ROME: THE GARDENS ON THE PALATINE

Vigna Barberini

Fig. 1. Aerial photograph of the Vigna Barberini taken early 1999

The artificial terrace that now carries the Barberini family name is located on the northeastern corner of the Palatine, beyond the visible remains of the Flavian Imperial palace (Fig. 1). Excavations carried out during the 1930s by A. Bartoli, and in the 1950s by G. F. Carettoni concentrated primarily on the central area of this site. These campaigns revealed the foundations of a large temple, which Bartoli identified, consistent with the earlier ideas of P. Bigot, as the remains of the late second-century temple of *Elagabalus*.

Recent investigations by the Soprintendenza Archeologica in collaboration with École française de Rome have revealed further episodes of the history of the area.

Approximately one third of the site has been explored, although the most ancient levels have been reached only sporadically (Fig. 2). The information gathered during the campaigns carried out annually between 1985 and 1999 are at present being analyzed, so that some of the information presented here must be considered provisional.

The excavations that reached levels prior to the rise of the Empire revealed a peristyle of a large *domus* once decorated with plants and basins. Probably destroyed during the 60s of the first century A.D., this luxurious dwelling was then buried under thick layers of soil used to create an artificial terrace that was a grand garden of the palace of Domitian. About a century later, during the last years of the

second century, this section of the Imperial palace was demolished to make room for a monumental complex centered around a temple dedicated by the emperor Heliogabalus to the eastern god, *Elagabalus*, later rededicated by Alexander Severus to Jupiter Ultor.

