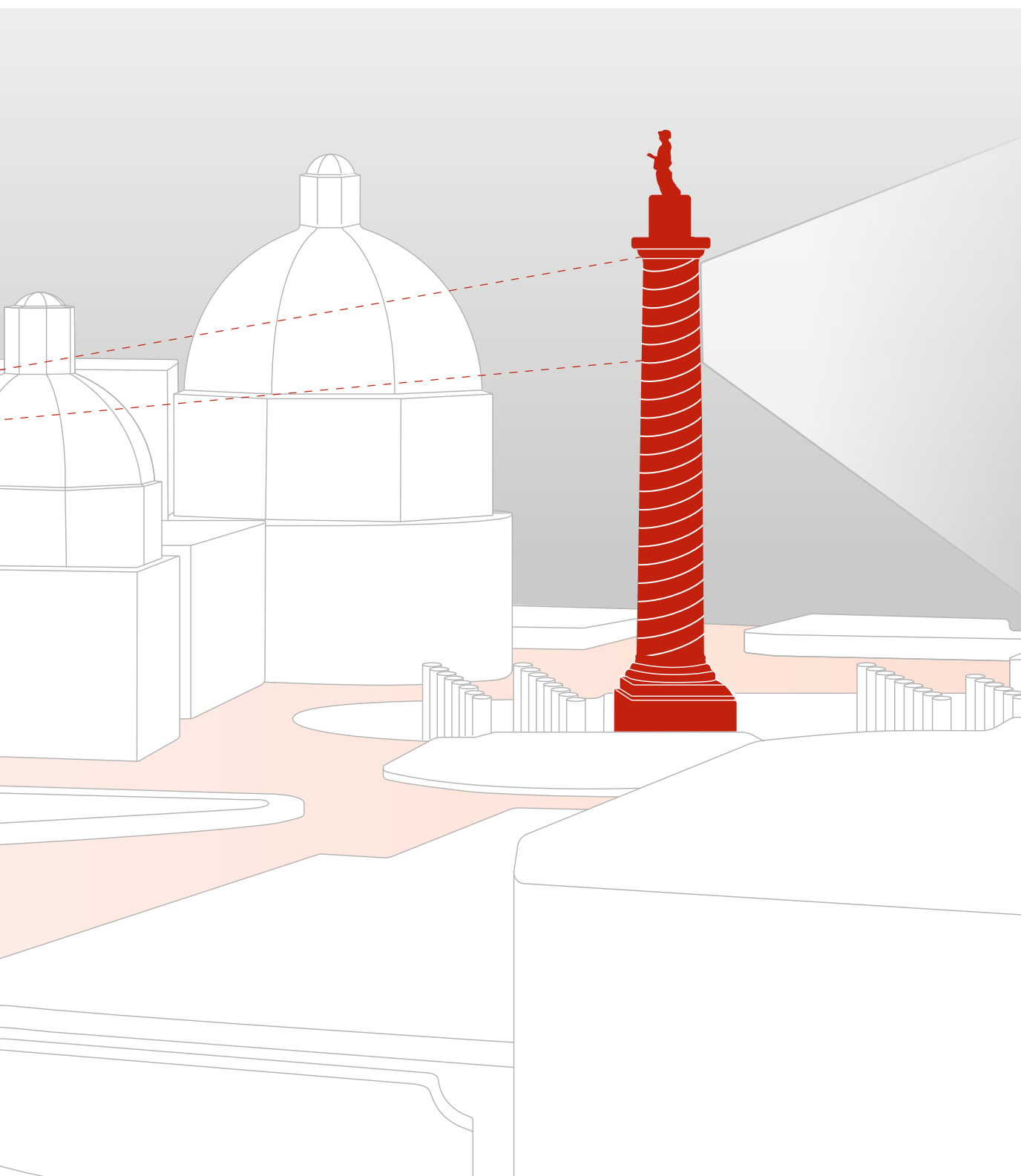
THE IMPERIAL PORTRAITS

CH. 3.4, P. 124

GAMES IN ANCIENT ROME

CH. 3.5, P. 130





- ◀ The fall of the last Dacian fortress
- ◀ Decebalus takes his own life
- ◀ The sack of the Dacian's treasure
- ◀ A group of Dacians submits to Trajan
- ◀ Escape and suicide of Dacians
- ◀ Siege of the Dacian capital

The six scenes carved onto Trajan's Column, framed by the lens and visible on the screens set in the tablespots (see pages 76-77), are described to the visitors through brief audios transmitted in the room when the installation is used. Through the auditory accounts the ancient monument and the Dacian campaigns led by Trajan become an integral part of the museum itinerary and the students' didactic activities.



Photo by Lorenzo Pesce



ROOM G

The Grave as a Mirror of Life

Much like a journey of initiation, Room G acquaints us with the world of the afterlife, ancient funerary traditions and burial rites. Two sarcophagi from Generali's archaeological collection have come down to us intact despite having undergone modifications for changes of use. One is located at the centre of the room, which in turn appears like an enormous sarcophagus: the walls, up to a height of a metre and a half from the floor, are clad in the same material used to cover the floor of the museum. Numerous marble fragments from other sarcophagi are exhibited along the walls, so entering into

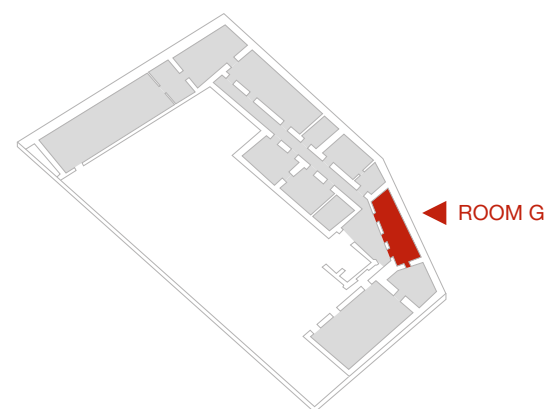




Photo by Giuliano Koren

contact with the complete sarcophagus in the middle of the room and illustrating the figures that are usually carved into the sides of important artefacts from the ancient funeral world.

The marble fragments are engraved with images, taken for the most part from the mythological repertory. They give the opportunity to perpetrate the deceased's life by showing episodes relating to their virtues or introduce the expectation of a happy afterlife. The myths represented in the collection are tied to the stories of Admetus and Alcestis and to Heracles, to the marine retinue (*thiasus*) or that of Bacchus, where Dionysus is the metamorphic divinity representing the passage from the condition of life to death. Bucolic scenes depicting shepherds and hunters allude to the idyll of country life. Equally the theme of the philosophers' banquet, shown on some sarcophagus fragments, is a glorification of the ideal of a life dedicated to reflection and the search for inner peace.

**Much like a journey of initiation
Room G acquaints us with
ancient funerary traditions
and burial rites.**

Left: white marble cinerary urn from the early Imperial period in the form of a vase with strigilated decorations (Assicurazioni Generali Excavation 1902-1904).

Right, above: fragment of a sarcophagus from III century CE with lion heads in white marble. The lion head was part of the decoration of a lenòs (tub-shaped) sarcophagus and was located at the end. (Collezione Merolli-FATA).



Photo by Mauro Mezzarobba

Right, below: sarcophagus in white marble from the middle Imperial period, lacking a lid. The front is decorated by a wavy grooved motif (strigilated), edged above and below by cornices and fluted colonettes topped by small composite capitals on the corners. In the centre is the panel destined for the inscription in memory of the deceased (Palazzo Poli Collection).



Photo by Giuliano Koren

G01



Photo by Lorenzo Pesce

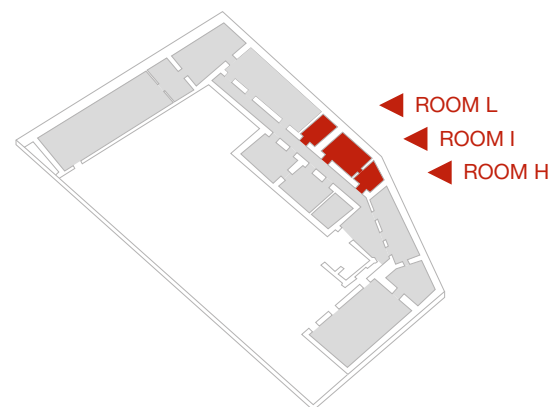


ROOMS H-I-L

Sign and Memory

Rooms H-I-L gather together exhibits of funerary artefacts conceived to leave a testimony of the passage of human life. The conviction that there could be rebirth after death by means of memory had recourse to a system of signs: portraits located in graves or carved in relief on sarcophagi, objects depicted on funeral monuments alluding to the life of the deceased, and inscriptions cut in stone that recall the dead in the words of the living.

Room H displays portraits found in graves and the more or less true to life images of the deceased, carved in relief on sarcophagi and funerary monuments.





The portraits of the dead, together with funerary inscriptions and grave goods, show us how the living would reconstruct the identity of those who had passed away so that their memory was shared and renewed by all on a daily basis. They indicate the dead person's social status, emotional bonds, religious beliefs and ideals of life. Reconstructing identity, through a system of visible signs, was indispensable to keep alive the memory of someone no longer there.

Room I (photo to left) was curated by the philosopher Carlo Sini. The four exhibits in the centre of the room represent recurrent types of ancient funerary art. In reference to these and other existing archaeological artefacts, Sini has made drawings in watercolour, transcribing a series of quotations by hand and collecting them in four "world-sheets."¹

Each "world-sheet" has been printed on a rectangular panel with openings that recall doors. The four panels are exhibited on the wall of the room, in such a way that the artefacts, drawings and quotes fuse in a game of connections leading the visitor through an unending labyrinthine path: crossing the "thresholds," going beyond each "wall," and hence beyond each "world-sheet," to access new and surprising points of view about the roots of our symbolic language.

Continuing on from the previous room, L is entirely dedicated to the theme of the cyclical nature of life.

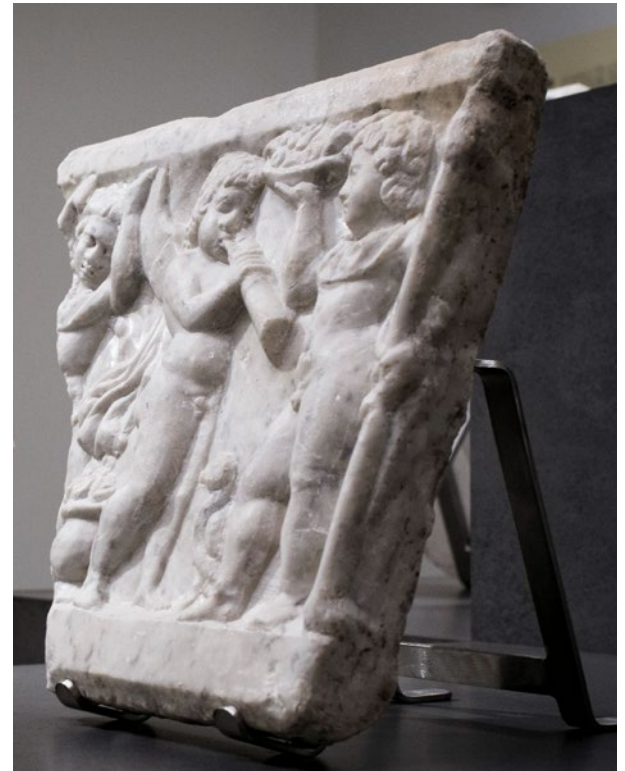
NOTES

1. The expression "world-sheet" is borrowed from Charles Sanders Peirce, American philosopher and founder of pragmatism, in which "even the simplest of signs holds a philosophy of the universe."

Top left: funerary epigraph (I-II century CE). The engraved slab of white marble carries the dedication from the wife Vettia for her deceased husband Marco Pupio Sabino, veteran of the Roman army. Like all the finds shown in photos on this and the two following pages, it was part of the Merolli-FATA Collection.



Top right: fragment of white marble from the lid of a sarcophagus decorated with a procession of seasonal Erotes, seen with garlands, and baskets of fruit and flowers (late III century CE).



Below left: fragment in white marble belonging to the front of a sarcophagus, on which is carved the bust-portrait of a man set on a small base (second half of III century CE).



