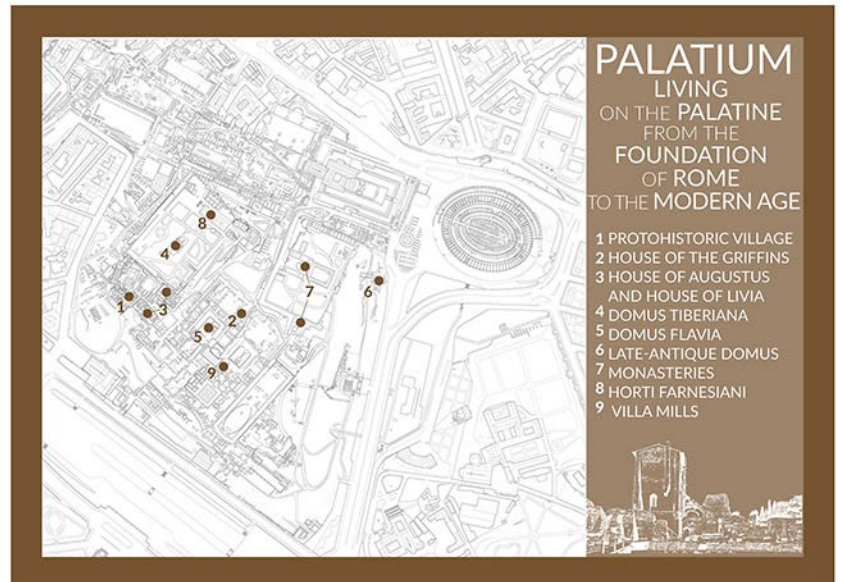


Palatium.

Living on the Palatine from the foundation of Rome to the Modern Age

The goal of this path is to discover the homes and inhabitants that have populated the Palatine Hill through the centuries. From the Archaic Age up until the 19th century, the hill on which Rome was born was in fact a predominantly “residential” area. The Palatine’s residential character culminated in the 1st century AD with the construction of the imperial Palaces: these residences were so closely linked with the hill on which they stood that its Latin name, “*Palatium*”, is still used in many modern languages with the meaning of “monumental residential building” (palazzo, palais, palace, Palast, palacio, etc.).

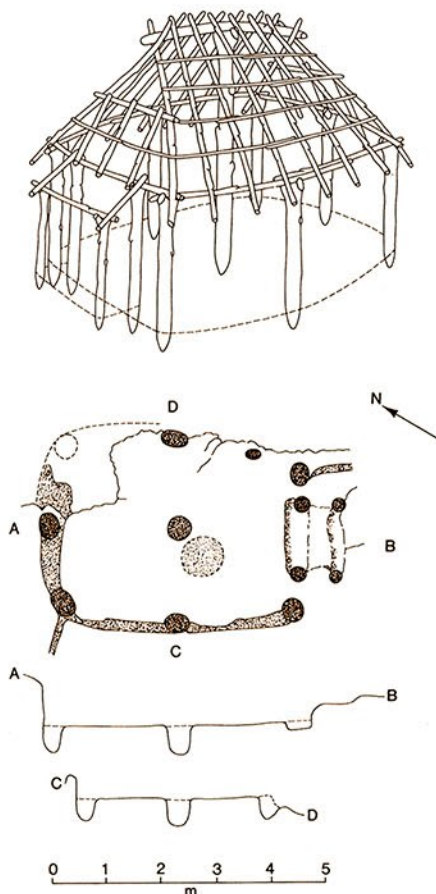


Monuments and sites of the path “*Palatium. Living on the Palatine from the foundation of Rome to the Modern Age*”

The protohistoric village of the *Cermalus*

We now know that the Palatine was consistently occupied and inhabited from as early as the 10th-9th century BC. The earliest evidence we have comes from the hill’s peak, precisely where tradition locates the mythical founding of Rome: the remains of a hut settlement used until the late 7th century. On the so called *Cermalus*, near the South-West corner of the Palatine, new evidence comes also from excavations of the North-eastern slopes of the Hill. These huts were very simple structures, oval-shaped, with wattle-and-daub walls and straw roofs supported by wooden poles inserted into the hill’s tuff stone. The huts were single-roomed with a hearth at their center and, in some cases, a small portico in front of the door.

Reconstructive drawing and archaeological survey with two sections from Hut A from the *Cermalus*, excavated on the Palatine in 1948 by Salvatore Maria Puglisi and reconstructed by Alberto Davico with a model currently on display at the Palatine Museum