Françoise Villedieu

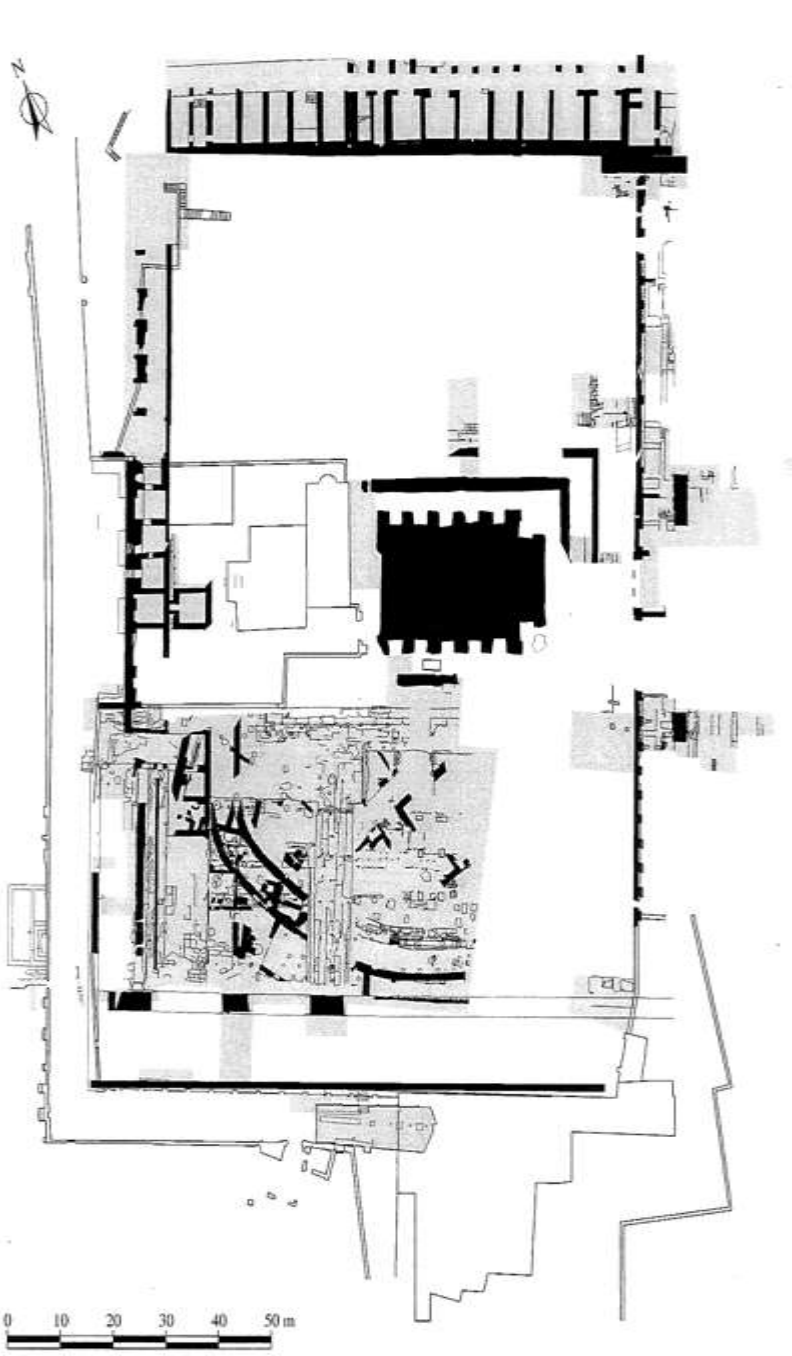

Fig. 2. Vigna Barberini: plan of the areas explored from 1985 to 1998.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: P. Bigot, "Le temple de Jupiter Ultor et la Vigna Barberini," *BullCom* 1911, pp. 80-85; F. Villedieu, J.-P Morel, P. Pergola, H. Broise, Y. Thébert, P. Gros, E. Hubert, *et alii,* "Rome: le Palatin (Vigna Barberini*)*," *Mélanges de l'École Française de Rome* 98 (1986) pp. 387-396; 99 (1987) pp. 481-498; 100 (1988) pp. 505-525; 101 (1989) pp. 489-498; 102 (1990) pp. 443-471; 103 (1991) pp. 313-338; 104 (1992) pp. 465-493; 105 (1993) pp. 419-439; 106 (1994) pp. 431-450; 107 (1995) pp. 459-493; 108 (1996) pp. 423-451; 109 (1997) pp. 417-440; 110 (1998) pp. 473-492; 111 (1999) pp. 449-481; 112 (2000) pp. 413-432; M. Royo, F. Chausson, E. Hubert, *et alii, La Vigna Barberini I. Histoire d'un site. Étude des sources et de la topographie*, Rome, 1997; M.A. Tomei, "La ex Vigna Barberini e le aree limitrofe: documentazione dall'archivio della Soprintendenza archeologica" *La Vigna Barberini I, op. cit*, pp. 191-210; C. Virlouvet, F. Villedieu, *et alii*, "Fouilles de l'École française de Rome sur le site de la Vigna Barberini (Palatin*)*," *Bollettino di Archeologia* 23-24 (1993), pp. 131-164; F. Villedieu, "La Vigna Barberini (Palatino): nuove acquisizioni," *Archeologia Laziale* XII, *Quaderni di Archeologia Etrusco-italica* 1995, pp. 33-39; F. Villedieu, "Constructions impériales mises au jour à l'angle N-E du Palatin. Résultats des fouilles de l'École française de Rome sur le site de la Vigna Barberini," *Comptes Rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions & Belles-Lettres*,1995, pp. 719-736; J.-P. Morel, "Stratigraphie et histoire sur le Palatin : la zone centrale de la Vigna Barberini," *Comptes Rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions & Belles-Lettres*, 1996, pp. 173-205; F. Villedieu, P. Veltri, "Les soutènements nord-ouest et nord de la terrasse de la Vigna Barberini (Rome, Palatin): constructions et remaniements de l'époque flavienne à l'époque sévérienne," *Mélanges de l'École Française de Rome*, 111 (1999), pp. 749-778; F. Villedieu , *et alii*, *Il giardino dei cesari*. Exhibition catalogue (Rome, Museo Nazionale Romano, Terme di Diocleziano, Oct. 2001- Jan. 2002), Rome, 2001**.**

THE GARDEN OF THE PERISTYLE OF THE JULIO-CLAUDIA DOMUS

At the end of the republican era and the beginning of the Empire residential dwellings occupied, at least in part, the northeastern corner of the Palatine. Two distinct excavation areas have revealed the partial remains of one or more *domus* in the southern part of the terrace, some 6.5 meters below the present ground level. The two excavated sections have not been joined because of a wide road of Severan date that divides them. It is not possible, therefore, to ascertain whether the pre-Domitianic remains, on either side of this road, belong to a single *domus*. It is clear, however, the remains all share several features: obliqueness with respect to the later platform, building materials and techniques, and a luxurious quality.

The most coherent remains belong to the northwest corner of a peristyle oriented WSW-ENE. Enough is preserved to show that this was a rectangular peristyle with six columns along the west, and more along the, not fully uncovered, north side. Remaining are the foundations of the colonnade, two column bases and several important sections of the peripheral walls (Fig. 3). In addition, several marble paving slabs were found in place. Impressions of others, the result of the removal of slabs in antiquity in preparation for a layer of simple pozzolana, reveal the original pattern. The slabs were cut into squares and rectangles, based on a Roman foot or half-foot, from three different marbles: Chemtou (Giallo Antico), "Africano" and "Palombino (coming, respectively, from northwest Tunisia, the surroundings of Smyrna, and an unknown location). Set at a 45º angle with respect to the peristyle galleries, this pavement was limited on one side by the colonnade, and on the other by the back gallery walls, built with large blocks of tufa and limestone. Between the columns were white marble paving slabs with grooves, perhaps indicating they supported light barriers.

Fig. 3. Peristyle column marble base of the Julio-Claudian domus.

The garden area enclosed by the colonnade (Fig. 4) contained two basins, below the level of the peristyle, along the long sides. Their lengths are not preserved however they are 2 meters wide and 1.50 meters deep. The edges were faced in white marble, but the basins had a covering of thick plaster, painted with two layers of light blue (*caeruleum* and Alexandrian frit). The short end of the south basin has two small steps painted blue, but these were later covered in marble. Although the excavations uncovered only a small section of the garden, a flowerbed, framed by triangular bricks, and fragments of flowerpots were brought to light.

