

Recent archaeological discoveries in Rome
and at Veii

In: Art and Archaeology, IX - 1920 -p.271-277

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CURTIS, C.D.

1920

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Recent archaeological discoveries in Rome and at Veii : A&A IX 271-277.
Temple souterrain de la Porta Maggiore ; soi-disant Victoire du Palatin ; fouilles
de Vies ; temple du VI^e s. et statue d'Apollon.

Art & Archaeology

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RECENT ARCHAEOLOGICAL DISCOVERIES IN ROME AND AT VEII.

BY C. DENSMORE CURTIS

IN SPITE of the war the Italian excavators have been by no means idle and have brought to light in Rome or its immediate vicinity a number of works of art which will rank among the most important known. The present article will discuss briefly a few of these and reproduce a number of photographs which have only recently become available for publication and will therefore be of especial interest to the large number of lovers of Rome who have not been able to travel during the past few years and have therefore not been able to keep in touch with the most recent discoveries.

The most striking and interesting among the new monuments which have been found is the underground temple just outside the Porta Maggiore in Rome. In the month of April, 1917, a slight sinking of the ground beneath the track of the railroad line to Naples led to the finding of an air-shaft or light-well communicating with an angle of a vaulted corridor some fifty feet beneath. This corridor, which formed the ancient approach to the temple, is preserved towards the east, sloping gently upwards, for some 90 feet from the bottom of the light-well. (See plan Fig. 1.) At that point the walls have caved in and its further course cannot be traced.

A short distance to the south of the angle with the air-shaft, the corridor opens into a small ante-room with a mosaic pavement. In the center a square opening leads to a descending channel for drainage purposes, terminating some 30 feet to the north in a

concave basin. In the vaulted roof of the ante-room was once a large rectangular opening, now walled up for safety's sake as the railway passes 25 feet above. Before it was walled up there was noticed a fragment of wall of *opus reticulatum* which served as a parapet on one side. The walls and

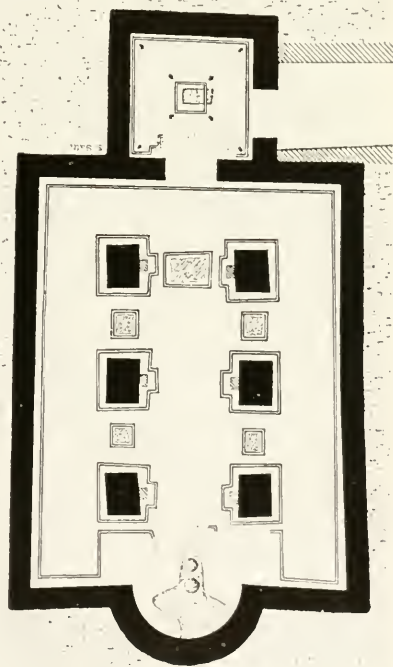


Fig. 1. Plan of the underground temple near the Porta Maggiore, Rome



Fig. 2. The nave of the underground temple, looking toward the apse.



Fig. 3. The capture of one of the daughters of Leucippus.

vault of the ante-room are covered with white stucco with various scenes and decorative elements in relief. In addition there are two bands of colored wall paintings, one near the floor, and one just below the spring of the vault. The barrel vault is divided into numerous compartments, some painted and some ornamented with stucco reliefs.

On the east side of this room are two openings, a door below to give access, and a window above to give light, to the

underground sanctuary, a large room about 46 feet in length which has the form of an early Christian basilica. The central vaulted nave is about 23 feet in height and terminates in a semi-circular apse (Figs. 2 and 3). On either side of the nave are three rectangular piers and four vaulted passage ways which give access to the two side aisles of which the vaults are slightly lower than those of the nave. The walls and piers are formed of excellent Roman concrete.



Fig. 4. Jason and Medea taking the Golden Fleece.

The solidity of the construction is shown by the fact that in spite of the frequent passing of heavy trains overhead, the delicate stucco covering on the walls is practically uninjured. The date, to judge from the evidence of the concrete, might be anywhere in the 1st century, A. D., possibly nearer the end than the beginning. For students of the history of architecture the importance of finding a building of basilica form at such an early date is too ob-

vious to require more than passing mention.

From the irregularities in the plan (See Fig. 1) it is evident that the structure was formed by digging out from the original volcanic strata spaces corresponding to the walls (about 2 feet thick) and the piers, leaving as a solid mass of earth the portion which was later to form the interior of the temple, including the vaults. The excavated portions were then filled with solid

concrete, and when this had set, the earth within was removed. The building was thus always underground and received its only outside light through the rectangular opening left in the roof of the ante-room. Traces of bronze supports in the vaulted openings between the nave and side aisles make it probable that artificial lighting was also employed, with hanging lamps.

Beneath the rear wall of the apse were found two *loculi* with the bones of a young pig and a dog, traces of a foundation sacrifice. This shows that the building was used as a temple, as does also the fact that the main axis runs exactly east and west.

