

NOTES FROM ROME 2023–24

by Christopher Siwicki

This gazette presents to the reader outside Rome news of recent archaeological activity (July 2023–July 2024) gleaned from public lectures, conferences, exhibitions and newspaper reports.

Questa gazzetta ha lo scopo di presentare ad un lettore fuori Roma notizie della recente attività archeologica (luglio 2023 – luglio 2024) tratte da conferenze, convegni, mostre e relazioni su giornali.

Excavations

In preparation for the wave of pilgrims anticipated to flood Rome for the Papal Jubilee Year 2025, public spaces across the city are receiving much-needed attention, and with it the opportunity for excavation. This includes a makeover for Piazza Cinquecento and the streets bordering the Baths of Diocletian, hopefully giving the areas around the Servian walls at Termini station and the exterior of the third-century *thermae* a more salubrious vibe.¹ A similar undertaking to improve the neglected piazza in front of San Giovanni in Laterano has uncovered a series of ancient and medieval structures. A terracing wall in *opus reticulatum* is dated to between the first century BC to the first century AD; Severan-era foundations perhaps relate to the barracks of the *equites singulares* underneath the basilica; also present is an early medieval (fourth–seventh-century) wall in *opus vittatum*, and another of large, recycled tufo blocks, built in the ninth century, with alterations into the thirteenth century.² The excavators suggest the latter wall had a defensive purpose, linking the approximate date of its construction to the Saracen raids of the 840s (although the immediate protection afforded by the Aurelian circuit surely rendered an extra wall superfluous). The new discoveries complement the findings of the multi-year *Rome Transformed* project, which since 2019 has been studying the area of the Eastern Caelian, presenting its results at a three-day conference held at the British School at Rome, in March 2024.³

The most ambitious Giubileo 2025 scheme is reconfiguring the spaces between the Castel Sant'Angelo and the beginning of Via della Conciliazione, with the diversion of traffic through an underpass below Piazza Pia. In June 2024, the

¹ <https://www.artribune.com/progettazione/architettura/2024/02/roma-giubileo-2025/>

² <https://cultura.gov.it/comunicato/26599>

³ For programme, <https://bsr.ac.uk/rome-transformed-plenary-lecture-conference/>

works here exposed an archaeological area of some 500 m².⁴ The main feature is a first-century AD building, comprising a series of rectangular rooms with simple mosaic paving (limestone tesserae surrounded by black borders), arranged along a central corridor. In the second or third century AD, the building was converted into a large open-air *fullonica*, with a series of vats and at least thirteen *dolia* sunk into the floor for the processing of fabrics. Terracotta campana plaques with mythological scenes were reused as drain covers. A wall of unidentified purpose, built of tufo and travertine ashlar, predating the imperial phases, was also found. The excavators suggest that the residential building, which had a view over the Tiber, might originally have served as accommodation for guests to, or workers at, the neighbouring *horti Agrippinae* or *horti Domitiae* (or perhaps falling somewhere in between). Because of a tight schedule for completing the underpass, the ancient structures were hurriedly removed, with the intention of their being installed as a permanent display in the gardens of Castel Sant'Angelo.⁵

Shortly after this announcement, the same works, but closer to the Tiber, exposed a retaining wall of *opus quadratum* travertine blocks, behind which are the brick foundations of a monumental *porticus*, fronting an open court (garden?).⁶ Three phases of building works between the reigns of Augustus and Nero have been identified and, most importantly, a lead pipe stamped C[AI] CAESARIS AUG[USTI] GERMANICI, a.k.a the Emperor Caligula. The excavators were quick to make a link to Philo of Alexandria's account of an embassy to Gaius, where the emperor received the ambassadors on the banks of the Tiber, on his mother's property.⁷ The find helps reconstruct the inheritance of imperial property in this area and probably places the aforementioned *fullonica* within the *horti Agrippinae*. The precise relationship between these various structures remains unclear from publicly accessible information, but further details will hopefully emerge soon.

Coincidentally, the site is only 300 metres from another major (and related) archaeological discovery of the last year. In July 2023, the Soprintendenza reported that an excavation (begun in 2020) in the courtyard of Palazzo della Rovere, on Via della Conciliazione, had found part of a small theatre.⁸ The announcement received considerable media coverage, due to the theatre having been constructed during the reign of Nero, in the imperially owned gardens of Agrippina the Elder, and is almost certainly that mentioned by Pliny the Elder:

⁴ <https://www.artribune.com/arti-visive/archeologia-arte-antica/2024/06/piazza-pia-giubileo-ritrovamenti-archeologici/>

⁵ <https://www.comune.roma.it/web/it/notizia/cantiere-piazza-pia-reperti-archeologici.page>

For a critical response, see https://www.ansa.it/lazio/notizie/2024/07/11/roma-antica-in-ostaggio-larcheologia-come-un-luna-park_d02d3395-8339-454f-8c28-d477af7e2ca7.html

⁶ <https://cultura.gov.it/comunicato/26552>

⁷ Philo *Leg.* 38 (181).