Below right: funerary relief in white marble with a bakery scene, the deceased being a baker (I-II century CE).



On this page: photos by Giuliano Koren



Photo by Giuliano Koren

Above: fragment of the lid of a sarcophagus in white marble with theatrical mask in the top right corner (late III - early IV century CE). The central panel shows a banquet scene.

Below: fragment of a funerary relief in white marble with two male portraits; it is probable that the relief were completed with other members of the same family nucleus (second half of I century CE). In the middle ground, a fragment of a sarcophagus lid (late III - early IV century CE) and a further sarcophagus fragment (III century CE).



Photo by Mauro Mezzarobba

Right: fragment of the lid of a sarcophagus in Proconnesian marble decorated with a mask and the figure of a seasonal Eros holding a sickle (second half of III century CE).

The possibility of being reborn through memory inevitably precludes the necessity of death. This awareness was part of the ancient world and was concretized in the selection of specific iconographic catalogues of objects connected to the sepulchre. In this room there is a collection of fragments of sarcophagi with depictions of seasonal and funeral genii, but also with figures in Bacchic or marine processions, the latter willing a happy life in the hereafter. The funerary genius with a torch represents the soul of the deceased, that is extinguished and dispersed, for which the hope of eternal return remains alive. The motif of consolation and return to life is entrusted to the seasonal genii, each characterized by a symbol drawn from nature to distinguish the different seasons. Generally seen together, often clasping luxuriant garlands, they represent the unstoppable movement of life.



Photo by Giuliano Koren

Portraits and images carved on tombs were used to identify the deceased and preserve their memory.

SEE ALSO

THE PAST AS MEMORY OF THE FUTURE
P. 08



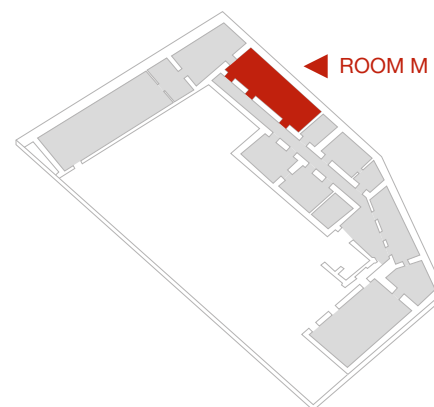
Photo by Lorenzo Pesce

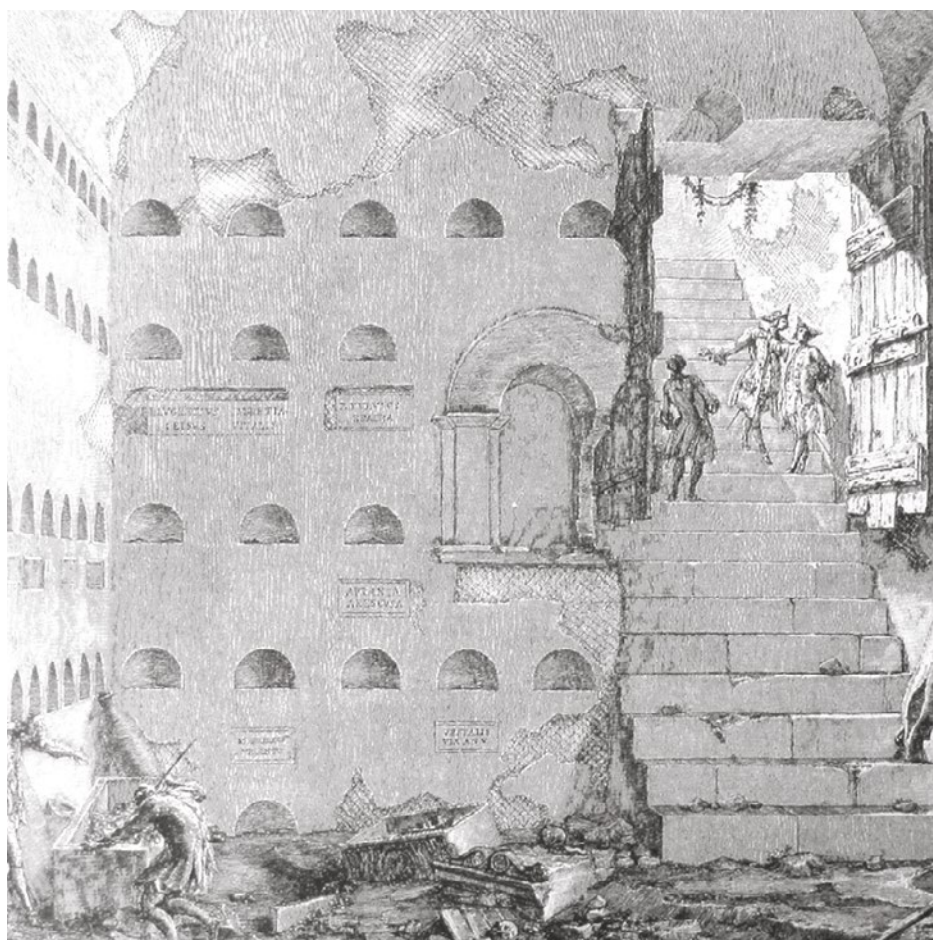


ROOM M

Words Set in Stone

Room M contains the epigraphic section of the museum: a collection of inscribed *tabellae* (small marble plaques) and slabs, tombstones, fragments of sarcophagi with inscriptions and carved funerary altars. The ancient Romans used epigraphs to mark their graves, but they also made use of them to recall names, jobs and further information regarding the deceased. Funerary inscriptions are considered important testimonies because they mirror the composition of the social organization of ancient Rome. Moreover, they witness the will to leave a record of one's existence by writing on durable material such as stone.





Above: print of an old burial chamber.

Right: exhibition of funerary epigraphs in Room M.

G.B. Piranesi,
Le antichità romane, 1756.

This is the final room on the exhibition itinerary and has been designed as an inhabitable set. Along the twelve meters of the left wall, visitors find a series of lit-up semicircles, of the same size and located equidistantly; these allude to *loculi* (small chambers) in the *colombari* (burial vaults). This reproduction of a print by Piranesi (1720-1778) shows an ancient burial chamber and provides the key to understanding the layout of Room M. Beneath some of the luminous semicircles there are small, engraved *tabellae* or slabs of marble fixed to the wall, exactly as they were in burial vaults, to mark the presence of the deceased's ashes contained in urns within the small chambers.

The ample space in the room is dominated by four large containers in the form of parallelepipeds filled with grey

This reproduction of a print by Piranesi shows an ancient burial chamber and provides the key to understanding the layout of Room M.

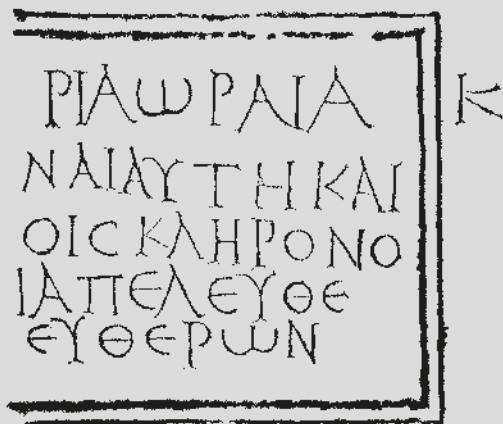


Photo by Giuliano Koren

ENGRAVED SLAB

Palazzo Poli Collection

White marble slab, broken on the left side, with funerary inscription in Greek arranged over five lines. The text recalls a woman by the name of [Vale]ria Horea who lived in the II-III century CE, and who had a grave built for herself, her descendants and her freed slaves. The inscription constitutes a vivid testimony of the multiethnic and multicultural composition of the Roman population in the middle to late Imperial period.



sand, displaying engraved tombstones and slabs. Like the *tabellae*, they carry the names and titles of the deceased and can be divided into the main social groups comprised by the ancient Roman community: *gentes* (people of Roman extraction), freed slaves, servants and foreigners. Unlike the custom in ancient cemeteries, but to ensure a didactic approach to ancient writing and culture, the epigraphs have been split up into the social groups to which the deceased belonged and exhibited in the respective containers.

Often, alongside the inscriptions, the slabs bear images sculpted in relief that represent the portraits of the deceased or instruments and symbols indicating their trades or the roles they carried out in their lifetime. For this reason, next to each parallelepiped, selected images have been chosen from ancient iconography to recall the identity of each social group. The tales of men who lived many centuries ago are told through a linking between past and present, both through verbal and visual language.

Carved slabs show the names and titles of the deceased and provide us with important information on the social make-up of the ancient Roman community.

2.3 | The Teachers' Points of View

To educate and to let oneself be educated

I have been teaching in Roman high schools for fifteen years and increasingly I come across (Italian) students who have never seen the Colosseum or St. Peter's. To establish an educational dialogue with them through the subjects I teach (Latin and Geohistory), I consider direct and participatory experience of what is real to be essential, at a time when we are faced with the challenges of a contemporary world that is undergoing a profound crisis of historical, cultural and moral identity. I am convinced that there is no text book, taught class or multimedia support that makes a child or adolescent feel "worthy to discover the world" as much as a small piece of reality, to look at, touch and encounter close up. The Radici del Presente Museum is one of the few places I am aware of that truly fulfils this need. I found out about it less than a year ago through the internet site, with its rich selection of didactic materials and experimental projects, and I have taken part in a teachers' tour: I was immediately won over by the effectiveness of the set up and the precision with which each artefact, even the smallest fragment, is skilfully placed in a context that, without the need for captions, gives it back its strength of 'communication'.

Last autumn, our second year students went to a talk on the ancients' games and past times, followed by a museum visit. Accompanying my students and watching them in action, I could appreciate another aspect of the set-up that I had not noticed while visiting as an adult used to the maxim "look, but don't touch": there are no display cases or protective barriers! And I discovered, above all for myself, that beauty inspires respect more than prohibition, and that human beings constantly understand and learn with all the sensory faculties they own.

At a distance of a few months I can attest that the added value of a visit to the museum consists in the self-awareness and curiosity shown by each student as he or she rose to the occasion: it is difficult to quantify such results in terms of marks or profit, but they are the only real reasons that it is worth running the risk of educating and letting oneself be educated.

Cinzia Capano
High school teacher
Liceo Scientifico Statale "Nomentano"
Rome

“History, which you read in books, materialised before the students’ eyes, so close that they could reach out and touch it.”



Photo by Giuliano Koren

Antiquity at your fingertips

Antiquity at your fingertips: this was the prevailing sensation that came across in the comments and looks of my students when we went to visit the Radici del Presente archaeological museum. Finally, statues, inscriptions and reconstructions are displayed without the roped barriers and glass cases that seem to be saying that those things are not “your” things, that someone else more important with a greater right to ownership than you-the-student has touched them and placed them in a confined area to which you have no access. And yet they are “your” roots belonging to “your” past, so why can’t you see them close up? Why should you be separated from something that is “yours”? The feeling that my students had was mainly that this time someone was trusting them, rather than attempting to separate them from “their” finds, which they didn’t dare touch anyway and which they scrutinized without reading the nearby captions so as not to condition their thoughts, exercising the intuition, imagination and curiosity that are at the basis of knowledge.

I found much in the museum that shared my way of teaching. When I present students with a poem by Leopardi for example, at first I simply distribute the text, just like a naked and crude artefact at the Radi-

ci del Presente Museum. Then I invite them to make comments and hypotheses, intuiting the meaning of the work and gathering clues about the unknown author as though they were detectives. Only after I have listened to them speak about the author do I give out supporting material and at that point they can see how close they got to reality.

They had a similar experience at the museum: the folder that the students gradually filled as they went from room to room and that contained the “solutions” to this intuitive guessing game, with the help of the trained guides, was only read at the end, bringing satisfaction to the students who for once were protagonists of their own learning. On this occasion, history, which you read in books, materialised before the students’ eyes, so close that they could reach out and touch it. The materialisation of a concept, in a world where almost everything the young encounter is virtual and immaterial, managed to stupefy and amaze them.