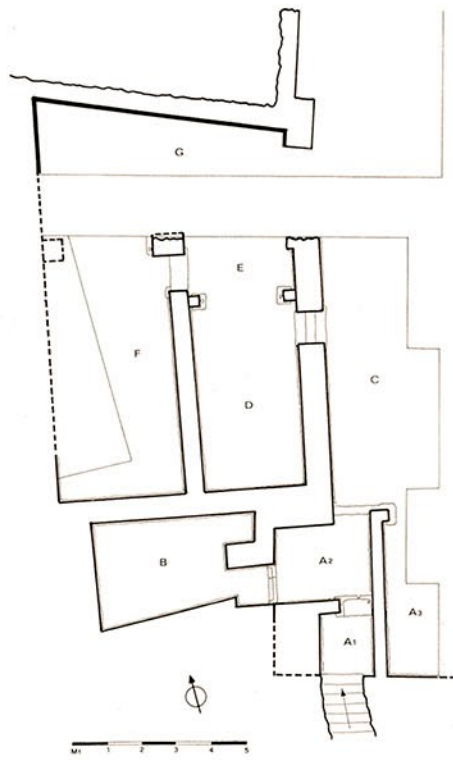
Model of the *Cermalus* huts, on display at the Palatine Museum, made in 1950 by the architect Alberto Davico. The three huts that have not been reconstructed, identifiable by the imprints left in the tuff stone in front of the center of the model, are those excavated by Salvatore Maria Puglisi in 1948. The rest of the village has been reconstructed freely. The archaeological data available and the study of the ceramic materials found at the site allow scholars to reconstruct a village dateable at least to the 9th century BC up to the 7th century BC



One of these huts, in the South-western corner of the Hill, was the so-called *Casa Romuli*, the reputed dwelling of the city's founder, Romulus. Not surprisingly, this hut and those closest to it were spared from later constructions and, as Plutarch and Dionysius of Halicarnassus tell us, they were maintained for centuries in their original form with careful restorations.

Model of Hut A from the *Cermalus*, on display at the Palatine Museum. The reconstruction, made by Alberto Davico in 1950, was based on archaeological traces found in the Hill's tuff stone and a comparison with hut urns found in the cremation tombs in Latium and Etruria between the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages (11th-10th cent. BC), which imitated actual habitations. Of the three huts discovered in 1948 by Salvatore Maria Puglisi, Hut A is one of the best preserved

A Late Republican-Age abode: the House of the Griffins



The "House of the Griffins"
ground floor plan from
F. Coarelli, Roma. Guide
archeologiche Mondadori

On the peak of the Palatine, at a much lower level below the Imperial Palace's great *Lararium*, several spaces from a Late Republican Age house have been preserved.

This is the "House of the Griffins", a private, two-story residence discovered in the early 20th century by Giacomo Boni, with the original painted decoration and ornamental flooring of several ground floor rooms still intact.

The house was built in *opus incertum* and it was at some point modified with structures in *opus reticulatum* and decorated with wall paintings and mosaics dateable to the late 2nd century BC.



Emblema of cubes in perspective inserted in the mosaic flooring of one of the ground floor rooms. Cubes are made of different types of colored stone: white (*palombino* marble), green (marly limestone from northern Latium) and black (slate) with a border in *rosso antico* marble



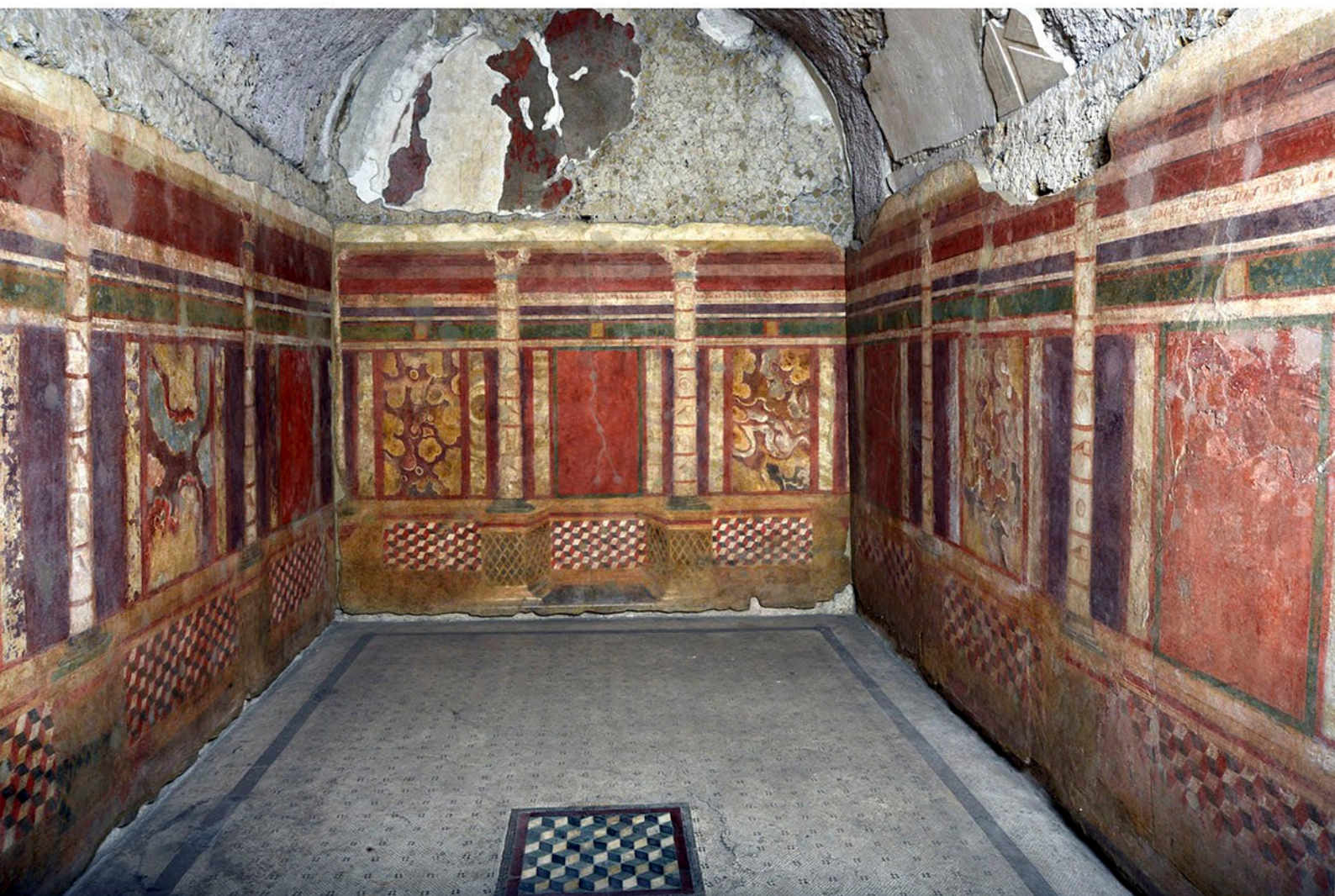
Stucco lunette that gave the *domus* its name, with a Griffin in relief