⁸ <https://www.artribune.com/uncategorized/2023/07/scoperto-a-roma-il-teatro-di-nerone-allinterno-di-palazzo-della-rovere/>

[Nero placed myrrhine ware in his] private theatre in his gardens across the Tiber, a theatre which was large enough to satisfy even Nero's desire to sing before a full house at the time when he was rehearsing for his appearance in Pompey's theatre. It was at this time that I saw the pieces of a single broken cup included in the exhibition.⁹

Bricks stamped PRISCUS DOMITIUS AFRI place its construction in the mid/late AD 50s. Other bricks bearing C SATRINI CELERIS/EX FIGLINIS MARCA indicate alterations in the Flavian period, with a further intervention at the beginning of the second century AD. The building was deliberately taken down in the late-second/early-third century, when its materials were stripped out, and holes for basins broken through the *opus spicatum* floor.¹⁰ The change of use is perhaps not unrelated to what was occurring at the nearby *fullonica* site.

Only a small part of the structure has been excavated, with most of it lying underneath Borgo San Spirito. Nevertheless, the gilded stucco, decorative gemstones and coloured marbles, including an alabaster ionic capital and pilaster in portasanta (similar examples are on display in the Drugstore Museum), give an idea of its architectural richness. Column shafts of cipollino and Africano marble (probably from the *scaenae frons*) are neatly laid out in the *vomitorium*, indicating that the spoliation of the theatre in the late-second/early-third century was organized and only partially completed. The excavation also uncovered ceramics and glassware (including particularly fine columned chalices) from the tenth century, and evidence of production, perhaps linked to the nearby *Schola Saxonum*. There are traces of a road leading to a landing place below Ponte Sant'Angelo, and numerous other small finds from the late Middle Ages can be connected to pilgrimage. It seems likely that the excavation will be covered over when the fifteenth-century Palazzo is converted into a hotel, although an agreement has apparently been reached to display the finds.¹¹

Further upstream, after decades of abandonment, the riverbank north of Ponte Milvio is being cleared and restored (beginning May 2024), as part of a project to create a series of parks along the Tiber.¹² Out of the detritus and foliage emerged a long-observed Tiber *cippus* of P. Servilius Isauricus and M. Valerius Messalla (censors in 54 BC). Several courses of tufo ashlar of the ancient river wall, a stretch of the *via Flaminia*, as well as various *opus reticulatum* walls have also been exposed, and there are plans to turn it into a small archaeological area.¹³

⁹ Plin. *HN* 37.20; cf. Tac. *Ann.* 15.33.

¹⁰ The results of the excavation were presented by Daniela Porro, Alessio De Cristofaro and Renato Sebastiani at the Finnish Institute in Rome (27 October 2023). For the video recording, <https://irfrome.org/en/27-10-conferenza-sul-teatro-di-nerone-in-vaticano-novita-dallo-scavo-di-palazzo-de-penitenzieri/>

¹¹ <https://www.turismoroma.it/it/notizie/pochi-passi-da-san-pietro-riemerge-il-mitico-teatro-di-nerone>

¹² <https://www.comune.roma.it/web/it/notizia.page?contentId=NWS1151857>

¹³ https://www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/cultura/arte/2024/05/28/ponte-milvio-scoperti-gli-argini-del-tevere-di-roma-antica_3cee55b6-545b-4f64-8a3b-d6d68ad7bee9.html

Back on the east bank, work on Piazza Augusto Imperatore continues.¹⁴ In July 2023, a marble (possibly Parian) head of Aphrodite was found reused as fill in the foundations of a late-antique building at the east edge of the site.¹⁵ Social media posts from July 2024 by Rome's mayor Roberto Gualtieri also show a wall of ashlar stone with elegant moulding at the base. The claim that this rectilinear structure is possibly Augustus' *ustinum* is difficult to reconcile with Strabo's description of it being circular, and it is generally thought to have been further to the south.¹⁶ The wall also appears to be a little too far west to be connected to where six inscribed paving stones or *cippi* (*CIL* VI 888–93) were found in 1777, and which is identified as the place of cremation for later Julio-Claudians.¹⁷ No doubt more details will be forthcoming as the piazza reopens – a partial opening is promised for December this year, and its completion scheduled for late 2025. The Mausoleum itself remains closed, although a bird's-eye view of the structure can now be had for the price of a cocktail from the terrace of the new hotel, installed in the former INPS palace to the north side.

Heading towards the southern *Campus Martius*, Piazza Colonna is once again open to the public, having been sealed off since 2013, following the shooting of two carabinieri. Along Via delle Botteghe Oscure, another fascist-era building has also been transformed into a luxury hotel, to the advantage of those interested in archaeology. Beyond the lobby of number 46, a staircase leads down to the exercise room, where it is possible to see part of what is probably the *Porticus Minucia*, the west side of which is also now accessible within the antiquarium of the Largo Argentina archaeological area.¹⁸ Excavated by the Soprintendenza in May–July 2020, the modest remains confirm the eastern limit of the *porticus*, and correspond to a fragment of the Severan *Forma Urbis*.¹⁹ Visible are two large peperino blocks of the perimeter wall, faced on the interior with white and coloured marble. Fragments of plaster in the collapse suggest the upper parts were painted. Although the *porticus Minucia* was built in the late-second century BC, the present structure dates from the imperial period (pavements at two levels were found) and presumably belongs to a rebuilding after the fire of AD 80 (when the temple also visible on Via delle Botteghe Oscure was restored). The excavators report layers of abandonment from the third century AD, although it is hard to imagine such a prominent structure in this central location being left completely vacant or derelict at this time. Abutting the exterior of the *porticus* are the traces of a first-century AD structure with a black and white mosaic floor and of a later building paved in

¹⁴ Reported previously in R. Coates-Stephens 'Notes from Rome' *PBSR* 89 (2021) 335–6; C. Siwicki, 'Notes from Rome 2022–23', *PBSR* 90 (2022) 333.

