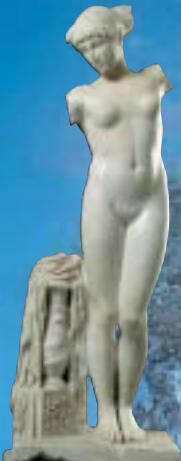


AZIENDA DI PROMOZIONE TURISTICA DI ROMA

VILLAS OF ANCIENT ROME



AZIENDA DI PROMOZIONE TURISTICA DI ROMA

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VILLAS
OF ANCIENT
ROME



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Initially, in ancient Rome, there was a small domestic garden called a “hortus”, confined in a narrow space at the back of the house. Then came the *horti*, the plural form indicating a greatly extended garden in which the house was only a part of an elaborate, organic complex consisting of different elements, that we refer to as a “villa”. Owing to their location outside the old city walls, villas were formally considered suburban residences even though they were used as town houses or rather as dwellings on the outskirts of the city. They became proper urban residences at the end of the 3rd century AD, when the emperor Aurelian included them in the circuit of the new city walls. The villas were obviously luxurious residences in which to retreat from the concerns of hectic city life and to sleep soundly far from nocturnal noises.

They were the ideal place to spend leisure time alternating rest and recreation with intellectual activities, to receive friends and cultivate high ranking social connections and to deal with business and political matters in a more relaxed environment.

INTRODUCTION

The favoured locations were those that met various requirements: proximity to the “walled” city, availability of ample space, pleasant surroundings and panoramic views, a supply of water, possibly spring water, etc. The choice initially fell on the high grounds and slopes of hills, such as those of the Quirinal facing the Campus Martius, the Campus Martius itself, the right bank of the Tiber and the heights of the Janiculum. The Pincio was soon favoured as well, and became known

The main
suburban Villas



INTRODUCTION

as the “hill of the villas” for the extension and quality of its buildings.. Subsequently attention was directed towards the external and more peripheral areas of the Caelian and Esquiline hills that were already partially inhabited and included in the circuit of the ancient city walls.

In villa design, open spaces were very important and skillfully arranged with paths, flowerbeds, bowers, brooks, fountains and waterworks, and adorned with exedrae, pavilions and statues. The buildings themselves could be structured differently: as a compact block, with a main body and projecting wings, with a closed or open courtyard, or as individual pavilions. Additional constructions could be added to the specifically residential section and used as baths, libraries, theatre cavae and belvederes. All these elements were conceived as an organic rational system that always maintained contact with the outside world. Porticoes and cryptoporticus, exedrae, open galleries and belvedere terraces were used as elements of passage and connection, creating an authentic union of nature and the work of man. The result was a new “landscape”, separated and isolated, fenced off from the surrounding area.

The first villas were built by private citizens, members of the great senatorial families who had accumulated fortunes with the spoils of war and the exploitation of conquered territories. Building began in the first half of the 2nd century BC, but the number of villas increased in the period between the decline of the republic and the rise of the empire. The trend lasted for the duration of the empire and is of great importance in the urban development and history of ancient Rome. In time, the villas surrounded the whole inhabited area and formed a single, vast and splendid ring of “structured greenery”

with the prerogative of “unified property”. Eventually, in fact, and for different reasons (through bequests, acquisition through marriage or confiscation), the villas all became imperial property.

Owing to the progressive “saturation” of available space, most of the new buildings had to necessarily be located beyond the ring of the “peripheric” *horti*, in the more distant suburbs, along the arteries of the main roads. In the meantime, emperors and members of the imperial families, the Julio-Claudians, the Severans, the Gordians, Maxentius and Constantine among them, also started building villas. These were proper suburban villas that accentuated every part of the complex, starting from the constructed areas and with the addition of new or previously undeveloped elements. The perfected structures included the circus and the hippodrome, an area equipped for horse-back riding and a manège and, not infrequently, a monumental family tomb. Among the innovations, the most relevant was that of the “rotunda”, a building with a main cylindrical body and walls subdivided into niches and apses covered with a dome and a forepart in the shape of a pronaos. The rotunda was variously used as a bath, a meeting hall, a living quarter, or even as mausoleum.

The last villas were built in the first decades of the 4th century, that also saw the first instances of abandonment or of incipient decay, even though restorations are often documented well into the 6th century. The buildings suffered further damage during the sacking and devastation of the barbarian invasions, starting from that of Alaric in 410. Their fabulous wealth, the luxurious furnishings and splendid decorations naturally made the villas “privileged” targets for plunder.

The ancient Roman villas that had better chances of surviving were those located in the “urban periphery” and that eventually became part of the Campagna romana - the Roman countryside. The area has only recently been threatened and partially absorbed by the monstrous expansion of the modern city. Consequently, especially in the southeast section traversed by the via Appia, the ancient via Labicana, Via Tuscolana and Via Latina, ruins of great villas, still stand sometimes reaching many metres in height. They are often situated in the vicinity of the long arched aqueducts, amidst the green fields that have remained virtually untouched by devastating intrusions. These villas, as their distance from the ancient inhabited area indicates, all date from imperial times and when they were not “incorporated” into the villas of the “urban periphery”, they formed a second and wider ring of “structured greenery” around the city. The most important and best preserved among them are the most famous owing to recent research, excavations and restoration. They will be described in the chronological order of the main phases of construction and with the names that are currently used.

The Villa of Livia

The villa belonged to Livia Drusilla, wife of Augustus and was situated at the 9th mile of the via Flaminia (near the modern Prima Porta), on high ground overlooking the Tiber valley. It was commonly known as *ad gallinas albas* (“the white hens”) because of a prodigy which according to tradition took place there. An eagle dropped a white hen with a laurel branch in its beak into the empress’s lap. The laurel

was planted and developed into a grove. After Livia’s death, the villa became imperial property and was probably in use until a late period, since the brick stamps indicate that

THE SUBURBAN VILLAS

restorations took place in the Severan era and again during the reign of Theodoric.

A massive wall with evident counterforts (still partially identifiable, even at

THE SUBURBAN VILLAS

Villa of Livia:
Fresco, detail
(Museo Nazionale Romano-
Palazzo Massimo alle Terme)



a distance) ran along the southern side of the high ground overlooking the river and supporting the terracing on which the villa was erected and that was accessible through a side lane of

Villa of Livia:
The Augustus of Prima Porta
(Vatican Museums)



the Flaminia. The remains of the buildings are unfortunately in very poor condition.

Systematic studies and excavations began in 1863/4 with the discovery of the famous marble statue of Augustus (known as the Augustus of Prima Porta), now on display in the Vatican Museums. The residential section of the villa was situated in the western area. The

ample, quadrangular free space towards the south was probably a garden. The residential area consisted of two sections and had a large cis-

rooms including the *caldarium*, also provided with two pools. East of the baths and connected to them by a long corridor, was the first nucleus of the residential section as well as the main entrance to the villa. On one side, a series of rooms, including a great triclinium, are arranged around an atrium with four pilasters. The other side consists of a what might be a peristyle, around an open porticoed area with ambulatories and important rooms. The other residential section stood on the opposite side and consisted of semi-subterranean rooms including a great rectangular hall (11.70 by 5.20 m) preceded by a vestibule and with a mosaic floor patterned with rows of white cubes against a black background.

Identifiable as a summer triclinium, this room was covered by a barrel vault decorated with painted stucco coffers. The walls were completely covered with the celebrated frescoes representing a flourishing garden surrounded by a reed fence and are one of the most remarkable examples of 3rd style Roman wall painting, dating from the end of the 1st century BC. They were removed in 1951 and are now on display at the Museo Nazionale Romano. During the restructuring of the villa in the first half of the 2nd century AD, other rooms (including a heated quarter and a latrine) were added above this residential nucleus. The walls are in some cases covered with frescoes or slabs of marble and the floors are in black and white mosaic or polychrome marble inlay. Towards the northern end, a staircase with two ramps and two small ovens on the intermediate landing, led to a service room, covered with a barrel vault and a skylight at the centre and probably connected with the nearby bath complex.



Plan of the
Villa of Livia at Prima Porta
(from Messineo)

tern and a bath complex at the centre. The cistern was dug out of the tufa and was divided by pilasters into naves covered by depressed arch vaults. The vast bath complex had a large rectangular hall with two pools (*frigidarium*) and a series of additional



The Villa of the Vignacce

The villa was situated at 5th mile of the ancient Via Latina, at the end of a side lane that flanked the arches of the Aqua Marcia aqueduct, now close to the via Tuscolana, at the Quadraro. It was built in the first half of the 2nd century AD, maybe by a Quinto Servilio Pudente, a wealthy owner of brick kilns, even though the surviving structures show signs of 6th century restorations. The main complex stood on large terracing, 120 metres in length, along the modern via Lemonia. Its supporting wall had a continuous series of counterforts and a niche with a fountain. The large ruins that rise from the ground belong to the bath complex. The most interesting are those of a large circular hall surrounded by a series of small chambers of which about a fourth remains. The

surviving half of the dome is one of the most ancient examples of the use of adding amphorae to the masonry to lighten the weight. Northwest of the hall there is a rectangular room with an apse and a cross vault. Further on are the remains of a vast rectangular hall with apses, flanked by a corridor and two rooms on each side, the larger rooms have cross vaults, the smaller ones barrel vaults. The southern section of the villa includes a large cistern, fed by the nearby aqueduct of the Aqua Marcia. It had three rooms on the lower level, four on the upper one and two rows of semi-circular niches. Three other water reserves were located in the western section of the complex.

In the past the villa underwent unsystematic investigations and excavations, pilfering and devastation. It has only recently been reorganized in part and included in the "Parco degli Acquedotti" - the Park of the Aqueducts. The colossal marble head of Julia Domna is on display in

Villa of the Vignacce:
Ruins



the "rotunda" of the Vatican Museums, as well as the statue of the *Tyche* of Antioch and of Ganymede carried off by an eagle, also in the Museo Chiaramonti, also in the Vatican.