Fig. 4. Axonometric reconstruction of the domus peristyle.

An Augustan date is appropriate for some architectural and decorative elements, such as the peristyle column bases without plinths, fragments of architectural terracottas, and frescos found *in situ* or gathered from the layer of earth rubble that buried the *domus*. Other elements, however, such as a floor mosaic or fragments from an ornamental wall mosaic could possibly date from slightly earlier periods. It seems likely that the Augustan dwelling (or dwellings) incorporated an earlier structure dating to perhaps the middle of the third quarter of the first century B.C. Because most of the decorative elements reflect the style of the Augustan villa and the contemporary Temple of Apollo on the Palatine, it is likely this *domus* was linked to the imperial court, or at least drew inspiration from the new artistic trends made fashionable by the first *princeps*.

It is possible that the *domus* of the Vigna Barberini was included in Nero's *Domus Transitoria* and/or *Domus Aurea*, but there are no indications of a Neronian occupation of the site. On the other hand, it seems clear that the *domus* did not last beyond Nero's principate, as attested by a cache of coins dating no later than 65 A.D. found in the destruction layer. Such destruction could have been the result

of landslides caused by two earthquakes that struck Rome in June 68 (Suet. *Nero*, 48; *Galba*, 18). Once ruined the *domus* was spoiled of most of its elements, the majority of which were dismantled and re-used.

Jean-Paul Morel

BIBLIOGRAPHY: J.-P Morel and F. Villedieu, "Le site de la Vigna Barberini à l'époque néronienne", *Actes du VI^e congrès international Neronia* VI, *Rome à l'époque néronienne* (Roma 19-23 mai 1999), in press; J.-P Morel, "Una ricca domus con giardino in età giulio-claudia" in F. Villedieu, ed., *Il giardino dei cesari*, Exhibition catalogue (Rome, Museo Nazionale Romano, Terme di Diocleziano, Oct. 2001-Jan. 2002), Rome, 2001, pp. 33-43.

A GARDEN OF THE FLAVIAN IMPERIAL PALACE

During the period of Domitian (81-96 A.D.) a large artificial platform with massive substructures at the north, east and west was completed at the site of the Vigna Barberini. On this platform stood a large structure with a curvilinear plan at the south, and with colonnaded aisles on the east and west (the north is not excavated) that enclosed a vast garden (Fig. 5). Over one-third of this garden area has been partly explored, another third was irrevocably destroyed when the later temple of *Elagabalus* was built, and the final third, at the north, remains to be excavated.

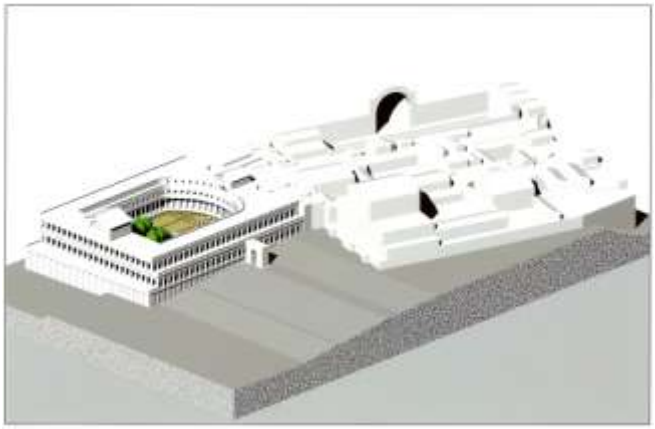

Fig. 5. Reconstruction of the Flavian Palace

Fig. 6. Map and hypothetical reconstruction of the structures and garden excavated on the site of the Vigna Barberini

Only a few elements of the ancient garden were found in place. In particular, a large rectangular basin (measuring 8.70 meters by 5.30 meters), ornamented with alternating rectangular and semi-circular niches faced in marble, was on axis with the center of the curved façade. Shortly after construction settling of the soil used to create the artificial terrace caused a rapid degradation of the whole northern section of the garden. During Hadrian's reign refurbishment and re-construction was undertaken, the results of which lasted up to the end of the second century A.D. This second phase is better recorded than the first, but it is possible that care was taken to preserve at least some trees of the Flavian period.

The Hadrianic garden was enclosed by a portico, presumably an *ambulation* - a common feature of Roman gardens (Figs. 6, 7). Running parallel to the east and west colonnades were wide strips of beaten clay bordered on the inside by medium-sized trees, possibly laurels. In the middle of the garden were likely three (two have been identified) parallel clay paths running north/south. At the southern terminus of the central path is a small masonry formation, possibly the base of an altar, flanked by two concrete bases covered with white marble.