¹⁵ For pictures, see <https://edition.cnn.com/style/article/marble-head-rome-scli-intl/index.html>

¹⁶ Strabo 5.3.8.

¹⁷ R. Lanciani, *The Ruins and Excavations of Ancient Rome*. New York, 1897: 462–4.

¹⁸ Reported previously in C. Siwicki, 'Notes from Rome 2022–23', *PBSR* 91 (2023) 307.

¹⁹ For pictures, see https://www.soprintendenzaspecialeroma.it/eventi/porticus-minucia-frumentaria-nuovi-ritrovamenti-archeologici-in-via-delle-botteghe-oscuere_391/

opus spicatum (the plexiglass occasionally obscured by exercise equipment and gym-goers). An accompanying video shown in the hotel provides a useful reconstruction of the *porticus*.

December 2024 brought to light a spectacular *nymphaeum* with a multicoloured mosaic, discovered in the maze of structures (part of a two-storey *domus*) behind the *Horrea Agrippiana*, against the north-west face of the Palatine Hill. The lower part depicts piles of arms, armour, oars and a trident framed by a *porticus* (although the presence of a peacock and garden scene suggests that it was not entirely triumphal in nature). The upper register shows a walled city, ships (possibly a naval battle) and a bucolic image of goats, all in coloured glass, pebble and shell. Side rooms (one of which was later converted into a cistern) are decorated with high-quality stucco work depicting architectural and pastoral scenes. The *nymphaeum* dates to between the late-second to early-first century BC, and was put out of use by renovations to the *domus* in the mid-first century BC, which was in turn demolished by the construction of the warehouse.

Moving to the south side of the Palatine, mounds of earth and awnings indicate activity at the bottom of the hill. Information panels refer to ‘The PNRR 46 Project for the *schola praekonum*’, a sort of headquarters of the various attendants in the *Circus Maximus*, dated to the Severan period. It is due to finish in October 2024, but details about the intended outcomes are vague – ‘enhance the understanding of the monument through archaeological surveys, interventions of the protection, conservation and accessibility’. Hopefully this includes opening the site to the public.

On the Palatine itself, the ‘House of Livia’ is now open to the public and a multimedia ‘experience’ installed;²⁰ new paths are being laid around the Temple of Magna Mater on the south-west corner; the Palatine Museum is partially closed for renovation; and the delightful Ninfeo della Pioggia, part of the Farnese Gardens, is accessible after a three-year restoration. The most significant development is the reopening of part of the *Domus Tiberiana*, following a 50-year closure, due to severe structural issues. Despite its name, the earliest visible structures are from the reign of Nero, with substantial Domitianic, Hadrianic and Severan alterations and additions. Ascending the Domitianic ramp next to the church of Santa Maria Antiqua, visitors can now continue through the immense brick arches (Hadrianic) supporting the belvedere terrace above, emerging onto the ancient street below Giacomo Boni’s garden. Behind the rooms to the right of the covered path, it is possible to see the pre-Hadrianic phase, differently aligned and mistakenly identified by Pietro Rosa in the nineteenth century as the ‘Bridge of Caligula’. In reality it is a Domitianic gallery, and traces of fine, decorative stucco can be seen on the underneath of the arches. A selection of finds (primarily architectural and sculptural) from the Palatine Hill have been installed in seven of the rooms to

²⁰ <https://www.finestresullarte.info/attualita/roma-dopo-restauri-riapre-casa-livia-palatino>

the left of the street. Rather grandly named ‘The Museum of the *Domus Tiberiana*’, these exhibits are only accessible if visitors have purchased the SUPER pass, continuing the absurd situation of different tickets within the park providing different levels of access and diminishing what is otherwise a superb new addition.²¹

Excavations continue at the Colosseum in the area of the collapsed external corridors, between the Valadier and Stern brick buttresses (arches 60 to 18).²² Between arches 67 and 68 a large, late-medieval fill contained a Pentelic marble torso (54 cm in height) of Jupiter Hegiacus, recognizable because of the scaled *aegis*, with the head of Medusa, over the left shoulder.²³ The excavations indicate that the stripping of the travertine paving in the collapsed ambulatories occurred between the tenth and twelfth centuries, when the spaces were given over to production and to the sheltering animals. Radiocarbon analysis on the skeleton of a mule (discovered the previous season) dates its death to the mid-eleventh century, and so it was not an unfortunate victim of the 1349 earthquake, as previously hypothesized by the excavators and optimistically parroted in last year’s ‘Notes From Rome’.²⁴