Villa of the Vignacce:
Parco degli Acquedotti



Villa of the Quintilii:
Ruins of the bath complex

The Villa of the Quintilii

The villa was located after the fifth mile of the Via Appia. Its identification was made possible by the finding of the owners' names stamped on the lead pipes on the site. The Quintili brothers, Sesto Condiano Massimo and Sesto Valeriano Massimo, were members of one of the most important senatorial families at the time of the Antonines. The villa covered a surface of about 1000 square metres. It was one of the largest in the outskirts of the city and its numerous and imposing ruins were known in the past as "Old Rome". In 182 AD the emperor Commodus condemned the Quintili brothers to death on a false charge of conspiracy, and the villa became an imperial property. The emperor Commodus, who had coveted it so much, may have resided there himself. Unsystematic investigations and occasional excavations were conducted on the site starting from the mid 1700s. More recent interventions include the liberation and reorganization of the

complex and the creation of an *anti-quarium* in an old farmhouse (via Appia Nuova n.1089). The surviving structures indicate two construction phases, the first dating from the time of the original owners, around 150 AD (or slightly before), and the second (preceded by some reconstruction attributable to Commodus) from between the end of the 3rd century and the beginning of the 4th. Documented restorations also took place in the 6th century, during the reign of Theodoric. The complex consists of five nuclei variously arranged on irregular land. The first corresponds to a service area that includes a large circular cistern, 29 metres in diameter, and divided into five connecting chambers. Another cistern of rectangular shape on two levels, was used in the Middle Ages as a foundation for the farmhouse known as Santa Maria Nuova. The approach to the villa on the Via Appia, past structures identifiable as *tabernae*, consisted of a monumental nymphaeum on two

levels composed of a wide semicircular exedra with niches and a fountain at the center. Initially the nymphaeum was separated from the road by a wall that ran along the traces of an aqueduct (derived from the *Anio Novus*).

Subsequently it was given an entrance facing the road, flanked by two columns on high bases and brick pilasters on the sides. In the Middle Ages it was incorporated into a castle that at first belonged to the Counts of Tuscolo. Substantial remains are still standing, including the beautiful loggia erected by the Astalli between the 12th and 13th centuries. Behind the nymphaeum, in place of the present lawn, there used to be an enormous



Villa of the Quintilii:
Cistern



Aqueduct
Near the Villa of the Quintilii

garden which may have had porticoes at least on its main sides. It was 300 metres long and, after the demolition of an earlier boundary wall, almost 110 metres wide. The aqueduct that reached the nymphaeum ran along the same boundary wall on the southeastern side. In later times two “circular pavilions” were added on the southern and western corners. Beyond the garden, facing east, there is a rectangular cistern, divided into two chambers with barrel vaults, that was connected to the aqueduct by a series of arches, closed in later times. The third nucleus of the villa was located in the northern section along with the bath complex. Imposing remains of grandiose rooms still stand, their walls reaching a height of 14 metres. The first section belongs to the *frigidarium*, a rectangular hall with large arched windows on two levels and a cross vault (collapsed), two pools on the shorter sides and a rather well preserved polychrome marble floor. The following walls are those of the *caldarium*, another great hall, almost entirely taken up by a large pool originally faced with marble. The few remains by the *caldarium* belong to a



Villa of the Quintilii:
Remains of one of the halls
of the bath complex

“*rotunda*” measuring 36 metres in diameter, probably open and used as a pool. The residential area proper was located east of the bath complex and arranged around a large courtyard, 36.50 by 12 metres, onto which opened a heated octagonal hall with a polychrome marble inlay floor, rooms identifiable as *cubicoli* or bedrooms, a nymphaeum and a place of worship. A lower floor housed *cryptoporticus* and service areas. The fourth nucleus of the villa was situated on the southeastern side and consisted of a circus-like structure, or a hippodrome, 400 metres long (and

THE SUBURBAN VILLAS

between 90 and 115 metres wide) that was added in a later phase and provided on one end with a semicircular nymphaeum fed by two cisterns, and subsequently transformed into a small bath. Brick stamps in this section indicate restorations carried out in the 6th century. Finally, in the northern corner of the entire complex, was the “rustic”, productive area of the villa with rooms assigned to the service area and the living quarters of the personnel.

The Villa of the Sette Bassi

The villa, one of the largest in the suburbs, was located at the 6th mile of the Via Latina, corresponding to the modern Osteria del Curato. The peculiar name was already known in the Middle Ages and may derive from the popular corruption of the name of a possible owner, Septimius Bassus. All that remains today is a complex of grandiose ruins that have been only partially excavated and investigated in the past. The villa was built in the 2nd century AD, at the time of Antoninus

Pius, on the site of a late republican “farm” and a small agricultural village (possibly the *pagus Lemonius*) that became the “rustic quarter” of the complex. It consisted of three main sections, built in successive stages, although over a brief period of time and according to a unitary project. The enormous terraced garden at its head measured 327 by 95 metres and was situated 5 metres below the level of the buildings and bounded by porticoes with exedrae and belvedere “towers” at the corners. Two nuclei in the north-eastern section faced the two contiguous sides of a peristyle. The first to be built was a compact square block (50 by 50 metres) with various groups of rooms opening onto a courtyard or on interior open spaces, still partially preserved, with walls more than 10 metres high. The second nucleus had a series of rooms along the ambulatory of the peristyle and others against the side of a large, partially open, porticoed hemicycle, with its convex facade projecting into the garden. The third nucleus, more splendid than the others, extended over the entire side at the end of the

Villa of the Sette Bassi:
View





Villa of the Sette Bassi:
Ruins

large garden. It stood on substructures that made it level with the other two nuclei. The interior contained two cryptoporticus and service rooms. About half of the building was occupied by a bath complex. The remains correspond to a great hall flanked with smaller ones and a double row of large windows on the front (one of the windows collapsed during a violent downpour in 1951). Other buildings stood apart from the main complex. The most substantial and visible remains are those of a small temple, located in the northeast area. The walls had a double row of windows preserved up to the base of the barrel vaulted ceiling, externally covered with a sloping roof. East of the large garden there is a cistern with a series of niches on the outside and the interior divided into two sections. The branch of the aqueduct that derived from the Aqua Claudia with a series of arches ended there. The villa eventually became property of the Lateran Basilica, perhaps through a donation at the time of Constantine, and was in use until after the end of ancient times.

The Villa of the Gordiani

The complex was situated at the 3rd mile of the Via Praenestina along both sides of the road. Nowadays it corresponds to the archeological Parco dei Gordiani, one kilometer past Largo Preneste (near via Olevano Romano). It is mentioned in the *Historia Augusta* as one of the most luxurious in the suburbs and renowned for its spectacular peristyle composed of 200 columns of four different types of marble. (Carystian green or cipollino, red porphyry, Phrygian purple and Numidian yellow). The family of the Gordiani probably owned the villa before some of its members rose to the imperial throne. Gordian III (238-244 AD), in particular, enlarged, restored and reorganized it. Within the "archeological park", on the right, among minor ruins, are the remains of a large square cistern dating from the 2nd century AD. It is provided with counterforts; the lower floor is divided into two chambers with a supporting function, and the upper level is divided into six barrel-vaulted chambers used to store



Villa of the Gordiani:
The Mausoleum

water. The most important ruins are on the left. Besides those of two other adjoining cisterns (the remains of a more ancient and modest villa from republican times are situated just past them and have been filled in again with earth), there is the remaining half of an octagonal hall with a circular upper section. During the Middle Ages it was used to build a tower to which the circular pilaster at the centre belongs. The hall, probably a bath, was erected at the time of the Gordiani. The interior contained a series of alternating rectangular and semicircular niches and was covered by a dome. There are other minor ruins, including those of a hall with an apse covered with a "shell shaped" vault that may have also been part of the bath complex. The following monument is the most imposing and is commonly known as Tor de' Schiavi, from the name of the family that owned the area in the 16th century. It is a mausoleum dating from

the beginning of the 4th century AD, after the time of the Gordiani and the approximately three quarters of it that remain have the aspect of a large "rotunda" (13.20 metres in diameter); a cylindrical drum is provided with round windows in the upper section. The hemispherical dome is not entirely visible from the exterior because the drum is raised above its impost. The interior had two floors. The lower, partly underground floor had a ring-shaped ambulatory with a barrel vault around a central pilaster and niches in the side walls in the usual alternation. The upper floor (probably reserved for funerary cult) had the same alternation of niches and was directly accessible from the outside through a monumental pronaos with four columns. It was preceded by a flight of steps that served as the monument's "facade", now entirely lost. The nearby ruins of a paleochristian basilica (67 by 33 metres) also date from the 4th century



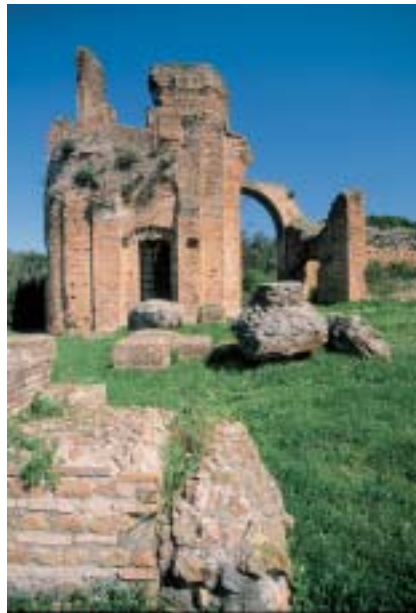
Villa of the Gordiani:
The Mausoleum

when the villa was partially reutilized. The characteristic “circus” plan, the traces of a large burial ground and the presence of catacombs in the area, indicate that the basilica had a funerary function.

