

Strong

The British School at Rome

(Faculty of Archaeology, History and Letters)

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ARCHÆOLOGICAL RESEARCH IN ITALY.

The Director of the British School at Rome, Dr. Ashby, who is at the Italian front with the British Red Cross, has asked me to take his place in presenting a short account of the archæological discoveries made in Italy since his last report (*The Times Literary Supplement*, May 11, 1916). He then gave it as his opinion that archæological research was not likely to be as entirely suspended in Italy during the war as in the rest of Europe, since in this country "the smallest excavation, even if undertaken from purely utilitarian motives, may disclose something of interest or importance"; and the events of the last eighteen months have fully justified the statement. No fresh systematic excavations have, of course, been started this year, any more than last, but all promising sites uncovered by either building or agricultural operations have been carefully watched and explored, while investigations begun before the war continue to be pushed forward.

OUTSIDE ROME.

In Rome the scene of excavation has naturally shifted somewhat from the familiar Forum and Palatine to the periphery and outskirts of the city, where many new works are in progress. The sporadic discoveries made in this manner have been so numerous that only the more important can be touched upon here. To the S.E. of the city, close to the Porta Maggiore and the Via Praenestina, a slight landslip under the broad railway track of the Rome-Naples line led a few months ago to the discovery, at a depth of fourteen metres, of a building of the second century A.D.; this is a superb arcaded hall (14m. by 8m.) of basilican plan, with atrium, apse, and a nave divided into three aisles by rows of pilasters. All available wall sur-

faces are covered with stucco decorations executed in a bold and rapid style; within the shell niche of the apse is the curious subject of Aphrodite (?) being pushed along the water by an Eros who stands on a rocky ledge, while a Triton holds out a sheet as if to receive the goddess; below the apsidal conch is represented a Nike holding the wreath of victory. The barrel vaults of nave and aisles are divided into innumerable panels depicting the trials and adventures of the soul in this world and its reward or punishment in the next; along the aisles, at the height of the impost, runs a broad frieze on which figures of *orantes* alternate with sacrificial and ritual objects and with symbols of resurrection and afterlife; and in the vestibule are stucco *tondi* that enframe Dionysiac scenes. Everything in the principal chamber is dazzling white, but the vestibule has a broad dado of Pompeian red, with brilliant figures of flowers and birds and a ceiling decoration in squares of exquisite sapphire blue. Various holes in ceilings and walls show that the basilica was rifled in the past, when the fine mosaic pavement was robbed of its square subject pictures, and the altar that stood against the apse disappeared, together with six low candelabra bases that have left their traces against the pilasters. The ancient entrance was to the left of the atrium, from a long corridor which, after winding round the back of the building, apparently debouched on a distant part of the Via Praenestina.

The total absence of any inscriptions makes it difficult to determine the exact purpose of the building; but from the subjects of the stuccoes, as well as from the secrecy of the approach, it seems reasonable to suppose that it was the hall of initiation

of some religious confraternity or *sodalitas*, connected with the Eleusinian or kindred mysteries. At present access to this impressive site is through a narrow hole at the top and down an almost vertical ladder to a depth of over 50 feet. The clearing has been carried out under incredible difficulties; overhead runs some of the heaviest railway traffic of Italy, so that every kind of precaution had to be taken that no disaster should happen either above ground or under. At first, till the basilica could be consolidated, every passing train brought down a shower of earth and loose stones upon the excavators. Both the Railway Administration, who at once reported the discovery, and who have taken the liveliest and most generous interest in the work of clearance, and Professors Colini and Gatti, who have directed the excavations, are to be congratulated upon the successful issue of their labours. In the same neighbourhood, again, three fine tombs of Republican date, with most of their portraits intact in their niches, were exposed at a corner of the Villa Wolkonsky, cut back to enlarge the new Viale di Santa Croce. These tombs, which happily are being restored *in situ*, are in line with a *columbarium* discovered many years ago under the same villa; they all apparently bordered an ancient road, which was probably the Via Caelimontana antiqua.