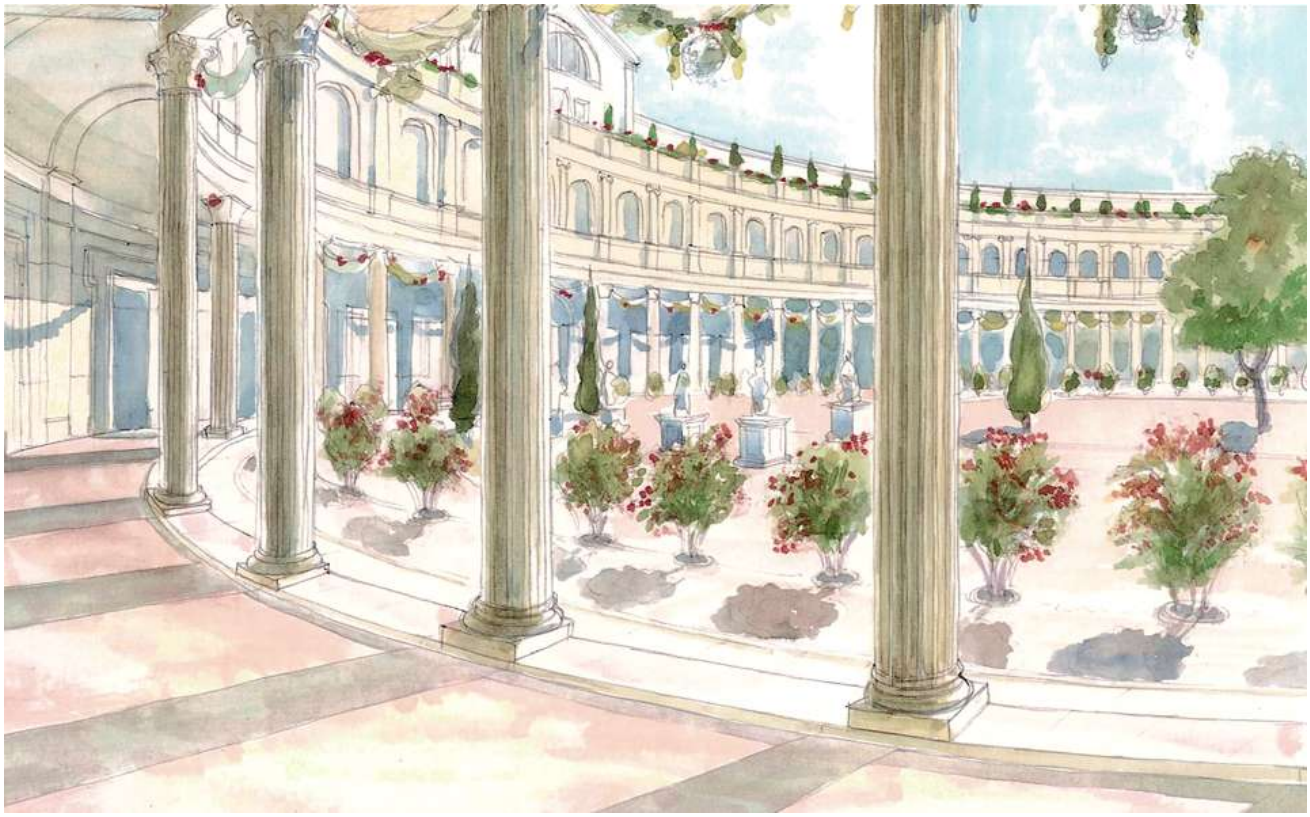

Fig. 7. Hypothetical reconstruction of the Flavian garden.

At least at the south (the only excavated area) two other paths run east-west, forming a regular gridded pattern. It is possible that the entire garden had an orthogonal layout of paths that were re-surfaced numerous times throughout the second century. At the corners of the crossings were discovered square and rectangular bases of masonry that likely supported sculptures. In addition, several flowerpots came to light at the corners of these bases as well as inside the rectangular beds formed by the paths.

On either side of the southernmost statue bases (those nearest the curvilinear portico) were two fountains, the only remains *in situ* of which is a marble slab framed by plinths, forming a shallow basin with a hole in its center to receive a lead pipe (Fig. 9). A circular imprint (0.69 meters in diameter) on the surface of this slab suggests that water would have cascaded from an upper basin onto the shallow rectangular basin, out through a hole in the side of the plinth and into a marble canal connected to the main water collecting system underground. This canal ran just outside the curved portico in a position to collect rainwater from the roof, but because of the considerable width (1.8 meters) it also functioned as a decorative device. The few numbers of manholes for drainage could have been easily closed to allow water to remain in this canal not only to cool the air, but also to reflect the columns of the portico and the nearby plants.