The Villa of Maxentius

The villa extended along the Appian Way between the 2nd and 3rd miles, near the tomb of Cecilia Metella. Its first phase must have been in the late republican period (1st century BC), a second phase in the Julio-Claudian period, and a third datable around the middle of the 2nd century AD when it was probably included in the large “farm” of the so-called Triopio of Herodotus Atticus. The final phase of construction took place under Maxentius (in the years around 310 AD) when the villa became an imperial residence. The erection of prestigious structures such as the “basilica”, the opening of a new monumental entrance, and the addition of a circus and mausoleum, conformed to a scheme based on the newly affirmed imperial ideology. The residential part rose on high grounds, properly evened

out and adapted with terracing supported, for a length of 115 metres, by a cryptoporticus with two parallel ambulatories, covered by barrel vaults and illuminated by small “wolf-mouth” windows. Later on, it was interrupted by a group of three rooms, while two panoramic pavilions in the form of towers were added to the two extremities. In front of the cryptoporticus and thus at the base of the “palace”, there were two nymphae carved in the rock and at one time richly decorated with mosaics and paintings. Above it ran a portico, probably open toward the valley, beyond which rose the “palace”. Several rooms can be distinguished which were arranged along the sides of a great hall with an apse (33 by 19.45 metres), provided with a heating plant. This was the most important area of the whole complex, apparently a “basilica”, designed for public meetings, hearings and ceremonies. In front of it, a few remains of an atrium can be seen, while on the north side there is a long and narrow cistern. East of it an area which was at first probably round and covered with



Villa of Maxentius:
Ruins of the Circus

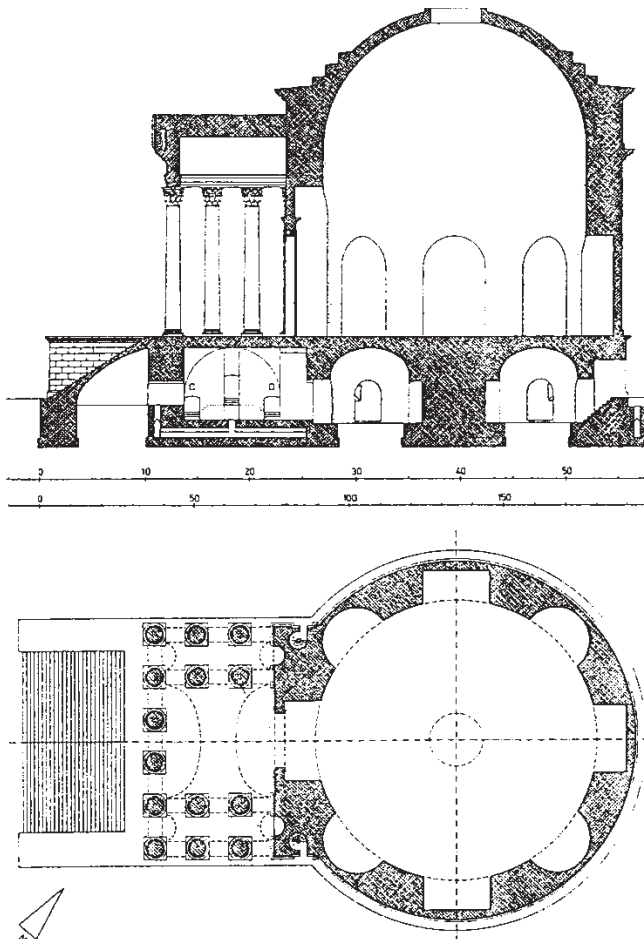
THE SUBURBAN
VILLAS

a vault, may have been part of the monumental entrance to the "palace". This was connected by a long ambulatory to the circus, which is the best preserved and most interesting part of the whole complex (and also the best preserved of all in the circuses of the Roman world). It extends along the valley, from east to west, for about 520 metres, with a maximum width of 92 metres. On the short west side delimited by two towers three stories tall (16 metres) and rounded on the outside, there were twelve areas (*carceres*) from which the riding chariots came out, while the main entrance to the building in the form of a large arch opened at the centre. Another arched entrance ("the triumphal entrance") opened

onto the opposite curved side. This and the two long sides were taken up by tiers of seats which rested on a vaulted structure and were divided into two sections of six tiers each, with a seating capacity of 10.000. The imperial tribune consisting of a large rectangular space and a *rotunda* with a dome set against it was situated on the long north side. On the opposite side, another tribune was perhaps reserved for the judges of the races. In the centre of the arena, the "*spina*", the longitudinal element around which the chariots raced) is still recognizable. Its length is exactly 1000 Roman feet or 296 metres, and had a series of pools alternating with niches and statues. An obelisk was also placed there, the one

Domitian originally erected in the Iseo Campense (or rather, in the Temple of the Gens Flavia on the Quirinal). Once recovered, it was boldly erected by Bernini in 1650 on his Fountain of the Rivers in the Piazza Navona). The third element of the villa is the so-called Tomb of Romulus, after the son of Maxentius who died in 309 AD and was buried there. In actual fact, this was a dynastic *mausoleum* intended for the whole imperial family. It was erected at a short distance from the Via Appia and

Villa of Maxentius:
Plan and reconstructive
section of the Tomb
of Romulus
(from Rasch).





aligned with it, at the centre of a large quadriportico (108 by 121 metres). It consisted of a circular building preceded by a projecting structure or pronaos, similar to that of the Pantheon (substituted in the 19th century by a still existing farm house) with six columns and steps in the front. The “rotunda”, partially preserved (diameter approx. 33 metres) had two stories the first of which consisted of a ring-shaped ambulatory with barrel vaults around a central pilaster (diameter 7.50 metres). Two entrances set against each other, and six niches designed to house the sarchopagi, were illuminated by “wolf-mouth” windows. The upper story had an area (now completely lost) originally covered with a gigantic dome and destined for the funeral cult. Adjacent to the east side of the quadriportico are the concrete remains of the nucleus of an older sepulchre (perhaps from the beginning of the Augustan

age) known as the Tomb of the Semproni, which was incorporated into the mausoleum of Maxentius. Beyond the north corner of the same quadriportico, several rooms with pools faced with marble belonged to the baths of the villa.

Villa of Maxentius:
Towers of the carceres
of the Circus.

The Villa of the Christian Flavians

In antiquity the site was indicated with the name of *ad duas lauros* (“the two laurels”). At the time of Constantine (founder of the dynasty of the second or Christian Flavians) it was part of the immense imperial properties that also included the Severan villa “of Old Hope” and extended without interruption from the area of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme to most of the southern suburb between the *Via Praenestina*, *Via Labicana* (modern Casilina) and *Via*



Villa of the Christian Flavians:
Remains of the Mausoleum
of Helen

Latina (modern Tuscolana), up to the foot of the Alban hills. In particular, the nucleus of buildings known by the ancient name, was located on the site of the former airport of Centocelle, between the modern via Casilina and via Papiria. During the construction of the airport, around 1925, numerous ruins above ground (that during the Middle Ages gave rise to the toponym *Centumcellae*) and those that reached a certain depth underground, were destroyed. All the rest, buried below the runways, “reappeared” almost magically in pictures taken from the air in 1953 that clearly revealed the practically intact planimetry of the villa. Regular excavations on the site have been conducted only recently, also revealing a bath complex and residen-

tial structures in via Papiria. The villa had an extremely regular structure with different constructions side by side and variously arranged at the sides of a central “body” composed of an enormous peristyle surrounded by several rooms. An intermediate atrium connected it to a large hemicycle, visibly projecting from the outside wall. The bath “quarter” was situated in the left section. A long covered ambulatory departed from it in a perpendicular sense flanking a vast area which was probably a garden. The section on the right, developed around two or three open

spaces, was more strictly residential. It was connected to a portico with a small temple at the centre (or a sepulchre in the shape of a small temple), while two round, domed mausoleums were instead detached and separated from each other. Another section of the vast estate housed the mausoleum of Helen, in the customary type of the domed “rotunda”. The presence of amphorae in the masonry to lighten its weight is at the origin of the popular name Torpignattara that was later extended to the area where the monument was located, along the modern via Casilina, the ancient *Via Labicana*. The villa was also the site of the execution in 445, of the emperor Valentinian III, son of Galla Placidia.

Nero's Domus Aurea is a particular case: a proper urban villa situated right in the heart of Rome, to the point that a pasquinade claimed that the entire city would be "transformed into a single great *domus*". It extended for 80/100

statue of the Sun with the features of Nero, 35 metres tall. The section on the Palatine that Nero had adapted before the fire of 64 AD (that eventually allowed him to build the rest) was meant to connect the imperial properties on the Palatine to those on the Esquiline that corresponded

A SPECIAL VILLA:
THE DOMUS AUREA

A SPECIAL VILLA:
THE DOMUS AUREA

hectares from the Palatine to the Caelian hill, from the Velia to the Esquiline. At the centre, in the valley later occupied later by the Colosseum, there was a large lake that Suetonius described as similar to a "sea, surrounded by porticoes and buildings as if it were a city". The lake received water from different sources but mostly from the Celimontano aqueduct that also fed the monumental fountain obtained by modifying the outer wall of the eastern side of the Temple of Claudius on the slope of the Caelian hill (along the

to the former villa of Maecenes. For this reason the complex was called



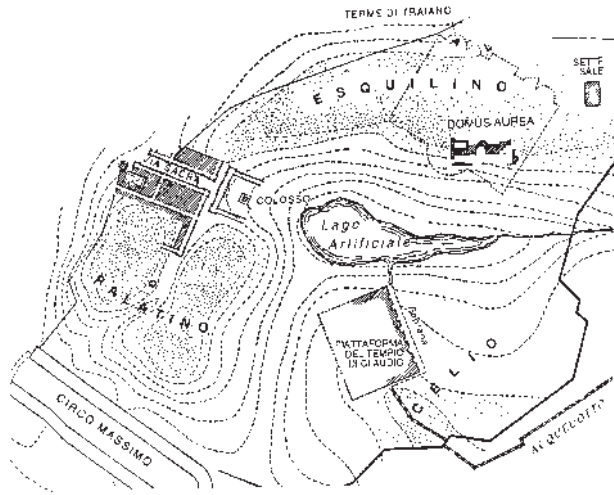
Domus Aurea:
The "Hall of the Masks"

modern via Claudia) with great niches and a colonnaded facade. Suetonius wrote that around the lake "there were cultivated fields, pastures, vineyards, woods and a multitude of domestic and wild animals of every species". The buildings consisted of different complexes that were nonetheless connected among themselves. A large porticoed vestibule was located on the summit of the Velia. At its centre was a colossal bronze