The decoration was elaborate and is still in large part preserved. The floors are covered with a mosaic formed of fine white cubes with a colored border. Set in this pavement were once small squares, probably of finer mosaics, which have disappeared, leaving only the square holes. The walls, including the vaulting, are covered with white stucco and are ornamented with a great variety of excellently modeled stucco reliefs (Figs. 3, 4.) with many stylized figures of Victories, palmettes, candelabra, cult implements, genre scenes, and also a number of mythological subjects, among which may be mentioned Jason and Medea taking the golden fleece, (Fig. 4) Herakles liberating Hesione, the rape of one of the daughters of Leucippus (Fig. 3), the flaying of Marsyas, the rape of Ganymede etc. The most important relief occupies the half-dome of the apse (Fig. 2) and represents, it seems to me, Sappho in the act of making the famous "Leukadian Leap" in her attempt to obtain relief from her hopeless love for Phaon. Sappho, with lyre in hand, is depicted as springing from the cliff of Leukas. Below in the



Fig. 5. Terra cotta statue of Apollo from Veii (front).
VIth Century, B. C.

sea a Triton spreads out a garment to break her fall. Opposite on a height stands Apollo, who had a temple on the spot, and to whom, according to Ovid (*Heroides* XV) Sappho promised to dedicate her lyre if he would be propitious.



Fig. 6. Back view of the Apollo from Veii.

Professor Cumont (*Revue Archéologique*, 1918, pp. 52 ff.) has recently advance a very attractive theory to the effect that the building was used by the Neo-Pythagorians for their cult practices. The decoration, certainly, is derived from Greek sources, with no Oriental and with no early Christian

motives. When brilliantly lighted, the gleaming white walls and the graceful reliefs make the place seem cheerful and spacious, even though it is underground. With the inner lights extinguished and one solitary lamp in the vault of the ante-room giving a subdued illumination in accordance with the original intention when that was the only opening to the outer air, the effect is indescribably mysterious and imposing, and yet even so not gloomy and forbidding, as must have been the case in a heavy, in-artistic sanctuary devoted to an Oriental cult such, for example, as the Mithraeum below the church of S. Clemente.

Another discovery in Rome itself is that of the so-called Palatine Victory an original Greek work representing probably a Nereid and dating from the early fourth century B. C. This was found on the Palatine by Commendatore Boni in 1918 while excavating the ruins of a medieval fortification on the slope leading up from the Arch of Titus to the Palace of Domitian. The statue is one of the few Greek originals which have come to light in Rome. It is slightly under life size. The head, arms and feet are missing, but even so the effect is most pleasing on account of the excellent execution of form and drapery. It is of about the same period as the mounted Amazon from Epidaurus in the National Museum at Athens, but is of much superior workmanship.

Other discoveries of importance have been made in the immediate neighborhood of Rome, such as that of the interesting columbaria beside S. Paolo Fuori le Mura and beneath the church of S. Sebastiano on the Appian Way. At Ostia, too, much that is new has been found, but it is from a site a little to the north of Rome, at Veii, that the most striking results have been obtained.

ART AND ARCHAEOLOGY

For some years past fragments of early votive offerings have been found from time to time near the bottom of the deep ravine above which on the south side rises the little village of Isola Farnese. Investigations on a terrace on the north bank led in the year 1916 to the discovery of a large temple enclosure with the foundations of a temple of the sixth century B. C. The site was in use even in earlier times as is shown by the presence of hut foundations of the Villanova period, and by house foundations of the seventh century. At a much later period a Roman road was cut through the sacred precinct, and at that time a group of terra cotta fragments from the sixth century temple together with others of a later date were carefully lined up in a trench at one side of the road and covered over with earth, doubtless out of reverence for their religious character. Among these were fragments of four life size terra cotta statues of the end of the sixth century B. C. which evidently formed together a group which was placed on a pedestal in the temple as an ex-voto.

The best preserved of these figures is a most vigorous and life-like statue of Apollo 5 feet 9 inches in height (Figs. 5, and 6). The god is clad in a short, tightly fitting chiton and a still shorter himation which leaves the right arm and shoulder bare. He strides forward with the right leg well advanced. On account of the rapid motion his garments press tightly against his form in front and flutter slightly out behind. The hair is bound by a cord which surrounds the forehead and passes behind the ears. Below the cord behind nine long curls hang down the back. The entire figure was cast in one piece and offers the best example so far known of the skill which was obtained by workers in terra cotta at that early period, a

skill which is attested by early writers, but not hitherto substantiated by the actual finds. The colors are remarkably well preserved. The flesh tints are, as usual on archaic male figures, of a brownish red, while the hair and eyebrows are black. The mantle is covered with a light yellow slip and has a reddish violet border. Tradition speaks of a guild of famous workers in terra cotta who lived at Veii and who were summoned to Rome to assist in decorating the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus. With this statue before us we appreciate as never before the wonderful effect which the huge cult statues of the early temples must have produced on the beholders, an effect often mentioned by ancient writers, but hitherto held to have been an exaggeration due to lack of knowledge of more advanced artistic products. It is even possible now to understand the references to the painting red of the faces of cult statues on festival days. Experiments made on the Veii fragments show that a simple anointing with oil gives a brilliant glossy surface to the flesh tints.

Together with the Apollo was found a fragment representing a captured deer lying on its back with its feet bound together. On the same plinth are two human feet and traces of a lion's skin, enough to show that the statue was that of Herakles and that, as Dr. Giglotti, the director of the Villa Giulia Museum, has cleverly pointed out, the two statues formed part of a group representing a myth, unknown in literature, but depicted on several early vase paintings, referring to a contest between Apollo and Herakles over one of the sacred deer at Delphi. Excavations still continue at Veii and it is to be hoped that they will prove as fruitful in the future as they have in the past.

C. DENSMORE CURTIS.

American Academy in Rome.