Gabriele Campioni
High school teacher
Scuola Secondaria “Caduti di Nassiriya”
Vasanello (VT)

2.4 | Guided Tours of the Museum: New Horizons

The Radici del Presente Museum is open to everyone and free to visit by appointment. Visitors are guided around the museum in groups, receiving a unique experience in the heart of Rome. Numerous special initiatives are arranged with the specific aim of involving students.

Over the course of the years the museum has become a space of cultural production and diffusion, but above all a place of inclusion. The first event, which was a great success, was the FAI Mornings for Schools” in 2015, when a visit to the museum was part of the circuit for schoolchildren in Rome with special guided itineraries arranged for the occasion. There were also thematic lessons held in 2016 and 2017 by a group of archaeologists from “Federico II”, University of Naples, who were responsible for researching and creating the museum’s didactic itinerary. Setting out from a close study of the artefacts, the lessons, differentiated on a basis of student age, enriched the experience of the guided tour, bringing to light the history and culture of Roman civilisation. It was the young visitors themselves who underlined the success of the initiative by expressing great appreciation of the museum’s innovative set up when filling in a questionnaire.

Once again it was schoolchildren who were the beneficiaries of the theatrical visit project, with the par-

ticipation of professional actors alternating with the guide in taking the limelight. This type of tour – with texts written by playwrights under the supervision of the archaeologist Maria Rispoli – involved four scenes in which actors in period costumes interacted with students.

Moreover, with the aim of making the museum accessible to a wider number of visitors and in particular people with disabilities, two specific highly inclusive projects were launched under the authority of the Soprintendenza Speciale Archeologia, Belle Arti e Paesaggio di Roma.

The first initiative, intended for the blind, involves tactile themed tours in which certain archaeological artefacts can be touched without the use of gloves and tactile drawings are made that will become part of the museum’s permanent exhibition.

The second project involves the deaf and is carried out with the collaboration of sign language interpreters, consultants from the Ente Nazionale Sordi (National Association of the Deaf), and the creation of guides for the deaf that give the museum the possibility of opening up to new horizons of inclusion and active participation.

To find out more about the museum and to book a visit:
www.radicidelpresente.it
info@radicidelpresente.it



Above: the image used to promote thematic lessons.

Below: the two photographs illustrate, respectively, a scene from a theatrical visit and an artefact chosen from the tactile itinerary.

On this page: photos by Monica Micci



3.1 | Research Continues

Some finds exhibited in the museum have inspired further in-depth research that has resulted in new interpretations.

The third section of this volume goes into greater detail about some of the exhibits displayed at the Radici del Presente Museum, focusing on themes that received particular attention during the planning and setting up of the museum.

In fact certain objects that can be seen on the tour have inspired further in-depth research that has resulted in new interpretations. More specifically, the research carried out for the museum presented the occasion to set in motion a systematic organization of the original records on the excavation curated by Archaeologist Giuseppe Gatti in the years in which Assicurazioni Generali's palazzo was built.

Furthermore, a careful selection made from the original documentary sources has allowed us to represent, in an immediate and intuitive manner, the story of the urban development of the zone of Piazza Venezia, including events leading to the construction of the building that today houses the museum.

The results springing from the new research studies were unveiled to the public on the occasion of the conference "Urban archaeology and the collecting of antique marbles: the experience of the Radici del Presente Museum at Palazzo Generali in Piazza Venezia," which was held on 3 October 2014 in Rome.

3.2

Representation of the City

Federico Rausa and Pietro Storti

Lecturer in classical archaeology, scientific curator of the museum

Architect, designer of the exhibition itinerary and didactic activities at the museum

One of the museum's added values: painstaking research in the archives and libraries of Rome has allowed us to recount, on the left wall of the corridor, the long and complex story of the transformations of the site and the ways of representing the city through historical maps, printed views and archaeological reports; on the right, original documents and period photographs from more recent date complete this journey through time.

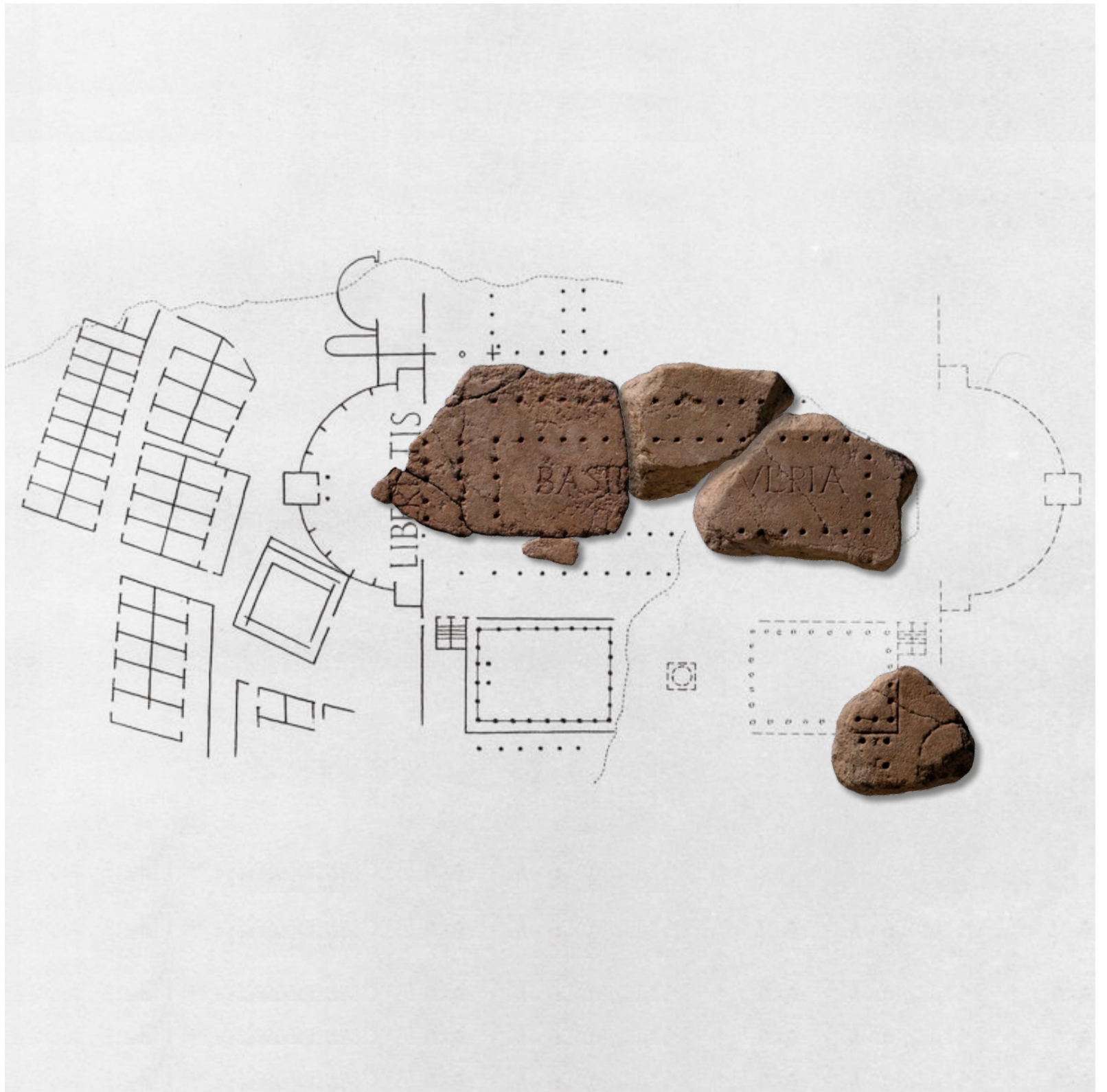
The attention that the area of Piazza Venezia has drawn to itself for millenia has made it the object of many different forms of representation.

Cities are always changing; each era alters the articulated pattern of roads, piazzas, buildings and monuments. In the majority of cases, urban and building developments are the fruit of real estate operations born of basic and material necessity and such changes pass for the most part unobserved: they are documented in the land register but only the citizens who are directly involved are aware of them and so, silently, they become part of the city. In other cases, such as that of the area of Piazza Venezia in Rome, every single change assumes a symbolic value well beyond the norm. That part of Rome has drawn continual attention to itself over the last few millenia so that every action, every renovation and every alteration is the result of a complex, well-structured and expensive operation involving the most important architects of their time, who are subjected to severe restrictions as well as the most varied criticisms. In this way too the identity is expressed of a place that has given form to some of the most important chapters of our monumental history.

Such significant contexts become the object of infinite forms of representation that constantly amplify and reinforce their role of protagonists; the urban setting that includes the Imperial Fora, Trajan's Column, the Capitoline Hill and the current Piazza Venezia has been, over the course of the centuries, sculpted, drawn,

“Demolition of Palazzo della Catena on the corner of Via Nazionale (film). 13 May 1903.”

SGIS, serie A, b. 88, fasc. A 555, s.fasc. 7, foto n. 2.
Courtesy of MIBAC - ACS
n. provv. 1418/2016.



Marble map of ancient Rome (marmoreal *Forma Urbis*), fragments of the slabs showing Ulpia Basilica (Antiquarium Comunale Rome) inserted into the reconstruction of the section for Trajan's Forum.

painted, engraved, described and, more recently, photographed, filmed and elaborated in the most assiduous and constant manner.

By displaying some of the main depictions of this central area of Rome on the two walls of the museum's corridor, we wanted to make a small addition to this eternal story. They describe to the visitor the architectonic and urban evolution that has endured over the centuries and at the same time show how the various ways of representing the city have developed: from reproductions of some fragments of the marble *Forma Urbis*, the gigantic map of Rome carved on 150 slabs between 203 and 211 CE, we reach the early twentieth century, when photography began to tell the visual narrative of the modern city.

Detailed research into the archives and libraries of Rome has allowed us to recount, along the left hand wall of the corridor, the long and complex story of the transformations the site has undergone and at the same time collate images to illustrate the ways in which the city has been represented through historical maps, printed views and archaeological reports. Running the time line in reverse, the collection of images displayed on this side of the corridor documents the urban and architectonic developments and highlights the recurrent link with the grandiose monumental complex of Trajan's Forum through a connection

that has never been entirely broken in the course of the centuries.

The series starts with some photographs and town planning maps (*Piano Regolatore*) that date from 1931 at the reorganization of Piazza Venezia, radically changed when the *Vittoriano* was built. Assicurazioni Generali's palazzo emerged after the demolition of the previous Bolognetti/Torlonia building and others nearby; it appears as a fully integrated element of the monumental fabric of the city. Prior to this epoch-making project, perhaps the greatest impact on the story of Rome as a capital city, Piazza San Marco, the name taken at the end of the fourteen hundreds, was a space defined by Palazzo and Palazzetto Venezia, from the fifteenth century, and Palazzo Bolognetti (later Torlonia in 1807) from the sixteenth. For anyone arriving in the city it represented the natural conclusion of Via del Corso, the urban stretch of the ancient Via Flaminia. The series of images of views and plans of the city by Vasi, Nolli, Falda, Tempesta and Bufalini, dating from the nineteenth century back to the middle of the sixteenth, accurately document the urban layout.

The situation is more elusive when it comes to this part of the city in the Middle Ages, when the ancient ruins still dominated the area uncontested. The reproductions of images of Rome chosen to illustrate the city as the destination for devotional pilgrimages

**From reproductions of some fragments
of the marble *Forma Urbis*,
carved between 203 and 211 CE,
we reach the early twentieth century.**



Detail of the area of Piazza San Marco (today Piazza Venezia), etching, G.B. Falda, 1676.

A.P. Frutaz, *Le piante di Roma*, III, Roma 1962, fig. 359.

– the map belonging to the anonymous author from Einsiedeln and that made by Fra' Paolino from Venice in 1320 – show an imaginary rather than a real city in which, within the circular walled perimeter, the monuments and other aspects of note are scattered around in symbolic form as signs that evoke the greatness of the past and present.

The sequence of images comes to its natural conclusion in the reproduction of the four fragments surviving from the *Forma Urbis* depicting the Ulpia Basilica shown to a scale of 1:240. They are an exceptional testimony of the high level achieved in the science of topographic relief by the ancient Romans and of their ability to reduce to scale. They allow the visitor to enter the dimension of the Imperial city, the metropolis of the ancient world at the apogee of its power.