Domus Transitoria, that is "of passage". It was rebuilt after the fire and its scarce remains are now below the structures of the palace of Domitian, built later. The remains include a large circular hall initially covered with a dome and located in a rectangular basin which may correspond to one of the *cenationes*, or banquet halls mentioned by Suetonius. Finally, the Oppian hill was excavated and terraced so that

Marble head of Nero



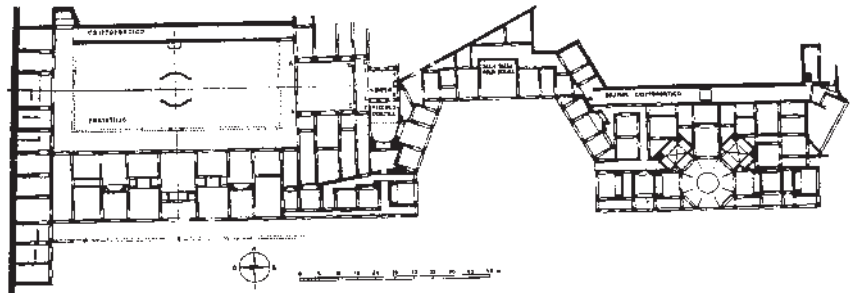
The urban area occupied by the Domus Aurea



Domus Aurea: Entrance for visitors

the architects Severus and Celer could raise the main building that extended from east to west for almost 300 metres and with a maximum depth of 60 metres. This section was raised on at least two levels and had an open porticoed facade along the southern side overlooking the lake. It consisted of three different nuclei between two large rectangular peristyles and on the sides of two large pentagonal twin courts. The different nuclei were interconnected by the porticoed facade and by long cryptoporticus along the entire north-facing side that also served as an "interspace" for the excavated hill. Each nucleus housed numerous rooms with different floor plans and uses, arranged in a regular layout. A great octagonal hall, still perfectly preserved and situated at the centre of the entire complex, was surrounded by a ring of other rooms.

Domus Aurea: Plan of the main building on the Colle Oppio



The dome was placed directly above the octagon, without "pendentives". The hall is commonly identified with the *cenatio rotunda* that according to Suetonius rotated "on itself day and night, like the world". This seems to indicate the presence of a hydraulic ball-bearing mechanism. Suetonius adds that "in the rest of the construction everything was covered with gold and adorned with gems and mother of pearl; the ceilings of the banquet halls had moving ivory panels with holes through which flowers and perfumes were scattered... the bath rooms had sulphurous water and sea water". This information sheds light on Nero's exclamation on occasion of the inauguration of his new abode, still largely incomplete at the time: "Finally I can start living like a man!". All this magnificence had a short life. A few years later, in June of 68, after the death of the emperor and the troubled months of civil war that followed, Vespasian reduced the size of the gigantic complex. He divided and partially dismantled it "to return to the city what had been taken from it". The lake was consequently drained in order to erect the Colosseum in its place, while the building on the Oppian hill, perhaps only briefly inhabited by Titus before he succeeded his father, was abandoned. The complex was later seriously damaged by fire and eventually interred and used as a "foundation" for the great baths that Trajan built on the Oppian hill.

Not much is left of the great villas of the city outskirts, swept away by historical events or erased by urban development and transformation. Of many there are only memories or at the most the possibility of identifying their location through quotations in ancient sources. Others have left “monumental” traces, almost without exception suffocated in the oppressive embrace of the modern city. Still others have survived only in scattered and heterogeneous elements of architectural structures or decorations now on display in museums.

The Villa of Scipio no longer exists. It was probably located on the slope of the Quirinal hill facing the Campus Martius, more or less where the largo Magnanapoli is today. Nothing is left of the Villa of Pompey later of Mark Anthony, that must have been in the heart of the Campus Martius, in the area nowadays included between the Monte Giordano and Campo de’ Fiori. The magnificent Villa of Caesar in Trastevere, on the slopes of the Janiculum towards the *via Portuensis* and the river, is also irretrievably lost. It was here that Cleopatra and her son Caesarion resided between 46 and 44 BC, and where Caesar in 45 BC offered lavish banquets to thousands of guests to celebrate his triumph.

Nothing remains of the neighbouring Villa of Mark Anthony, perhaps around the area of today’s piazza San Cosimato. The same fate overtook the Villa of Agrippa that occupied the section of the Campus Martius between the Pantheon and the Tiber and included a small wood (in the area where Domitian built his *Odeum*, close to piazza Navona). The Villa of Asinio Pollone on the Appian Way where Caracalla erected his great baths, is also lost.

Nothing is left of the villas of the two famous and wealthy freedmen of Claudius and Nero, Pallante and Epafrodito, that rose on the high ground of the Esquiline, east of the modern piazza Vittorio Emanuele. The

THE VILLAS OF THE CITY OUTSKIRTS

THE VILLAS OF THE CITY OUTSKIRTS

Villa of Domitia (perhaps Domitia Longina, wife of Domitian) was located on the right bank of the Tiber, in the area later occupied by the mausoleum of Hadrian, now Castel Sant’Angelo, but nothing remains.

The Villa of the Farnesina

Considerable sections of the wall and ceiling decorations in fresco and stucco, belonging to different rooms of the Villa of the Farnesina, are now on display in the Museo Nazionale Romano, at Palazzo Massimo. The villa itself

Villa of the Farnesina:
Wall with fresco
in “cubicle B”



THE VILLAS OF THE CITY OUTSKIRTS

rose on the right bank of the river Tiber, in correspondence to the 16th century villa of the same name. The substantial remains of the building - commonly known as the "Farnesina"- were found and partially excavated but then reinterred or destroyed, around 1880, during the construction of the embankments of the river. Datable from the second half of the first century AD, the villa was initially attributed to Clodia, sister of the tribune Publius Claudius and celebrated by Catullus with the name of Lesbia. At present, it seems more likely that the occasion for its construction was the marriage of Agrippa to Julia, daughter of Augustus, in 19 BC. The painted decorations, full of motifs and references to recently conquered Egypt, certainly date from that time. The villa was not used for long and was in fact abandoned owing to the constant devastating floods of the Tiber. As far as it is possible to establish, it had a main central body in the shape of a hemicycle with the convex side facing the river and two symmetrical structures on the sides. These had a loggia also overlooking the river and were connected by a long cryptoporticus that opened onto a large room aligned with the hemicycle and symmetrically flanked by minor chambers probably arranged around two courtyards. The wall paintings are many and well preserved. They feature monochrome surfaces within architectural "frames", consisting of extremely slender elements and small pictures at the centre. Or else they represent complex and scenographic architectural partitions that seem almost to open

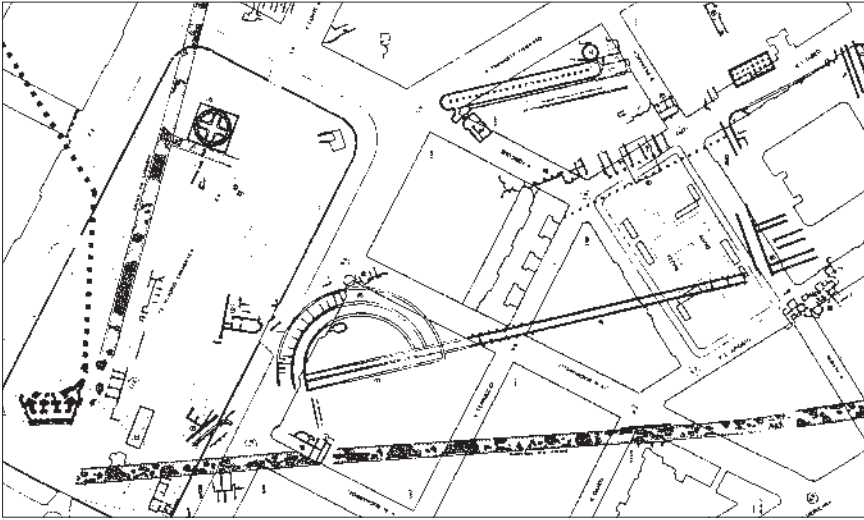
at the centre, as if from a window, onto great paintings of classical inspiration, flanked by genre scenes. The accessory decoration is also remarkable. It is executed with masterly skill and made up of minute elements (threadlike candelabra, foliage, garlands, acroteria, figurines of caryatides and winged victories) or "miniaturistic" figurative friezes placed above the wainscoting adorned with geometric and vegetative motifs. The signature of Seleukos, a Syrian-Greek painter, is still visible on one of the walls.