The painted decorations constitute rare Roman examples of the so-called second initial style: the walls are decorated with architectural perspectives of columns and panels that imitate precious stones, such as onyx. The mosaic floors are embellished in one room with central element bordered in *rosso antico* marble and decorated with cubes in perspective achieved through an inlay of white, green and black stones. The perspective cube pattern appears in the house's painted decoration as well.

The house's name derives from a stucco-decorated lunette with two Griffins in heraldic positions.

Various phases of modification and decoration of the *domus* are documented. In the Imperial Age, the residence was destroyed and interred.

Literary sources inform us that, in the Republican Age, the Palatine was one of the most sought-after residential areas for the Roman ruling class, desired both for its prestige as well as for its proximity to the Roman Forum, the political center of the city. Many studies have attempted to locate the houses of the various protagonists of the Roman Republic which once stood here. In some cases, these houses were well-known for their splendor, as reported by Cicero for example, himself a resident on the hill.



Second initial style painted decoration with architectural perspectives of columns and panels imitating precious stones in one of the ground floor rooms of the "House of the Griffins"



House of Augustus, view with the "Room of the Masks" on the left

From the Republic to the Empire: the House of Augustus and the House of Livia



House of Augustus, "Room of the Pine Garlands"

With Augustus, the history of the Palatine Hill as a residential area had its most important turning point: Octavian, who had been born on the Palatine in 63 BC, decided to establish his residence there, acquiring the house of the orator Hortensius Hortalus and other properties. This was a politically motivated decision: it's no coincidence that the residences of Augustus and his wife Livia are found right next to the remains of the hill's huts, a deeply symbolic area linked to the city's most ancient phase, with which the new *princeps* wished to be associated. The most striking aspect of the emperor's palace is not so much its architectural elements as the refined, late second style painted decoration still visible in some of its rooms, including the "Room of the Masks", which evokes the façade of a theatrical scene, the simpler "Room of the Pine Garlands" and the marvelous "Study".



House of Augustus, detail of the painted decoration in the "Study"



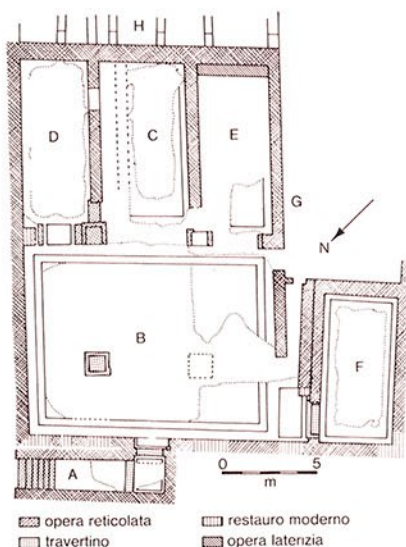
House of Augustus. Refined painted decoration in the "Room of the Masks"



House of Livia, general view



House of Livia, detail of painted decoration



The same is true of the House of Livia, built out of a pre-existing residential structure, renovated and decorated with second style paintings like those in the House of Augustus. The two residences were separate structures but were connected via corridors and cryptoportici, similarly to other Augustan properties on the hill. There was therefore nothing particularly monumental about the residence distinguishing it from the later imperial palaces but in perfect keeping with the character of its inhabitant, who is described in ancient sources not only as a champion of dissimulation and understatement, but also as a true lover of the modest lifestyle: Suetonius (Augusto 73) tells us that “the furniture and furnishings were extremely simple, as one can see from the beds and tables still visible today. They say that he slept on a bed with modest covers.”