On Via dei Fori Imperiali, digging over the northern corner of the Temple of Peace, in Largo Corrado Ricci, appears to have ceased (for now?).²⁵ Excavators came down onto the remains of the nineteenth-century Palazzo Nicolini, demolished in 1934, as well as the oven of the bakery that once fronted the portico of the *Forum Transitorium* (famous from paintings and early photographs). The body of an individual carrying a sheathed dagger and coin purse was apparently dumped here in the sixteenth century, its contorted skeleton indicating that it was moved after death (no doubt to be the subject of a cold case, true-crime podcast). Two limekilns from the fourteenth century testify as to what probably happened to much of the marble that once faced the precinct wall of the Temple of Peace, but the excavation has concluded some 2.5–3 metres above the level of the ancient paving.²⁶ Whether work continues in the future is unclear; for now, the site adds yet another unsightly hole in the ground above the Imperial Fora.²⁷

On the opposite side of the road, work is ongoing around the seven columns of the *porticus* of the Temple of Peace, that were re-erected in 2015.²⁸ Rather than any

²¹ <https://colosseo.it/area/musei/museo-della-domus-tiberiana/>

²² Previously reported in C. Siwicki, ‘Notes from Rome 2022–23’, *PBSR* 91 (2023) 313.

²³ The excavators compare it to a statue of Jupiter in the small cloister of the Baths of Diocletian and another from Utica, now in Leiden (Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, inv. H II BB 8).

²⁴ Information gleaned from signboards at the site.

²⁵ Previously reported in C. Siwicki, ‘Notes from Rome 2022–23’, *PBSR* 91 (2023) 312.

²⁶ For a detailed video discussing the excavation, see <https://www.archaeoreporter.com/it/2023/12/21/nuovi-scavi-archeologici-ai-fori-imperiali-il-foro-della-pace-e-le-tante-roma-che-si-sono-sovrapposte-nei-millenni/>

²⁷ On the ‘holes’, A. Claridge and C. Siwicki, ‘Notes from Rome 2018–19’, *PBSR* 87 (2019) 309.

²⁸ On the 2015 decision, https://www.ansa.it/english/news/lifestyle/arts/2015/02/12/temple-of-peace-to-be-restored-for-rome_1686a4e2-464c-4a22-9fc5-8b9ec17d107b.html#:~:text=With%20reconstruction%20work%20set%20to,Cultural%20Heritage%20Claudio%20Parisi%20Presicce

further vertical anastylosis (only the shafts were put up, but the original scheme was to add capitals, entablature and part of the roofing),²⁹ attention appears to be focused on the steps and paving, perhaps indicating plans to make this area accessible to the public. At the Forum of Trajan, the reconstruction of a section of the *Basilica Ulpia* was unveiled in December 2023. At the cost of 1.5 million euros (donated in 2015 by Alistair Usmanov), three cipollino marble columns of the upper order of the Basilica have been raised atop four of the lower granite ones (themselves put back up in the previous century).³⁰ Between them, an almost entirely new (the integration of original fragments is minimal) series of capitals and entablature has been created from concrete covered with plaster moulding.³¹ The stark white of the new intervention is visually jarring, but will presumably soften with time; the decision to repair the broken cipollino marble shafts with brick is in keeping with the practice previously used for the lower order, but is ugly. Aesthetics aside, the reconstruction is helpful in gaining a better understanding of the impressive height of the basilica. As at the Temple of Peace, work continues on the steps and pavement, and a future *percorso* around them might be planned.

Urban Plans

At the top of Via dei Fori Imperiali, Piazza Venezia is in total chaos, for traffic and pedestrians alike. The cause is the creation of a 700-million-euro station for Metro C.³² The new Metro line and the works for the Jubilee are the two main urban development projects currently affecting the historic centre. But on the horizon is a new scheme to revamp the arteries around and between the archaeological areas of the Imperial fora, Colosseum, western Caelian, *Circus Maximus*, Baths of Caracalla, Palatine and Capitoline Hills. Overseen by Walter Tocci (deputy mayor under Francesco Rutelli, 1993–2001), the Centro Archeologico Monumentale (CArMe) intends to improve accessibility through and across the various sites, with new routes and pedestrianized areas (ironically, bridging certain roads – namely *Strada Bonella* over the Forum of Caesar – that were destroyed by archaeologists only a few decades ago). Intended to be complete within three years (2025–7), it is currently budgeted at a whopping 282 million euros (from PNRR, Jubilee, state and municipal funds).³³ The biggest announcement so far is the complete reworking of the pedestrian areas either side of Via dei Fori Imperiali by Labics architects (winners of the 2021 Colosseum floor competition).³⁴ Given the

²⁹ Detailed at https://www.ansa.it/english/news/lifestyle/arts/2015/03/20/temple-of-peace-to-get-restored-columns_ec598c9f-f2cd-42b6-9aae-546cbc8ff0b3.html

³⁰ Previously reported in C. Siwicki, 'Notes from Rome 2022–23', *PBSR* 90 (2022) 334.