On the right side of the corridor the written documents and photographs relating to more recent times are displayed: drawings, letters and above all photographs dating from around the turn of the twentieth century, before and during the construction of the building belonging to Generali. These records, conceded by kind permission of the State Central Archive, describe some of the fundamental moments in the historic journey that culminated in the current shape of the piazza and the palazzo. In the first half of the corridor we see drawings by Giuseppe Sacconi, the architect who won the International competition to design the monument

Map of Rome from the eighth century CE from "Einsiedeln's Itinerary," chromolithograph, reconstruction by Christian Huelsen in 1907.

Capitoline Historical Archive.

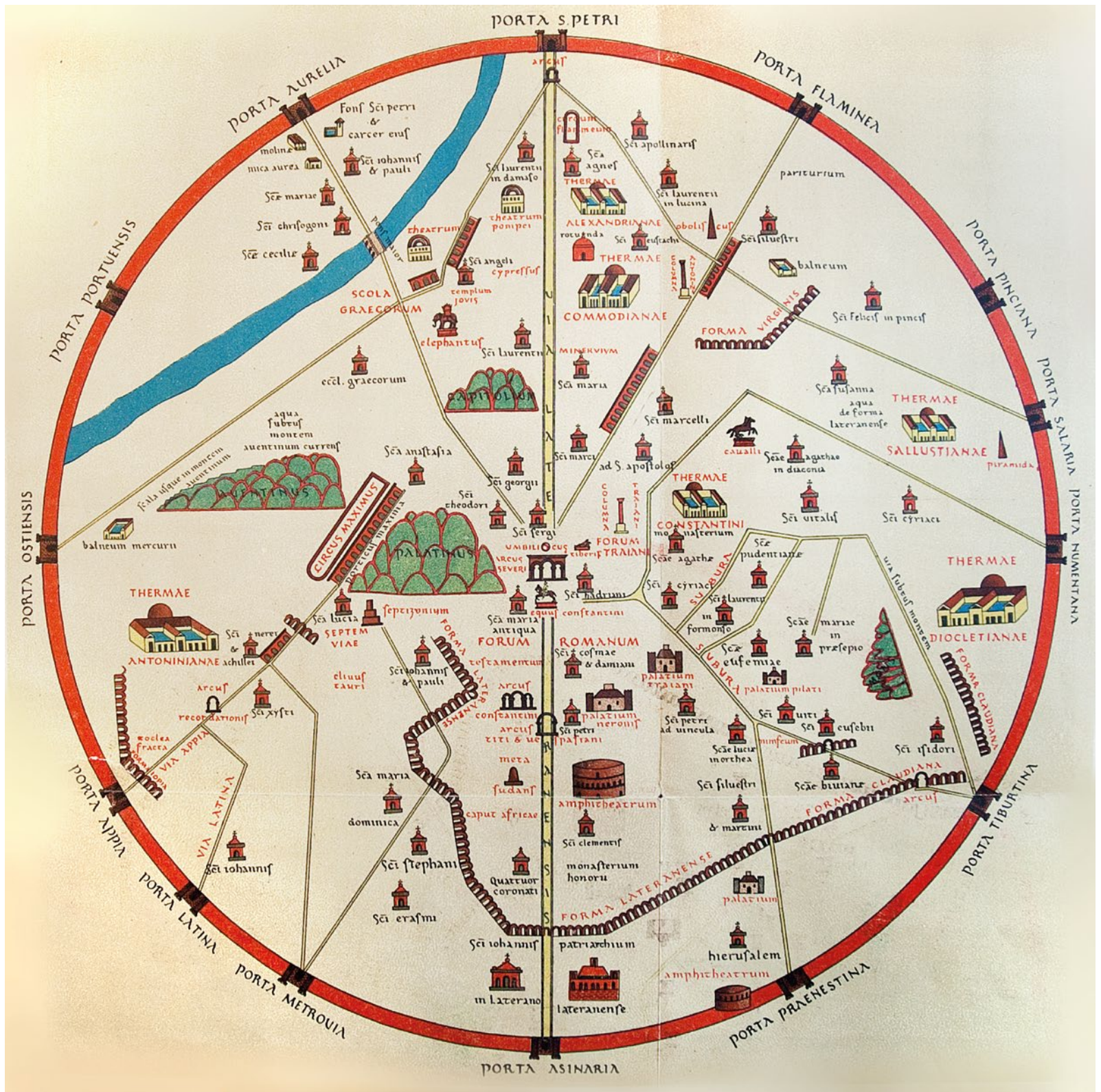




Photo by Mauro Mezzarobba

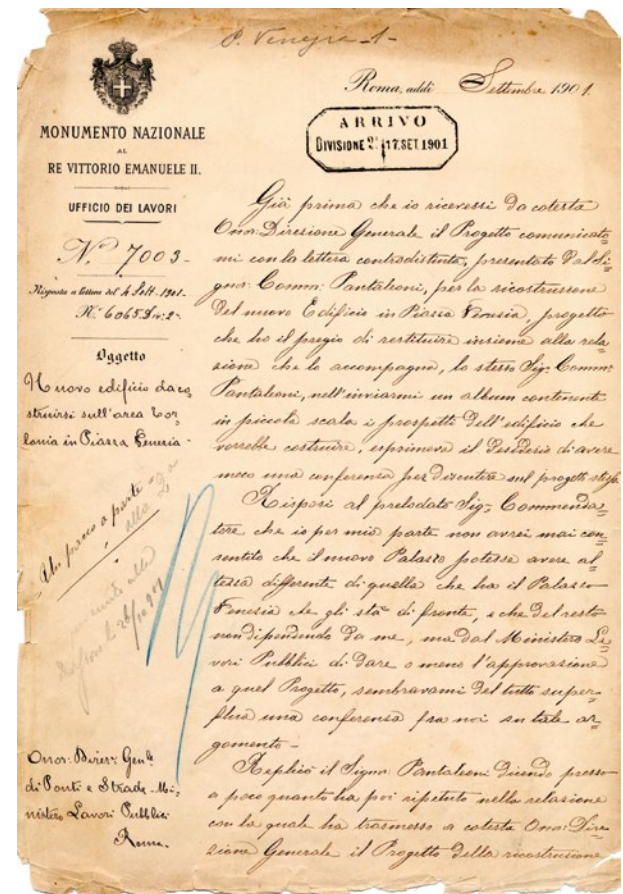
Left: exhibition of drawings and letters belonging to Architect Giuseppe Sacconi in the corridor of the museum.

Right: letter from Giuseppe Sacconi to Ministry of Public Works, in which he turns down the new project. Rome, 16 September 1901.

ACS - Ministry of Public Works, Dir. gen. Edilizia e porti, Div. V, Monumento to Victor Emmanuel II, Palazzo del Parlamento, various urban developments (1871-1928), b. 74, fasc. 240.

dedicated to Victor Emanuel II and the consequent re-configuration of Piazza Venezia. Alongside the drawings are some excerpts from numerous hand-written letters from Sacconi during the long phase of the project's approval. The correspondence between the architect and the Minister of Public Works witnesses both the fascinating dialectic that belonged to the era and the tenacity that was necessary to overcome the various phases in the procedure of approval. Reproduced in large format, the letters, drawings and many photos of the building site provide tangible proof of the radical change, in less than a century, of our way of expressing ourselves, planning and building.

Drawings, letters and photographs describe some moments in the historic journey that led to the current shape of the piazza and palazzo.



SEE ALSO

THE PALAZZO, THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDS AND THE CITY
CH. 1.2, P. 20

CORRIDOR – THE HISTORY OF PIAZZA VENEZIA
CH. 2.2, P. 64


3.3

The Excavation in Piazza Venezia led by Giuseppe Gatti

Maria Rispoli

Archaeologist specializing in classical antiquities, curator of the museum's artefacts itinerary

The creation of the Radici del Presente Museum, which displays artefacts from the excavation carried out by Giuseppe Gatti in the years 1902-1904 in Piazza Venezia, prompted the start of the systematic collection of original documentation related to digs. The recovery of some unpublished documents has increased the knowledge of the ancient structure that emerged and enabled the identification of the various phases of occupation of the area between the first and fifth centuries CE.



“There may never again be an area of Rome to explore as vast as the zone now cleared of buildings.”

Giuseppe Gatti

Left: “From the small loggia on the ground floor. View of the main scaffolding of the building and the demolition of Palazzo della Catena. 22 August 1903.”

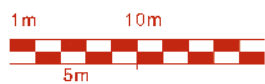
SGIS, serie A, b. 88, fasc. A 555, s.fasc. 7, foto n. 17.
Courtesy of MIBAC - ACS
n. provv. 1418/2016.

Setting up the Radici del Presente Museum involved a research study into the archaeological survey that was conducted between 1902 and 1904 in the area in which the palazzo belonging to Assicurazioni Generali was built. Initially there was insufficient documentation about the dig to permit an analysis of the phases of occupation of the area in the heart of the ancient and modern city. However, the recent discovery of the entire archaeological documentation – conserved at the State Central Archive and in the Roman Archaeological Documents Archive – produced by Giuseppe Gatti, the famous archaeologist who led the excavation (see inset on p. 122), has enabled the clarification of the functions and chronology of the structures from the Roman era that emerged during the dig.¹

The first information concerning the archaeological survey was published in 1934 by Guglielmo Gatti, an archaeologist like his grandfather, who interpreted the structures uncovered as those belonging to an *insula* (island or block of buildings) and a public building that was located just beside the great monumental complex of Trajan's Forum (fig. 1). In reality, the archaeological remains relate to five main chronological periods between the first century BCE and the first decades of the sixth CE. The construction of the *insula* in the time of Hadrian, the first half of the second century CE, was preceded by the reorganization

NOTES

1. Research on G. Gatti's excavation and archival and archaeological documentation first published by M. Rispoli in the scientific review *Römische Mitteilungen* for the German Archaeological Institute. Rispoli, RM 122, 2016, pp. 123-179.



Left: digital reproduction of the map showing the structures excavated by Giuseppe Gatti in 1902-1904. Including the road parallel to Via Flaminia and the *tabernae* building found in 1932 (fig. 1).

Drawing by Studio L. A. Partners s.a.s., Milan.

of a large and important public area paved with flint paving stones and divided into two piazzas by means of boundary bollards placed at regular 4.15m intervals along the side of Piazza Venezia and road Y. They marked out the piazza to the north, on the side of Via Cesare Battisti.

The spaces between the travertine bollards, which were 1.90m high and very similar in size and shape to those that encircled the Colosseum, were enclosed by barriers that were only opened on certain occasions to allow passage from one piazza to the other. This connection has led to the belief that there was a func-

tional relationship between the two areas, reserved for activities that were different but complementary.

From an urban point of view, the entire paved area had the form of a defined space between the two road axes that ran east-west.