The Villa of the Lamia

The remains of the Villa of the Lamia are also preserved in a museum. They comprise a remarkable group of statues found in excavations in the area of the villa in 1874, and now in the Capitoline Museums. The most significant are the Anadiomene Venus

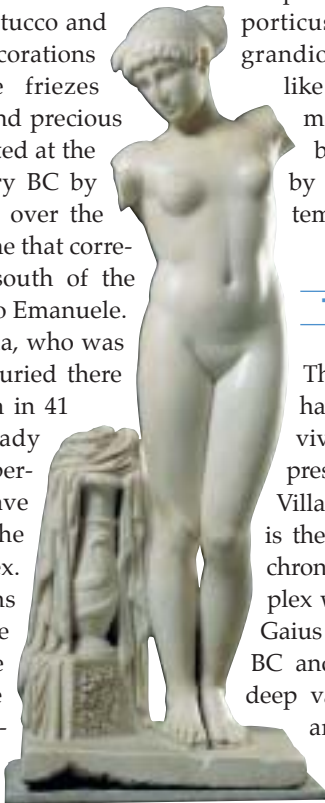
Villa of the Lamia:
Bust of Commodus
as Hercules between
two Tritons
(Capitoline Museums)





Area of the Villa of the Lamia on the Esquiline

(known as Esquiline Venus) and two related female figures, a recumbent Dionysus and a portrait of Commodus as Hercules between two busts of Tritons. There is also a splendid floor inlaid with alabaster along with elements of architectural decoration in gilded stucco and other sumptuous decorations with gilded bronze friezes studded with gems and precious stones. The villa, created at the end of the 1st century BC by Elio Lamia, stretched over the plateau of the Esquiline that corresponds to the area south of the present piazza Vittorio Emanuele. At the time of Caligula, who was briefly and secretly buried there after his assassination in 41 AD, it had already become imperial property. Nero is likely to have included it in the Domus Aurea complex. Numerous remains found during the building boom of the late 1800s, were destroyed or reinterred. The ruins belonged to different

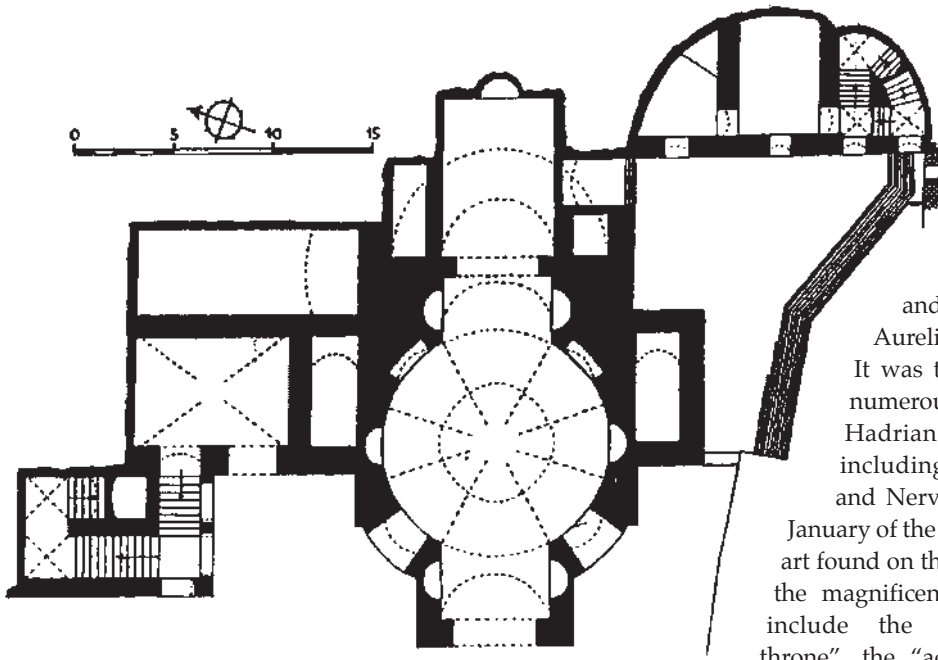


structures scattered amidst the greenery and adapted to the elevation of the terrain. The strictly residential section was situated between the modern piazza Vittorio Emanuele, piazza Dante and via Emanuele Filiberto. The complex included porticoes, cryptoporticus, baths, cisterns and a grandiose “*nymphaeum*” shaped like the cavea of a theatre (95 metres in diameter), closed by a long portico and served by a complex hydraulic system.

The Villa of Sallust

The “monumental” ruins of half a dozen villas have survived in varying conditions of preservation and visibility. The Villa of Sallust (*Horti Sallustiani*) is the first among them, also for chronological reasons. The complex was created by the historian Gaius Sallustius Crispus after 44 BC and extended over the wide, deep valley between the Quirinal and the Pincio (the area included today between the Aurelian walls, via Veneto,

Villa of the Lamia:
“Venere Esquilina”
(Centrale Montemartini)



Villa of Sallust:
Plan of the central building

via Venti Settembre and via Piave) with a stream, the *Aqua Sallustiana*, flowing through it. The valley was entirely filled in at the end of the 1800s. The

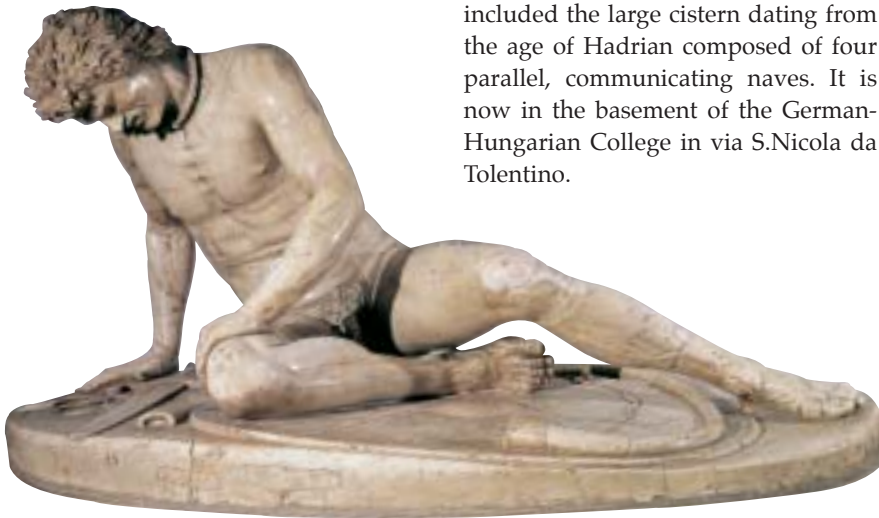
villa probably became imperial property at the time of Tiberius. It was enlarged, embellished and restored especially by Hadrian in the 2nd century AD and probably again by Aurelian in the 3rd century. It was the favorite resort of numerous emperors besides Hadrian and Aurelian, including Nero, Vespasian, and Nerva who died there in January of the year 98 AD. Works of art found on the site are evidence of the magnificence of the villa and include the famous "Ludovisi throne", the "acrolith" (a colossal statue of a female goddess) also known as Ludovisi, the Niobe and probably the Dying Gaul and the Gaul committing suicide. The obelisk found there

Villa of Sallust:
Ruins in Piazza Sallustio





too, was almost certainly erected by Aurelian. It was recovered in 1735 and after being transported to the Lateran, was placed in front of the church of the SS. Trinità dei Monti by pope Pius VI in 1789. The villa always remained one of the most celebrated and admired in the city but it was almost entirely destroyed during the "sack" of the Goths led by Alaric who entered into the city through the nearby Salaria gate. The imposing remains of what must have been the main edifice are visible today at the centre of piazza



Sallustio, up to 35 metres below the street level. The different sections of the villa alternated with vast green areas. The main edifice was completely reconstructed at the time Hadrian. It appears to be developed on two levels around a large *rotunda* of the diameter of 11.20 metres, and a "shell-shaped" vault. The walls had niches that were originally covered with a wainscoting of marble slabs and stucco in the upper sections. The hall is preceded by a vestibule and flanked by two rooms (maybe *nymphaea*). At the far end, past a room that was symmetrical to the vestibule and had two niches in the walls, there was a large rectangular hall with a small apse, a barrel vault and two smaller chambers on the sides. Other remains of the villa are visible within the confines of the American Embassy (part of a cryptoporticus with wall paintings) and in via Lucullo (section of wall with niches). The villa probably also included the large cistern dating from the age of Hadrian composed of four parallel, communicating naves. It is now in the basement of the German-Hungarian College in via S.Nicola da Tolentino.

THE VILLAS OF THE CITY OUTSKIRTS

Villa of Sallust:
The Obelisk
of Trinità dei Monti



Villa of Sallust:
Relief with
the birth of Aphrodite,
known as "Trono Ludovisi"
(Museo Nazionale Romano –
Palazzo Altemps)

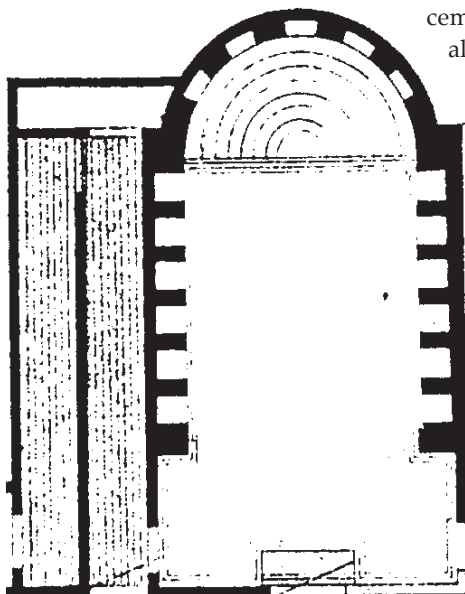
Villa of Sallust:
The Dying Gaul
(Capitoline Museums)

The Villa of Maecenas

The Villa of Maecenas (*Horti Maecenatis*) also survives in monumental ruins. The area had been previously occupied by the ancient cemetery of the city,

almost entirely abandoned and in extremely bad repair. The villa was built on the Esquiline after the great works of reclamation that Maecenas himself promoted around 30 BC. These involved the interment of the cemetery and the leveling of the embankment of the republican walls (that were partially dismantled and partially incorporated into the new structures) and led to the transformation of the high ground of the hill, past the crowded neighbourhoods, into a continuous series of splendid villas. The Villa of Maecenas was inherited by Augustus and became the residence of Tiberius, not yet emperor, on his return from the voluntary exile in Rhodes, in 2 AD. Nero later incorporated it into the Domus Aurea. All that remains is a vast half buried hall, 10.60 by 24.40 metres, accessible by means of a sloping ramp. When found and excavated in 1874 at the centre of today's largo Leopardi, it was named "auditorium of Maecenas". It is more accurate to call it a nymphaeum or better still, a summer triclinium. It was located at the centre of a group of residential buildings, partially uncovered during excavations and then demolished. In agreement

with the excavations, it can be assumed that the triclinium was the meeting place of the circle of poets and men of letters that Maecenas had gathered around him and that included, among others, Virgil, Horace, Cornelius Gallus and Propertius. The six rectangular niches along the longer walls were frescoed with trees and fountains behind fences, creating the illusion of windows opening on a garden. The far end wall was entirely occupied by an exedra, with five niches in the upper section and six wide concentric steps in the lower section that formed a kind of theatre cavea. Water came out of holes in the walls (closed in later times) and flowed down marble-covered steps with the effect of a waterfall. The opposite side of the hall probably had a door at the centre, flanked by windows overlooking the view toward the Alban hills. The upper sections of the longer sides above the niches and the section of the exedra below the niches, were entirely fres-



Plan of the Auditorium
of Maecenas

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Auditorium of Maecenas:
Fresco (detail)





Auditorium of Maecenas:
Interior

coed with a low frieze representing Dionysian and genre scenes against a black background, surmounted by vermilion red areas adorned with foliage motifs. The original mosaic floor had very fine tiles and a double frame in encaustic painting. In later times it was substituted with slabs of marble.