³¹ For further comment, see <https://www.artandobject.com/news/putting-ancient-columns-rome>

³² Previously reported in C. Siwicki, 'Notes from Rome 2022–23', *PBSR* 91 (2023) 312–13.

³³ With links. <https://www.comune.roma.it/web/it/notizia.page?contentId=NWS1093828>

³⁴ C. Siwicki 'A new floor for Rome's Colosseum', *Art and Object* (12 July 2021) <https://www.artandobject.com/news/new-floor-romes-colosseum-what-you-need-know>

sensitivity of the areas affected, no doubt many opinions will be forthcoming when work gets underway. Architectural plans and models can appear both misleadingly attractive, but also unfairly soulless, and it is best for readers to decide for themselves about the potential of the scheme.³⁵ But for such a sum to be spent, then the decisions had better be the right ones, and in contemplating this *nuova passeggiata* (as it is titled), it is worth recalling a letter to *The Times* by Richard Norton, Director of the School of Classical Studies in Rome, in 1899:

It was only some half-dozen years ago that Minister Baccelli sanctioned the spending of 200,000 lire on the levelling and broadening of the roads all round the Colosseum! For all necessary work a quarter of this sum could have sufficed. Danger of a similar waste exists in a plan of the Commission which has been recently appointed to draw up schemes for the organization of a kind of park management of all the ancient monuments of Rome. The plan proposed is to construct a road or *passeggiata archeologica* one hundred metres broad running from the Palatine to the Baths of Caracalla! This will cost some 200,000 lire. The service such a road would render to the modern city and the addition which it would make to our knowledge of the past have yet to be demonstrated.³⁶

Museums and Exhibitions

The most important museum event this year was the opening of the Parco Archeologico del Celio and the Museo della Forma Urbis.³⁷ The museum occupies the former *Palestra della Gioventù Italiana del Littorio* at the southern end of the site. The Severan marble plan is laid out in the main room, the original fragments sunk into a floor, onto which Giovanni Battista Nolli's eighteenth-century map of the city is printed. It is an effective device, and the decision to lay the plan flat (as opposed to mounting it on a wall, which might be deemed more 'accurate'), allows visitors to walk over and closely inspect fragments. Given that the last major display of this monumental document was a century ago (with only the odd piece being brought out occasionally for exhibitions), its permanent installation is beyond welcome. Along the walls of the museum, pieces of the plan not placed in the floor are used to explain issues such as ancient errors and modern interpretations. The contribution of scholars to understanding the *Forum Urbis*, in particular Lucos Cozza, is also acknowledged.

The museum gardens (no ticket required) are also a splendid new addition to Rome's archaeological parks. Numerous architectural pieces and inscriptions from the old Caelian Antiquarium have been conserved and rearranged. They

³⁵ For images, <https://www.tribune.com/progettazione/architettura/2024/04/nuova-passeggiata-fori-imperiali-roma-studio-labics/> and <https://www.finestresullarte.info/interviste/ecco-come-trasformeremo-fori-imperiali-intervista-labics-passeggiata-roma>

³⁶ R. Norton, 'The condition of historical buildings in Italy', *The Times*, 9 January 1899. The letter is A. Cubberley, *Notes from Rome by Rodolfo Lanciani*, 1988: 241–7.

³⁷ <https://www.finestresullarte.info/archeologia/apre-al-pubblico-parco-archeologico-del-celio-e-nuovo-museo-forma-urbis>

include large marble fragments of tombs that were used to construct the Aurelianic *Porta Flaminia*,³⁸ discovered when it was dismantled in the late nineteenth century; part of the temple of *Fortuna Muliebris* from the fourth mile of the *Via Latina*; and the tomb of Servius Sulpicius Galba (possibly the consul of 108 BC) from Testaccio. Across the road, the other part of the abandoned antiquarium building continues to crumble, with many ancient architectural pieces lying still in the overgrown grounds.³⁹

In November 2023, the ancient necropolis of the *via Triumphalis* was reopened to the public, by means of a new, direct entrance off Piazza Risorgimento.⁴⁰ The remarkable site, with burials and cremations from the first to the fourth centuries AD, will be accessible on Fridays and Saturdays (booking required).

Among the best (certainly the most innovative) exhibitions of the last year was ‘Nuova Luce da Pompei a Roma’ at the Capitoline Museums.⁴¹ From the Vesuvian sites, approximately 150 bronze items relating to artificial lighting (lamps, candelabras, decorative stands) were arranged around nine rooms of the Villa Caffarelli. The theme explored how interior domestic spaces in antiquity were lit. In particular, it created an appreciation of how decorative forms were deliberately crafted to cast varied shadows, demonstrating the Roman delight in playing with illumination. The exhibition was the result of a research project at the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich, and should be a model of how to bring new academic work to the attention of the wider public.⁴² First exhibited in Munich,⁴³ at Rome the Vesuvian objects were joined by a selection from the Capitoline’s permanent collection, including a tall, bronze lamp shaped like a torch, from the *Excubitorium* of VII cohort of the *vigiles* in Trastevere.

In November 2023, ‘Fidia’ opened at the Capitoline Museums.⁴⁴ Dedicated to the life of the renowned classical sculptor, none of the works actually touched by the hand of the master were on display, as none are known to still exist.