It is likely that road Z, the largest in size, rising from west to east, left the slopes of the Quirinal to cross Via Flaminia at right angles where Via del Corso is today. The urban plan precedes the construction of Trajan's Forum and can be dated to the second half of the first century CE (period 2). It was an urban layout that was soon altered when Trajan's Forum was



Photo by Giuliano Koren

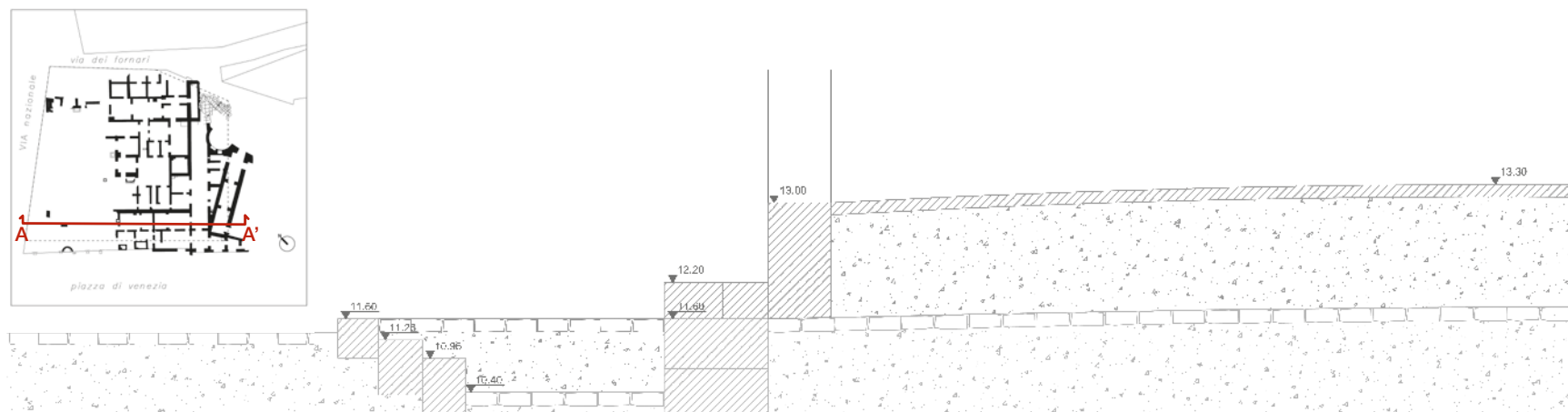
Right: detail of the layout printed on the surface of the table in Room A; in the foreground is the layout of the *insula*.

created with the role of urban junction linking the areas at different heights.

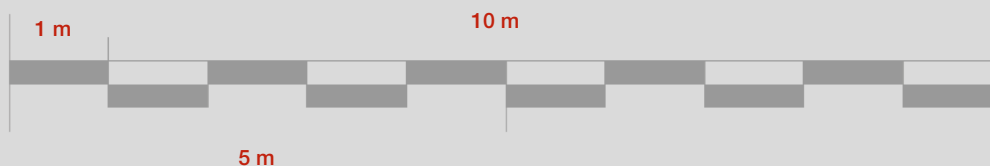
In Hadrian's time the area underwent an important renovation with the construction of an *insula* and an *auditorium*, the latter a building dedicated to cultural activities and linked to the *Athenaeum*, founded by Hadrian in 135 CE (period 3). It was found in Piazza della Madonna di Loreto during the survey in preparation for Metro C, conducted by the Special Superintendence for the Archaeological Heritage of Rome. The structures of the *insula* cover the paved piazza, excluding the north side of the piazza that was kept in use. The walkways were consequently raised by around 1.5m (fig. 2). The *insula* was a type of residential building, a block of flats made up of numerous dwellings and shops, generally belonging initially to a single proprietor and then divided into several property units, transmitted by inheritance and rentable.

Within the *insula* where Palazzo Generali is located it is possible to make out different residential homes and at least two units of property as the archaeologists previously highlighted: a *domus* facing onto Piazza Venezia and, behind it, a residential building characterized by a plan with a central courtyard around which various spaces gravitated. On the side of Via dei Fornari it is likely that the structures represent a third building conceived as an autonomous living unit and then annexed to the building with the courtyard. This last dwelling adjoined the *domus* from middle to late Imperial times uncovered by the Provincia di Roma beneath Palazzo Valentini. On the side of Piazza Venezia, the *domus* occupied a strategic position because it faced west onto a beaten roadway parallel to Via Flaminia.

A study of the layout has permitted us to find some parallels in houses built in Ostia in the time of Hadrian,



Section AA'



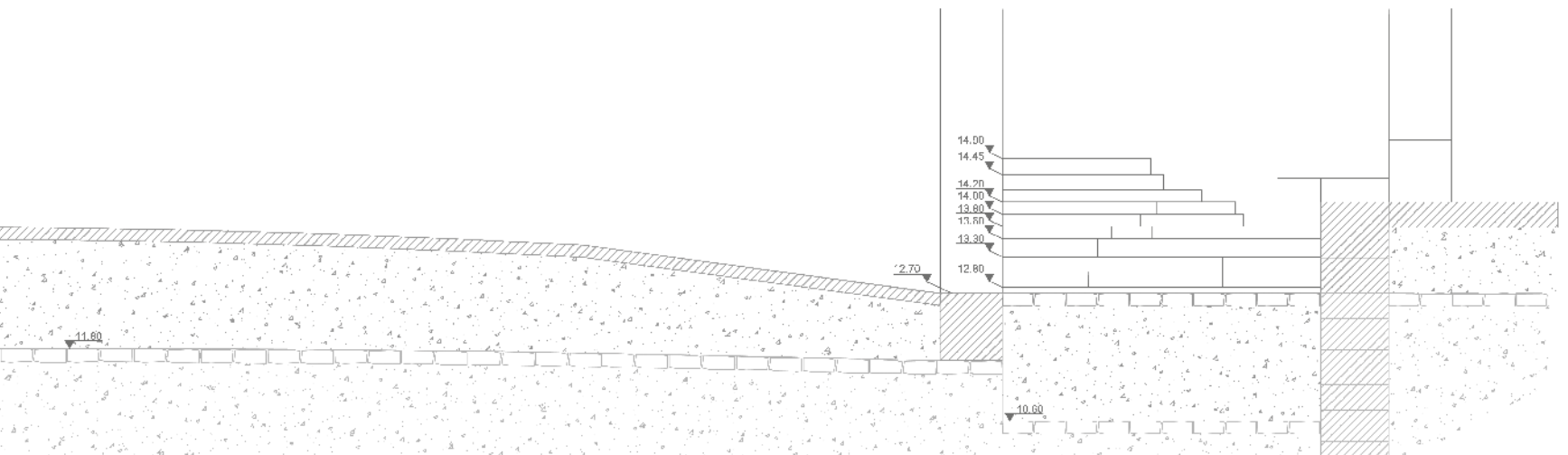
distinguished by a separation of the formal reception rooms of the lower level from the sleeping and staff quarters that were located on the floor above. Such dwellings are generically held to be of moderate luxury. The central building was made up of a *domus* on the ground floor and separate apartments on the upper floors, accessible by a flight of stairs that opened into the courtyard. The *insula* was separated from the *Auditorium* by road Z, which was raised by about 2m in Hadrian's time and provided with steps to link the area to that of Trajan's Forum. Indeed, the area of Piazza Venezia, then as now, was located in a natural depression with a difference of height that varied from four to five meters with respect to Trajan's Column. The secondary entrance to the *Auditorium* also opened onto road Z; it can be seen in area A. Areas A-C, which were discovered previously by Giuseppe Gatti, with areas D-F, make up part of the *Auditorium*

and it is likely that they were planned as a connecting element between the *insula* and the public building. They comprised a latrine and probably *tabernae* (shops) used by the people from the complex.

The excavation produced some artefacts, amphoras and dolia, which give an idea of the continuity of life at the *insula* until the fifth century CE (periods 4 and 5). Then, just like the *domus* beneath Palazzo Valentini, the ancient dwellings beneath Palazzo Generali were abandoned and filled in with anthropic deposits at the end of the fifth century CE and beginning of the sixth.

Stratigraphic north-south section, reconstructed for periods 2 and 3.
Scale 1:150 (fig. 2).

Ideation by M. Rispoli.
Drawing by Studio L. A. Partners
s.a.s., Milan.



SEE ALSO

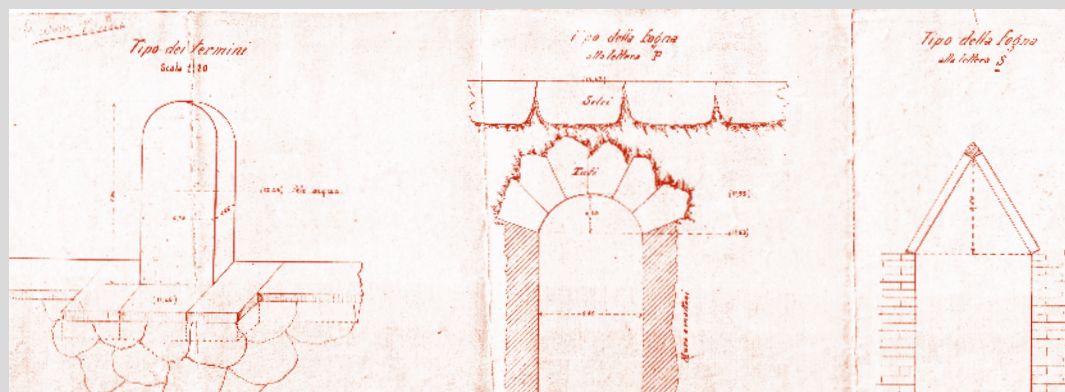
THREE MEN AND A PALACE
CH. 1.1, P. 12

ROOM A – THE FIRST NUCLEUS OF THE COLLECTION
CH. 2.2, P. 56

AN EXAMPLE OF URBAN ARCHAEOLOGY AT THE START OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

The plan to reorganize Piazza Venezia at the time of the construction of the monument to Victor Emanuel II included the involvement of an illustrious archaeologist, Giuseppe Gatti. Unlike today there was no strong tradition of precautionary archaeological research, since there existed no legal requirement. Thus Giuseppe Gatti, director of the Office of Excavations and Discoveries of Antiquities in Rome and the Environs, embraced this project as a one in a million chance to dig in the subsoil near Trajan's Forum. In 1902 the archaeologist wrote a letter in which he requested from the General Direction of Antiquities and Fine Arts the opportunity to carry out a survey into the area adjacent to the monument to Victor Emanuel II prior to the reconstruction of "new buildings, roads and gardens." He sustained that "the area in Piazza Venezia was none other than the large road without monuments that led from Trajan's Forum to the main entrance of Campus Martius." Giuseppe Gatti personally directed the dig and produced a rich collection of material that has only fully come to light in recent times. Besides the planimetric survey of the structures uncovered, there were also the excavation reports and further plans, in particular the sections and elevations of numerous archaeological finds. Added to these documents are the archaeologist's personal notebooks and the dig diaries. This survey represented, without doubt, an extraordinary example of urban archaeology in the early twentieth century, in which one can see a certain topicality regarding the organizational dynamics of the two sites that proceeded

at an equally rapid pace due to the pressing timescale imposed by the project of the piazza as a whole. The archaeological excavation began on 14 August 1902 with the demolition of Palazzo Torlonia and came to an end on 15 March 1904; it was not an extensive form of dig, but went forward in large trenches starting on the side of Piazza Venezia and advancing in an anticlockwise direction to reach the side of Via Nazionale, today's Via Cesare Battisti. Once the surveys had been made of the ancient structures that emerged in the exploratory trenches, the area was handed over to the construction company to become a building site. The contemporaneous nature of the two sites is vouched for by a selection of photos, conserved at the Central State Archive, that illustrate the phases of demolition of the old buildings and the construction of the new palazzo that took place in the piazza.





“Demolition of Palazzo Catena and nearby buildings on Via dei Fornari, seen from the ancient column found there. 2 April 1903.”

SGIS, serie A, b. 88, fasc. A 555, s.fasc. 7, foto n. 1. Courtesy of MIBAC - ACS n. provv. 1418/2016.

“Sections of archaeological finds in Piazza Venezia.” The drawings were produced during the excavation led by Giuseppe Gatti and conserved at the Archaeological Documentation Archive of Rome.

Maria Rispoli
Römische Mitteilungen 122
2016, p. 132, fig. 8.