The investigations under the basilica of San Sebastiano on the Via Appia, on the spot traditionally connected with the temporary burial of SS. Peter and Paul, referred to in Dr. Ashby's last report, have been resumed with great vigour. In the lowest archaeological stratum, beneath the fourth-century *Basilica Apostolorum*, further *columbaria* and two more rooms of the Roman house partially uncovered last year under the presbytery have been cleared. The mural decorations of this house are among the finest examples yet known of Augustan and Claudio-Neronian painting; one, a sea-piece of singular beauty, represents a harbour, formed by a long pillared pier, with boats putting out to sea, and on the shore a *fête champêtre* that takes place beneath an awning stretched between a picturesque round tower and a huge tree. There is still considerable uncertainty as to what was the connexion between this Roman villa and the complicated building of third-century date under the nave of the basilica, which appears to have been a *triclia*, or "place of refreshment" for the use of the pilgrims, who, as the innumerable *graffiti* discovered here testify, came in crowds to visit a spot hallowed from the earliest times by memories of the two Apostles. Excavation here naturally presents considerable difficulties, since the magnificent seventeenth-century church

erected by Cardinal Scipione Borghese must at all costs be preserved intact; but when the work is finished we shall, as the latest Italian report points out, "at last be in possession of sure evidence for solving the still obscure problem as to the origin of the cult of the Apostles at the third mile of the Appian Way."

Excavation at Ostia continues steadily. A vast rectangular market-place divided into two courts by a central building has been uncovered north of the road between the Theatre and the Temple of Vulcan, considerably below the level of the Imperial city. Close by have been found further fragments of the local *fasti*, two pieces of which—in the Capitoline Museum and Vatican respectively—were discovered many years ago. The new instalment of this curious chronicle records the events of the years A.D. 36 to 38 and gives, *inter alia*, an account of the death of Tiberius at Misenum on March 16 of the year 37, of the transport of the body to Rome by the soldiery, and of the ceremonies of the funeral. Of the houses recently disengaged, one displays the novel feature of a long balcony running round two of its sides; another is remarkable for its well-preserved mural paintings, which include figures of poets, philosophers and female dancers. Among other Ostian finds are the fine fragment of a marble pavement, representing the Seasons; a little column of cipolino, with the image in relief of the Good Shepherd—one of the few Christian memorials found at Ostia—and a round altar with divinities carved in relief.

North of Rome, at Acqua Traversa, a considerable stretch of what appears to be the ancient Via Veientana has been laid bare; farther north, to the right of the same road after the divergence of the Via Clodia, an extensive Roman *Statio* has been explored, containing, besides large storerooms stocked with huge jars for wine, oil, and grain, a number of rooms and corridors, some with traces of wall-paintings. At Narce, in Faliscan territory, a large necropolis, dating from the sixth to fifth centuries B.C., has been brought to light. Excavations continue at Veii, where the foundations of the gate of the Acropolis have been uncovered as well as two strata of huts or *capanne*, the first belonging to an Italic people, the second to the Etruscan settlement. The site of a temple, tentatively called that of Apollo from the principal statue found there, has yielded a rich series of terra-cotta figures, which have been brought to the Museum of the Villa Giulia, where they bid fair to eclipse the older finds from Conca and Civita Castellana. The Apollo is of singular beauty; the unsympathetic material of terra-cotta has been so transformed by the use of colour

as to produce the effect of bronze and ivory ; the face, which was coloured red, has deepened with time to a rich brown, that contrasts with the creamy white of the delicately pleated tunic ; the long slit eyes have white eyeballs and black pupils ; the delicate facial oval, prominent chin and well-defined cheek-bones have the distinction of a fine archaic Greek head ; the complicated tresses of the hair and the treatment of the draperies are purely Ionian, and find their nearest analogy in the figure of the archaic drum from Ephesus at the British Museum. A beautiful head of Hermes, with long plaited hair and high conical winged cap, and various small heads of warriors were found at the same time. These Veientian figures are certainly the most important archaic works yet discovered on Italian soil, and the Museo di Villa Giulia is to be congratulated on this splendid addition to its treasures. The same Museum has also become possessed of the objects recently found in a tomb at Todi, the ancient Tuder—including a Greek vase signed by Pamphaios, and a fifth-century bronze helmet with eyebrows and frontlet outlined in silver and cheekpieces engraved with the figures of warriors in purest Aeginetan style.

IN ROME.

We now return from this survey of the principal excavations round about Rome to the city itself. Here the western extension of the Piazza Colonna, on which the Palazzo Piombino stood up to 1882, has been thoroughly explored before it is handed over to the modern builder. To every-one's surprise, instead of the *Porticus Vipsania* of Agrippa, which most authorities believed must occupy this site, a large group of *insulae* of Imperial date was revealed, the largest of which, on the line of the Via Lata (modern Corso) is a many-roomed building with engaged pilasters, bearing no resemblance whatsoever to a colonnaded portico. Recent finds in Piazza Colonna include a fine male portrait head of the period of Caracalla, and the charming head of a child, which from the treatment of the close-lying hair may be of Augustan date. In digging the foundations of a bank opposite the new façade of the Chamber of Deputies on the Monte Citorio, an interesting inscription came to light belonging to the basis of the statue of a *curator operum publicorum*.