However, the most revolutionary innovation of the House of Augustus is to be found elsewhere: its connection, via internal passages, to the adjacent temple of the Actian Apollo, inaugurated in 28 BC. The residence's close connection with a temple building was adopted from Hellenistic examples but was as of yet unheard of in the Roman world. It bestowed a solid link with the sacred, which would be further reinforced by the emperor's construction of the shrine to Vesta. The holiness of the building extended inevitably to its owner, paving the way, after the apotheosis of Julius Caesar in 44 BC, for the deification of the figure of the *princeps*.

Plan of the House of Livia-
da F. Coarelli, Roma.
Guide archeologiche Mondadori



Domus Tiberiana, Domitian's Ramp

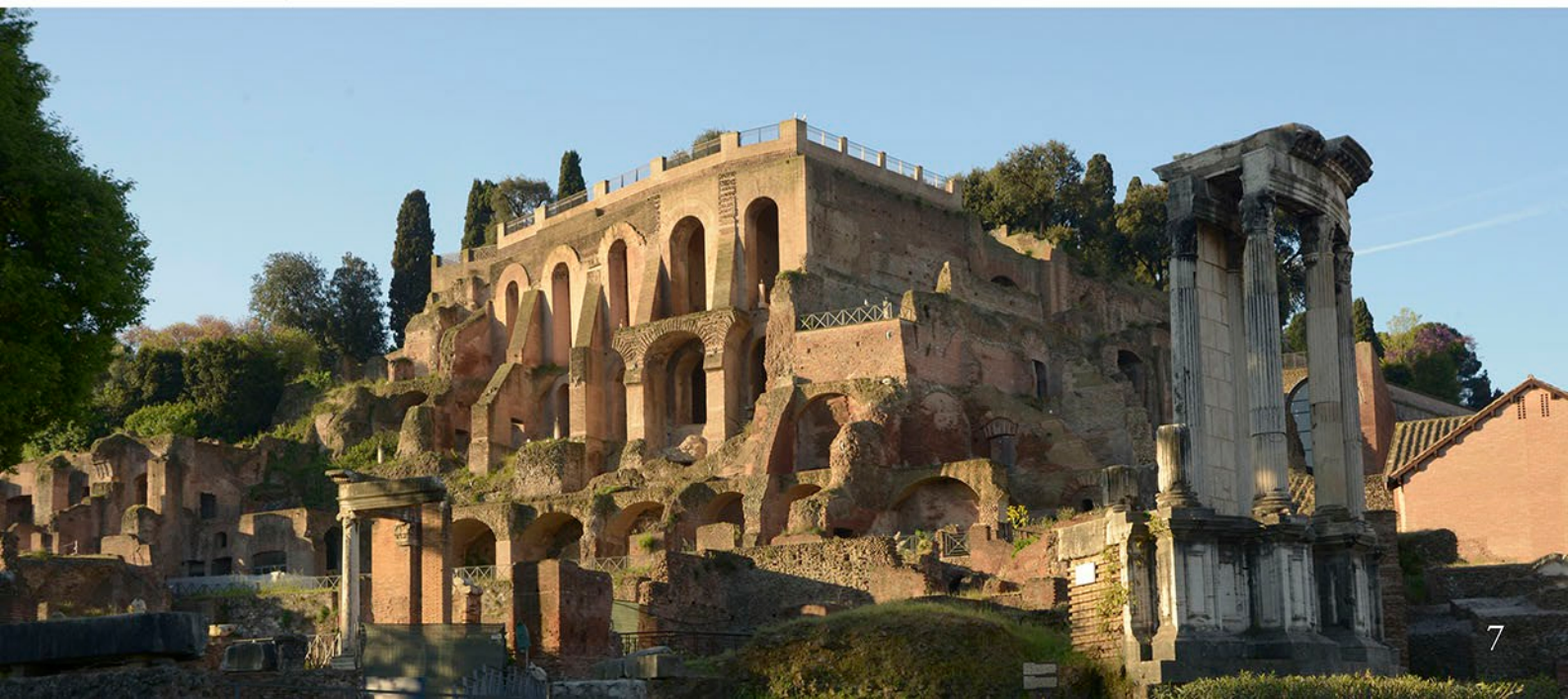
Domus Tiberiana, view from the Roman Forum

The *Domus Tiberiana*: the first Palace?

Of all the imperial residences on the Palatine, the *Domus Tiberiana* is surely the least-known to the public as well as to archaeologists themselves. One of the things that makes this large and complex building so “mysterious” is the fate that befell it in the Renaissance period: in the 16th century, the *Domus* was covered over and partially obliterated by the vegetation of the Farnese Gardens. Built by the Cardinal Alessandro Farnese, these gardens still cover the hill's North-western face.