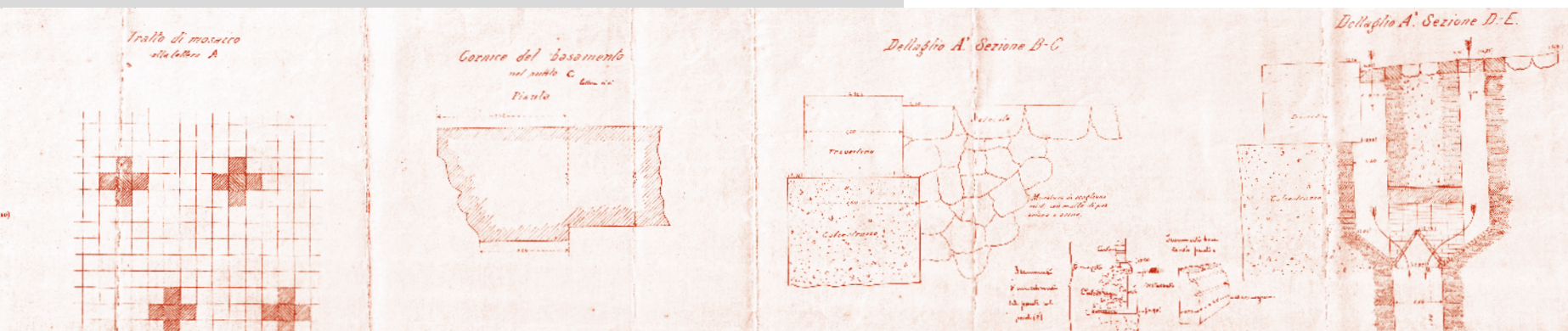
Once the surveys had been made of the ancient structures that emerged from the excavation, the area was handed over to become a building site.

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M. Rispoli, *Gli scavi di Giuseppe Gatti per la costruzione del Palazzo delle Assicurazioni Generali in piazza Venezia a Roma*, *Römische Mitteilungen*, 122, 2016, pp. 123-179 (with previous bibliography).



3.4

The Imperial Portraits

Giuseppe Scarpati

Archaeology official at MiBAC, specialized in ancient Roman sculpture and portraiture

Three of the marble portraits in the museum reproduce the features of people of Roman Imperial rank: the woman with an elaborate hairstyle and diadem is probably Domitia Longina, wife of Domitian; while a likeness of Trajan at the end of his principate can be seen in a fragment of high-relief and, finally, a bust altered in modern times, perhaps with the intention of depicting Nero, retains an ancient portrait of Gallienus.

There are interesting portraits of important imperial personages, previously little known or entirely unpublished.



Among the antiquities displayed at Palazzo Generali there are some interesting Roman portraits of important Imperial personages. These works are little known or entirely unpublished and there is a dearth of information regarding their provenance. In Room E, which is dedicated to public life, there is an impressive female head; it belongs to a large format statue of a princess from the Flavian dynasty. A woman with an austere and matronly air wears a hairstyle with a high toupée of curls rising from her forehead, above which sits a half-moon diadem. Recent research identifies two female members of the Flavian house with characteristic features comparable to this portrait: Giulia (c. 63 - c. 89 CE), the only daughter of Emperor Titus, and Domitia Longina (51/55 - 126/130 CE), Domitian's wife and daughter of the famous general, Domitius Corbulo. Both princesses received the title of Augusta and had the privilege of wearing the diadem in images stamped on coins, during their lifetime.

While the depictions of Giulia – whose brief existence was poorly affected by her relationship with her despotic uncle, Domitian – seem highly conditioned by a stereotype of idealized youthful beauty, in portraits of Domitia the empress's facial features are clearly recognisable. On a basis of the general configuration and possible comparisons, the most likely attribution



Photo by Mauro Mezzarobba



Photo by Giuliano Koren

Above: female head in white marble, larger than life size, depicting a princess from the Flavian dynasty, probably Domitia Longina, wife of Emperor Domitian. The portrait, with the subject dressed in Augustan robes dates from the late I or early II century CE; she is displaying a hair style that was popular among aristocratic ladies in the Flavian-Trajan periods (Palazzo Poli Collection).

Below: fragment of a portrait in white marble, smaller than life size, depicting Emperor Trajan. Originally belonging to a relief of historical-commemorative subject, probably intended for an important official monument. Here the emperor is shown in the final phase of his reign, which lasted from 98 to 117 CE (Merolli-FATA Collection).

of the portrait displayed in the museum is to Domitia Longina, in a version made during her husband's reign (81-96 CE), following the bestowal on her of the title of Augusta.

The second Imperial portrait, to be found in Room F, with a close view of Trajan's Column, consists of a fragment originally belonging to a large historical relief probably located on a public monument in ancient Rome.

It is easy to recognise the well-known features of Trajan, who reigned in the years 98-117 CE, shown already advanced in age. His hair recalls the classicist style that is typical of later representations of the emperor, with long tight locks close to the scalp emerging from a central spiral on the top of his head. In this case the noteworthy variations generated in the arrangement of his hair are evident, and can also be found in a famous head in Ostia, unanimously considered a masterpiece in portraiture from the first decades of the II century CE. The recent discovery of a new replica in Rome, on the slopes of the Palatine, although not completely congruent, supports the hypothesis that this depiction of Trajan derives from an autonomous model, conventionally defined "of the fine head of Ostia."

Although the Ostian portrait is definitely posthumous, opinions on the date of the prototype's creation are



Photo by Lorenzo Pesce



Photo by Giuliano Koren

Modern bust in grey marble with an ancient head remodelled on a portrait of Emperor Gallienus (253-268 CE). The work is the result of restoration carried out between XVIII and XIX century, in part altering the features of the face of the subject (Merolli-FATA Collection).

... an ancient head, having undergone modern alterations aimed at making the subject look like Nero.

divided. Some scholars consider it to have been made after Trajan's divinization, whilst others adopt a different interpretation, linking it to the last phase of the emperor's life, based on a comparison with one of the reliefs on the Arch of Trajan at Benevento dedicated in 114 CE. In the fragment belonging to Generali a realistic orientation emphasizes the faded aspect due to advanced age, suggesting a date for the creation of the portrait between the final years of Trajan's reign and the beginning of the epoch of his successor Hadrian.

The bust in grey marble of modern make that comes from the Merolli collection, located in the area of the museum dedicated to re-use (Room D), has an ancient head, subjected to heavy restoration during the eighteenth or nineteenth century, which would seem to be aimed at making the subject look like Nero. Despite the alterations made in modern times, there are nonetheless the recognizable traits of an adult man with a thick neck, wearing a short curly beard, with thin lips and large expressive eyes depicting irises and pupils. The hair is formed of a compact mass in which long undulating curls are carved.

The observed characteristics correspond to those identified in a group of portraits that scholars generally link to Gallienus, who reigned from 253 CE with his father Valerian and, after his death, alone until

268 CE. Portraits of Gallienus can be divided into two main groups: a first in which the emperor is depicted with youthful features, short hairstyle, beard and with some peculiarities of countenance, following a model that was ostensibly created at the time of his rise to the throne; in the second group his lineaments are more mature, the hair long and wavy; his eyes raised upwards giving him an inspired expression. This image would be the one that was most common from 260 CE onwards when Gallienus was the empire's only sovereign.

A small number of copies show features and stylistic elements that distinguish them from the main group of the second type, perhaps depicting the appearance of Gallienus in his final years of life. The group includes an example that belonged to the Ludovisi collection, now displayed at Palazzo Altemps, which constitutes the best comparison with the Generali head – particularly striking in the similarity seen in profile – with only minor divergent particulars in areas that have undergone restoration.

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SEE ALSO

ROOMS D-E-F – PUBLIC BUILDINGS AND HOLY SPACES
CH. 2.2, P. 76

3.5 Games in Ancient Rome

Valentina Pirozzi

Archaeologist specializing in classical antiquities, particularly from Pompeii and Herculaneum

The Romans loved table games, which they played indoors but also in the street and around the basilicas, temples and amphitheatres. The framework of the game was carved into support bases known as *tabulae lusoriae* (playing boards) or straight into the stone of pavements or the steps of monuments and public places. During the excavation before the construction of Palazzo Generali at least six *tabulae* were found, two of which (dating to IV or V century CE) were kept and are today exhibited in the museum.

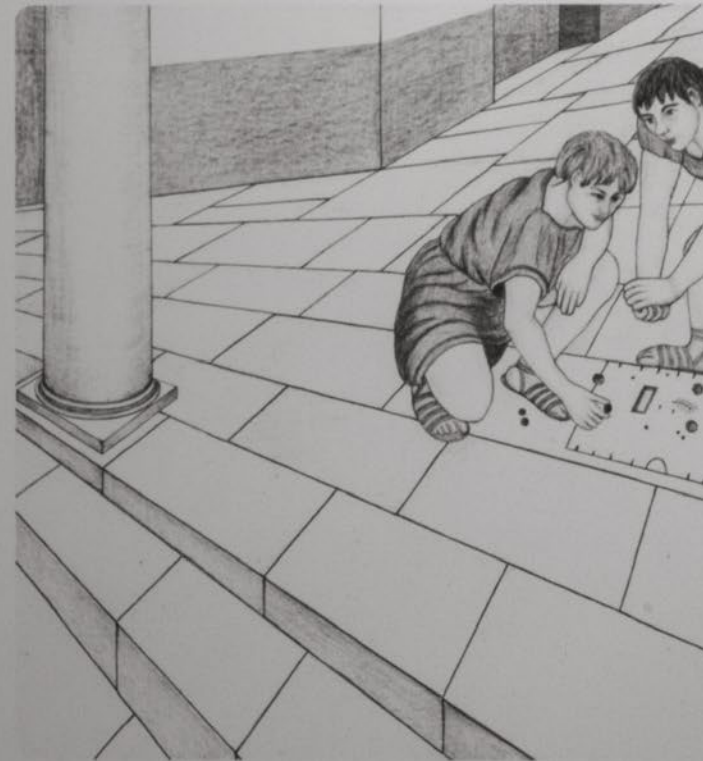


Photo by Giuliano Koren
Drawing of hypothetical reconstruction
by Cinzia Morlando



Many *tabulae* have been found in Rome particularly for the game with grooves, indicating its popularity.

During the excavation that preceded the building of the palazzo for Assicurazioni Generali, structures were found in the north east sector that were part of the entrance to a monument, about two metres wide and flanked by two steps.¹ On the paving stones and the two steps, all made from re-used materials, were carved graffiti, *tabulae lusoriae* and plaudits for protagonists in public performances and fights.² Gatti's diary reports the discovery of at least six *tabulae lusoriae*, used for different games. Only two of these *tabulae* have come down to us and are exhibited at the Radici del Presente Museum.

The first *tabula lusoria* was carved into a large block of white marble with grey veining. There are four small holes and a rectangular-shaped groove leading away from an engraved palm branch, one of the most common symbols for victory. The layout of the game, carved in red is still clearly visible with the signs of the counting points and, in the centre, the bottom line of the game itself. There are no sources that refer to this game in particular, but it can be supposed that it consisted of rolling a marble or a walnut into all the small holes, in a chosen order, up to the hole located beyond the line; each hole presumably corresponding to a certain score.

The marble rolling game must have been very popular, judging by the high number of *tabulae* of the type that

NOTES

1. The following extract appears in the dig diary of 4 February 1904: ... in the corner of the building opposite the Palazzo della Prefettura, 7 metres beneath road level, an entrance was found, made of marble slabs and two steps, on which were carved inscriptions, graffiti and *tabulae lusoriae*...

2. Again, the report made by Gatti states: *from the line of the new building and between the abovementioned ruin and steps, an area of pavement was found made up of white marble paving stones and on two levels the central part raised by 0.17 m., so that the whole effect was one of a lobby with steps at the side.*

Some of the pavement slabs were square and some shapeless, however their upper surfaces showed signs of carved figures and palm branches...