The Villa of Agrippina

The fortuitous discovery of remains of the Villa of Agrippina (*Horti Agrippinae*) in August of 1999, in the course of the construction of a parking lot in the Janiculum, filled the local newspapers with heated polemics on the eve of the Jubilee of the year 2000. The villa belonged to Agrippina, the daughter of Agrippa and Augustus' daughter Julia, who



married Germanicus and became the mother of the emperor Caligula. The complex stretched over various "terraces" on the right bank of the Tiber, between the river, the Janiculum and the Vatican Field. It developed in particular on the northern extremity of the high ground known in modern times as Collina di Santo Spirito- Hill of the Holy Spirit, now occupied by the complex of the "De Propaganda Fide" College (College for the Propagation of Faith). At his mother's death in 33 AD, Caligula inherited the villa and built a circus, later known as the "circus of Gaius and Caligula", on the northern boundary of the property (in the area that today extends from piazza San Pietro past the Vatican Basilica). Caligula had an obelisk brought from Egypt in 37 AC and placed on the *spina* of the circus. It was still standing in 1586 (on

Roman coins
with the effigies
of Agrippina and Caligula

THE VILLAS OF THE CITY OUTSKIRTS

the side of the Sacristy of St. Peter) and then moved to the centre of the piazza San Pietro. The villa later became the property of Nero, who opened it to give refuge to the people who lost their homes in the fire of 64 AD. It also became the site of the martyrdom of the apostle Peter and of the Christians whom Nero blamed for the fire.

Numerous remains unearthed in the area since the mid 1700s and attributed to the Villa of Agrippina have rarely been preserved (for example, beneath the hospital of Santo Spirito). The remains found in 1999 (and partially destroyed) belonged to various rooms with plastered walls frescoed in the so-called Fourth Style (white backgrounds, slender stylized architectural elements on different levels, small genre paintings of fantastic small figurines, little birds, and floral motifs), dating from the 2nd century AD.

The Villa of Domitia Lucilla

The numerous and scattered remains of buildings discovered between 1959

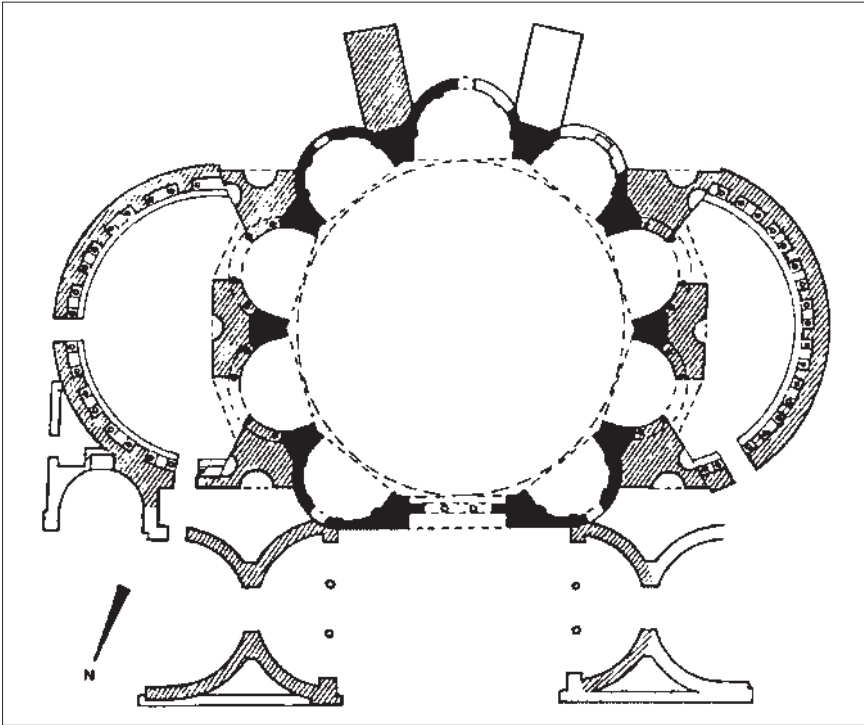
and 1964 in the area of the square and the hospital of Saint John Lateran have been attributed with near certainty to the Villa of Domitia Lucilla, mother of Marcus Aurelius, who was born there. The complex, consisting of various structures dating between the 1st and 4th centuries AD has been the object of controversial interpretations and hypotheses. In particular, below the Corsia Mazzoni of the Hospital, there are rooms probably corresponding to a bath complex, and a peristyle with a pool at the centre that was later substituted with a section of wall. Marble reliefs representing the Temple of Vesta and the Vestal Virgins (also found during the excavations) may have belonged to it. It is thought to be the original base of the equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius that was located in this area before being transferred to the Capitoline to 1538. The villa was most likely inherited by Marcus Aurelius and then by his son Commodus, thus becoming imperial property.

The Villa of Gallienus

The imposing ruin of the so-called Temple of Minerva Medica, by the Stazione Termini, along the via Giolitti, in correspondence to via P. Micca, is commonly indicated as monumental evidence of the Villa of Licinius Gallienus, emperor from 260 to 268 AD. Nonetheless, a very recent study attributes the monument- that probably dates from the era of Constantine- to the nearby villa of "Old Hope". Known by the modern name of *Horti Liciniani*, the villa of Gallienus must have been on the highest part of the Esquiline, included today between the church of Santa Bibiana and Porta Maggiore, at one time occupied by a burial ground, later reclaimed. Ancient

Villa of Domitia Lucilla:
Equestrian statue
of Marcus Aurelius
at the Campidoglio





Villa of Gallienus:
Planimetry of the complex
of the Temple
of Minerva Medica

sources describe it as being such a vast complex that the whole court could find lodgings when the emperor resided there. The construction of the Aurelian walls left out a large part of it. As far as the Temple of Minerva is concerned, it was actually a large hall used as living quarters, for meetings and for business. It was partially heated in the winter and later made more pleasant in the summer with the addition of two large exedrae, opposite one another and with fountains. The hall appears decagonal on the outside and circular inside (25 metres in diameter). The walls, covered at one time with mosaics and slabs of porphyry, are subdivided into a series of deeply recessed niches. Ten large, arched windows opened above them. The hall was covered with an "umbrella vault" at a maximum height of 33 metres, at least partly covered with mosaics. It collapsed almost entirely in 1828. The niches contained statues, some of

which have been found on different occasions, along with other statues, columns and capitals. The most remarkable are those dating from between the end of the 4th and the



Villa of Gallienus:
Temple known as
"Minerva Medica"

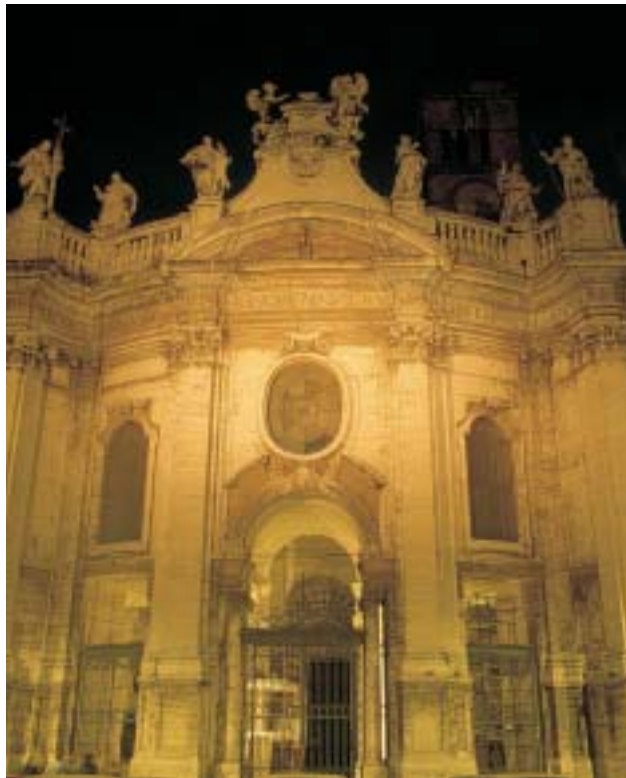
beginning of the 5th century AD, now part of the Capitoline Collections. They represent two magistrates wearing their togas about to launch the *mappa* that marked the beginning of the chariot races in the circus.