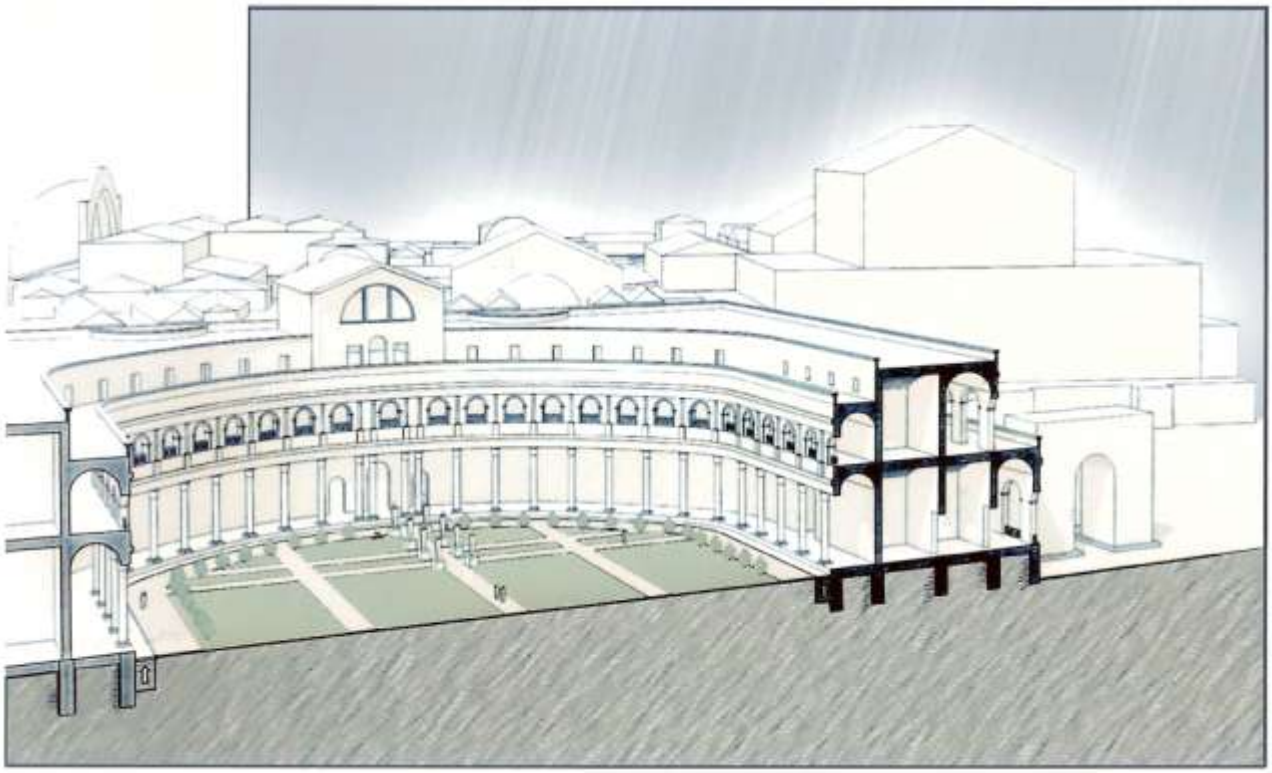

Fig. 8. Hypothetical reconstruction of the southern portion of the Flavian garden.

Fig. 9. Base of a fountain

Fig. 10. Flowerpots found in the gardens of the first and second century.