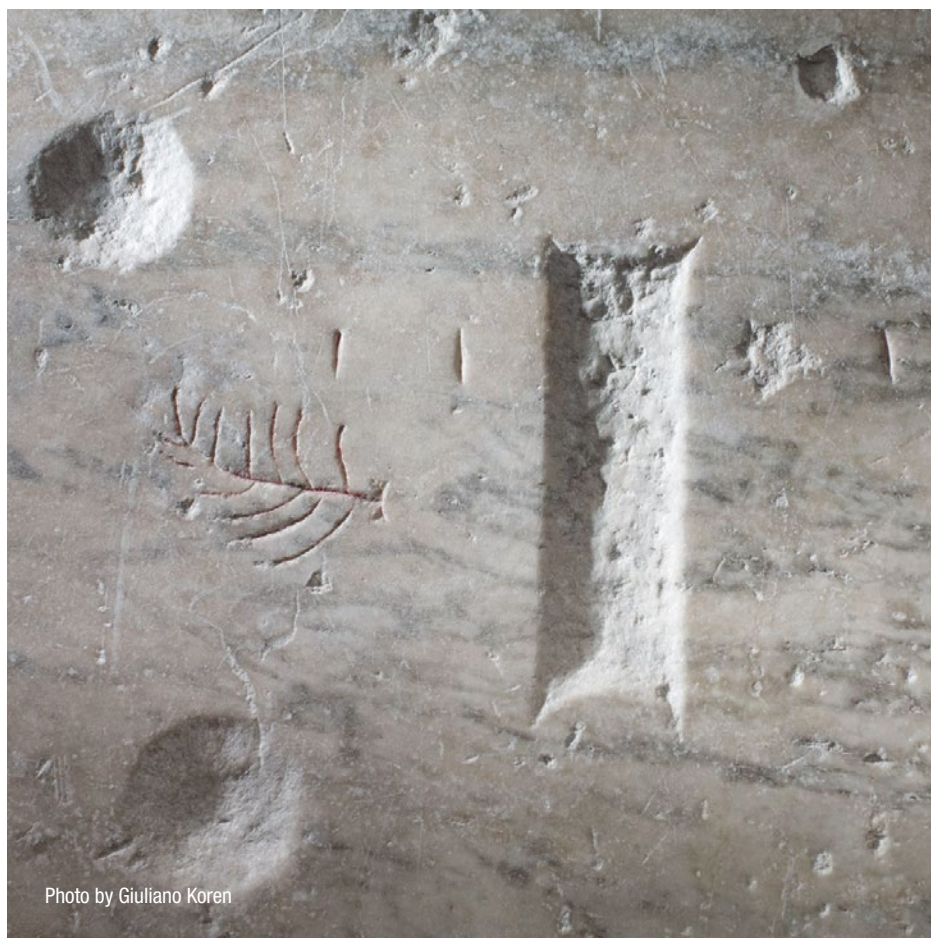


Photo by Giuliano Koren

have been unearthed and the places in which they were found. They are almost always public places, such as the area around the Fora in Rome, Trajan's Baths and the Pantheon.

The second *tabula lusoria* is a large table game in grey veined Bardiglio marble, reconstructed from two fragments. Lines are carved in a thick parallel mesh over the whole surface: sixteen parallel lines painted red and divided into four groups, carved with different numbers and symbols. Some of the symbols are abstruse, such as stylized palms, *genitalia* and *pyrgi* to throw the dice, actual dice and an 8 drawn horizontally (to indicate a thousand, for good fortune), small heart-shaped leaves, large up-turned S shapes and wheels, again to bring good luck.

Only the second line from the top and the two bottom lines are made up of letters. At the top it reads: *Bri*. At the bottom, on the last lines: *Levatataras ... Roma*. The former is hard to interpret, while the word *Levatataras* could be thought to have the same meaning as other similar expressions carved on the *tabulae lusoriae* inscriptions meant for the *ludus duodecim scriptorum*, on which one often sees the formula *Leva te*, *Levate*, *Lebate*, *Leba tev*, *Lavari*, that can be translated as "withdraw" or "get up; leave the game."

It is not yet possible to tell with exactitude which game was played on these types of *tabulae*. The presence

The palm branch engraved on the *tabula lusoria* is one of the most famous symbols for victory.

Left: *tabula lusoria* with grooves carved into a large block of marble, a re-used step; the layout of the game carved in red. The *tabula* was intended for a game called *tropa* or “game of holes.” The player must throw marbles, walnuts or bones into all the holes, in a given order (Assicurazioni Generali Excavation 1902-1904).

Right: *tabula lusoria* carved into a large slab of dark grey Italian marble, made up of two fragments. The *tabula* has sixteen parallel lines carved in red, among which can be seen letters, numbers, symbols and allegorical elements making clear reference to luck. The theme of the game, that must have consisted in players moving pieces, was located in the centre, by the palm (Assicurazioni Generali Excavation 1902-1904).

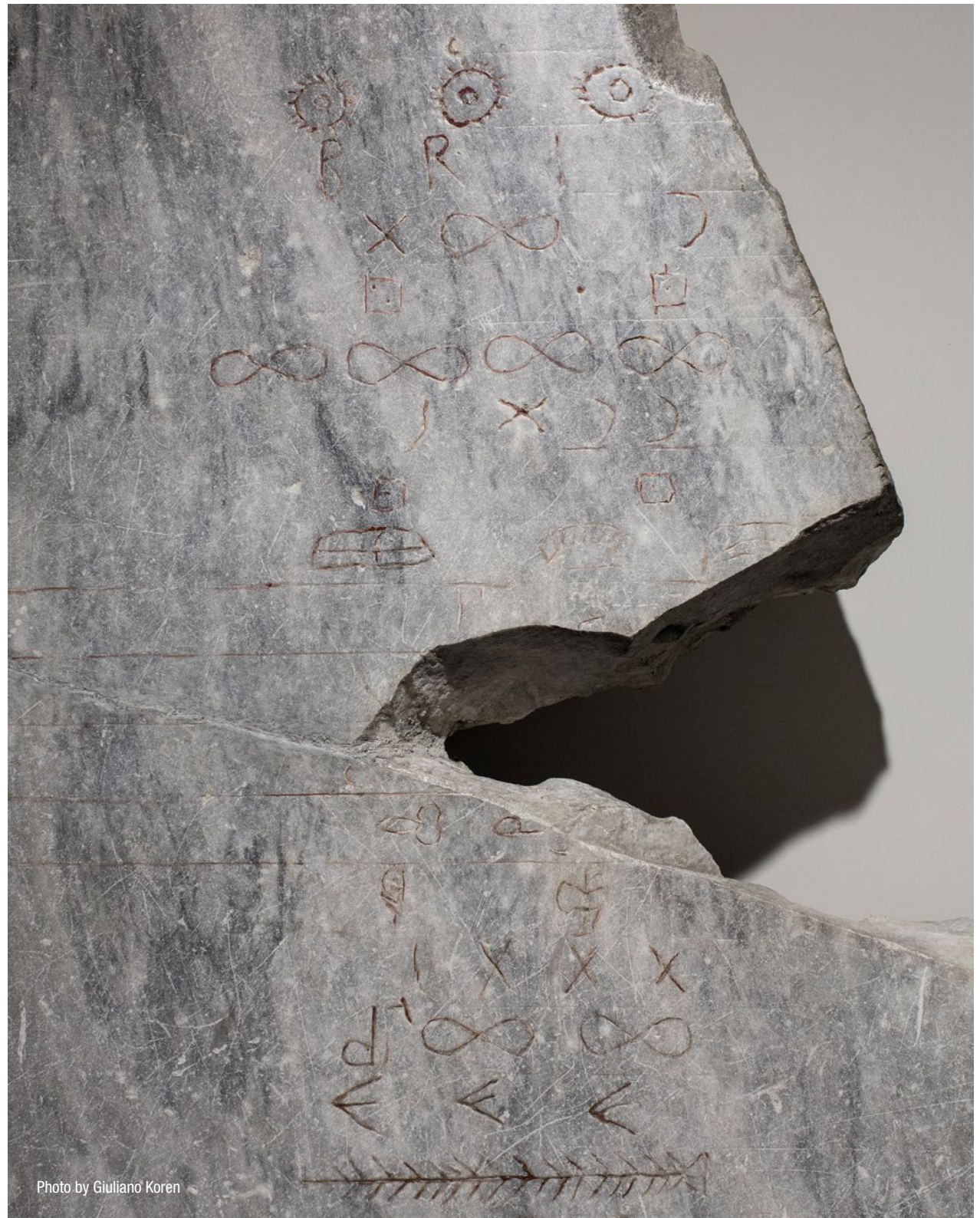


Photo by Giuliano Koren



PROHIBITED GAMBLING

One of the most widespread pastimes for the ancient Romans was gambling, with playing pieces, dice or bets for money. To prevent their dissemination, as early as Republican times the *lex Alearia* was promulgated, the first of numerous laws introduced by the Roman State to counter this type of practice. The *lex Alearia* prohibited all games with dice, coins and bones, except during mealtimes and on *Saturnalia* feast days. Ignoring these measures, the Romans got round the law by gambling in private homes, in *cauponae* (taverns) and at *tabernae lusoriae*, true gambling houses.

Image from M. Borriello, *La Caupona di Salvius* (VI, 14,35-36) in A. d'Ambrosio, P.G. Guzzo & M. Mastroroberto (edited by), *Storie da un'eruzione. Pompei, Ercolano, Oplontis*, exhibition catalogue (Naples, National Archaeological Museum 20 March - 31 August 2003). Electa, 2003, pp. 268-273.

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of the *pyrgus* and the dice would indicate a mixed game, in which both dice and playing pieces were used; it must have been a game of chance; gambling. There are very few such *tabulae*, with a varying number of parallel lines interspersed with figures.

The palaeographic data relating to the Bardiglio *tabula lusoria* – whose inscription shows some characteristics typical of late epigraphy, such as the A of Roma with the median stroke broken on the bottom line, the L with an oblique base stroke and the M with slightly widening side strokes – suggest a chronology beginning at least in the IV century CE, which would be coherent with Gatti's affirmation dating the structures to an era not before V century CE; a further significant element supporting chronology is the monogram PE, seen in a small fragment of a *tabula* found during the construction of the Generali building, which often appears on playing pieces, *tabulae lusoriae*, oil lamps, inscriptions and decorations in the late antiquity from the first half of the IV century CE, in the V century and into the VI, in particular in Rome and in a Christian sphere, but not only.

SEE ALSO

DEVising PATHS TO LEARNING
CH. 1.4, P. 36

ROOMS D-E-F – PUBLIC BUILDINGS AND HOLY SPACES
CH. 2.2, P. 76

3.6

The Last Pugilists of Antiquity

Francesco Pio Ferreri

Archaeologist specializing in classical antiquities, especially sports in the Greek and Roman eras

Between the IV and V century CE, despite the veto of the official Church against ancient competitive and combative practices from pagan tradition, boxing remained extremely popular in Rome. This is confirmed by marble slabs dating from the period with carvings on athletic themes, the extemporaneous and spontaneous nature of which witness the obvious enthusiasm of spectators for this sporting discipline.



Figures sketched with a few essential lines and shown for the most part in a victory pose, holding a small stylized palm branch in their right hands.

The collection of antiquities at the Radici del Presente Museum includes a group of marble slabs bearing the carved figures of pugilists accompanied by Latin inscriptions. They came from a sort of paved alley flanked by two steps, brought to light in February 1904 during the excavation for the foundations of Palazzo Generali, on the corner between Via Nazionale (today Via Cesare Battisti) and Via dei Fornari, at a depth of seven metres below road level. In ancient times the alley must have linked the *insula* beneath the palazzo with the late Roman baths and *domus* documented under nearby Palazzo Valentini, and it was clad in re-used marble elements of different types and sizes: the accounts of the aforesaid excavation mention, besides the pugilist slabs, marbles with engraved games (*tabulae lusoriae*) and the commemorative epigraph of the gladiator Maximus, numbered by experts among the last accounts of Roman gladiatorial combat.