³⁸ As recorded by Rodolfo Lanciani in the original ‘Notes from Rome’, *Athenaeum* 2555 (14 October 1876), 504–5; 2611 (10 November 1877), 604–5.

³⁹ A short guide to the site *Parco Archeologico del Celio. Museo della Forma Urbis* was published by De Luca Editori d’Arte (2023).

⁴⁰ https://www.ansa.it/english/news/2023/11/07/vatican-opens-new-entrance-to-via-triumphalis-necropolis_6b6d916d-1933-48a1-b1c6-54e0ab0a36d7.html

⁴¹ ‘Nuova Luce da Pompei a Roma’ (5 July–8 October 2023) was curated by Ruth Bielfeldt and Johannes Eber.

⁴² <https://www.lmu.de/en/newsroom/news-overview/news/in-the-light-of-pompeii.html>

⁴³ ‘New Light from Pompeii’ (Bavarian State Collection of Antiques, Munich, 9 November 2022–2 April 2023). The exhibition was accompanied by a catalogue in German, R. Bielfeldt et al. (eds), *Neues Licht aus Pompeji* (Munich) 2022. For a more detailed review, see J. Clarke ‘New light from Pompeii’, *BMCR* (10 February 2023) <https://bmcr.brynmawr.edu/2023/2023.10.02/> and a video of the Munich exhibition can be found at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cei_70MFDIA

⁴⁴ ‘Fidia’ (24 November 2023–9 June 2024) was curated by Claudio Parisi Presicce. An accompanying catalogue of the same title (edited by N. Agnoli, A. Avagliano C. Parisi Presicce and F. de Tomasi) was published by L’Erma di Bretschneider.

Nevertheless, the curators were able to recreate Phidias' *oeuvre* through a selection of Roman-era 'copies', as well as exploring the broader context within which he operated, and his later reception in antiquity through to the nineteenth century.⁴⁵ Among the pieces on loan were the exceptional bust of Lemnian Athena from Bologna, the marble extremities of a fifth-century BC acrolithic statue of Apollo from Cirò Marina and the famous ceramic jug with 'I belong to Phidias' scratched into the base, excavated in his workshop at Olympia. This promises to be the first of five exhibitions at the Capitoline Museums on the subject of *I Grandi Maestri della Grecia Antica*.

On the top floor of the Museums, in Sala degli Arazzi, there was also the opportunity to see the exquisite fourth-century AD glass fragment depicting Roma, found during work on the Metro C station at Porta Metronia.⁴⁶ Probably the bottom of a cup, it features the goddess, helmeted and carrying her spear, picked out in gold leaf. Outside, a full-sized replica of the colossal statue of Constantine (found in the Basilica Nuova on the via Sacra) now sits in the garden of the Villa Cafarelli.⁴⁷ Created from resin and plaster by Factum Foundation, who scanned the actual marble fragments in Palazzo dei Conservatori, the statue first appeared in the 2022 Fondazione Prada exhibition 'Recycling Beauty' (Milan).⁴⁸ Questions over the colour and index finger of the right hand aside, the thirteen-metre-high, seated figure makes quite an impression, and will remain in Rome until December 2025.

At the Museum of the Ara Pacis, 'LEX. Giustizia e diritto dall'Etruria a Roma' occupied the ground-floor museum space in the second half of 2023.⁴⁹ Presenting the theme of law and justice, from Rome's archaic kings to the high imperial period, the exhibition split into three parts: the first section centred on the concept of justice in the Roman world, the relevance of heroes and gods and maintaining the *pax deorum*; the second part revolved around politics and justice in Republican and Imperial Rome; and the third considered the role of law in daily life, how it worked for citizens, women, slaves and soldiers. On display were some notable pieces from private collections, including a first-century BC marble relief of magistrates ploughing a sacred boundary, from Siena, and a folding curule chair (*sella curulis*), possibly from Rome. The Carabinieri Command for the Protection of Cultural Heritage (TPC) had a small section near the end, displaying objects recovered from various, often dubious, contexts. Among these was a fragment (the Frammento Fallani) of the

⁴⁵ For further comment, see C. Siwicki, 'Fidia' *London Review of Books* 46.8 (April 2024). <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v46/n08/christopher-siwicki/at-the-capitoline-museums>

⁴⁶ VRBS ROMA (21 April 2023–5 May 2024). On the discovery, C. Siwicki, 'Notes from Rome 2022–23', *PBSR* 91 (2023) 313.