Fig. 11. Detail of the marble canal

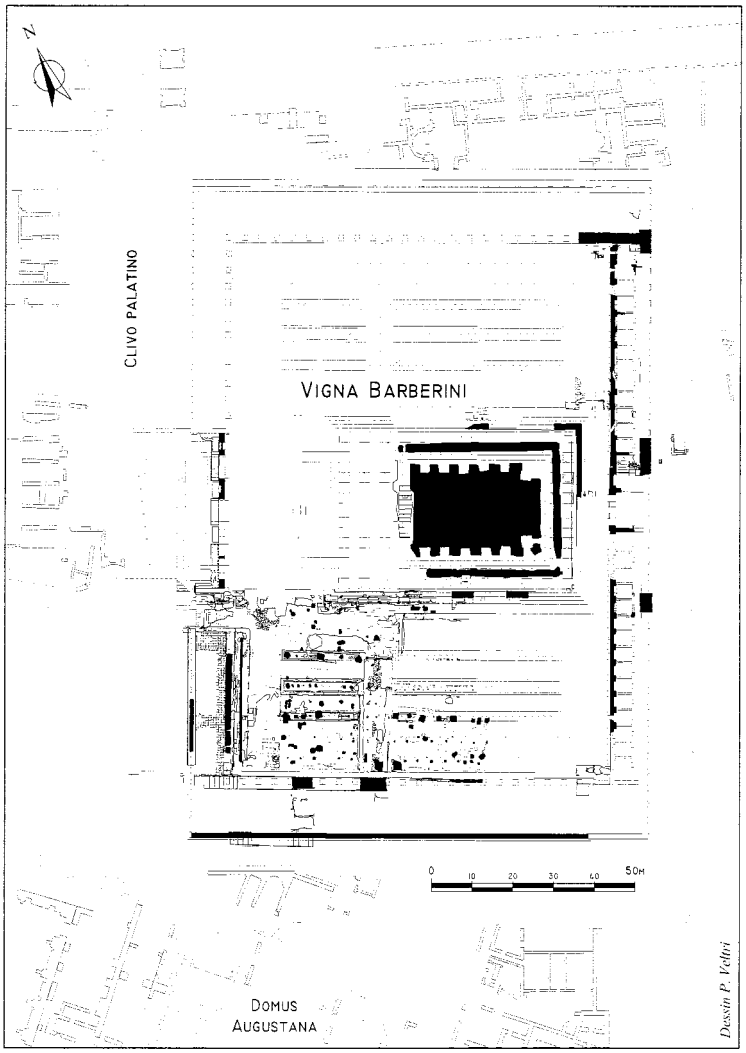

Fig. 12. Plan of the late monumental complex of the Vigna Barberini.

Because of the imprint of lead pipes identified during excavation and the network of underground drainage a large fountain further north, not uncovered, was likely on the north-south median axis of the garden. Furthermore, scant remains of a building, destroyed by the later Severan temple as well as by earlier archaeological excavations, have come to light on the same north-south central axis. The thin walls suggest a simple garden kiosk that, however, would have been adorned by at least two marble columns (no longer extant), the bases for which were richly carved with leaves and shells.

Throughout the second century a series of repairs attempted to slow the subsiding soil on the platform, but to no avail. Perhaps also as a result of a fire, which raged through Rome in 191/192, the gardens and buildings on the site of the Vigna Barberini were destroyed and the construction of a new monumental complex was undertaken.

Jean-Paul Morel

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THE GARDENS OF THE TEMPLE OF ELAGABALUS

The building of a religious complex, identified by scholars as the Heligabalium (later dedicated to Jupiter Ultor) was the final transformation in antiquity of the NW terrace (Fig. 15). An enormous peripteral temple facing west was enclosed by three porticoes on the west (with a monumental entrance), north and south, and by a closed gallery at the east. Construction may have started as early as 190, but the buildings took shape only later in two successive periods, the first ending around 210/220, the second at least by the years 220 to 240.

Two garden areas at the south of the temple (for symmetry the same type of gardens may be surmised at the north) have been uncovered, one measuring 17 x 20.5 meters, the other of the same width, but with a length of at least 24 meters. The two areas were separated by a wide paved path running north-south that led to a secondary doorway at the south, giving access to the imperial palace complex (Fig. 16). Thus the larger garden (not fully excavated) may have extended uninterrupted for a length of some 42 meters.

Both gardens had the same tripartite configuration: running along their lengths (east-west axis) was a wide central flowerbed flanked by clay paths and narrower beds. In each of the beds were discovered halved amphorae used as flowerpots that were sunken into the ground (Figs. 17, 18). The narrower beds held large amphorae alternating with smaller ones. The wider, middle beds had large amphorae defining the median axis, and smaller amphorae, tightly aligned, along the border. The purpose of these pots was to maintain humidity at the roots (particularly important for an artificial terrace), and perhaps to limit the growth of the plants.

All the pots (dating from the middle of the second century to the early 3rd century) appear to have

Fig. 13. View of the southern wall, which separated the Heliogabalium from the Domus Augustana.

been buried at the same time, suggesting they represent the original garden design for this early third century complex. No plant remains have been identified, however dwarf cypress or plane trees could have been planted in the larger pots and the small amphorae along the border of the middle beds may have been for box hedges (Fig. 16).

Besides these tripartite planting beds, two rows of plants were also set into circular cavities (c. 0.50 meters in diameter) evenly carved 3 meters apart through the marble paving slabs and into the