The Villa of the Sessorium

The villa known as “Old Hope” (*Horti Spei Veteris*) still survives in significant ruins. The peculiar name comes from a toponym that in turn derived from the ancient Temple of Hope, built in the first half of the 5th century BC in the area traversed by the *Via Labicana*

Severus, continued under Caracalla and was completed in the first decades of the 3rd century AD by Elagabalus. It fell into disuse after his death in 222 and was partially damaged by the construction of the Aurelian walls even though the circuit was designed to include it. The villa was brought to new life with substantial building activity at the time of Constantine, when his mother Helen chose it as her residence. The villa was frequented until the early 5th century AD. In later times it was abandoned and then became in part property of the Church. Among the more or less substantial ruins that have survived, the most

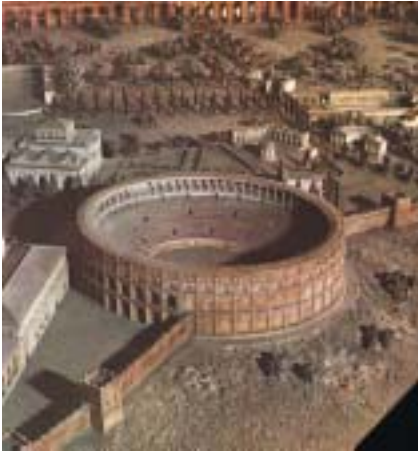
important is the great palatine hall that Helen transformed into the *Basilica Jerusalem* that later became Santa Croce in Gerusalemme. The rectangular hall (36.50 by 22 metres and 22 in height) was originally open on all sides with a series of arches on pilasters surmounted by a row of windows and the entrance was on one of the long sides. When it was transformed into a church, the hall was isolated from the rest of the palace and every connection closed off. The



Basilica of Santa Croce
In Gerusalemme

and later famous for the presence of the Porta Maggiore. After the 4th century AD, it was also indicated with the name *Sessorium*, probably from *sedes*, in the sense of “residence”. The construction began under Septimius

hall was given an apse on one of the short sides (the entrance was transferred to the opposite short wall) and divided internally into three spans with transversal, open walls with arches on columns or pilasters. It was



two parallel rows of six connecting chambers, the remains of which can be seen at the intersection between via Sommelier and via Eleniana. In the vicinity of the hall converted into a church there is a small “court” amphitheatre connected to the hall by means of an open corridor 300 metres long (of which some traces remain). The amphitheatre became known as “castrense”; perhaps when the villa was abandoned it was used by the nearby barracks of the *equites singulares*, the imperial equestrian guard.

THE VILLAS OF THE CITY OUTSKIRTS

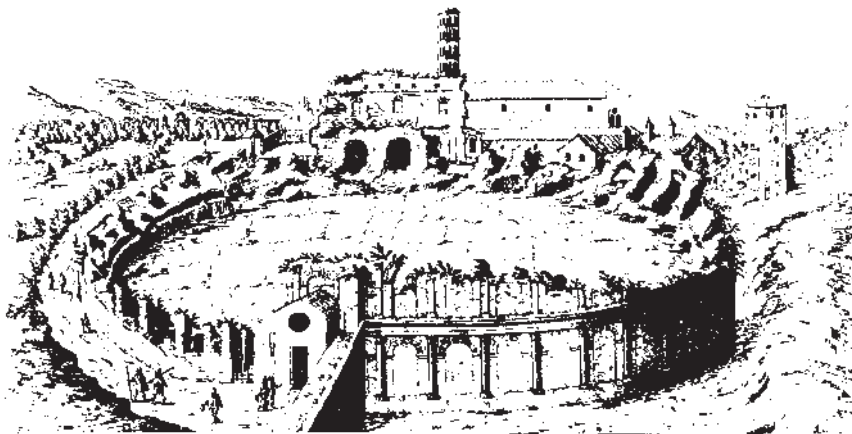
The Castrense Amphitheatre
In the scale model
of ancient Rome
(Museo della Civiltà Romana)

enriched by a smaller nave that was obtained by incorporating a side corridor. By the church, that now has the aspect of the 18th century restructuring, in the area of the Museo Storico dei Granatieri, there are the remains of a sumptuous hall with an apse. Nothing remains instead of the baths, built at the beginning of the 3rd century AD, destroyed by a fire and rebuilt by Helen between 323 and 326 AD and thus known as *Terme Elenianae*. The baths stood in the area now traversed by via Sommeiller. Their substantial remains were dismantled at the time of pope Sixtus V during the building of the via Felice (today via Santa Croce in Gerusalemme). At a brief distance there is a large cistern composed of



Almost circular in plan, with the two axes of 88 and 75.80 metres, the amphitheatre had two levels of arches

Castrense Amphitheatre:
Ruins incorporated in the
Aurelian Walls



Castrense Amphitheatre
In an engraving by Du Perac
(16th century)



The Aurelian Walls
In Viale Castrense

on pilasters framed by Corinthian semi-columns on the first level and pilasters on the second. Above this was a filled-in wall with windows having travertine brackets to fasten the poles that held the fabric of the “*velarium*”. At the time of Aurelian, the amphitheatre was incorporated into the new city walls with the closing of the arches involved and the lowering of the external level by roughly two metres. This guaranteed the preservation of three quarters of the perimeter of the building, especially around via Nola and viale Castrense. Much less remains instead of the circus built by Elagabalus (who loved riding chariots in it personally) that was named *Circus Varianus*, from the emperor’s proper name, Vario Avito. The circus extended for about 500 metres parallel to the nearby *Via Labicana* (modern via Casilina), with the longitudinal axis more or less corresponding to the modern via Acireale and via Oristano, and the curved side located past via Ozieri. The “*spina*”

was adorned by the obelisk that Hadrian had dedicated to Antinous (probably on the Palatine, in the gardens of the *Adonea*). The obelisk was found, collapsed, in the 1600s and was initially transported to Palazzo Barberini, then moved to the Vatican, and finally erected in the Pincio gardens by pope Pius VII in 1882. The circus was abandoned when the Aurelian walls cut it in half, leaving two thirds of it outside of their circuit. The remaining part inside the walls was used in different ways and substantial ruins have recently been brought to light during excavations behind the basilica of Santa Croce.

The Villas of the Pincio

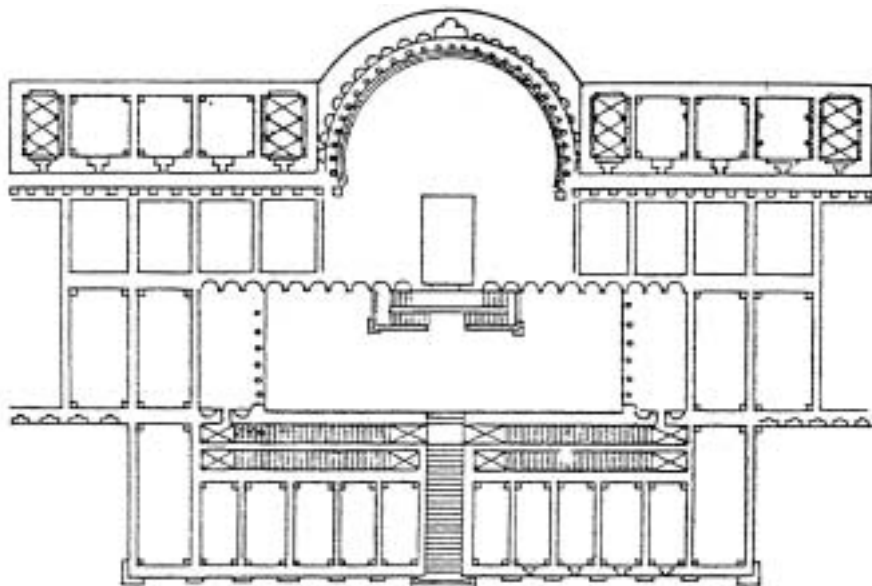
Ancient sources mention various villas but in most cases the names change according to the succession of owners, such as the villas of the Domitii, the Acilii, the Anicii and finally of the Pincii, the family who bought most of

the hill in the 4th century AD and after whom it was named. In any case, the most ancient villa, as well as one of the most ancient in Rome, was the one created in the 1st century BC by Lucius Licinius Lucullus (*Horti Luculliani*) who built it with the proceeds from the spoils of the war against Mithridates. The villa extended for about 20 hectares on the summit of the hill and over two of the western slopes. The main section stood in the area included today between Trinità dei Monti and Villa Medici. It was inherited by the son of Lucullus (who must have completed it) and then ceded to Marcus Valerius Messalla Corvinus, an illustrious figure of the Augustan era. In 47 AD, the villa belonged to Valerius Asiaticus who was accused of conspiracy against Claudius and forced to commit suicide. It consequently became

the residence of Messalina, who had done everything she could to acquire it but who enjoyed it for only a few months because she was assassinated a year later. When the emperors started favouring the more comfortable and splendid Villa of Sallust (also for security reasons owing to its proximity to the barracks of the pretorian guard), the villa must have been sold to private citizens, perhaps at the time of Trajan. In the 2nd and 3rd centuries it must have been the property of the *Acilii Glabriones*. Between the 4th and 5th centuries it belonged to the *Anicii* and then to the *Pincii*, but after the sack of Rome in 410, it became imperial property once more. At the beginning of the 6th century king Theodoricus ordered the spoliation of the villa but in the same century it was used again as a residence by the Byzantine general Belisarius.



Bust of Lucullus



Plan of the Horti Luculliani

THE VILLAS OF THE CITY OUTSKIRTS

Villa Medici on the Pincio,
on the site of the ancient
Villa of Lucullus



Today almost nothing visible is left, but what was seen in the past, what remains below the structures and the gardens of the Villa Medici and the Convent of the Sacred Heart at Trinità dei Monti, and what has been found in recent excavations, not yet completed, allows us to “reconstruct” the main features of the villa and its overall structure. The complex was developed with a series of “terraces” connected with ramps of steps facing the Campus Martius and the course of the river Tiber. Its most renowned element was on the summit of the entire complex and consisted of an imposing curvilinear structure (almost 200 metres in diameter) that covered the entire area included

ensured the water supply later obtained with double connections to the *Aqua Claudia* and the *Anio Novus*. A large still visible cistern having the capacity of 1000 square metres was instead built during the late 4th century phase. Recent excavations under Villa Medici led to the exploration of important structures including a large apse (14 metres in diameter) provided with a heating plant, richly decorated and covered with marble, dating from the time of Honorius. In the basement of the Convent of

the Sacred Heart there is a complex of six chambers connected to three different corridors and to a cryptoporticus. On an upper level there are rooms with mosaic floors. Below the nearby Biblioteca Hertziana, in the via Gregoriana, there is a long foundation wall of the late republican period later transformed (perhaps in the Julio-Claudian era) with a series of niches into a nymphaeum. Its wall was decorated with mythological and sacred landscapes in glass paste mosaic. The structures known as “Muro Torto”, along the avenue with the same name, belonged to the villa and were substructures of the northern section.