On the slabs with engravings of an athletic theme the schematic figures of boxers are sketched with a few essential lines and shown for the most part in a victory pose, with a small stylized palm branch held in the right hand, according to an iconography taken from mosaics, reliefs and medallions from the Imperial era with depictions of winning athletes and chariot drivers. Their identification as pugilists is confirmed

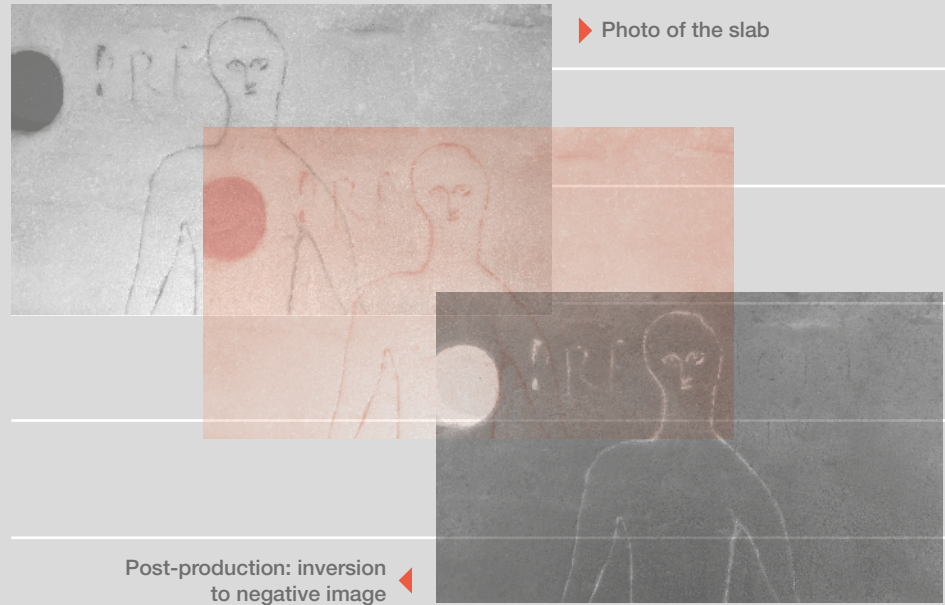
by the presence of woven bands wound around the wrists and hands, corresponding to the ancient pugilist's gloves (*caestī*). A close inspection of materials at the recent museum exhibition enabled us to check the surfaces of the slabs for the presence of engraved characters that were partially blurred by wear or the shallowness of the grooves. Once these were recomposed, the names of the athletes represented could be made out. Most were in Latin (*Repostus*, *Pretorinus*, *Leopardus*), and sometimes of Greek origin (*Marturius*, *Teodulus*), largely belonging to a late Roman chronology (IV-V century CE), coherent with the general dating attributed to the context in which they were found. This chronology lends proof of the vitality of athletic competitions at an advanced phase of late antiquity, already witnessed in Rome, in the final decades of the IV century, from the lost inscriptions of San Pietro in Vincoli relating to the erection of statues in honour of pugilists and fighters in the *Curia Athletarum*, seat of the international association of athletes. An interesting fact, drawn from a re-reading of the engravings under examination, is the recurrence of particularly common names in the Christian world (*Leopardus*, *Marturius*, *Teodulus*) associated with athletes, as proof of the fact that a discipline as cruel as that of the pugilist could still enjoy fame in the bosom of the Christianized empire, despite the veto imposed

THE GRAPHICAL RECONSTRUCTION OF THE SLABS

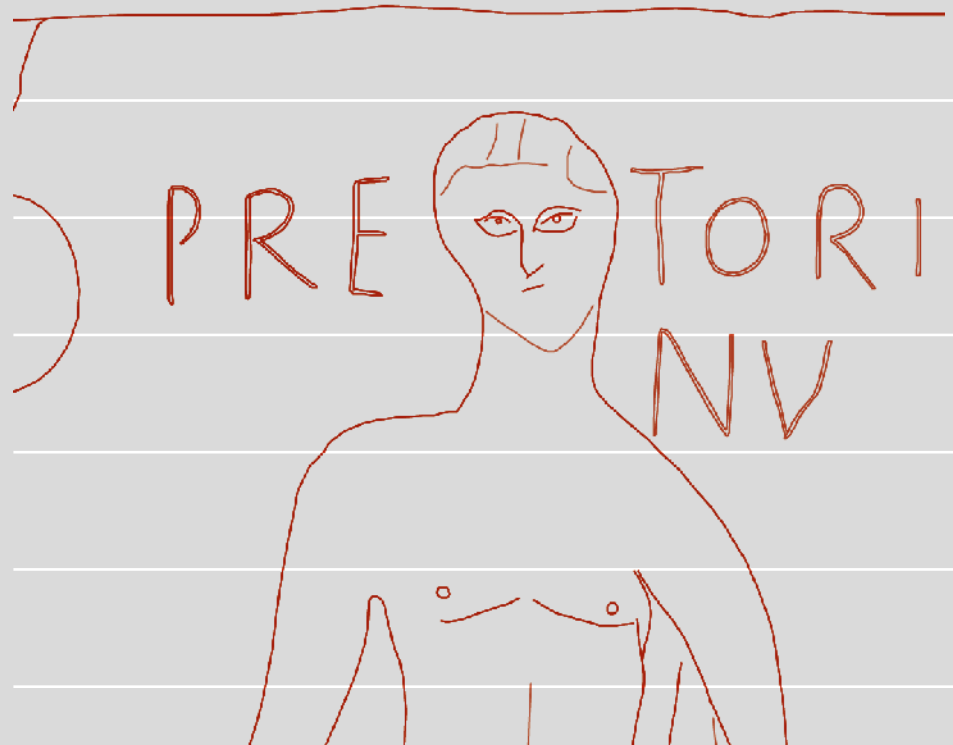
A further inspection of the marble slabs with graffiti on the theme of athletics was conducted with the main aim of finding out the precise identities of the illustrated pugilists. In previous publications of the artefacts (Gatti 1904, Scrinari 1993), the names inscribed on the surface of the marble reliefs were for the most part translated into syllabic groups that were difficult to read and were not compared to names from the Roman era. In ancient times the grooves engraved in the slabs were coloured in red (rubrication) that time has in part worn away.

An autoptic review of the materials was accompanied by updated photographic images, with close-ups of the surfaces taken from various angles and using different types of lighting, to bring out the effects of light and shade and better show up the marks of the incisions. Alongside the jobs carried out in the post-production phase on the contrasts and negative inversion of images, the archaeologist Marzia Del Villano made a graphic relief of the slabs using a tracing technique,

applying and fixing a transparent plastic film on the marble surface and manually copying the epigraphs and graffiti figures. The reliefs thus produced, in a 1:1 scale, were then scanned and vectorized to obtain a clear and reliable graphic reconstruction of the artefacts and the relative engravings. Successive comparison with documentation of epigraphs known from Roman times permitted the reconstruction of the athletes' names, and the graphics and chronological recurrence indicate that they are from the late Imperial period.



▲ Traced relief drawing



Detail of the slab with incisions of the pugilist Pretorinus: from photo reproduction to relief drawing (by Marzia Del Villano).

In Greece and in Rome

Dating from this period is the fresco from the Minoan site of Akrotiri, on the Greek island of Santorini, showing two young pugilists in gloves, fighting.

Boxing is inserted into the program of the ancient Olympic games; the first champion, Onomastus of Smyrna, also established the rules of the sport.

The Latin poet Virgil, author of the *Aeneid*, describes the boxing match between Dares and Entellus in the fifth canto of the poem.

C. 1625 BCE

VIII-VII
CENTURY BCE

688 BCE

490-473 BCE

29-19 BCE

616 BCE

Homeric poems handing down the most ancient literary testimony of pugilist encounters, at the funerary games held in honour of Patroclus (*Iliad*, book 23, vv. 651-699) and the fight between Ulysses and the beggar Irus (*Odyssey*, book 18, vv. 88-100).

Boxing for young men (*paides*) was introduced in Olympia.

During this period was the distinguished career of the athlete Theagenes of Thasos, who won 1,300 boxing victories.

Detail of the incision depicting the pugilist Repostus.

With the fall of the Roman Empire in the West, the practice of boxing as a sport undergoes a drastic decline that will last about thirteen centuries, until the birth of modern boxing in Britain.

393 CE

The year in which, according to tradition, the Roman Emperor Theodosius I bans the Olympic games, considered pagan.

476 CE

by the official Church on ancient pagan agonistic and recreational games. A useful term of comparison is provided by the inscriptions on the tombs of Christian chariot drivers in the churches and cemeteries of Rome, such as the epitaph of the *elefantarius* Olimpio, in the catacombs of Commodilla, or that of the chariot driver Eutimio buried in the Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls in the year 439.

In conclusion, attributing the pugilist engravings to the IV-V century, besides confirming the survival of a late antique athletic tradition, also seems to indicate a partial lessening of the censorious tones of Christian teaching, which stigmatized the “vanity” of sporting competitions, and the recreational-competitive reality of the time. The proximity of the area in which the artefacts were found to the ancient area of Campus Martius is significant because the main buildings used for entertainment were concentrated there, from Circus Flaminius to the theatres of Pompey and Balbus, to Domitian’s stadium and *odeion*. Indeed the echo of the last events put on in these monuments might have inspired the anonymous patrons who engraved the memory of their favourite performers in our graffiti. The exceptional character of the slabs in the Generali collection lies in the extemporaneous and spontaneous nature of the engravings; and their provenance from the same context of gladiatorial graffiti and *tabulae lussoriae* does not seem random, witnessing “first hand” as it does, the popularity among the people of late Imperial Rome of the world of games.

SEE ALSO

THE ROOTS OF A GREAT PAST IN THE PRESENT
CH. 1.3, P. 28

ROOM A – THE FIRST NUCLEUS OF THE COLLECTION
CH. 2.2, P. 56

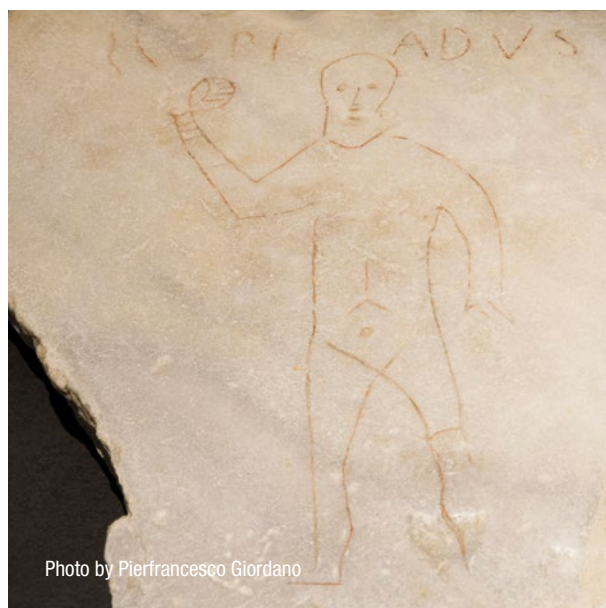


Photo by Pierfrancesco Giordano



Photo by Pierfrancesco Giordano

In 2016 the slabs with pictures of pugilists were leant by Generali for the exhibition in Rio de Janeiro on the occasion of the Olympic Games.

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Top left: slab carved with figures of the boxers Leopardus and Marturius (detail).

Left below: slab showing the boxers Repostus and Pretorinus (detail).

Right: slab showing the boxer Teudulus.



Photo by Michele Stallo

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Professor emeritus of classical archaeology at La Sapienza, University of Rome, he has made many important archaeological discoveries on the Palatine Hill. In 2009 he was appointed president of the Consiglio superiore dei beni culturali. He is president of FAI and author of numerous books, the most recent of which is *Io, Agrippina* (Laterza).



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After joining Generali in 1985, he has focussed mainly on editorial communication, coordinating the company review *Il Bollettino* for over twenty years; he also assumed the responsibility of editor-in-chief from 2007 to 2014. He has edited various books on cultural themes and the history of Generali and has written the text for the essays *The Age of the Lion* (published in 2015 with a preface by Paolo Rumiz) and *Artisti per le Generali* (2018). Alongside his colleagues at the Historical Archive and other experts he produced the two-volume work *Generali in History*, edited by Marsilio in 2016.



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Graduate in architecture and founding member of the company Trivioquadrivio from Milan, he focuses on corporate social responsibility projects in the field of culture. Since 2006, for Generali, he has designed exhibition spaces and didactic itineraries in collaboration with various Italian universities. He is currently participating in a research project in partnership with the University of Reggio Calabria aimed at valorising cultural heritage acquired from production activities. He conceived and coordinated the Radici del Presente Museum exhibition project and relative didactic activities.



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Archaeology official at MiBAC working on the Archaeological Park of Pompeii, he graduated from Federico II, University of Naples, where he has enjoyed a long collaboration with the Department of Humanistic Sciences. His main research interests include the phenomenon of antiquary collection in the modern era and sculptural production in the Roman era, with a particular emphasis on late-republican and imperial portraiture. He contributed to setting up the Radici del Presente Museum and participates in the didactic activities promoted by Generali in that context.



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Francesco Pio Ferreri

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- National Archaeological Museum of Naples

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museum and to book a visit:**
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