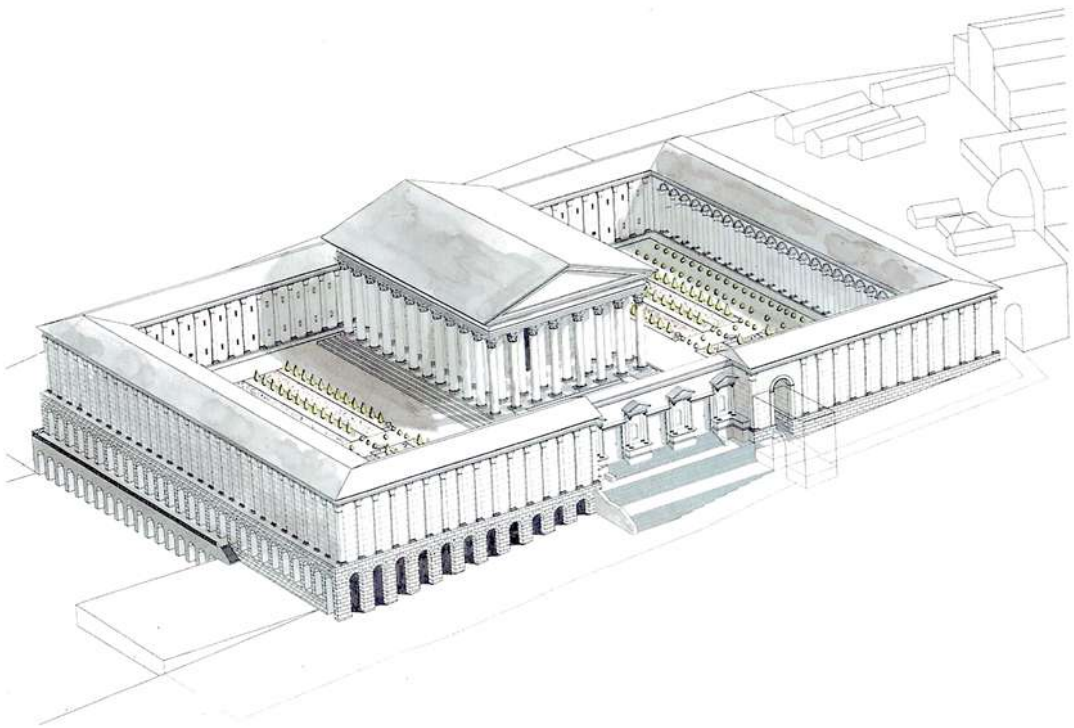

Fig. 14. Reconstruction of the late monumental complex.

underlying layers of soil in front of the south portico (Figs. 18, 19). The cavities, some 0.50 meters in depth were filled with soil enriched with metallic scraps.

Similar planting cavities were also regularly spaced along the N-S path leading to the doorway through the south portico. These cavities, carved after the floor was laid, were connected to an underground canals that contained three transverse branches with openings used for irrigation. Excess water was drained via a connection to a sewer along the south portico (Fig. 18). To facilitate drainage the canals were filled with fine soil, alternating with layers of marble shards and stones. Between this permeable soil and the marble paving slabs were bipedales covered by a layer of mortar. The plantings, surrounded by marble, must have conveyed the impression of growing directly out of the pavement (Fig. 19).

Within this planted environment were fountains and other decorative, or more likely, religious features, such as statues, altars and perhaps even standards which, according to eastern custom, would have depicted divinities associated with the god to whom the sanctuary was dedicated.

Although the specific plantings cannot be identified, it is safe to speculate that no plants had excessive foliage. We should imagine a strictly manicured and rectilinear garden that reflected, without dominating, the nearby architecture of temple and porticoes.

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Fig. 15. Reconstruction of the temple garden. Watercolor by J.-M. Gassend, based on the computer generated reconstruction by P. Veltri, in collaboration with F. Villedieu

Fig. 16. Halved amphorae used as flowerpots in the Severan gardens. Photography by C. Durand

Fig. 17. Reconstruction of part of the temple garden. Watercolor by J.-M. Gassend, based on the computer-generated reconstruction by P. Veltri and N. André, in collaboration with F. Villedieu.