One of the *Domus*'s corridors, the so-called Neronian Cryptoporticus, in a period Alinari photograph





Detail of the wall mosaic that decorated one of the oldest residences incorporated into the *Domus Tiberiana*

Archaeological excavations have therefore always been limited to the marginal areas of the building: worth mentioning is the enormous effort put forth by Pietro Rosa, the archaeologist employed by Napoleon III, who had acquired the Farnese Gardens. Beginning in 1861, Rosa systematically excavated the area for a 10 year period, bringing the Hill's southern, eastern and especially northern faces to light, with the imposing, 20-meter-high foundations that serve as a spectacular backdrop to the Roman Forum to this very day. The complex's intricate lower floors, containing the remnants of numerous Republican Age aristocratic houses, have yet to be investigated and interpreted. These early *domus* constituted the initial core of the *Domus Tiberiana*, which began as the residence of Tiberius Claudius Nero, father of the emperor Tiberius; this house may have been the same one inhabited by Germanicus, Claudius (before becoming emperor) and Caligula who, according to sources, enlarged the *Domus Tiberiana* "up to the Forum".



Painted decoration of the Republican Age *Domus* in the area of the *Domus Tiberiana* found on the Hill's western side



Republican Age *Domus* uncovered on the Hill's western flank in the latest excavations, in the area of the *Domus Tiberiana*



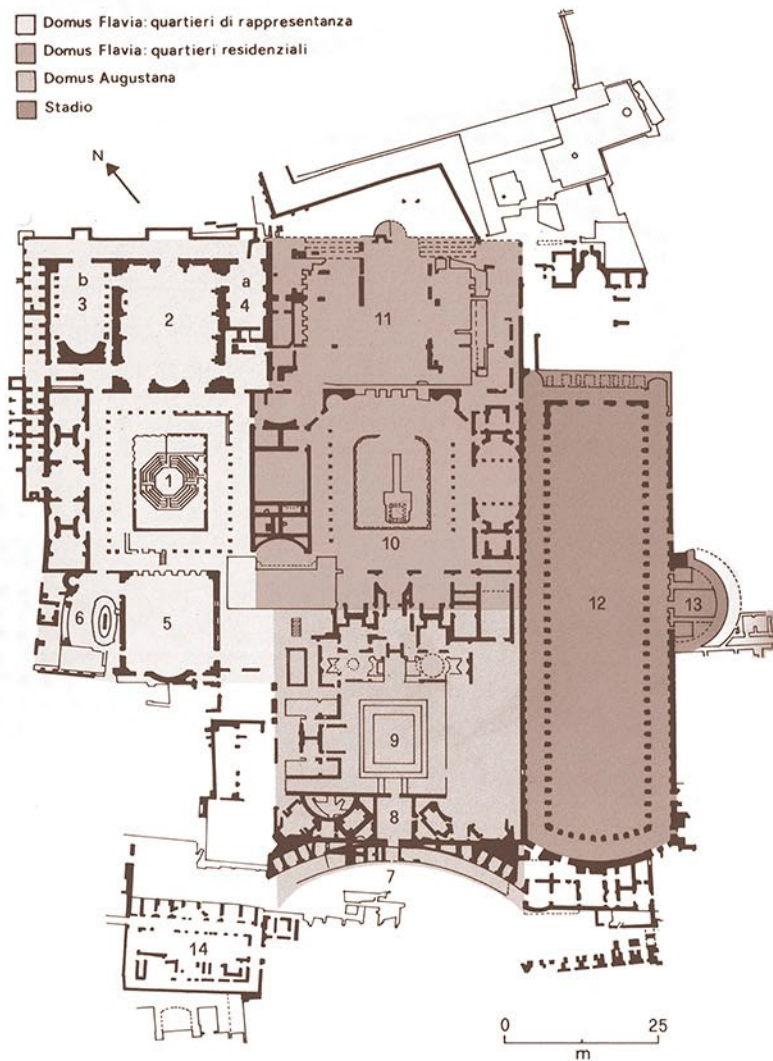
Basin of the *Domus Tiberiana* discovered in 2005 in the Farnese Gardens area

The renovations ordered by Caligula (who, by a strange twist of fate, was killed in 41 AD in the cryptoporticus of his own *domus*) were the first large-scale building project to which the *Domus Tiberiana* was subjected. Both architecturally and chronologically, the *Domus* was never a uniform construction; it took form gradually through to a series of progressive expansions, taking on a more monumental appearance only from the period of the emperor Claudius and then Nero.

In this period, the ancient *domus* were incorporated into a large foundation (circa 50 x 45 meters) surrounded by a quadriporticus that was connected to the area of the Forum by a monumental staircase. Other structures dateable to the Claudian period include the large basin surrounded by gardens, excavated from 2005 on the tier of the Farnese Gardens, and the cryptoporticus brought to light in the same area: the latter has in fact yielded a lead pipe bearing an inscription of the emperor's name.