⁴⁷ https://www.ansa.it/english/news/lifestyle/arts/2024/02/06/colossus-of-constantine-on-display-in-capitoline-museums_9dfdac13-eeb5-4579-a9e0-6f0b53df9122.html

⁴⁸ <https://www.artribune.com/arti-visive/2022/11/mostra-recycling-beauty-fondazione-prada-milano/>

⁴⁹ Lex. Giustizia e diritto dall'Etruria a Roma (27 May – 1 October 2024) was curated by Vincenzo Lemmo. A catalogue of the same title was published by Gangemi.

sixth-century BC Montecitorio obelisk, brought to Rome by Augustus, that had been donated by an antiques dealer to the Ministry of Culture, having only re-emerged in 2021.⁵⁰

Next, in May 2024, 'TEATRO. Autori, attori e pubblico nell'antico Roma' opened at the Ara Pacis.⁵¹ Through more than 240 pieces, the exhibition expertly traced the development of theatre in Rome, from its third-century BC origins in Magna Grecia, onward. Separate sections examined the influence of Greek drama, comedy and tragedy in the Roman capital, the organization of putting on performances (including the manufacture of masks) and theatre architecture. Regarding the latter, four masks from the keystones of the arches of the Theatre of Marcellus were present, as well as the exceptional first-century AD frescoes from the theatre at Nemi.

Finally on display in the Museum of the Imperial Fora is the head of Dionysus, discovered to so much fanfare in 2019 during works to remove the sixteenth-century Via Alessandrina, the statue having been reused as building material in a thirteenth-century foundation wall.⁵² The combined height of the head and neck is 43cm, further analysis has identified the marble as Pentelic and it is dated on stylistic grounds to the 'early imperial age'. The other significant sculptural find from the demolition of the Via Alessandrina was a bust of the emperor Augustus. From 29 June to 26 November 2023, this was also put on display in the Market of Trajan, alongside another marble head of Augustus, found in 2021 at Isernia (ancient Aesernia) in Molise.⁵³ The former is carved from Thasian marble, the latter from Luna. Damage at the base of the necks makes it difficult to ascertain if either head was part of a full body statue. The Isernia portrait is of a mature Augustus, while that from Rome is Octavian, of the 'Actium' or 'Alcudia' type, dated 40–38 BC. The Via Alessandrina bust (like the head of Dionysus) was found in a medieval (eleventh-century) layer.

At the National Etruscan Museum of the Villa Giulia, an exhibition about the Etruscan city of Spina was installed, as part of the centenary celebration (1922) of the discovery of the remarkable settlement on the Adratic coast.⁵⁴ Having

⁵⁰ https://www.ilmessaggero.it/roma/news/montecitorio_obelisco_carabinieri_trovato_pezzo_dopo_mille_anni-5992282.html

⁵¹ 'TEATRO. Autori, attori e pubblico nell'antico Roma' (21 May–3 November 2023) was curated by Salvatore Monda, Orietta Rossini and Lucia Spagnuolo. A catalogue with the same title was published by L'Erma di Bretschneider.

⁵² On the context of the discovery, see A. Claridge and C. Siwicki, 'Notes from Rome 2018–19', *PBSR* 87 (2019) 309; C. Siwicki, 'Finding wonderful things: What the media missed while covering the discovery of two statues in Rome', *History Today* 70.4 (2020, April).

⁵³ 'Imago Augusti. Due nuovi ritratti di Augusto da Roma e Isernia' (29 June 2023–3 September 2024) was curated by Beatrice Pinna Caboni, Dora Catalano, Maria Diletta Colombo and Claudio Parisi Presicce. An accompanying catalogue with the same title was published by Campisano.

⁵⁴ 'Spina etrusca a Villa Giulia. Un grande porto del Mediterraneo' (10 November 2023–7 April 2024) was curated by Valentino Nizzo. A catalogue with the same title was published by ARA edizioni.

previously been shown at Ferrara, it was arranged in Rome in combination with objects from the museum's permanent collection, emphasizing Spina's place within the wider Etruscan world.⁵⁵

The entrance to the Curia Julia from the Roman Forum remains inaccessible, due to the seemingly never-ending works around the *comitium*. Nevertheless, the building itself is often open and used to hold events. 'Copernico e la rivoluzione del mondo' celebrated the 550th anniversary of the birth of the Polish astronomer, focusing on the influence of his time in Rome and Italy in the development of the heliocentric theory.⁵⁶ Copernicus' debt to antiquity (acknowledged in *De revolutionibus*) was represented, among other objects, by a marble bust identified as Pythagoras, from the Capitoline Museums, a fifth-century BC 'Pythagorean' pitcher from Ripacandida, a mosaic emblem of Plato's academy, on loan from the National Archaeological Museum of Naples, and a ceiling fresco from the villa at Stabia depicting an armillary sphere. For part of May and June, eight of the Parian marble heads belonging to the Augustan-era statues of barbarians that once adorned the Basilica Aemilia were also exhibited in the Curia.⁵⁷ These important, but rarely displayed, sculptures have been subject to a recent programme of restoration and research, presented at a 'Study Day' in the Curia on 7 June.⁵⁸

The Parco archeologico del Colosseo also put on two larger exhibitions in 2023/24. 'L'Amato di Iside. Nerone, la Domus Aurea e l'Egitto' was set up within the spaces of the Golden House, again populating its halls with statuary.⁵⁹ The first part of the exhibition examined Nero's relationship with Egypt; the second, the presence of Egypt in Rome, specifically the development of the cult of Isis. Over 150 works were displayed, with many coming from museums across Italy.⁶⁰ On loan from the Munich Museum of Egyptian Art were the fragmentary statues of Isis, Horus and Harpocrates, that were found in the Tiber and have been associated with Tiberius' destruction of the *Iseum* in the Campus Martius.⁶¹

⁵⁵ Images and videos of the exhibition can be found at <https://spina100.museoetru.it/#press> <https://www.archaeoreporter.com/en/2023/11/18/spina-etruscan-maritime-hub-in-the-mediterranean-an-exhibition-at-the-national-museum-of-villa-giulia-rome/>

⁵⁶ 'Copernico e la rivoluzione del mondo' (21 October 2023–19 January 2024) was curated by Jurek Miziolek and Francesca Ceci.