Substructures of the Pincio
in Viale del Muro Torto

covered the entire area included between the Villa Medici and Trinità dei Monti. It probably had porticoes and was supported by a massive terraced wall (still partially visible in the 1500s). The structure is commonly identified with the “Nymphaeum of Jupiter”, mentioned by sources and perhaps dating from the period in which the villa belonged to Valerius Atticus. A complex system of canalizations carved out of the tufa and ending inside Villa Medici initially



GLOSSARY

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Apse: A covered semicircular or polygonal architectural structure with a vaulted recess

Acroterion: An ornament placed at the apex of a temple structure

Agger: Rampart, embankment

Alabaster: A fine grained gypsum or calcite, easy to work with

Ambulacrum/ambulatory: A sheltered place to walk in, normally in the shape of a portico

Atrium: A large entrance hall in a public or private building. In a Roman house, the porticoed courtyard onto which the rooms opened

Basilica: A public Roman building with a rectangular plan used for meetings, business transactions and the administration of justice

Cal(i)darium: In a bath complex, the heated room with a large pool for bathing

Caryatid: A supporting column sculptured in the form of a female figure

Cavea: The seating complex of an ancient theatre or amphitheatre

Cinnabar: A bright red mineral used in antiquity for pigment

Cistern: A brickwork structure for the storing of rainwater

Corinthian: One of the classical architectural orders, characterized by capitals with acanthus leaves

Cryptoporticus: In Roman architecture, a partially underground covered portico

Hemicycle: A semi-circular structure in a building or in an architectural complex

Encaustic: Ancient painting technique consisting of pigment mixed with beeswax and fixed with heat on a plaster surface after its application

Exedra: A semicircular structure in public and private Roman buildings

Frigidarium: An unheated room with a cold water pool in a bath complex

Lacunar: A recessed panel in a ceiling

Mausoleum: A large stately tomb, the name derives from the sepulchre of Mausolus at Halicarnassus (4th century BC)

Nymphaeum: A building of varying shape and decoration, usually containing one or more fountains

Pavilion: An isolated building in an open space, used for different purposes

Pendentive: The section of vaulting between the dome and the walls of the square structure that supports it

Peristyle: An open space enclosed by colonnades, common to Greek and Roman buildings

Porphyry: Precious ornamental material obtained from volcanic rocks

Portico: A porch or walkway with rows of columns on one or more of its sides

Pronaos: The portico that precedes a Greek or Roman building

Raceme: In Roman art, a stylized decorative motif with foliage scrolls and sometimes symbolical elements

Specchiatura: An architectural element consisting of a recessed panel, usually outlined by moulding

Taberna: In the Roman world, a shop often connected to living quarters

Terme: Public buildings with rooms and equipment for hot and cold baths, massage and physical exercise

Triclinium: The dining room in a Roman house consisting of couches along three of the walls

Velarium: An awning consisting of various sections of cloth spread across Roman theatres and amphitheatres to shield the spectators from the sun

Vestibule: The open space that precedes a hall or a complex of rooms

Vault: An arched structure serving to cover a space that differs according to the successions or crossing of the arches themselves

SITES OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Addresses, opening hours, directions from Termini Train Station

DOMUS AUREA

Via della Domus Aurea
Gardens of the Colle Oppio
Admission: € 5,00 + € 1,50
Reservation required
Tel 06 39967700
Open: 9.00am-7.45pm
Closed Tuesday – Bus n. 714

VILLA OF THE FLAVIAN CHRISTIANS – MAUSOLEUM OF HELEN

Via Casilina, Km.5 (Tor Pignattara) Bus n.105

VILLA OF THE GORDIANI

Access from Via Prenestina and Via Venezia Giulia – Tram n.14

VILLA OF THE QUINTILII

Via Appia Nuova, 1092
Tel 06 39967700
Admission: € 4,00
Opening hours: winter 9.00am-3.30pm – summer 9.00am-5.30pm
Closed Monday
Metro Line A – “Colli Albani” stop then Bus n.664

VILLA OF THE SETTE BASSI

(Osteria del Curato)
Metro Line A- “Anagnina” stop

VILLA OF THE SESSORIUM

Remains of the hall with apse in the area of the Museo Storico dei Granatieri di Sardegna
Piazza Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, 7
Tel. 06 7028287
Opening hours: from Monday to Friday 9.00am-4.00pm Saturday and holidays only with Reservation
Remains of the Castrense Amphitheatre
Viale Castrense/ Via Nola
Basilica di S. Croce in Gerusalemme
Piazza S. Croce in Gerusalemme,12
Tel 06 7029279 - Bus n.16

VILLA OF THE VIGNACCE

Via Lemonia (Parco degli Acquedotti)
Metro Line A “Giulio Agricola” stop

VILLA OF DOMITIA LUCILLA

Remains of the bath complex and various structures in the basement of the S. Giovanni Hospital
Via dell’Amba Aradam, 9
Open: only on request
Tel 0677053011- fax 06 77053495
Bus n.16

VILLA OF GALLIENUS

Temple known as Minerva Medica (Via Giolitti/ Via Pietro Micca)
Tram n.14 or a few minutes on foot

VILLA OF MAXENTIUS

Circus of Maxentius and Tomb of Romulus
Via Appia Antica,153 – tel 06 7801324
Admission: € 2,60
Opening hours: winter 9.00am-5.00pm – summer 9.00am-1.00pm
Closed Monday – Bus n. 714
up to Piazza Numa Pompilio and then Bus n.118

VILLA OF MAECENAS

Auditorium – Largo Leopardi,2
06 4873262
Admission: € 2,60
Opening hours: 9.00am-1.30pm
Closed Monday – Bus n.16

VILLA OF SALLUST

Remains in the centre of Piazza Sallustio
Bus n.910
Underground cistern in the interior of the German Hungarian Pontifical College
Via S. Nicola da Tolentino, 13
Tel 06421191 – fax 06 42119125
Visits by appointment
Metro Line A “ Barberini” stop

MUSEUMS THAT DISPLAY FINDINGS FROM THE ANCIENT VILLAS

Addresses, opening hours and directions from Termini Train Station

CAPITOLINE MUSEUMS:

"Dying Gaul" (Villa of Sallust),

"Magistrates wearing their togas"
(Villa of Gallienus)

Piazza del Campidoglio

Tel 06 67102475

Admission: € 7,80

Opening hours: 9.00am-8.00pm

Closed Monday

Buses n.64/40/70/H/170

CENTRALE MONTEMARTINI:

"Esquiline Venus" (Villa of Lamia)

Via Ostiense, 106 – tel 065748038

Admission: € 4,20

Opening hours: 9.30am-7pm Closed
Monday

Metro B Line "Piramide" stop then bus
n.23

MUSEO NAZIONALE ROMANO – PALAZZO ALTEMPS:

**"Ludovisi Throne", "Acrolith", "Gaul
committing suicide"** (Villa of Sallust)

Piazza Sant' Apollinare, 44

Tel 06 39967700

Admission: € 5,00

Opening hours: 9.00am-7.45pm

Closed Monday – Bus n.70

MUSEO NAZIONALE ROMANO – PALAZZO MASSIMO ALLE TERME:

Rooms with frescoes (Villa of Livia
and Villa of the Farnesina),

"Niobe" (Villa of Sallust)

Largo di Villa Peretti,1

Tel 06 39967700

Admission: € 6,00

Opening hours: 9.00am-7.45pm

Closed Monday

A few minutes on foot

VATICAN MUSEUMS

"Augustus of Prima Porta" (Villa of
Livia), **"Colossal head of Julia
Domna"**, **"Ganymede and the Eagle"**,

"Tyche of Antioch" (Villa of the
Vignacce)

Viale Vaticano – tel. 06 69884947

Admission: € 12,00 reduced € 8,00

Opening hours: January-February
and November-December 8.45am-
1.45pm; from march to October
8.45am-4.45 pm

Closed Sunday and religious holidays.

Open with free admission every last
Sunday of the month.

Metro Line A "Cipro" stop

- The sites mentioned in the text not listed on these pages are not at present open to the public
- Opening times and admission prices may vary



Villa of Sallust:
Statue of Niobe
(Museo Nazionale Romano
– Palazzo Massimo
Alle Terme)



INFORMATION POINTS

Aeroporto Leonardo Da Vinci
(Arrivi Internazionali - Terminal B)

Largo Goldoni (Via del Corso)

Piazza San Giovanni in Laterano

Via Nazionale (Palazzo delle Esposizioni)

Piazza delle Cinque Lune (Piazza Navona)

Piazza Pia (Castel Sant'Angelo)

Piazza del Tempio della Pace (Fori Imperiali)

Piazza Sonnino (Trastevere)

Via dell'Olmata (Santa Maria Maggiore)

Piazza dei Cinquecento (Stazione Termini)

Stazione Termini (Galleria Gommata)

Via Marco Minghetti (Fontana di Trevi)



REGIONE LAZIO



PROVINCIA DI ROMA



COMUNE DI ROMA



AZIENDA DI PROMOZIONE TURISTICA DI ROMA

Via Parigi 11 - 00185 Roma
Tel. 06 488991 - Fax 0648899238

Visitor Center

Via Parigi 5

Tourist Information Service

Tel. 06 36004399

www.romaturismo.it