With the construction of the Flavian Palace, the *Domus Tiberiana* lost its centrality and took on a more functional role; however, Domitian, and later Trajan and Hadrian, continued to tend to it and even expand it, most notably on the Hill's northern face with its formidable foundations. The Antonines lived there and Commodus restored it after a fire. In the Middle Ages, the *Domus*'s vicinity to the Forum and to the still-inhabited part of the city made it preferable to other Palatine residences. In the 8th century AD, it was even inhabited by Pope John VII, son of Plato, curator of the Imperial Palaces.

- Domus Flavia: quartieri di rappresentanza
- Domus Flavia: quartieri residenziali
- Domus Augustana
- Stadio



Imperial Palace floor plan, with the palace's two sections highlighted: *Domus Flavia* and *Domus Augustana* – from F. Coarelli, Roma. Guide archeologiche Mondadori

The quintessential Palace: the *Domus Flavia*

With the evolution of the figure of the *princeps* and the changing nature of the political role he began to assume, the functional configuration of the emperor's Palace evolved as well.

The process began with the introduction of the new political system proposed by Augustus, in which the new services of the State were now managed by the *princeps*. This gradually brought about the expansion of the imperial Palace, which now required more space for offices and archives, as well as new rooms to perform the *salutatio* and *convivium* ceremonies, the two most important public functions.

5. *Domus Augustana*, lower floor, courtyard with monumental fountain with four counterposed *peltae* (shields of the Amazons)





Domus Flavia: on the southern side of the peristyle the so-called *Cenatio Iovis*, banquet hall, facing the *Aula Regia* on the northern side, which opened onto open-air areas with waterworks. In the foreground, the *opus sectile* flooring restored by Giacomo Boni

With Domitian, the last of the Flavian dynasty, it was deemed necessary to construct an imperial palace that occupied the entire Hill; a building that would dominate ordinary mortals both physically and materially, almost a heavenly abode. Thus was born a new architectural type: the dynastic Palace.

The residential complex was essentially divided into two sections: the public (the *Domus Flavia*) and the private (the *Domus Augustana*), designed and built, according to historical sources, by Rabirius, one of the few Roman architects whose names we know.

While the name *Domus Augustana* is now used to indicate just the residence's private sector, it was originally meant to refer to the entire complex. Occupying the entire southern zone of the Hill, it was necessary to distinguish it from the northern sector, known as the *Domus Tiberiana*.

In keeping with the Hill's historic residential function, the new residence of the emperors overlapped and therefore destroyed the Late Republican residential quarter and part of the Neronian residences. Observing the majesty of the palace's brickwork remains today, we can only imagine how the lavish ancient residence must have appeared in its heyday, clad in polychrome marbles, with sprawling columned courtyards and numerous frescoed spaces. All of these elements would play a fundamental role in the formation of a new architectural language. The ambitious building project transformed the Hill itself: for its construction, large mounds of earth were erected and a system of terraces was put in place that modified the original appearance of the terrain, eventually creating "an abode as high as the heavens", as Martial tells us (*Epigr.* VIII, 26. 12).



Domus Flavia, general view with large octagonal fountain at center of peristyle, *Aula Regia* in the background and *Basilica* to its left. The closed spaces had access doors that connected directly to the Palace exterior

As imposing and majestic as the *Domus Flavia* may seem to modern eyes, it was however “not enough” for the emperor. Thanks to the writings of Suetonius, we gather that, beginning with the Flavian dynasty, the emperors didn’t reside steadily on the Palatine. Many emperors commissioned luxurious residences outside the *Urbs* city limits, where they often stayed for long periods of time.

The heart of the *Domus Flavia* was comprised of the spaces designed for the emperor’s public engagements. Various rooms opened onto a majestic peristyle with a large octagonal fountain at its center: to the North, the *Aula Regia*, where audiences and other official meetings with the imperial court were held and, to the west of the *Aula Regia*, the *Basilica*; on the peristyle’s southern side, the emperor’s dining room - the celebrated *Cenatio Iovis*. Here, guests ate while reclining on *triclinium* couches and were entertained by waterworks. When necessary, they availed themselves of the heated room, made possible through a heating system that involved a double floor level (*suspensurae*) through which hot air circulated.

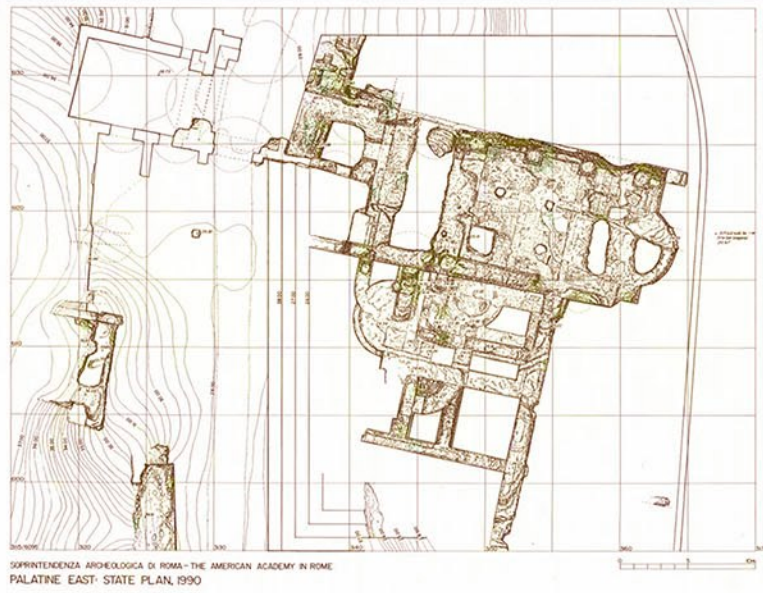
Domus Flavia peristyle with octagonal fountain-labyrinth originally surrounded by a portico of columns in Numidian marble. Today, we can only imagine the latter thanks to the bases and fragments of column drums and capitals visible in the foreground and to the right. In the background to the left the Palatine Museum and to the right the Casina Farnese