In the course of investigations to ascertain the nature of the antique remains on the projected line of prolongation of the Via Arenula to the Corso Vittorio Emmanuele, further architectural members of the two temples in the Piazza San Niccolò dei Cesarini have been discovered ; the one, a circular peripteral temple, generally supposed to be that of Hercules Custos, is to be completely

disengaged and isolated as centre of a little piazza ; the other, a rectangular tufa temple which is built into the foundations of the church, must perforce remain underground. Both temples, besides having been drawn in the Renaissance by Antonio da Sangallo, appear on the ancient plan of Rome in the Conservatori Palace. The beautiful little temple of Republican date by the Tiber, generally called that of Fortuna Virilis, is likewise being isolated from the sordid houses built close up to it.

The official opening of the new *Passeggiata Archeologica* between the Coelian and the Baths of Caracalla, on the birthday of Rome (April 21) this year, marked in a sense the end of the cycle of operations connected with this part of the "Zona Monumentale." The next area to be cleared will presumably be that of the Imperial Fora, in accordance with the grandiose scheme of Corrado Ricci. The question of disengaging the remains of the Temple of Jupiter Capitolinus under the Palazzo Caffarelli, late seat of the German Embassy, is being carefully considered ; but at present no official fiat has gone forth, and it would be premature for any one in Rome to comment upon E. D.'s letters to *The Times* of September 14 and 18, under the heading "Delendum est Palatium." From an excellent monograph by Signor Valentino Leonardi on the history of the hill and its significance for Rome and Italy, published a few months ago, we learn that the Palazzo, where an Emperor—forgetful apparently of Caligula's fate—has dared to place his throne "in the very axis of the seat of Jupiter Optimus Maximus," was ill-omened from the first. The land it is built on was given by Charles V. about 1536 to one Ascanio Caffarelli, who had been his page for thirty years ; and Signor Leonardi marshals interesting evidence to show that the Emperor, besides being an interloper in Italian affairs, had no right to hand over for the erection of a private residence land which since the time of the Flavian dynasty had been respected as public property by the successive rulers of Rome. There is also no doubt that the Palazzo, though ascribed to a pupil of Vignola, is both gaunt and ugly, having probably been disfigured in the course of numerous transformations. It remains to be seen, however, whether all these will prove adequate reasons for removing, as E. D. suggests, a building which would be admirably adapted to civic purposes in the event of the Government's deciding to appropriate the site. Part of it, for instance, might be turned into an annex to the overcrowded Capitoline Museums, and the fine collection of antiques now uncomfortably lodged in the distant Antiquario Comunale might be transferred here with advantage.

Other discoveries in and outside Rome may be more briefly summed up. The magnificent Augustan gate near the Porta Tiburtina (San Lorenzo), built to carry over the road the triple aqueduct of the Marcia, Tepula and Julia, till lately buried almost to the springing of the vault, has been completely disengaged and isolated. Outside the ancient *Porta Portuensis* (Portese), close to the catacombs of Pontianus, an extensive Christian cemetery of sixth to seventh century date came to light, but had to be covered up again for the erection of new houses. Investigations under the large new railway offices lately built on part of the beautiful Villa Patrizi, in the Via Nomentana, close to the British Embassy, have shown the existence here, at a depth of 70ft., of ancient quarries from which was extracted the greyish tufa used for the Servian wall and the platform of the Temple of Jupiter Capitolinus; at a depth of 50ft. are pozzolana quarries that were worked in the Middle Ages; and above these again are the remains of a Roman villa of Imperial date. It is to be hoped that plans and sections may soon be available of these interesting superposed strata, where the medieval quarry is so curiously sandwiched between the early Roman workings and the Imperial villa. Finally, it may be noted that excavations in the *Domus aurea* of Nero have again resulted in important discoveries. These, however, it would be premature to disclose, beyond stating that they include a superb domed octagonal hall and a number of chambers with mural paintings that for freshness and beauty surpass anything yet found in Rome.

ITALY AND AFRICA.