⁵⁷ 'Statue di Barbari in Marmi Colorati. Novità dal Foro Romano e Terracina' (officially, 7–17 June 2023).

⁵⁸ For the programme, see <https://colosseo.it/evento/statue-di-barbari-in-marmi-colorati-novita-dal-foro-romano-e-da-terracina/>

⁵⁹ 'L'Amato di Iside. Nerone, la Domus Aurea e l'Egitto' (22 June 2023–14 January 2024) was curated by Alfonsina Russo, Francesca Guarneri, Stefano Borghini and Massimiliana Pozzi. A catalogue with the same title was published by Artem.

⁶⁰ For images, see <https://www.finestresullarte.info/en/exhibitions/rome-s-relations-with-egypt-as-seen-through-nero-the-major-exhibition-at-the-domus-aurea>

⁶¹ Joseph. *AJ* 18.3.4.

‘La Colonna Traiana. Il racconto di un simbolo’ was held in the ambulatory of the first level of the Colosseum.⁶² Organized in conjunction with the Museo Galileo at Florence, it followed the Uffizi’s 2019 exhibition ‘The Art of Building a Masterpiece: Trajan’s Column’.⁶³ Part was dedicated to illustrating the complexities of constructing the column, from quarry to building site. The crane reliefs from the tomb of the Haterii and Terracina – the usual suspects for illustrating Roman construction methods – were both present, as well as a series of charming models of ancient machines for lifting stone, made by the sculptor Claudio Capotondi.⁶⁴ The piers of the Colosseum were wrapped with drums onto which the column’s frieze was projected at 1:1 scale. It is a continuing shame that the Museo della Civiltà Romana remains closed (with no indication of when it might reopen), where a full set of plaster casts of the reliefs are kept.

The decision to hold both exhibitions in these spaces was limiting. While the *Domus Aurea* was a thematically sound location for the former, and the site was open every day of the week (as opposed to just weekends), it potentially capped the number of people who might see it on account of the ticket cost and the need to book. Moreover, visits around Nero’s palace are guided and time-restricted. The first level of the Colosseum has long been used for temporary exhibitions, but the difficulty in reserving a ticket, coupled with the sheer number of visitors in Leviathan-like groups, makes spending time within the amphitheatre increasingly unpleasant. Moreover, most tourists in the Colosseum are understandably there to see that monument, lessening the impression of a temporary exhibition about a completely different structure. Such shows would surely be better placed in the Parco’s other, quieter spaces in the forum or on the Palatine Hill.

It was a good year for Dacians in Rome. Alongside ‘La Colonna Traiana’ at the Colosseum, the Museo Nazionale Romano put on ‘Dacia. L’ultima frontiera della Romanità’ at the Baths of Diocletian (having already shown it in Madrid and Bucharest).⁶⁵ This exceptionally full exhibition comprised over 1,000 objects, primarily from Romanian and Moldovan museums (although the show opened with the plaster cast of the column of Trajan coloured by Bianchi Bandinelli in the 1970s). The richness of Roman (and pre-Roman) material culture in the territories was amply illustrated in the first rooms, which focused on Dacia as a province. Bronze pieces were in abundance, including legionary weaponry and a bust of the emperor Decius. The second-century AD marble sculpture of the

⁶² ‘La Colonna Traiana. Il racconto di un simbolo’ (22 December 2023–30 April 2024) was curated by Alfonsina Russo, Federica Rinaldi, Angelica Pujia and Giovanni Di Pasquale.

⁶³ ‘Building a Masterpiece: Trajan’s Column’ (20 June–5 October 2019) was curated by Giovanni Di Pasquale and Fabrizio Paolucci. An accompanying catalogue – Giovanni Di Pasquale (ed) *The Art of Building a Masterpiece: Trajan’s Column* – was published by Giunti.

⁶⁴ <https://www.claudicapotondi.it/homepage/colonna-traiana/>

⁶⁵ ‘La Colonna Traiana’ at the Colosseum, the Museo Nazionale Romano put on ‘Dacia. L’ultima frontiera della Romanità’ (21 November 2023–21 April 2024), which was curated by Ernest Oberlander and Stéphane Verger.

unusual serpent god Glycon, from Tomis (Constanta), was a particular highlight. Billed as ‘the largest and most prestigious exhibition of archaeological finds organised by Romania abroad in recent decades’, its full scope told a story from the eighth century BC to the eighth century AD. Other parts of the exhibition go back into Iron-Age Dacia, and the relationship with Thracian, Scythian and Greek peoples. The final section focuses on Christianity, the impact of the Huns and the end of the Roman Empire.