After the palaces: the “late-antique *Domus*”

With the construction of the *Domus Flavia*, which joined the earlier *Domus Tiberiana*, the Palatine was almost completely occupied by the homes of Rome’s most powerful, with whom the Hill had now become synonymous. The name *Palatium* has in fact taken on the meaning of “monumental residential building” in many of the world’s languages.

The Hill’s private residences did not altogether disappear, however: on its eastern slopes, near the Arch of Constantine, a series of excavations conducted between 1989 and 1991 by the Archaeological Superintendence and the American Academy in Rome shed light on the remains of a large *domus*. Built across several levels that slope downwards towards the modern Via di San Gregorio, the residence, which contains structures from the Neronian and Antonine periods, was enlarged and renovated in the early third century. The decorations preserved in one of its rooms have been dated to this period: a black and white mosaic with four-petaled flowers, rigorous in its geometric partition, juxtaposed with wall paintings on white backgrounds. Executed in a simple yet gracious style, the room’s painted decoration is organized in a typical tripartite layout, with no suggestion of perspective and with space divided into red or brown architectural frames; the animals, birds and garlands that fill these spaces bestow luminosity and a touch of lightness to this small room, the only great *domus* to have survived the passing of the centuries relatively unscathed. The richly-decorated house, whose ancient owners are as of yet unknown, seems to have had a rather brief life: as early as the first half of the 4th century, some rooms were abandoned and filled in; others, including the small decorated room and an apsed hall added on to the house in the 3rd century, remained in use until nearly 600 AD, although we do not know in which capacity.



Floor plan of the late-antique *Domus* from E. Hostetter et al, A late Roman *Domus* with apsidal hall on the Palatine, in *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 11, 1994



Late-antique *Domus*, detail of painted decoration



Late-antique *Domus*, black and white mosaic flooring



General view of the Barberini Vineyard area with the churches of St. Sebastian with the monastery building (upper left) and St. Bonaventura with its scenic botanical and vegetable gardens

The medieval Palatine: monasteries

The Palatine is often remembered as the seat of the imperial palaces; however, beginning in the Middle Ages, numerous convents were also constructed on the Hill, contributing to maintain its prestige and conserve its residential function even after the imperial palaces were abandoned.

One of the Hill's most important monastic complexes is the church of St. Sebastian, probably built in the 10th century over the site of the Saint's martyrdom, traditionally identified "*ad gradus Elagabali*", i.e. "on the steps of the temple of Elagabalus", built in the 3rd century AD in the area of the current-day Barberini Vineyard. As early as the 11th century, there is mention of a monastery inhabited by Benedictines, which fell into a period of decay in the 13th century and was abandoned.

Only in 1630 was it subject to an important restoration project by the Barberini family, when Urban VIII acquired the property where the church and monastery stood and tasked the architect Luigi Arrigucci with their restoration. The church's medieval frescos were destroyed at this time with the sole exception of those adorning the apse. The effective dedication to St. Sebastian took place in 1650, as commemorated by the stone placed at the center of the church's entryway.

Church of St. Sebastian, constructed over the ancient "Temple of Elagabalus". The church's façade presents a triangular tympanum and the Barberini emblem with bees in positions of prominence

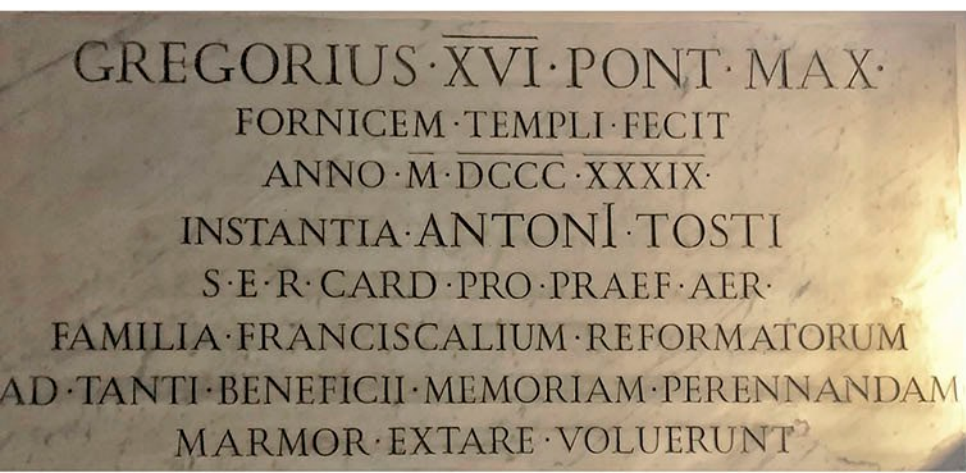




At the end of the Via di San Bonaventura, the Church's simple façade. The Stations of the Cross begin in the last stretch of the narrow street; the niches are visible on the left and on the façade of the Church