Both at Sezze (ancient Setia), near Velletri, and at Siccii, in Tuscany, the remains of considerable Roman *thermae* have been laid bare; at Alife, an ancient Samnite city, a statuette of *Heracles bibax*, of the school of Lysippus, has been found; a striking discovery is reported from Fabriano, in Umbria, where an archaic Italic war chariot (*biga*), made apparently for use and not for mere ceremonial or sepulchral purposes, has been unearthed. This unique piece is now in the Museum of Ancona, well protected, we trust, from modern war attacks. A fine Roman head of Hadrianic date, recently added to the Naples Museum, comes from Santa Maria di Capua. The Necropolis of Rosarno (ancient Medma), already referred to by Dr. Ashby, continues to yield terracottas and vases in great numbers; among this year's finds was a curious series of votive figurines of horses in half relief, attesting a cult of the Dioscuri or of Demeter. From Pompeii, finally, comes news of the discovery of four more skeletons of victims of the eruption. These were

found in the now famous house of Trebius Valens, close to the wall of the *ambulacrum* where the unfortunates had evidently sought shelter from the storm of ashes that entered through the open peristyle. The corpses were doubled up, showing that death was caused by the fall of the roof under the weight of the accumulating scoriae. Two of the skeletons have been recognized as those of women from their delicate gold earrings, a third—of unascertained sex—was wearing an iron ring, the bezel of which contained an engraved carnelian; on a fourth, thought to be the skeleton of a boy, were found a little key and a coin of Domitian.

Nor does archaeological activity flag in the new Italian provinces of North Africa. At Cyrene, for instance, where excavations are in progress at the temple of Apollo and on the site of the Agora, a fine Eros, stringing his bow, the best replica so far known of a type commonly attributed to Lysippus, has been discovered, besides a portrait head of the Antonine period and four bronze vases; important finds at Tripoli are also reported, but no particulars are yet available.

THE CHURCHES.

Last year Dr. Ashby referred to the important discoveries at San Clemente and at San Crisogono; of San Sebastiano I have said something, in connexion with the Roman villa found on its site. By the friendly cooperation of ecclesiastical and civil authorities, investigations are proceeding in a number of other churches. At Santa Sabina, on the Aventine, where excavations have been for some time in progress, the remains of a Roman house with mosaic pavements of the third century have been identified under the pavement of the church, confirming once again the domestic origin of the ancient presbyterial *tituli* of Rome, and disposing of the theory that the Aventine basilica was built over a temple of either Juno or Diana. Among other results of the recent scientific examination of the church, it has been established that traces of the fifth century mosaic of the apse still exist under the Cinque-cento fresco; that in its earliest form the church, which is now open to the roof, had a flat basilican ceiling, and that the aisles had no apse. The modern altar is to be removed and the *schola cantorum* of the time of Eugenius II. (824-827), several slabs of which are in existence, re-erected. The thirty-four ninth-century windows have been reopened and pieces of the ancient frames have been found, with fragments attached to them of the original panes of selenite—a yellowish crystallized gesso with the transparency of alabaster and, as the name implies, the soft radiance of moonlight, which appears to have been extensively used in

ancient basilicas, including St. Peter's and St. John Lateran. When its restoration is finished, Santa Sabina will offer a grandiose and practically unique example of a great fifth-century basilica with a few well-defined additions of the ninth century. Admirable work preparatory to this of restoration had been done by the Dominican Father J. Berthier in his learned history of Santa Sabina and its adjacent convent, while Professor A. Muñoz, who conducts operations here on behalf of the "Reale Sovraintendenza dei Monumenti," is to be congratulated on the results already achieved and on the knowledge and insight which he brings to his difficult task. The investigations commenced under his direction at the venerable basilica of Santa Prassede are equally promising; the fine forecourt, which had long fallen into disuse, is being cleared of its disfiguring hovels; the ancient pavement of the church is being restored; four magnificent marble slabs of the *schola cantorum* of the time of Paschal I. have been found, and one of the ancient windows, with panes of selenite as at Santa Sabina, has been reopened.

Work of a similar nature is reported from various parts of Italy, as from Naples, where students of Angevin art will be glad to hear that the great monument of ~~Charles~~ Robert of Anjou, in the church of Santa Chiara, has at last been freed from the disfiguring wooden erections put up on either side of it in the seventeenth century. A discovery that promises to throw further light on the relation of the islands of the Venetian lagoons to Ravenna, previous to the establishment of the dogship, is reported from Venice, where the remains of a building with forms recalling the architecture of Ravenna have, it seems, come to light under the Doge's palace.

THE MUSEUMS.