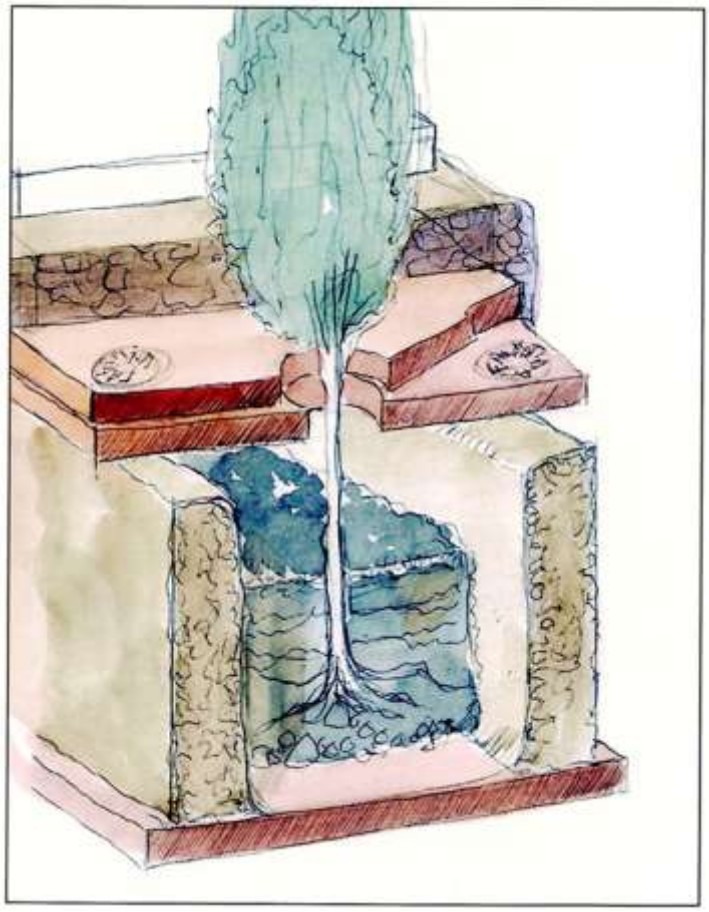

Fig. 18. Reconstruction of a tree and planting bed in the temple garden. Watercolor by J.-M. Gassend, based on the computer-generated reconstruction by P. Veltri and N. André, in collaboration with F. Villedieu.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: F. Chausson, "Le site de la Vigna Barberini de 191 à 455**"** in *La Vigna Barberini I. Histoire d'un site. Étude des sources et de la topographie*, Rome, 1997, pp. 31-85; M. Royo, "Constructions antérieures au grand temple «sévérien»" in *La Vigna Barberini I, op. cit.*, pp. 21-26 (Adonea); H. Broise and Y. Thébert, "Élagabal et le complexe religieux de la Vigna Barberini, " *Mélanges de l'École Française de Rome*, 111 (1999), pp. 729-747; Y. Thébert, "Il santuario di Elagabalus: un giardino sacro" in F. Villedieu, ed., *Il giardino dei cesari*, Exhibition catalogue (Rome, Museo Nazionale Romano, Terme di Diocleziano, Oct. 2001- Jan. 2002), Rome, 2001, pp. 83-94; G. Rizzo, "Le anfore utilizzate come vasi da fiori nei giardini del tempio" in F. Villedieu, ed., *Il giardino dei cesari*, Exhibition catalogue (Rome, Museo Nazionale Romano, Terme di Diocleziano, Oct. 2001- Jan. 2002), Rome, 2001, p. 98.

THE ADONEA

Philostrates (Life of Apollonius of Tyana, 7.32) writes of the Adonea in the Flavian palace on the Palatine where Apollonius and Domitian met and where the emperor had made a sacrifice to Minerva in the hall of Adonis that was overflowing with flowers in vases. It was proposed in the nineteenth century this Adonea was in the area of the Vigna Barberini and that a fragment of the Severan *Forma Urbis* partially depicts it. Recent excavations do not support such a location for the Adonea, and the marble fragment could represent the Severan Adonea that was in Trastevere. Flowers in vases, that were part of the cult activities to Adonis, do not necessarily indicate a planted garden, although the marble fragment, with its symmetrical lines and rows of dots, likely render schematically formal garden plantings.

Françoise Villedieu

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PALATINE FIGURES (VILLEDIEU)

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Fig. 4. Axonometric reconstruction of the *domus* peristyle. Drawing and watercolor by J.-M. Gassend.
Fig. 5. Reconstruction of the Flavian Palace with, in the forefront, the main body of the complex excavated at the Vigna Barberini. The computer-generated three-dimensional model of the northern body was carried out by N. André, in collaboration with F. Villedieu, based on excavation findings gathered under the direction of H. Broise, J.-P. Morel, P. Pergola, Y. Thébert and F. Villedieu. The model of the southern section of the palace was designed by N. André and S. Appert, in collaboration with F. Villedieu, based on past drawings and reconstructions by H. A. Deglane, F. Dutert and, especially, I. Gismondi.
Fig. 6. Map and hypothetical reconstruction of the structures and garden excavated on the site of the Vigna Barberini. Drawing by N. André.
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Fig. 8. Hypothetical reconstruction of the southern portion of the Flavian garden. Drawing and computer-generated model by N. André.
Fig. 9. Base of a fountain composed of a square marble slab and four long, narrow slabs placed edgewise along its sides. On the rear slab is a disc left by the foot of a basin, which would have once stood here. At the centre of the slab is a hole through which pipe would have carried water to the fountain. From the upper basin, water cascaded onto the base and would have flowed out through the opening carved at the centre of the structure's side. From there, it flowed into a channel connected to the main water collecting system.
Fig. 10. Flowerpots found in the gardens of the first and second century. Photography by C. Durand.
Fig. 11. Detail of the marble canal at the outer edge of the portico that framed the garden. This canal gathered rainwater from the level above the portico and emptied it into the sewage system below. By closing off the few manholes, it may also have been used as a basin to cool and beautify the garden.
Fig. 12. Plan of the late monumental complex of the Vigna Barberini. Drawing by P. Veltri.

Fig. 13. View of the southern wall, which separated the *Heliogabalium* from the *Domus Augustana*. Photography by C. Durand.

Fig. 14. Reconstruction of the late monumental complex. Three-dimensional computer-generated model by P. Veltri, in collaboration with F. Villedieu, based on data from the excavation overseen by H. Broise, P. Gros, J.-P. Morel, P. Pergola, Y. Thébert and F. Villedieu, integrating the reconstructions carried out by J.-M Gassend (the temple), J.-P. Adam (the porticoes) and D. Theodorescu (the monumental gate).

Fig. 15. Reconstruction of the temple garden. Watercolor by J.-M. Gassend, based on the computer-generated reconstruction by P. Veltri, in collaboration with F. Villedieu.

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