Church of St. Bonaventure, view from the Barberini Vineyard area with the contemporary work of art "Anello" in foreground



An inscription inside the church notes that, in 1675, its usage was temporarily granted to the Franciscans from the nearby convent of St. Bonaventure. In fact, shortly after St. Sebastian, came the convent of St. Bonaventure on the Palatine, founded by the blessed Bonaventura of Barcelona: in 1675, the friar obtained permission from Cardinal Francesco Barberini to build a "retreat" atop the Palatine, over the ruins of a cistern connected to the Claudian Aqueduct. Despite the difficult terrain, work began in 1676 for the construction of a new church and convent. In 1689, five years after Bonaventura's death, the church was consecrated.

The convent of St. Bonaventure is accessible via a narrow uphill path that leads directly to its entrance. The final stretch of this path is decorated by the Stations of the Cross niches erected in 1731 by Leonardo da Porto Maurizio, who resided in the convent between 1730 and 1751. The scenes within the niches were originally painted but, after decades of water damage took their toll, they were inaugurated anew in 1772 with painted terracotta scenes made by the sculptor Giuseppe Franchi and by Corrado da Rimini.

As confirmed by a commemorative stone plaque on the wall to the left of the entrance, the church's current 19th-century appearance is attributable to the renovations commissioned by Cardinal Antonio Tosti. The cardinal's renovations substituted the original wooden truss ceiling with painted coffer barrel vaulting and replaced the church's altars and flooring.

Stone plaque inside the church of St. Bonaventure commemorating the 19th-century renovation project commissioned by Antonio Tosti

The Farnese Gardens: from the Farnese family to Pietro Rosa and Giacomo Boni

In the Renaissance period, the Palatine Hill was chosen by the powerful Farnese family as the site of a large private garden with wide boulevards, trees, flowerbeds, fountains, new buildings and a collection of art.

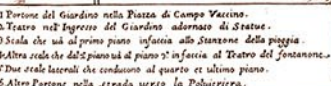
The site's mythical and ideological associations, linked to the founding of Rome and seat of imperial power, made the Palatine with its new garden a potent tool to affirm the family who, with Paolo III Farnese, had even reached the papal throne (1534 – 1549).

Antiquity was a fundamental element in their conception of the garden: visitors to the Hill could admire not only the remains of the imperial palaces but also the sculptures from the family's private collection. Humanists and antiquarians such as Fulvio Orsini and Pirro Ligorio were but a few of the many masterminds behind the project.



View of the Casina Farnese on the Palatine, above the remains of the imperial Palace

After a long period of decline, the Gardens were ‘inhabited’ once again in the 19th century: Pietro Rosa, the Director of excavations appointed by Napoleon III, had the Aviaries transformed into a private residence, of which even Giacomo Boni availed.



17

The neogothic Palatine: Villa Mills



Villa Mills, demolition workers at work

Over the course of time, the Palatine had transformed into an aristocratic locale where important Roman families established their residences. As early as the 14th century, a villa built by the Stati family and acquired two centuries later by the Mattei family stood between the *Domus Flavia* and the *Stadium*. Centuries later, in the 19th century, the Scotsman Charles Mills chose this spot to build the villa that took his name. Mills acquired and refurbished the former Villa Mattei, eliminating its Renaissance-era structures and giving it its characteristic Neogothic appearance, which we now know only through photographic documentation: the villa was in fact almost completely demolished between the 1920's and 30's by Alfonso Bartoli, when the systematic excavations to unearth the imperial ruins began in earnest.

Villa Mills before its demolition





Villa Mills, at the far right the building that now houses the Palatine Museum is visible

The only remaining section of the Renaissance villa is the small loggia known as the Loggia Mattei, still open to visitors, which was decorated by Baldassarre Peruzzi or his workshop. The building that now houses the Palatine Museum is part of the more recent structure built by the nuns of the Visitation in 1868 as a convent. It was then turned into a museum by Bartoli, who chose the structure to conserve the materials that his excavations were slowly bringing to light. Probably one of the last people to have the pleasure of seeing the Villa Mills was Stendhal, who visited it in the first quarter of the 19th century. He even cited it in his celebrated “Roman Walks”, highlighting it as one of the noteworthy sights to see in Rome.

This path is curated by Francesca Boldrighini and Giulia Giovanetti with Michela Di Meola
 English translation by Ryan Audino
 Layout by Simonetta Massimi
 Photographs from the Parco Archeologico del Colosseo Archives