A word remains to be said about the museums. A room of Christian and Jewish antiquities has been opened at the Museo delle Terme, which, though small, is admirably representative, as it is mainly composed of the excellent pieces brought over from the Museo Kircheriano. A recent acquisition is already famous: it is the beautiful third-century statue of a young man, beardless and long-haired, generally admitted to be an early "portrait" of Our Lord. The Palazzo di Venezia, where the Austrian Legation had its seat, was taken over last year by the Italian Government, and is to be transformed, it is said, into a great historical museum of the fine arts; but the details of the scheme are not yet fully developed. The new museum of St. Peter's, the first stone of which was laid in July last by Cardinal Merry del Val, will supply the need long felt in

Rome of a well-arranged and comprehensive collection of medieval and Renaissance art. The many splendid tombs and other monuments once in old St. Peter's, whose *disjecta membra* now lie scattered in the crypt of the new basilica (some having even wandered with time to churches outside Rome) are to be removed here, and so far as possible reconstructed; thus the oratory of John VII., with its precious mosaics; the once stately tombs of Nicholas V. and of Paul II.; the "ciborium" of Sixtus IV., and other masterpieces will, it is hoped, be seen, restored to something of their pristine splendour. The pictures of Giotto and Melozzo da Forlì, and many other treasures now in the sacristy, are also to be transferred to the new museum, where, as architects will learn with interest, the different models of the cupola of St. Peter's, by Bramante, Sangallo, Michelangelo, and others, at present stored in a room difficult of access, are to be exhibited in a hall to themselves.

The cleaning and repairing of several important mural paintings have been brought to a successful conclusion. Correggio's much damaged frescoes in the cupola of San Giovanni at Parma; those of Fra Angelico and Signorelli at Orvieto, and of Piero della Francesca in the church of San Francesco at Arezzo have been cleaned, the cracks in the walls repaired, and the scaling cured by a new process which produces no sort of alteration of the colour pigments. In the lower church of San Clemente in Rome the famous frescoes have been subjected, under the joint supervision of Signor Muñoz and the Prior, Father Nolan, to a simple washing by which they have regained their original brilliancy of colouring. Needless to add that in all operations of this kind the motto now is "preservation without restoration."

In a sense the crowning artistic discovery of a memorable year is the beautiful panel picture of the "Blessed Virgin and Child," by Filippo Lippi, which, after hanging unheeded for years in a little church close under the walls of Corneto Tarquinia, revealed itself, almost by chance, to the keen eyes of the distinguished historian of art, Signor Pietro Toesca. The exquisite little picture, which shows the old Florentine master at his best, has been removed to the Museum of Corneto.

PRECAUTIONARY MEASURES.

That there should be so much archaeological and kindred work to record in Italy after more than two years of war is striking evidence of the sterling qualities of the Italians and of their power of perseverance in face of difficulties. Conditions are abnormal; staffs are depleted; the young men have all gone to the war; but the veterans at home have done wonders, and doubled and even trebled their hours of work that scientific activity might suffer no undue

interruption from the preoccupations of the moment. We must not forget that the fundamental effort of the Ministry of Fine Arts has been to provide for the safety of all monuments of historic and artistic importance in the zones most liable to enemy attacks. A profusely illustrated report has just been issued, with a preface by Corrado Ricci, which describes in detail these precautionary measures. Wherever it was possible works of art exposed to grave danger have been removed to places of safety, as at Venice, where the horses of St. Mark's were lowered from the portico of the church and conveyed to a strongly armoured vault, while the "Paradiso" of Tintoretto and other pictures of the Ducal Palace were rolled into huge cylinders and similarly disposed of. But the main work has naturally been the protection of monuments *in situ*; innumerable portals and façades of churches, chapels and loggie, columns and statues, altars and ciboria, whole edifices like the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia at Ravenna or the Arch of Trajan at Ancona; groups of

monuments like the Tombs of the Scaligers at Verona; the complete series of Giotto's and Mantegna's frescoes in Padua, are protected by a scientific system of screens and of scaffoldings filled up with sandbags or sea-weed mattresses, and, more rarely, by bastions of brickwork. If we bear in mind the countless monuments of Italy and the consistent manner in which the scheme of protection has been carried out—from Aquileia to Venice, from Treviso to Bergamo, from Padua to Verona and Milan; at Brescia, Cremona, Bologna, Florence, Rome, Ravenna, and in practically every city of the Adriatic coast as far south as Trani and beyond—we may gauge what it has cost the country in money and in labour to safeguard its magnificent artistic patrimony.

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